

**SOPLEY
FATAL ACCIDENT LAST WEEK.
INQUEST.**

C.T. March 16, 1918

An inquest was held by Mr. John Druitt, Coroner for the Hundred of Christchurch and Liberty of Westover, last Saturday afternoon at Sopley Park, on the body of Annie Veal, a housemaid in the employment of Mr. J. Kemp-Welch, J.P., who was struck by an aeroplane and killed on Friday, 8th instant.

Mr. Melsome was elected foreman.

Mr. John Kemp-Welch said that deceased had been in his service 13 or 14 years. He did not see the accident as he was not at home.

Dr. James Robert Hall Walker, of Christchurch, said he was motoring through Sopley at 12.25 the previous day and was told that there had been an accident. He went to the spot and found an aeroplane, and lying alongside, covered with a rug, the dead body of a woman. He examined the body in the field. There was a lacerated wound on the right side of the neck, going down to her vertebrae, the fifth and left vertebrae suffering from a compound fracture. The left shoulder blade was fractured, and three-quarters of the left hand was entirely severed. The injuries were quite consistent with the story he had heard that deceased had been knocked over by an aeroplane's propeller. They were sufficient to cause death, the injury to the neck being the primary cause.

Claude Michael George Barrington, a Lieut., attached to the Royal Flying Corps, said that he was flying a machine which he had to deliver at a certain destination. When he reached Sopley he was not quite certain of his whereabouts and descended in Sopley Park to enquire. He left the engine running for about half a minute, to see if anybody came, so that he could go straight up again. He saw a man at the bottom end of the Park and beckoned to him. As he did not come witness stopped the engine. A crowd of people then came from all directions and he enquired his way, and told the people to keep away from the machine. When he went to start again he got two of the men to hang on to the spars to prevent the machine going forward on starting. He had one man at the switch whom he told how to work it. He then swung the propeller for over ten minutes, before the machine started. The difficulty in starting was because he had the throttle almost closed to prevent the machine starting off with a great roar. On the last swing when the machine started, the person on the right wing released his grip, which allowed it to move forward; the person on the left wing pulled hard, and as the machine has a tendency to swing to the left, when on the ground, it helped her to start. Directly he saw the machine had started, he dived under the wing to stop the machine, but before he could reach it the machine had done a half circle and the propeller caught the deceased and killed her. Directly witness saw deceased had been knocked down he sent for a doctor and the police. He felt her pulse to see if she were still alive, but nothing could be done for her, and her pulse had stopped.

He thought she was only unconscious, but she was really dead. He did not touch anything until the Sergt. of Police appeared on the scene. A good number of people congregated round, and every time he swung the propeller they edged nearer and nearer, and as he had his back to them he did not notice this. Witness thought that when the engine started one of the men got nervous and let go. The engine started at about 900 revolutions to the minute, and at the aerodrome when testing before flight, two men hold the machine at 1,400 revolutions. When giving the men directions he told them that if they thought they could not hang on, not to hold it, and he would get someone else, as he would probably be killed and possibly some of the spectators, if they let go.

The foreman asked whether the pilot had ever landed under similar circumstances before.

Witness said that he had often done so, and restarted with the help of one assistant. He stated that he was a probationer at present, being fully qualified as far as flying was concerned. There was nothing really wrong with the machine. The pull on the right wing was very slight, and would not be appreciable until the weigh was on. It was a four bladed propeller which was the reason why he

started it himself.

Supt. Knox asked whether witness had not insisted on the spectators keeping clear.

Witness said that he had not noticed them getting so close, as he was engaged with the propeller.

In reply to the Foreman witness said their instructions in such cases were to get up as well as they could, and they usually managed to get two men to hang on,

Mr. James Murray, head gardener at Sopley Park, said that he was looking at the machine when it came down about 11.45 in the Park, and he went over to see it. He heard the pilot ask two men to hold on to the machine, and the pilot asked him to work the switch which he did under the pilot's instructions. The pilot pulled the propeller round for some time. After about ten minutes the engine started. His cap was blown off, and the next thing he saw was the body of deceased under the machine. He considered he had a narrow escape himself. There were 20 or 30 spectators. He heard the pilot ask the people to stand back, and saw him turn the switch off and stop the machine, and a couple of boys went for the doctor and police.

In answer to the Foreman witness said that he was standing on the ground beside the machine, the switch being outside.

Asked why he did not switch off when the machine swerved, he said he was only doing what he was instructed to do.

The Jury brought in a verdict of "Accidental Death."