

Wigan Observer and District Advertiser, Saturday August 9th 1879

*"An occurrence of an unusually singular nature took place at Ince on Thursday night. It seems that a boatman, named Isaac Bamber of Burscough Junction, whose boat was lying at No 15 lock, Ince, had been on Thursday to bury a brother who had been drowned at Burnley sometime during the week. He returned home at ten o'clock, and in company with his wife retired to rest in the cabin of his boat. Owing to some means or other the lock below where deceased's boat was moored had been left open and the water in that part of the canal running away the boat turned partly over on its side. Deceased awakened about eleven o'clock and finding water coming into the cabin he with his wife immediately got on deck, but at once returned to fetch away his infant, which he thought had been left behind. A girl about twelve years of age had however, unknown to the deceased, brought the child on deck, and it is supposed the deceased remained in the cabin searching for the child. Becoming alarmed in consequences of her husband not returning the wife gave information to the police and at half-past eleven o'clock that same night Police constable Lyons found deceased's dead body in the water which had accumulated in the cabin of the boat."*

Wigan Observer, Wednesday August 13<sup>th</sup> 1879

#### THE SINGULAR CASE OF DROWNING ON A CANAL BOAT AT INCE

*"In our Saturday's issue, we briefly reported the circumstances under which Isaac Bamber, of Lathom, captain of the canal boat "Catherine," was drowned the previous Thursday night while trying to rescue his child, who he supposed was in the cabin of his boat, which had fallen on its side in the pool in which it was lying, below No. 15 lock of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, at Rose Bridge. The particulars are of an unusually sad character. Deceased had that day returned from the burial of a brother, who had been drowned at Burnley while engaged at work on the canal, and along with his wife and two children retired to the cabin of his boat for the night. About half past ten o'clock the wife found the boat had lurched to one side, and on investigation it was discovered that one of the paddles of the lock below the pool in which the "Catherine," which was loaded with coal, was moored had been left open, thus allowing the water to run out of the pool. The paddle was "let down," and after informing the lock-keeper, who lives close to the canal, what had been done, the parties retired to their cabin, thinking that the water from the bye-wash of the lock higher up would soon fill the pool and right the boat. They, however, took the precaution not to go to bed. The wife lay on a form, while the husband stretched himself on the floor. Overcome with sleep, Mrs. Bamber fell into a sound slumber; but some time after the husband perceived water was entering the cabin and he seized hold of his wife who also seized hold of her daughter, and the three got on deck in safety. Unnoticed by either the deceased or his wife, the daughter when coming out of the cabin clutched the baby by the legs and brought it out with her and in the excitement of the moment the wife shouting "oh, my child, Isaac," deceased jumped into the cabin which was rapidly filling with water, to search for the child. Being apprised by the daughter that the child was safe, the wife shouted to her husband to come on deck, but at that moment a wave came towards them and the boat giving a lurch, it was instantly submerged in the water. The shouts of the woman brought Police Constable Lyon to the spot and he promptly rescued her and the two children from the perilous position in which they were placed, all of them being two or three feet in water. The body of the deceased was recovered later on and removed to a neighbouring house. On Monday, Mr Barker, deputy county coroner for the district, held an inquest on the body at the Rose Bridge Inn, Ince, when the following evidence was taken:*

*Alice Bamber, widow of the deceased, said she lived at Lathom. Her husband was captain of the canal boat "Catherine," which belongs to Messrs. J. Taylor and Sons, and was 38 years of age. On Thursday deceased went to the funeral of his brother who had been drowned at Burnley. On his return he along with witness visited some friends, where he had some drink, but not much. She did not have any nor had she partaken of more than six glasses of liquor since her marriage thirteen years ago. They got on board their boat at half-past nine o'clock. It was in a pool below the No. 15 lock, and was moored to stumps on the canal bank. Immediately witness got on board she and her little girl and boy, 13 months old went to bed but her husband lay on the floor as it was too hot to go to bed in the cabin, there being a large fire in the stove. About half-past ten o'clock witness awakened, and finding the boat on its side she aroused her husband, who sent her to Abel Buckley's, the lock tender, to inquire whether the water of the pool should be allowed to run away. Instead of*

going to Buckley's she went to her brother-in-law's, which was only a short distance away and asked what sort of a pool the one below No. 15 lock was to lie in. She was informed that their boat had lain there many a time, and that nothing had happened to it. A man named James Hall, who was in the brother-in-law's house, accompanied witness to the lock when it was discovered that one of the paddles had "dropped out." Hall dropped the paddle in. They went to Buckley's house and knocked him up. Buckley put his head out of the bedroom window, and inquired what they wanted and they told him that the pool was "off" and the boat capsizing, that they found one of the paddles of the lock up, and that they had put it down, where upon he said, "Go to bed, and the pool will be filled by morning." Buckley then closed the window, and witness went away thinking he would follow. The bye-wash was running then. Hall accompanied her to the boat, and then went home. The boat was then in the same position as she had left it. She told her husband what Buckley said, but they decided not to go to bed in case the water might come in upon them. Witness lay on a form and her husband stretched himself on the floor, but the little girl and the baby were in bed. Witness fell asleep and was awakened by her husband catching hold of her by the arms and legs. In her sleepy state she could not think what her husband was after, and she seized hold of the end of the form and exclaimed, "Oh, do not put me in the canal, Isaac, I have done no wrong." Her husband thereupon said "God bless thee, Alice, come out of the cabin, we are going to be drowned." By this time she came to herself and assisted her husband all she could. She seized hold of her girl who unknown to her at the time dragged the child out of the cabin by the legs, and when they got on deck she shouted, "Oh, my child, Isaac." Deceased that instant jumped into the water in the cabin to search for the child. When she discovered the child was safe, she shouted to her husband to tell him to come on deck, but she did not suppose he heard her. Immediately her husband got into the cabin a wave came and the boat turned over. She and her children were meanwhile on deck, the little girl being up to the neck in the water, and their screaming attracted a police-constable (Police-constable Lyon) who at once got them ashore and proceeded to divest himself of some of his clothing for the purpose of fetching out her husband. Some men came up at the time and told the police-constable that he must not go into the cabin or he might be drowned too. A number of women took her and the children away and she did not see what took place afterwards. In answer to other questions by the deputy Coroner and the jury, witness said the paddles of the locks on the canal were not allowed to be left open. Any person who did so was fined heavily, but sometimes boatmen forgot to close them. A boat might have passed the pool when she was asleep but she thought it highly improbable. She did not hear any pass and she questioned whether there was sufficient water to allow of one passing through the lock. The by wash was running very hard and the water from the pool was running very hard. All her best clothes and other property, to her of some value, were spoiled with the water. She could not explain why her husband did not go himself to see what was wrong with the lock. She was always sent by him to look after things. Her husband go drunk at times, but he was not what could be called a drunken man. He saw that they had meat for her and the children before he took to drinking. They had been lying in the pool since Tuesday.

James Hall, Bridgewater-street, Ince, colliery winder said he was in the deceased's brother's house on Thursday night, when deceased and his wife left to go to his boat. About half-past nine o'clock deceased was sober, though he had shad some drink. He could walk straight. Shortly after ten o'clock deceased's wife came to her brother-in-law's house and asked what "sort of a pool is this to lie in." She was told that they had lain in that pool for weeks, and no harm had come to them. Witness then proceeded with her to the lock and found that one of the paddles was up. At Mrs. Bamber's request he dropped the paddle, and then went to the lock tender's house to inform him of what had happened. Buckley, after hearing what they had done, told them to "go home and go to bed' if thou has dropped the paddle, the pool will be filled by morning." The by-wash was running hard at the time.

Police-constable Thomas Lyon said he was on duty on Thursday night on the canal bank, when he heard the screams of a woman and children. He proceeded to the spot and found Mrs. Bamber and her two children on the deck of the boat, which was about one foot under water. He got them to the bank, and having ascertained that the husband was in the cabin, he (witness) stripped himself and went in and found deceased lying on his back on the bottom of the cabin. When he (the constable) stood in the cabin, he was up to his neck in water. Previous to this he saw something white in the canal, which he thought was deceased's body, and was going to jump in for it, when he discovered it was something else.

*Abel Buckley, lock-keeper at the Wigan locks at Ince, said his duty was to look after the locks and to see that the boatmen did their duty and did not unnecessarily waste water. He went off duty on this particular night after eight o'clock, an hour later than usual, and at that time everything seemed to be right. The last boat passed through the lock about nine o'clock. He could not account for the paddle of one of the locks being up when the witness Hall went to inspect it. He had been six years a lock-keeper, and for ten years previous to that he was in the service of the canal company in another capacity. The boatmen were frequently very careless and left the paddles open, but they were fined when they were found out. Boys also sometimes opened the paddles for mischief. When he went off duty there were two watchmen who were supposed to walk along the canal bank twice in the course of the night. One of the watchmen should start from Henhurst Bridge at eleven o'clock and walk up the canal bank as far as Rose Bridge; but on this particular occasion the watchman did not come upon the scene until between two and three o'clock in the morning. In answer to a juryman, witness said it was his duty to get up in the night-time when anything wrong was pointed out to him. When he was roused up the first time Hall said to him, "Alice here has been asleep, but she cannot sleep for the boat grating on the side. We have been to this lock and found the off-side paddle up, and we put it down." Witness replied that if they had put the paddle down the pool would be filled by the bye-wash by morning. They did not tell him the boat was in a dangerous position, or he should at once have gone to put things right. He should only have been too glad to have done so.*

*Alice Buckley, wife of the preceding witness, said she knew the deceased. She saw him go on board his boat about half-past nine o'clock on Thursday night. There were three women with him, one on each side of him having hold of his arms, and one behind. He appeared to have had some drink. The paddles were right then and the water from the pool was running over the bye-wash. Everything was right at a quarter to ten o'clock. No boat passed through the lock after that. The paddles were often left open, but it was seldom they found out who opened them.*

*This concluded the evidence.*

*The Deputy Coroner said the question the jury had to consider was whether anyone was to blame for what had occurred. He could not help thinking that the deceased was to be blamed for sending his wife to look after matters instead of going himself; but from the evidence of the lock-keeper's wife he was somewhat in drink when he went to his boat that evening. The evidence upon that point was, however, not very clear.*

*The Foreman: The paddle of the lock must have been left open from mischief or maliciousness.*

*The Deputy Coroner: There is certainly someone to blame, but it is difficult to put it upon any particular person.*

*A Juror: There had been negligence on the part of the deceased.*

*The Deputy Coroner: I believe he must have been in drink.*

*The Foreman: But we have not sufficient evidence to prove that he was in drink.*

*After some conversation, the jury returned an open verdict that the deceased was found drowned in the cabin of his boat, which had partly capsized through the paddle of the lock having been left open during the night by some person unknown.*

*The Deputy Coroner said that verdict would leave the matter open for the investigation of the police. If the paddle was left open by a boatman he might be liable to a charge of manslaughter.*

*The Foreman: I think great credit is due to the policeman for the way in which he discharged his duty.*

*The Deputy Coroner: He stripped himself and promptly went into the water.*

*The Foreman: It was a very humane act indeed.*

*This closed the inquiry."*