

**The Bournemouth Daily Echo, Tuesday, October 15, 1940.**

**AMAZING STORY OF OLD MINE EXPLOSION**

**Holidaymakers Had Often Rolled It About**

**CORONER WARNS PUBLIC ABOUT WAR MATERIAL OF ANY KIND**

An extraordinary story of a naval mine which was constructed in 1916 and used in the last war, and was then washed up on the sand dunes at Mudeford, where it lay for years, after which it was dragged into a Christchurch boat-building yard, where mischievous persons often rolled it away, and was eventually sold for scrap last August to a Boscombe metal merchant, in whose yard it exploded last Saturday. Inflicting terrible injuries on the man, who began to cut it up into pieces of the required size with an acetylene cutter, was told at the inquest which was held on Monday afternoon. The dead man was Frederick Ernest Trim, aged 40, of 587, Charminster Road, and for 25 years he had been employed by Mr. C.W. Powell, whose business is carried on in a yard in Victoria Road, Springbourne.

The sound of the explosion in this thickly-populated area was heard for a considerable distance, and many people believed it to have been a bomb.

The Coroner (Mr. H.G. Thompson) said it was only owing to the mercy of providence that there was not a much bigger death roll and much more damage done. There was no crater in the yard, and it seemed that the explosion went upwards; probably at an angle of 45°, and therefore it only caught one house and did minor damage to windows. But when one studied the yard and realised the small houses that were around, one was appalled at what might have happened.

The Coroner intimated that no doubt the mine must have been rendered innocuous for all ordinary purposes, but when an acetylene cutter was used and heat was generated there was an explosion.

The first witness at the enquiry was George William Powell of 16, Thistlebarrow-road, who said he employed Trim as a lorry driver and acetylene cutter. Before he came to him he believed Trim was in the Navy for a time. On 7th of August he purchased the mine from Mr. Mens, a boat-builder, of Tuckton, and it was included in a load of scrap iron. When it was brought to the yard they threw the mine off the lorry onto the ground, and it was put in a corner waiting to be cut up. On Saturday morning Trim said to him: "We had better get that old mine out of the way and get it cut up."

The Coroner: Did you give him any instructions as to what he should do with the mine? —No, because he knows what is to be done with these things. It has to be cut into lengths. He understood that.

Witness said carbide and acetylene were used, which together made the flame for the cutter. He was not there when the explosion happened.

### ***Found 60 yards away***

The Coroner asked witness if he examined the mine before the accident. He said he did. He found a small hole on the top part of the mine near the ring, about the size of a half-crown.

The Coroner: What did you deduce from that? —We naturally thought the thing was empty, being open like that, and that it was simply an empty tank and that all the stuff had been discharged.

You did not get any advice about it? —No.

I suppose you did not know anything about mines?—No, not about mines. Except that they are dangerous? —That's right.

The Coroner then produced a small metal plate, which it was disclosed was picked up at 96, Victoria-road, about 60 yards from the place where the explosion occurred, and was assumed to have been attached to the mine. Mr. Powell said he had not seen the plate on the mine.

The Coroner said the plate stated the charge and that the weight was 70lbs. for the whole article. If witness had seen that and he could have weighed the mine he would have found that the total weight was approximately the figure given, and he would have known that the charge was in it. Witness agreed.

The Coroner: You did not examine the mine even carefully enough to see the plate? —No. It must have been well rusted into it.

In other words, I am afraid you did not take any precautions other than to see the muzzle of this hole at the top of the mine? —I took that to be that it was empty.

And you took it, therefore, that it was inoperative? —Witness said that as the hole was there he thought the charge had been taken out.

The Coroner: Have you ever had a mine before? —No, and I don't want another one.

Mr. A. Dalton, for Mr. Powell: You deal in metal to the extent of some thousands of pounds a year?—Oh, yes; a tremendous weight a year.

And it would be impossible for you to examine all the parts? —That's right.

The Coroner: Yes, but when he gets an article which is dangerous that puts it in a different category. It's not like a pot or a pan which it doesn't matter if you examine it or not. When he brings to the premises an article, which is, or may be dangerous, the onus is on him to make sure the article is not dangerous.

Mr. Dalton: Yes. He appears to have been satisfied with the hole that it rendered it innocuous.

In reply to further questions, Mr. Powell said he certainly believed it was harmless, or else he wouldn't have had it on the place.

The Coroner: I am quite sure you would not.

Witness said the mine was banged off the lorry on the ground.

The Coroner: That was rather a risk before you had examined it.

Witness: Yes. We should have been blown to pieces.

Inspector Gill asked if the weight of the mine was evenly distributed over the whole cylinder. Witness said it was more heavy at the bottom than it was at the top. He said he put a stick in the hole as far as it would go.

The Coroner: So that any explosive charge that was in the mine was in the part of the cylinder farthest away from the hole? —That's right.

Dr. B.E. Thompson said he was called to the yard about 6 p.m. The Coroner: I don't think we need to go into details. They are most distressing as you know? —Yes. The Coroner: The injuries were terrible? —Yes. It was obvious that death was from severe multiple injuries.

### ***Thought it was a bomb***

William Thomas Ellacott, 121, Stewart-road, a lorry driver's mate employed by Mr. Powell, said he helped to roll the mine to the spot in the yard where it was going to be cut up and then he left Trim and went home to dinner. He heard the explosion and thought it was a bomb at first.

The Coroner: Naturally, we all did.

Asked if he had any discussion with Trim about the mine being dangerous, Ellacot said Trim did not think it was really a mine. He thought it was a buoy.

The Coroner: You don't think he realised what it was? —No, he did not realise any danger whatever.

P.C. Brown said he heard the explosion, and went to the yard and saw smoke rising. He found oxygen escaping from a rubber tube attached to a cylinder. He turned the oxygen off and then found human remains behind a heap of iron railings about 29 ft. from the approximate site of the explosion. Other parts were found in gardens. One piece of the mine, about 18 inches square and approximately a quarter of an inch thick, was found about half a mile away. There was no damage to the yard. One house had a wall blown in and quite a number of windows were broken.

### ***Rolled about***

Edwin Mens, of 72, Riverside-road, carrying on business as a marine engineer at Tuckton Bridge, Christchurch, said he first saw the mine in 1917 amongst the sand dunes at Mudeford, on the south side of the river. It

remained there for approximately 13 years, although it was moved about by the winds and the storms. About 1930, because the tides had shifted it near to his stage where he landed passages, he decided to have it up at his yard and make a war relic of it. They towed it behind a boat and dragged it very roughly up the slipway to the road, where he used it as a sort of corner stone so that the public could see it.

The Coroner: Did you have any trouble with it? —Yes, fellows at night sometimes have rolled it down the bank. This happened several times during the period that it has been there.

And you had to haul it back I suppose? —Certainly.

In August, as the government were asking for metal, he sold it with other scrap to Mr. Powell.

Mr. Mens said he never saw the plate on the mine. He thought it was inside. The Coroner said it was much more likely to be outside. It would not be any good inside. Witness: Except for reference. The Coroner said the manhole would have had to be taken off, and witness said that some of the nuts of the manhole on top of the mine were missing which made him feel that they had unloaded it when it came ashore. Mr. Mens said there was no hole on top of the mine when he saw it, but there was a union which carried the eye. Had there been a hole the water would have got in when they carried up the river and it would have sunk. He considered it hermetically sealed. If it had been open the water would have perished the powder surely. "I always considered it safe," he said. "Why did the authorities leave it about for the holiday-makers to roll about?"

The Coroner: Do you think anybody told the authorities? —Well, the coast-guards were about on the beach.

Inspector Gill: I take it the coast-guards are frequently along this place? —Yes.

So it must have been known to the naval authorities? —Yes, I should say so.

You say that after you took the mine into your possession it was rolled about? —Yes.

And no harm, of course ever came of it? —No.

So in that respect the mine was perfectly safe to handle in any way except as it was used on Saturday last? —Yes.

So that, so far as you know, the naval authorities may have rendered it safe for all ordinary purposes and left it there? —Oh possibly.

It was left by the naval authorities in what was apparently a perfectly safe condition for anything that was likely to happen on the seashore? —Yes.

Mr. Dalton asked if witness knew whether other mines of this kind had come up in Bournemouth. He replied that he knew the Corporation sold some.

The Coroner: Unfortunately we don't know what was in those mines. Presumably they were innocuous, otherwise we should have heard of it.

Mr. Powell, recalled, said there was a hole in the mine, about one foot deep.

### ***Unusual case***

Describing it as a most unusual, and happily a most rare case, the Coroner said that apart from the evidence that had been given he had the great advantage of having inspected the yard where the catastrophe occurred and the surrounding neighbourhood. He had also been in touch with the naval authorities at Poole, with whom he had a consultation the previous day as to the condition of this mine. From all these things put together there was little doubt as to what happened. The Coroner then outlined the history of the mine since 1916, saying that undoubtedly it was made in a naval arsenal and was used in the 1914-1918 war.

Two things came at once to the mind. One was that it was left over that long period of years and not made innocuous. He was advised by the naval authorities that the hole referred to by Mr. Powell was no doubt the spot where the primer was and had possibly been taken out. It was quite possible to look up records after such a period of years and see whether any work had been done by the naval authorities. He was again advised by the naval people that no ordinary movements connected with the mine would have any effect on it whatsoever. That would account for the fact that nothing happened when it was bumped down on the ground and when it was removed. Of course, it was a different matter when an acetylene cutter was used, because the charge was still there, and when the heat was generated there was an explosion.

### ***Coroner's comments***

"When anyone brings on to their premises an article that may be inherently dangerous, he is under a very special responsibility," continued the Coroner. "Although I am sorry to say it, because I know how Mr. Powell feels about the loss of a valued man, I do feel, and it is my duty to say so, that he did not take the precautions that he had ought to have done. He told me very frankly that he knows nothing whatsoever about mines, and I think the onus was upon him, not having the knowledge, to acquire it. It would have been very easy to have done it. The naval authorities, the coast-guards, anybody would have warned him." Apart from that no one seems to have seen this plate that was on the mine which would have told him that it was dangerous and that it was not an empty shell.

The Coroner returned a verdict that death was the result of multiple injuries—there was no question of criminal negligence—and that they were due to accidental causes.

### ***Public Warned***

There was one other observation he had to make, and the naval authorities were very much with him in making it, and that was an appeal to the public when they came across articles of this description, not necessarily naval but anything connected with war, not to touch them. Since the last war there been a number of alterations. They have had the magnetic mine, which was so dangerous that even if they touched a wire connected with it, or some strand or other, it might set the whole thing off.

"I want," he said, with all the earnestness at my command to make this widely known. I have heard this afternoon that there are other mines in Bournemouth and district. I have heard about them before, and if there are any such found at once information should be given to the naval authorities. Whatever article any member of the public finds, if there is any idea that it has anything to do with the war, then at once, without satisfying the curiosity that is in most of us, information should be given either to the nearest naval authorities, who are at Poole in this neighbourhood, or failing them to the coast-guards, or failing them to tell the police and they will take action at once."

Sympathy was expressed with the widow and family of the dead man, and tributes were paid to his valued and experienced service to his employer. The Coroner said it seemed rather an irony of fate that a man who was for a time in the Navy should meet his death from one of the articles used in the Navy.

The Coroner was accompanied by Mr. P.E. Knowles, H.M. Inspector of Factories, Southampton. \_\_\_\_\_

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