

News item from the Berkshire times Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July 1876.

Shrivenham.

Strange fatality.

A sad death, involving a most serious issue, has just occurred at Shrivenham, the circumstances of which are at once peculiar and painful. It seems that a month ago yesterday, two boys Harry Lewis and the deceased, who is 12 years old and named James Henry Taylor, being the son of a blacksmith of Shrivenham were sitting together on the trunk of an old tree used as a block upon which to chop sticks in the playground of the National School, which both attended. The boys were waiting for the commencement of afternoon school, and while so engaged, a lad named Henry Knapp, 10 years of age, the son of a mason of the village, who was a schoolmate of the other little fellows entered the playground. The disposition of this boy, it is said, is a quarrel some one and some time previously he had kicked the little boy Taylor. On the present occasion Knapp went straight to the block upon which the two boys were sitting and, seizing an axe that was lying near, exclaimed, "*see me hit that Jim Taylor on the head!*" With that he raised the weapon and, it seems, struck poor Taylor on the back of the head with it remarking, "*There, now, thees got thy allowance.*" The force of the blow was such as to knock the poor little fellow down, and he fell flat on his face. He almost immediately regained his feet, however, crying out, "*Oh! my head, my head!*" Notwithstanding, he went into school at the proper time and, during the afternoon volunteered to help clean up the wood which was strewn in the playground. On the schoolmaster putting the question to the boy, and as the little fellow apparently wished to do it particularly, the schoolmaster allowed him to do so. Having, with the other boys who helped, completed the task in about 20-minutes he returned to the school and resumed his studies. These he pursued for about 20 minutes in apparently his usual health when he complained of pains in his head and vomited. This he did again in the playground where upon the schoolmaster told him he was ill, and had better go home. The boy did so, and on his way met his father who spoke to him, but he returned no reply, and the father, without giving the circumstances more than a passing thought, went on. The boy at length near his parents cottage met his brother, who saw that the boy was unwell. In getting inside the house, the poor boy exhausted, dropped on the floor. His mother immediately attended him with the care and attention which a mother

alone knows best how to bestow, and while nursing in the garden he explained how the occurrence happened. Vinegar was applied to his head, upon which there was a small swollen lump and other measures which household skill recommended were adopted. Under this treatment the boy lay until the following Sunday, when, finding him worse rather than better, Dr Parker, of Shrivenham was called in. He found the boy suffering from a tenderness on the crown of the head, of the pain occasioned by which the boy complained to Dr Parker, as also, of a pain down his left side. Dr Parker treated the boy as usual in such cases. The boy became delirious from the effect of the blow, and, a day or two subsequently. Dr Parkers attention was called to the boy's bowels by the parents, to whom the lad still complained of pain situated there. On an examination Dr Parker found bruised and sloughing, the discharge being very great; and proceeding from internal inflammation, the lad at the time suffering from inflammation of the bowels. Dr Parker also found a wound in the groin and another in the loin. He treated the poor little sufferer accordingly, but, without ever rallying, the little fellow, after gradually getting worse, died on Wednesday morning last. Under the circumstances and inquest was considered necessary, and was accordingly held at the Barrington Arms, Shrivenham, on Thursday morning by Mr W. D. Wasborough, county coroner, and a respectable jury, summoned by Sgt Winchcombe. The jury was comprised as follows: Rev G W Murray (chairman), Messrs. Wentworth, Lewis, Lamb, Lee and Crook. Evidence was called substantiating the facts narrated above, about which there was no dispute. Dr Parker's evidence however, was of an important nature and caused considerable surprise. The conclusion at which he arrived was that there was not the slightest connection between the blow which deceased had received and the immediate cause of death, which was the result of inflammation of the bowels and slowing of the peritonium. This statement as before intimated, caused some surprise, and many were the questions which the jury put to Dr Parker in reference to it. He, however, remained unchanged in his opinion, although it should be stated he admitted that, though ordered by the coroner to make a post-mortem examination, he, in doing so that day had simply removed the scalp and had not opened the skull. He said he found everything perfectly clear no traces of extravasation of blood whatever and explain to the jury that he did not proceed to infer that a more complete examination of the skull did not open it, in fact in consequence of Mr superintendent Rhys saying it was necessary a statement which, it was said, mysteries denies ever having made. under these circumstances the jury there being no other medical man called returned a verdict in

accordance with the medical testimony, though undoubtedly the majority, if not the whole of them, early coincided with the reservation made by the foreman at the time that, whatever their own private opinions might be they could only return a verdict upon the evidence given. The verdict, therefore amounted to one of '*natural causes.*' Upon the same day, however, the boy Knapp, who had been previously apprehended and remanded from Monday, when Mr T. L. Goodlake, a magistrate of the Faringdon bench, attended at Shrivenham, and took what proved to be the dying boy's deposition, was brought up at Faringdon before Mr Goodlake charged with wilfully and maliciously injuring James Henry Taylor with intent to do grievous bodily harm. The evidence taken on the previous Monday having been read over, the prisoner, who apparently felt his position, was committed for trial, the committing magistrate offering to accept bail good and substantial - the boy's father in £50 and two other sureties in a like sum each. They were not forthcoming at the time and the boy was removed in custody.

The case was arraigned for the Berkshire Lent Assizes and on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1877, the Berkshire Chronicle printed, *Henry Knapp, charged with unlawfully and maliciously wounding James Henry Taylor, with intent to do him grievous bodily harm at Shrivenham, on the 30<sup>th</sup> June last.*

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 1877, the Wilts & Gloucester Standard carried the short note, *No Bill. The grand jury, at the Berks Assizes, threw out the bill against Henry Knapp, of this village, a little boy who was committed by the Faringdon bench of magistrates on a charge of unlawfully wounding a schoolfellow named Taylor in the school yard last June, and in which case the coroner's jury found a verdict of, 'Died from natural causes.'*