

Two Parbold men drowned

Missed their way when returning home

From the Ormskirk Advertiser, 5.1.1928

The bodies of two men were recovered from the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Monday morning at Parbold. They were John Belsher Heaton (37) of Beech House, Parbold, and William Barrow (44), postman, of Bradshaw Lane, Parbold, who left the Railway Hotel, Parbold, on Saturday evening, when it was very dark.

On their way home they had to cross the canal bridge, and it is presumed they missed their way and fell into the water. Dragging operations were carried out by the police, and the body of Heaton was found close to the bridge. Barrow's body was discovered not far from the same spot. Both men were perfectly sober when they left the hotel.

Barrow was a married man and leaves a widow and four children. He had been postman in the Dalton and Parbold district for 28 years. Heaton was a single man, and resided with his brother, who is the sub-postmaster and has a grocery business.

Heaton joined the 13th King's (Liverpool) Regiment in late 1914, and served throughout the war. He was gassed just before the Armistice, and was invalided home. His father was postmaster in Parbold for many years, and was extremely popular in the township. He had been a cricketer and footballer of local fame.

At the inquest yesterday, it was stated that the bridge was very dangerous and ought to be lighted, and the coroner (Mr. Harold Parker), in returning a verdict of 'Accidentally drowned', said he would communicate the recommendation to light the bridge to the canal company, and he was surprised there had not been more accidents of that description.

Double drowning tragedy at Parbold

Sad fate of well-known residents

Coroner, and lamps at canal bridge entrances

From the Wigan Observer, 7.1.1928

A gloom was cast over the Parbold district in particular when the news of a sad drowning tragedy, which claimed the lives of two well-known Parbold residents became known on Monday morning. The victims are: John Heaton (57), of Beech House, Bradshaw Lane, Parbold, who assists his brother, Mr. Heaton, the sub-postmaster of Parbold, in his grocery business; and William Barrow (44), postman, of Bradshaw Lane, Parbold. Their bodies were recovered from the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Parbold early on Monday morning.

Barrow is a married man with four children, whose ages range from 7 to 17 years. Heaton is a single man, and he served in the War. The two men had been missing from home since New Year's Eve, and as on that night the weather was rather misty and very dark. It is surmised that they were returning home together when they missed their way and fell into the water of the canal.

When they were missed, the police were informed, and dragging operations were commenced, with the result that the bodies of the two men were recovered from the canal. Both men were familiar figures in the district, in which many well-known Wigan and Southport business men reside.

Inquest Proceedings

A dark and a dangerous place

Colonel Harold Parker, the County Coroner for the area, conducted the inquest at the Railway Hotel, Parbold, on Wednesday afternoon.

Percy Atherton Heaton, Postmaster, Parbold, brother of the deceased, said that he was working in company with his brother in his shop until 8.30 on New Year's Eve. His brother then left to proceed home, a distance of a quarter of a mile, and that was the last occasion on which witness saw him alive.

As his brother had not arrived home by the evening of New Year's Day witness informed the police that he was missing. At 11.30 a.m. on January 2, he was told that his brother's body had been recovered from the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, and he went to his mother's house, and there identified the body. Alfred Morris, licensee of the Railway Hotel, Parbold, said that Barrow came into the smoke room of the hotel at 8 o'clock on New Year's Eve, and ordered some refreshment. He was then in his usual jovial mood. Heaton entered the smoke room at 9 p.m. and asked for refreshment. They remained on the premises until 10.15, and then left together, telling witness that they were going home. Both of them were perfectly sober.

William Taylor, Station-road, Parbold, a porter, spoke to seeing the two men leaving the Railway Hotel and to both of them being perfectly sober at the time. Elizabeth Ellen Barrow, the widow, stated that her husband left home at 7.40 on New Year's Eve to manage her stall, which was near the Railway Hotel, for a "night out." Witness called for him at the hotel at 10.30 to enquire whether he was ready to go home. He said he would not be a minute, and that he would be going home with Mr. Heaton. Her husband was quite sober. His body was brought home at 12 o'clock on Monday morning.

Police-constable James Connell, Parbold, said he received information from Mr. Percy A. Heaton, the postmaster, at 9 p.m. on New Year's Day that his brother and Barrow had been missing from their homes since the previous night. At 10 o'clock on Monday morning witness and Police-constable Faulkner commenced grappling operations in the canal near the bridge, and at 10 45 recovered the body of Heaton, and at 11 30 also found Barrow's body. On examining the body of Heaton witness saw a cut on the right groin, which had apparently been caused by passing boats. He did not, however, discover any marks on Barrow's body, and there was no suspicion of foul play in either case.

The Coroner further questioned the witness: 'Was it exceptionally dark on the night of the 31st?' - 'Yes'.

'Was it misty?' - 'Yes, it was inclined that way in the valley.'

'The streets of Parbold are not lighted?' - 'No.'

'The canal bridge, where the bodies were found, is a very dangerous place?' - 'Yes.'

'There are openings from the road to the canal bank on each side of the bridge?' - 'Yes. There are two on each side.'

'Do you think that if lamps were placed at each opening it would be better?' - 'No doubt. There is no reason why all the places should be left open, except in two instances for the horses to come up from the canal and cross the road, a the towing path is on the opposite side of the bridge.'

'That only applies to one side of the road?' - 'Yes, that is so.'

The Coroner said it was very sad that those two men, both of whom were highly respected in Parbold, should have come to an end on New Year's Eve in that manner. He was quite satisfied, from what he had heard, there could be no suggestion that they were not perfectly sober. They were going home in the usual way, and by some mischance they cut down the road and practically walked into the canal.

It was a very dark night. He had had cases of people who had met their death in a similar way in the past. He was, therefore, quite satisfied that, at the expense of a very little trouble, the danger at that particular place could be very much reduced. It would be only a question of placing a lamp at each entrance to the bridge and painting each end of it white. If that were done, he thought that the danger now existing, especially on dark nights, would be considerably reduced.

He would, therefore, communicate with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company and put before them his recommendations. There was no doubt that the bridge was very dangerous, and his surprise was that there had not been more accidents. A verdict of 'Accidentally drowned' was returned in each case.