

## "IT WENT - OH, GOD"

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### *Dramatic Evidence at Sidmouth Inquest*

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#### **JURY'S RIDER**

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A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned at an inquest conducted by the Deputy Coroner for East Devon (Mr. B. R. Dunning) at Sidmouth police station yesterday, on Harold Leslie Heard, 20, whose parents live at 93 Clifton Street, Exeter, who was fatally injured while being shown the working of a humane killer. The jury added a rider to the effect that the ammunition should be kept separately from the gun by a responsible person.

Evidence of identification was given by Percival Edward Heard, a brother.

Charles Alfred Taylor, of 2 Denleigh Terrace, Sidmouth, who was in a state of collapse while giving evidence, said he was employed by Messrs. Selley, Bros., butchers, of Fore Street. He called for deceased at his lodgings, 4, Sidbrook Cottages at 7.30 am on Monday, and together they drove in three fat bullocks from a field. One they left at Mr F. Holmes', by whom deceased was employed, and the other two they drove to the slaughter-house of Messrs. Selley. Heard went into the slaughter-house and picked up a sheep gun which was kept in a box. Deceased then noticed a humane killer and asked if it were a new one. Witness replied "No, it has been cleaned," and picked it up for a moment to look at it. Deceased had the sheep killer in his hand, pulled the trigger, and said, "It won't work. How does it work?"

"I put it up against him and tried it," continued witness, "and it went - Oh, God!"

Deceased "walked about" and then said, "It's gone through me!" He walked across to the kitchen and witness put the gun down somewhere and followed. Deceased collapsed slowly on his right side in the kitchen and looked at witness, but did not say anything.

The housekeeper was in the kitchen and rushed for Mr. Selley. Replying to the Deputy Coroner, witness said he was accustomed to the gun and had slaughtered animals with it. It had a safety-catch but it was difficult at a glance to see if it was loaded. He last used the gun on Monday week. He never loaded the gun until he wanted to use it. He did not know it was loaded. He could not explain why the gun did not explode the first time, but deceased might have done something while witness walked across to look at the other killer.

Florence Elsie Vincent, housekeeper to Mr. Selley, said she thought the two were fooling when she first saw them. Heard was saying, "It's gone through me," and they went into the kitchen. Witness called Mr. Selley, and, on returning, saw deceased sink to the floor. She knew the lads were the best of chums.

Frederick Theodore Selley, of Messrs. Selley Bros., said he found the deceased lying on his side. Witness saw he was badly hurt, and fetched Superintendent Irish, of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, who 'phoned for a doctor. It was difficult to see when either of the

killers used was loaded. Both Taylor and Spurway, the other slaughterman, were accustomed to the killers. Witness had not the faintest idea how the killer came to be loaded at the time of the accident.

Arthur William Irish said he found the deceased unconscious and groaning. Witness discovered a bullet mark which appeared to be over the heart.

Wallace Spurway, of 6, Pathwhorlands, Sidmouth, employed by Mr. Selley for 5 years, stated that he last used the sheep gun on Wednesday, when Taylor was with him. Witness put the gun back in its place unloaded, and had not touched it since. He had never found it loaded when he had used it. Questioned by Inspector Dart, witness said that three sizes of cartridge were used in the gun for different animals, but only one cartridge at a time could be used. It was impossible for a cartridge to be put in and forgotten. It was usual to leave the empty case in the breach, and this had to be taken out before re-loading.

P.C. Knowles produced the fatal pistol and the coat deceased was wearing.

Dr. W. S. Campbell said deceased was dead when he arrived. There was a bullet mark on the left breast, and the charge had, apparently, severed a large blood vessel.

The Deputy Coroner, summing up, said Taylor did an incredibly foolish thing; not only did he pull the trigger, but, knowing how to use the weapon, actually pressed the muzzle against his friend's chest without ascertaining whether it would go off.

After the verdict had been given, the Deputy Coroner said the jury had not seen fit to comment on Taylor's action, but he thought it would be a lesson that would last all his life. Who did load the gun they would never find out.

The Deputy Jury and the jury expressed sympathy with the relatives.

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