

Clara Louise Prangnell

Charles Dyer Prangnell married Ann Bessant in 1891 at St. John's Church in Newport. They had three daughters Lily Emily who died at the age of 2 and was buried in Northwood Cemetery on 10/12/1883, The burial record says that her father Charles Prangnell of West Cowes was an engine driver. Clara Louise was born in 1884 and Annie Sarah was born in 1894.

Charles Prangnell is recorded as being a Night watchman at the Cement Works when he was called as witness regarding the death of James Marchant of Portsmouth, engineer on the Company's steam barge Rochester, who had drowned in a tank at the West Medina Cement Mills site. (IWCP Nov.17, 1894).

On 30th July 1898, the family were still living at the Cement Mills site and the Isle of Wight County Press of that date records that Clara and her mother won prizes at the Northwood Cottage Garden Show. Clara won the prize for a basket of flowers and grasses for children under 15, 1st prize for a dressed doll by girls aged 12-14, first prize for her onions and 3rd prize for her cos lettuce. Mrs Prangnell won a prize for a basket of garden flowers, 1st prize for a child's summer frock and 3rd prize for laundry work.

Unfortunately the next historic documents for the family as reported by the Isle of Wight Observer on Saturday 10 September 1898 records a more tragic happening. The text of the newspaper reported is included below:

"THE MEDINA DROWNING ACCIDENT.

On Saturday morning Mr H. R. Hooper, 8.A., acting as Coroner, investigated the circumstances attending the death of Clara Pragnell, 14 years of age, of Dodnor, near Cowes, who, with her mother and others, returned from the Cowes carnival in a rowing boat on Thursday evening.

Charles Pragnell, a labourer, living at the Cement Mills, deposed that on Thursday his wife, daughter, and Mr Wells, his son, and two others returned from Cowes carnival in a rowing boat. The body was that of his daughter Clara aged 14.

Thomas Wells stated that the occupants of the boat included himself, his son, Mr Hookey, Mrs Wells, Mrs Pragnell and her two daughters Clara being one of them. It was a still night till they got to the Mills They wished to land Mr Hookey on the east side, but, failing to catch the wall, the eddy drove them back into the full force of tide rushing into the Mill pond Witness jumped up, intending to catch the beam, but was overpowered by the strength of the tide. The boat— a rowing boat— drifted from him. He clung to the beam until assistance was rendered him by Mr Phillips, who saved him. He couldn't say how the others reached the shore.

In reply to a question, witness said he could not say whether they were sitting in the boat or not at the time of the accident. It was like a flash of lightning. All he knew was Mr Phillips saved him. Frank Phillips, of East Medina mills, said he was in bed on Thursday night at 20 minutes to 11, when he heard cries of " Help." He jumped out of bed and ran downstairs immediately, without stopping to put anything on. He saw several persons struggling in the water just inside the mill gates, and at once rushed to their assistance, and noticing Mr Wells clinging to the beam, he pulled him out. Witness and Mr Wells next assisted to get Henry Hookey up over the wall. This done, he ran to the assistance of the ladies, and just as he got there they were washed by the tide to the bank and managed to get out by themselves.

George Wells (a juror): My son helped his mother out and Mrs Pragnell as well. Witness, resuming his evidence, said the other girl got out without assistance. Witness continued to search for Clara Pragnell the whole of the night but could not find her. Mr J. Roach, also Mrs Roach and Mr Hookey joined in the search. Witness found the body next morning about 6 40 and brought it ashore. He understood there was not much space between the cross beam and the boat, so that several of the occupants were caught by the head and shoulders. The boat filled— it never capsized — and the occupants floated out.

The jury expressed their deep sympathy with Mr and Mrs Pragnell in the bereavement. The Deputy-Coroner remarked that great credit was due to Mr Phillips.

A verdict of " Accidentally drowned " was returned by the jury.

Mr and Mrs Pragnell desire, through the medium of the Press, to express their thanks to all those who had so gallantly assisted in the rescue of the boating party."

Clara Louise was buried in Northwood Cemetery on 6th September 1898, only 38 days after winning the prizes at the Northwood Cottage Garden Show