

## Frances Hind (Yelf)

### 1861 census, Manor House, Gonalston, Nottinghamshire

Thomas Hinde	56	Head	Farmer, 293 acres,	Gonalston, Nottinghamshire
Frances Eliz Hinde	56	Wife		Thithby, Nottinghamshire
John M Hinde	25	Son		Gonalston, Nottinghamshire
<b>Frances E Hinde</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Daughter</b>		<b>Gonalston, Nottinghamshire</b>
Eliza Wrath	29	Servant	Cook	Foston, Lincolnshire
Ann Smith	21	Servant	Housemaid	Newark, Nottinghamshire
Ruben Upton	17	Servant	Groom	Hoveringham, Nottinghamshire

### 1881 census, Buxton Cottage\*, Hunnyhill, Carisbrooke

Joseph Yelf	Head	Married	62	Retired (Coachman)	Newport, Isle of Wight
<b>Frances Elizth. Yelf</b>	<b>Wife</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>Gonalston, Notts.</b>
Frances Yelf	Daughter		6	Scholar	Canterbury, Kent
Gertrude Yelf	Daughter		6	Scholar	Canterbury, Kent
John Yelf	Son		4		Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight
Edith Yelf	Daughter		3		Newport, Isle of Wight
Dora Yelf	Daughter		1		Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight

*\*note – 1904 Kelly's street directory has Buxton Cottage, Heytesbury Road (number 6 today).*

## Isle of Wight County Press – 7 September 1889

### SUICIDE BY STRYCHNINE POISONING AT NEWPORT.

### CHEMISTS AND THE SALE OF POISONS TO CHILDREN.

Edward F. Blake, Esq., deputy coroner for the Island, held an inquest at the Old Inn, Newport, on Monday last, on the body of Frances Hind, aged 48, who for about 17 years past had been living with Joseph Yelf as his wife, occupying a house on Hunnyhill known as Buxton Cottage. The deceased belonged to a family of high social standing, and there were circumstances about the case which made it a peculiarly sad and painful one. It will be gathered from the evidence that on Saturday morning last the deceased sent one of her daughters – a child of eleven – to the chemist's for a 3d. packet of rat poison. This was supplied and taken home, the child handing the packet to her mother, who went upstairs, and when Mr. Yelf returned very soon afterwards he found the deceased lying on the bed quite dead. She had gone about her household duties to the last, making preparations for dinner. It was evident that she had taken the whole of the contents of the packet, the ingredients including a grain and a half of strychnine – sufficient to have poisoned the whole family. The jury having viewed the body, which presented a shocking appearance, the face being completely black and terribly drawn and distorted, the following evidence was taken:

Edith Hind Yelf, 11 years old, daughter of the deceased, disposed : I have three brothers and three sisters. My eldest sister is 15. On Saturday morning my mother sent me to Messrs. Pollard and Brown, the chemists', for my father's medicine. When I came back my mother said I had

been a long time, and I said I had been kept waiting. My mother then asked me to go for 3d. of rat poison, and said I must not be so long gone this time. She gave me a penny for myself. She said there were some rats in the house. I went to Messrs. Pollard and Brown's again – it was before dinner – and got 3d. of rat poison, in a packet. When I got back my mother was in the kitchen and I gave it to her. She said "That's all right; don't tell your father." I went into the other room. Some time afterwards my father came home and asked where mother was. I said upstairs. He called to her, and she did not answer. He went upstairs, and he found her lying dead on the bed. He went for Mrs. Westmore, who lives opposite, and also for a doctor. I went upstairs and saw my mother lying dead on the bed. She was dressed. She had seemed all right before she went upstairs. She had lately complained of a pain in her heart. She has gone on with the duties of the house the same as usual. There had been no quarrel. She was usually in good spirits. She did not seem worried the last few days. We all had breakfast together on Saturday morning. She seemed the same as usual then. On Friday she went to the Forest to get blackberries, my two eldest sisters going with her. – The intelligence with which this youthful witness gave her evidence was remarked upon both by the Coroner and the jury.

The Deputy Coroner said he could not shut his ears to the fact that there had been all sorts of rumours in circulation about this case. He believed those rumours to be altogether groundless, and before he called the husband – and he saw no objection to call him – he wished to say that he saw no necessity for cautioning him.

The jury generally expressed a similar opinion, one of them stating that they had to deal with the evidence, and had nothing to do with rumours.

Joseph Yelf was then called and deposed : I live at Buxton Cottage, Hunnyhill. The deceased was 48 years old. She had been living with me as my wife for 17 years, and we have seven children. Last saw her alive on Saturday morning, about half past eleven, when I had occasion to go into the town. I said I should not be long, and she said "All right." When I left her she was busy cooking dinner. When I was in town I called at Messrs. Pollard and Brown's, and the manager asked me if I had sent for some rat poison. I said "No," and was then told that my daughter had been for some. We have no rat, and I said it must be for a neighbour. I was home again by half past 12. I stayed a short time in the garden looking at the fowls, and then went indoors. There was a shoulder of mutton in the oven, and the potatoes were baked, but the cloth was not laid. I asked the children where their mother was, and they said upstairs. I went to the foot of the stairs and called her, but received no answer. All at once it struck me about the powder. I ran upstairs, and saw her lying on the bed, dead and getting cold. She was dressed, and lying on her left side. I scarcely know what I did after that. A neighbour was sent for, and the doctor. – Q. Had she had anything to worry her ? – A. Yes; a little. Our eldest daughter had been working for Mrs. Oake, the dressmaker, and she was accused – falsely accused – of stealing things, such as buttons and reels of cotton. I took her away directly, and Mr. Oake did not like that, as being a handy girl, he wanted to keep her for the time she was supposed to stay, and he said "She shall never have another place here." We got her a place at Mr. Knight, the photographer's, and Mr. Oake went there and said "Don't have that girl; she will steal everything about the place." Mr. Knight discharged her, after keeping her a month as agreed. I have entered an action against Mr. Oake. It is going on now. There accusations preyed greatly on the deceased's mind. I may say here that her uncle and aunt were insane. – Q. Had there been anything to worry her, beyond what you have said? – A. Nothing that I know of. She was generally cheerful, and was very

particular about her children, and a better woman never lived. She was always the same, and no mother could be more loving to her children. I learned afterwards that she had divided her jewellery amongst her children, but she did that because of some apprehension she had about her health. – Q. You say that an uncle and aunt of hers were insane. Have you ever noticed anything about the deceased to lead you to suspect that she would take her life? – A. Never. We lived very happily together, and I never had an angry word with her in my life.

A juryman referred to reports which were in circulation about the witness's eldest daughter, and witness said there was not the slightest foundation for them. The juryman said he put the question in order that the witness might have an opportunity of denying the reports.

Mr. Thomas Milton, manager to Messrs. Pollard and Brown, chemists, Newport, deposed : On Saturday last I sold a 3d. packet of rat poison to Mr. Yelf's daughter. I complied with the rules laid down as to the sale of poisons. I asked the girl what it was wanted for. She said to kill rats and that her mother had sent her for it. I knew the child before, and a short time previously she had come for some medicine for her father. I made the required entry of the sale in the book produced. – Q. What was the poison the packet contained ? – A. Rather less than a grain and a half of strychnine. – Mr. R. George (a juryman) : Do you consider you were justified in selling poison to so young a child ?

Witness : She is a very intelligent child and a very careful child. And it must be borne in mind that no harm came to the child through the sale.

Mr. Crews (another juryman) thought the question of intelligence or ignorance had nothing to do with the matter. Under no circumstances ought poison to be sold to a child.

The Deputy Coroner said supposing the child had taken the poison, a question might arise, but considering that the child gave the packet to a grown-up person, the fact of whether it was sold to a child of 12 or a person of 20 made no difference in this particular case.

Witness : I refused to sell poison to an adult the same day because I did not consider him intelligent enough.

Mr. Crews : Ridiculous !

Witness said shortly after the sale of the packet the father came in, and witness told him his daughter had been for some rat poison.

Mr. Switzer (a juryman) thought the eldest daughter should be called, as reports injurious to her character were in circulation, and he thought they ought to be cleared up. Mr. Switzer mentioned the nature of some of the rumours, and said it was due to the girl that she should have an opportunity of contradicting them.

The Deputy Coroner said they had nothing to do with rumours. Their duty was to ascertain the cause of death. Personally he did not think it necessary to call the eldest daughter, but if the jury thought otherwise she should be sent for.

Several jurymen expressed agreement with Mr. Switzer, and a vote being taken, showing a

majority of two in favour of the girl being called, the Deputy Coroner ordered her to be sent for.

Meanwhile

Inspector Greenleaf was called and stated that on Saturday he went to Buxton Cottage and saw the body of deceased in the bedroom. It was laid out. Asked Mr. Yelf if he had seen any paper lying about, and he said no. They had searched everywhere. Witness made a search, in Mr. Yelf's presence, and eventually he went to the fire-grate, in front of which was a screen, and behind this he found the paper produced, screwed up. It was labelled "Pollard's Vermin Killer," and was quite empty. He afterwards went to Messrs. Pollard and Brown's and saw Mr. Milton, the manager. Asked him if he had sold any rat poison that morning, and he said yes. Asked to look at his book, which was shown to him. It contained an entry of the sale, which witness initialled.

Dr. Edward Allan Waterworth deposed that on Saturday, a few minutes before one, he was sent for, and went to Buxton Cottage at once. Saw deceased on the bed, quite dead, and the hands were getting a little cold. There were no signs of any struggle, and no marks of violence. The body was very stiff, and the arms were drawn up tightly over the chest in a manner which, together with the expression on the face, was suggestive of death from strychnine. He had no doubt whatever that the deceased died from the effects of strychnine, a grain and a half of which would cause death in a very short time.

Mr. James Brading (a juryman) : Would not a grain and a half be a very large dose ?

Dr. Waterworth : Yes. I believe the sixth of a grain is the smallest dose of strychnine that has been known to cause death.

Frances Hind Yelf said she was 15 years old and the eldest daughter of the deceased. On Saturday morning her mother got breakfast ready for the children, and witness afterwards went into an adjoining room and was engaged in needlework there. She knew nothing of what had happened till her father came in and said her mother was dead. Soon afterwards witness went upstairs and saw her mother lying on the bed dead. At breakfast time witness noticed nothing different in her mother's manner. She seemed in her usual health, and got breakfast ready for all of them. She had been annoyed and worried at the accusations made against witness when she was at Mrs. Oake's. After some time witness went to Mr. Knight's, her work being to touch up photographs, but he said she was not able to do what was required of her, and she had to leave, but Mr. Knight said it was not in consequence of what he had been told, though her mother thought it was the cause, and it worried her a great deal. She often alluded to it. The charges made against witness were not true. Her mother had had no other cause to be worried about her.

The Deputy Coroner asked the jury if there were any other questions which they would wish to put to the witness. They said no, and expressed satisfaction with her evidence.

The Deputy Coroner then summed up the evidence, remarking that there could be no doubt that the death of this poor woman was due to poison, self-administered, and the only question that remained was as to her state of mind at the time. As to this it was important that the jury should bear in mind that there had been insanity in the family of the deceased.

The jury (of whom Mr. N. H. T. Mursell was foreman) returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased committed suicide while in a state of temporary insanity, and they added an expression of opinion that Messrs. Pollard and Brown's manager should be censured for selling poison to so young a child.

Mr. Milton having been called into the room.

The Deputy Coroner said the jury had desired him to express their opinion that he (Mr. Milton) did not exercise sufficient care and judgment in supplying so young a child with so rank a poison. It was no part of his (Mr. Blake's) duty to lay down regulations as to the sale of poisons, but it would strike him (Mr. Milton), as it struck the jury and himself, that it behoved him to use the utmost discretion and care in selling poisons of this description, and he hoped that in future under no circumstances would he sell poisons except to adults, and even then only after the fullest inquiry and the most careful consideration.

Mr. Milton : As a rule we do not sell poisons to children, but this was an exceptional case.

The Deputy Coroner : I have conveyed to you the opinion of the jury, and there the matter ends.

Mr. Brading said the jury thought that poisons ought not to be sold in such large quantities.

The Deputy Coroner said that was not a matter within his or their control. He was bound to say that there had been no breach of the law in the sale of this poison, though there might have been a want of due discretion, and it was this that the jury had censured. If the jury wished the law as to the sale of poisons altered, they should communicate with their Member.

*Transcribed by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries © 2024*  
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