

## **Leslie Joseph Spragg**

Based on a report in the Portsmouth Evening News of the 31st August 1922, this is the tragic story of a 12-year-old schoolboy, Leslie Joseph Spragg, the son of Mr John Spragg (who lived and worked at West Medina Cement Mills).

On his way to Northwood School with his sisters one morning, young Leslie decided to wait for a school mate by the side of a disused reservoir, which was completely open in a field off Stag Lane. Another boy, William Spall, said that he had seen Leslie by the reservoir looking at fish in the water, and shortly after heard 2 splashes. But with no shouting he thought that Leslie was throwing stones.

It was only at the end of the school day that Leslie was reported missing. A search was carried out, and it was Ebenezer Shirland who found his body in the reservoir, having apparently fallen in. The report said "There was between 4 and 5 feet of water with mud at the bottom, and if he fell he would have a difficulty to get out".

The Coroner returned a verdict of "accidentally drowned", and said that unless some protection was provided, another accident would happen there. Mr. J. L. Warsap. For the owners, said "the matter should have attention".

It is not known whether any protection was provided, and while not strictly an industrial accident, the tragedy reflects the low importance that was given to health and safety at the time. Leslie was buried in Northwood Cemetery (Plot 27, Grave 7606) in an unmarked plot.