

Saturday, June 3, 1922

Ballinasloe Fatality

YOUNG BALLYHAUNIS MAN'S DEATH
ON THE SUCK

PERISHED IN MIDST OF HELP

STRANGE DISCLOSURES AT
CORONER'S INQUEST

"ONLY A POOR CATHOLIC"

MAN WITH BOAT REPRIMANDED
BY JURY

SCENES IN COURTHOUSE

**Plucky Young Ballinasloe Man
Complimented**

A very sad fatality occurred in Ballinasloe at about four o'clock on last Sunday evening, when a young man named Patrick Dwyer (17), draper's assistant at Mrs. Finnegan's, was accidentally drowned while bathing in the River Suck, a short distance from the red bridge near the railway. It would appear that the deceased, who is a native

of Ballyhaunis, but who has been living in Ballinasloe since last March, accompanied by a few other boys left the town in the evening to go for a swim. He got into the water alone, leaving his companions on the bank, and swam down in the direction in which the river runs for about twenty yards. He then turned, but in attempting to swim against a strong current he found himself unable, and got into difficulties, probably cramp. He then put up his hand to ask for help and a young man named Daniel McCarthy, a tailor, seeing the deceased in distress jumped into the water without divesting himself of his clothing and swam to the rescue. He caught a hold of the deceased and shouted to a young man named Wilson, who was coming up the river in a boat with two young ladies, to hurry on, as there was a man drowning. Wilson, however, rowed the boat to the bank of the river to allow the young ladies to get off, but by the time this was done it was too late, help was futile, for the deceased had gone to the bottom of the water never to return. When news of the sad occurrence was conveyed a large crowd soon gathered at the bridge and on the banks of the river, and the search parties with boats, in one of which was Rev. Fr. Moloney, C.C., soon got busy. It was not, however, until about nine

o'clock that the body was recovered. Large crowds remained in the vicinity until the body was taken out of the water, when all that was mortal of a quiet and inoffensive young man were taken to the courthouse, where Dail troops guarded the remains during the night.

At about three o'clock next morning the sad news was conveyed to Mr. and Mrs. Dwyere by Mrs. Finnegan's manager, who motored to Ballyhaunis. His parents and brother, William, soon afterwards arrived in Ballinasloe.

Deceased was an exemplary young man, went to daily Mass, was a member of the Pioneer Association, and was generally very popular. He is a son of Mr. Michael and Mrs. Dwyer, Ballyhaunis, and brother of Mr. William Dwyer, N.T., secretary of the mayo County Committee, I.N.T.O., and secretary of the Ballyhaunis branch of the I.N.T.O., to whom, with the other members of the family, deep sympathy is extended in the loss they have maintained. The poignancy of the affair is increased when it is remembered that the deceased perished while help was so near at hand.

A very curious story was related in regard to the tragedy. It would appear that the deceased asked some of his companions who were with him prior to plunging into the water what would

they do in case he was drowning. He shortly afterwards threw himself into the water, saying, "Here goes, sink or swim."

THE INQUEST.

At about 12.30 o'clock on Monday Mr J. J. Hoban, coroner for East Galway, sat at the courthouse to inquire into the circumstances leading to the unfortunate death of the deceased. The following jury was empanelled: — Messrs. John Kirwan (foreman), Thomas Finn, Patrick Burke, Frederick Murray, Michael Fitzpatrick, Michael Connolly, U.C.; James Kelly, Thomas Connolly, Patrick Dolan, Patrick Leech, W. O'Rourke, and W. J. Logan.

After viewing the remains in the magistrate's room, where heart-rending scenes were witnessed, the inquest was formally opened, Mr. L. Flynn, Loughrea Brigade Chief of Police, and Captain Coy, O.C. watching the proceedings on behalf of the army authorities.

The first witness was Mr Michael Dwyer, father of the deceased. He identified the remains as those of his son, Patrick Dwyer, whom he last saw alive about March 4, when his son came to Ballinasloe to take up an appointment as draper's assistant with Mrs. Finnegan. At about 3.30 o'clock that morning Mr. Kearns, manager for Mrs. Finnegan, came to witness's door with others and informed a party in the house that his son had been drowned.

Mr. Flynn: Do you know that your son had a dispute with anyone at any time? — Never.

Coroner: I understand you want to get the remains removed, as you are in a hurry, and before handing them over I wish, on behalf of the jurors and myself, to offer you our sincere sympathy. — Mr. Flynn: I wish to associate myself with the vote of sympathy in the sad circumstances in which your son has met his death. — Mr. Kirwan (foreman) also associated himself with the vote of sympathy. He asked were there any witnesses to be brought up. — Coroner: There are, but it is not necessary to keep the remains.

Eventually, Mr. Dwyer decided to remain until the inquest had concluded.

DOCTOR'S EVIDENCE.

Dr. T. J. Rossiter stated that he viewed the remains of the deceased. There were no marks of violence on the body. In his opinion, death was due to drowning.

SERGEANT MURPHY'S EVIDENCE.

Sergeant J. Murphy, Dail barracks, Ballinasloe, stated that at about 4.30 o'clock on Sunday afternoon he received a report that a man had been drowned in the vicinity of the red bridge. He immediately proceeded to the scene of the tragedy. He saw no trace of the remains, and was not with the search parties, but some of the men who accompanied him went with the search parties. Witness went back to the barracks and sent out another man —

Quartermaster McNamara — in charge of two men. Witness was not near the scene of the tragedy when these men arrived. The first thing witness did when he got the report was to inquire as to the particular spot where deceased was drowned. He saw three or four boats, and the men in them were searching for the body with oars. They had a drag, but as it was too short it was useless.

Mr Flynn: Had there been any attempt by the military authorities to recover the body? — Witness: there were two of our men in the boats, and they were searching for the body. — When you left for Ballinasloe was it for help you went to recover the remains? —Yes; I sent another man in my place to try to get the body. Did you leave two men abroad looking for the body in the river? —Yes, and I also sent out a further search party.

Quartermaster Peter McNamara stated that on the evening in question he was ordered to go to the red bridge to search for the body of deceased, and went out with a search party.

Mr. Flynn: What happened when you sent out? —Witness: When we went out, we went down to the bank of the river. There were four or five boats searching for the remains at the time, so we stood on the bank for about an hour. How long were you there before the body was found? —About an hour and a half. Were you present in a boat when the body was found? — No; none of those with me were in the boat at the time, nor at any time while I was there during the search. The two men who went out

with Sergeant Murphy, were they in a boat at the time? —They were not in a boat when I went out. Were they there at all? —All our men were practically on the bank of the river. Was there a diver amongst any of the men on the bank? —I think there would be one. Was he there at the time? —I did not see him; I was there until the body was recovered.

Foreman: We would like to hear the man who tried to save Dwyer. —Coroner: According as the witnesses come up you can examine them. —Foreman: I do not see what good these witnesses are. The man who tried to save Dwyer will give information as to who was there at the time. —Coroner: He will be sworn later.

Mr. Connolly: Were you in charge of the military search party? —Witness replied in the affirmative. It might be well to explain what the term “diver” means; it might be misconstrued by the public; I take it that he was an ordinary swimmer who goes down in an ordinary way? —Yes, an ordinary swimmer.

Mr. Connolly: The question was answered in such a way as to lead one to think that the military authorities had a trained diver. —Mr. Flynn: I will bring that out later on.

MR. MCCARTHY'S EVIDENCE.

Daniel McCarthy, sworn, stated that he was in company with Patrick Dwyer at the time he was drowning. Deceased went into the water by himself, but there was a lot of people on the bank at the time.

Mr. Flynn: Was he divested of his clothing? —Witness: He was; he went in with the intention of having a swim. —Will you tell the jury now what exactly happened before he went down? —He was swimming about for a while; he then began to swim with the stream; he was making towards a place where the water was very deep. Some of those who were on the bank shouted to him that it was a dangerous place. He turned around then as if to come back towards where we were, and I believe the current was too strong for him to swim against.

Foreman: How far was that from where he went in? —Witness: I suppose it would be about twelve or thirteen yards. —Coroner: Were there any boats on the river at that time? —Not at that time. —Was there anybody swimming in the river? —Nobody but himself. —Mr. Connolly: How many were on the bank with you? —There would be about twenty, all boys. Deceased let himself down as if to find bottom, and it appeared he could not. He asked the men who were on the bank was there a hole there when he came up.

Mr. Connolly: Did he go completely under the water and then ask the question? —Yes; a boat then came around the corner and it was at this time that he showed signs of distress. —Coroner: Do you know who was in the boat? —I do. —Foreman: How far was the boat from where deceased was in distress? —It would be about thirty yards. —Mr. Flynn: Will you tell the jury what signs he showed of distress?

Witness: I saw he was in trouble, and I asked

him, “Pat, are you drowning?” He roared “Help.” He had gone under the water at the time. The crowd rushed towards where the boat was coming. They told the occupants that there was a man drowning, and to “Hurry on.” I jumped into the water with my clothes on and made towards him. When I got to him the boat was just passing him out. He was after making a grasp for the oar which was put towards him by the man in the boat. He was on the pint of going down after catching at the oar when I pulled him up again.

Coroner: So he actually caught the oar then? —Witness: I could not say; I do not know whether he did or not. I told him to be easy, that I would do all I could for him. I held him for about three or four minutes waiting for the boat to come to us. The man who had the boat was leaving out two women on the bank about four or five yards away.

Foreman: When you went to his assistance, the man with the oar did not stay to assist you? —Witness: No; he did not; he had to leave out the ladies.

Foreman: that is very bad, I do not care what ladies they were. We all have wives and sisters, and if the man in the boat had come to this man's assistance it would be a different story today. We all have mothers, sisters and brothers, and a thing like this should not have occurred for the sake of any lady or gentleman.

Witness (continuing): I saw it was useless waiting for the boat. I had to let him go in order to catch a better hold of him. He started then to

grapple with me, and I disentangled myself from him. He sank and never rose again.

Foreman: Did the boat come back then? —
Witness: No, the boat did not come back.

Coroner: So the man in the boat did not stand or return? —Witness: I saw him going back to leave the ladies out. He came back then to search for him.

Mr Dwyer, (father of deceased): A good time! —Coroner: how many minutes elapsed in the meantime? —Witness: I could not say.

Mr. Flynn: In your opinion, if the boat had remained after he had caught the oar could they have saved his life? —Witness: Well, he had every assistance. —Foreman: Had he remained with the boat he would have shown his sympathy in trying to save his life. How many were in the boat altogether? —Witness: a man and two women.

Mr Dwyer (father of deceased): You know that a man in a boat can, by back-paddling make it almost stand against the stream? —Witness: I do not know; I was in the water at the time.

SHOUTED AT MR. WILSON.

Thomas Treacy, who was in company with deceased, stated that he had nothing further to add to the evidence of Daniel McCarthy.

Coroner: You did not go to his assistance? —
Witness: I shouted to Mr. Wilson. —Did you go into the water? —No; I do not know how to swim.

Coroner: In your opinion, could the party in the boat have been of any assistance? —Witness:

Well, deceased was held for two or three minutes over the water after the boat had passed. The boat went forward and the two women were left on the bank.

Mr. Flynn: After the man leaving the two ladies on the bank out of the boat did he return to where deceased was sinking? —Yes, he did. —Did he return immediately? —As soon as he had left the two ladies on the bank he returned. —Have you any idea what length of time passed between leaving the ladies on the bank until he got back to where deceased was sinking? — It took him five or six minutes, anyway, to leave them on the bank. —Coroner: Was deceased in trouble for those five or six minutes? —He was not.

Mr. Kelly: In your opinion, had the deceased by that time gone beyond all human aid? —
Witness: Yes. —Mr. Connolly: What distance was it to where the ladies were put on the bank? —It would be about ten yards. he went and turned the boat into the bank. It seems he was not a good hand at rowing a boat.

Mr. Connolly: did he make all the haste possible to the scene of the drowning man? —
Witness: Well, after leaving the ladies on the bank he came back immediately —Mr. Kelly: Do you know the man who was in the boat? —I do. —Would you kindly give his name? —Mr. S. Wilson.

THE MAN IN THE BOAT.

The next witness was Samuel Wilson. He

stated that he was out in a boat on the river that evening at about ten or fifteen minutes to four.

Mr. Flynn: Did you come to the assistance of Patrick Dwyer, the deceased? —Witness: I did. —Will you tell the jury exactly what happened? —We were going up the river. There is a turn in the river before you come to the red bridge. As we were coming towards the turn we heard a lot of shouting on the bank near where the people usually bathe in summer. There were ladies in the boat, and it was suggested that we should turn, but on looking up the river there appeared to be only one man in the water, and we decided to go on. Immediately afterwards some of the crowd on the bank shouted to hurry on, that there was a man drowning or being lifted —I could not say which. I pulled the boat for all I was worth in the direction of the man in the water and at the time I did not know if the man near me was in difficulties. At this time deceased was at least fifty yards from me —he may have been sixty. When I got level with deceased I threw an oar towards him. It must have got within a foot of him at the very least. I could not throw it any further without actually hitting him with it. He tried to grasp it, but failed. The right oar was then out of the rowlocks. This particular boat I was rowing had rowlocks and was scarcely ever used. I do not think I have used it three times. When I tried to get the oar back into the row-lock, I could not do so. The result was that I had only one oar, the left one, and the boat drifted into the right bank opposite to where the boy was.

To the foreman: My back was to the bridge; my right oar was gone, with the result that the front of the boat turned out with the current. The moment she struck the bank the ladies got out, and I can safely swear that there was no more than a minute and a half or two minutes passed until I had the boat shoved into the centre of the stream again. At that time I saw Mr. McCarthy—I did not know him then—making for the bank at the opposite side, and I then pulled right after him thinking that he might have had a hold of the deceased. I then pulled into the bank and told Treacy and some others to take the boat when I could not work her with row-locks which did not fit the oars.

Foreman: When you came up to the turn you heard the crowd telling you to hurry on; how many yards was that from the turn—you said about fifty?—It would be that at least. —You must have left the drowning man and gone to the other side of the bank? —No; I was going up to the bank of the river and deceased was on the right hand side. I threw him out my right-hand oar, with the result that I had only the left hand to pull the boat with.—Why did not you stay in the boat with the ladies and do all you could? —I could not get my oar back into the row-lock. —You only threw it out to him? —Yes.

Foreman: You are after swearing here that it was five or six minutes since the boat came back, and the evidence is that the boy was drowned before you came back at all? —I do not deny that. I came back immediately.

Foreman: You showed bad oarsmanship and

unchristian conduct no matter whether you had ladies or gentlemen with you. I think between yourself and the ladies you should have assisted a little better than you did (applause in court). It is a shame in a town like Ballinasloe to have such a thing occur (renewed applause). —Witness: I think as far as the ladies were concerned they had no power to return.

Mr. Dwyer (father of deceased): I will ask you one question: If the oar was out of the row-lock could not you back the boat by placing the oar at one side of it? —Witness: I could not, because I did not know anything about it. —To the foreman: The boat drifted into the bank. If I got Ballinasloe I could not stop it. —Foreman: Ballinasloe was not as dear as the life of the man which could have been so easily saved. —Witness: What could I do but my best. I am not a good boatman. —Mr. Leech: It is a great wonder you brought two you ladies up the river in a boat then, you could not do that except you were able? —Witness: I am telling the truth when I say that I never rowed. —Mr. Leech: I do not suppose there are two of the jury who believe your statement. —Witness: I am sorry if they do not. —Foreman: The jury cannot help you. The poor boy lost his life. I know he is better off than we.

Mr. Leech: He was only a little Catholic child whose life was not worth saving. —Mr. Dwyer (father of deceased): That is all. —Mr. Leech: If he was on the opposite side he would be saved. —A juror: We know that. —Coroner: It seems a curious thing to me; I think the man

able to work a boat should also be able to work it under such circumstances. —Mr. Leech said it was hard to believe witness's word that he was back in two minutes. —Witness: The boat was in at the bank immediately. —Mr. Leech: Sure there is no bank there at all. —Coroner: Is not there an ordinary landing place? —Witness: The boat just struck the bank. If I had my own boat this would not have happened. —Foreman: It is a wonder you did not see to it, and not do things so reckless. —Witness: I could not swim a stroke. —Mr. Flynn: Owing to the contradictory evidence, it would be well to call another witness who was on the scene.

John Leech was then sworn, and stated: The only evidence I have to add to that of Daniel McCarthy is: when Mr. Wilson pulled up the boat to where the chap was drowning it did not seem to me that he took the oar out of the lock at all. He just kept up the oar on top of the water, and it did not reach the deceased at all while he was passing. He raised one oar out of the water. It was not long enough. It did not reach Dwyer. —Replying to the foreman: If he took out the left oar I would have seen him. —Mr. Flynn: Remember, now, you are on your oath. Do you swear positively that it was the left oar that was taken out of the water? —Witness: I did not see the left oar taken out of the row-lock. —Mr. Flynn: When you say that you only corroborate Mr. Wilson's evidence.

Replying to the foreman, witness said that the boat passed the drowning boy on the right-hand side. —Foreman: The boat would be on the

south side of the two boys? —Mr. Dwyer: Did you make any attempt to stop the boat? —Witness: He moved into the bank to let the ladies out first.

Mr. Wilson said something at this stage, and the coroner told him not to interrupt.

Continuing, the witness said that he stripped himself and Mr. Wilson gave them the boat. They searched around the place but could find no trace of Dwyer. Witness dived a couple of times but it was no use. —Coroner: In your opinion, if you were in the boat where Mr. Wilson was, would you have saved the boy. —Witness: I would. —Coroner: That is the point I want to get out. So there may have been negligence. — Mr Dwyer: If you had ladies in the boat would you take their modesty into account sooner than save a drowning man? —Witness: I would not. (Applause in court followed this answer).

Mr. Connolly asked what was the depth where deceased was drowned, but the witness said he did not know.

Joseph Brennan (14) who was present on the evening in question also gave evidence, in which he stated that Wilson was the nearest to the boy who was drowning. McCarthy held deceased for about three minutes, and at the same time called to Mr. Wilson to come back with the boat. Mr. Wilson left the ladies on the bank, and in the meantime, McCarthy had to let go the drowning boy; and was trying hard to get to the bank himself. A few minutes later Leech and Finn took the boat and went out to search for the body. —Coroner: Are you stating that Mr. Wilson did not

go back at all? —Witness: He was on the opposite bank.

Patrick Finn also gave evidence. —Mr. Flynn: There was a little matter about a diver in this case. My reason for asking that question was owing to some references that were made in the court before the inquest was opened that there were two divers in the barrack. I want to make it clear to the jury and to the townspeople that there are not. —Mr. Connolly: My reason for asking the question was the same, as I did not want the public to be misled, as it would look as if there were professional divers in the barrack.

The coroner, in summing up, said that the jury had heard the evidence of a medical witness, and there would not be much trouble in ascertaining the cause of death. There was, he said, some contradictory evidence, but at the same time it was for them to consider whether there was negligence on the part of anybody, or could there have been anything more done to save the boy's life.

The jury brought in the following verdict: — “We find the cause of death was accidental, but it is our opinion that Mr. Wilson did not use the necessary judgment that probably would have saved the boy's life. We desire to make special comment on the great bravery displayed by the young man McCarthy in the gallant attempt he made to save the poor boy's life.”

A vote of sympathy was passed with the deceased's parents and friends, in which the coroner joined. —the jury were then

discharged.