

George Prince

Fatal accident at the West Medina Cement Mills:

Based on a report in the County Press and South of England Reporter of the 27th January 1894. This is about the accident which killed George Prince at the West Medina Cement Mills. At 69 George was the oldest employee at the mills, having worked there for nearly half a century.

An inquest was held at the Trafalgar Inn, Newport on the same day as the accident. George went into the office well before 6am on the morning of Tuesday 23rd January, and then went to the bag store, where he was the foreman. It seems that, as usual, he climbed the 8 foot ladder to the upstairs room which was used for mending and storing old bags. He normally left his belongings there before crossing the room on his way to getting a hot drink from the miller. That meant him walking close to a 4 foot diameter hole in the floor which was used to pass the cement bags up and down.

That morning witnesses heard crying or singing and found George (who was known as uncle), lying crumpled on the ground floor, asking for his daughter. He was badly injured, and must have fallen through the hole. At his age it was thought that he may have “turned giddy or mis-stepped”. It seems that he hadn’t lit a lamp, and it would certainly be dark at that time on a January morning.

He had injuries to his head and was taken the 2 miles to his home in a cart, although a witness thought he had died before he was put in the cart. A doctor was called to his home but found him dead when he got there.

Further questions from the jury revealed that 6 months before the accident there had been a wooden rail in place to prevent people falling through, but that it got in the way when bags were passed up and down. Because of this inconvenience, it was taken down and wasn’t replaced. Comments were made at the inquest that the rail, provided by the company, was a cheap solution, and too easy to take down. However, as he was the foreman, it was George’s responsibility to replace it, and none of the other workers had complained. It seems that the jury used that as a reason not to blame the Company. A Factory Inspector had visited within the last 2 months and had not commented on the lack of protection. Mr Douglas, the Manager of Works for the Company, said that to prevent further accidents, he had ordered the opening to be boarded up to the height of the rail. (Perhaps they used a stable door).

“The jury then unanimously agreed to return a verdict of Accidental death.”