

**Norwich Wife**  
**Shot Dead**  
**HUSBAND'S ARREST**  
**ON MURDER CHARGE**  
**A GHASTLY STORY**  
**PRISONER'S STATE-**  
**MENT**

At Sprowston, a suburb of Norwich, late on Saturday night, a young married woman named Curtis was shot dead by her husband. The evidence on that point is perfectly simple and direct, being substantiated by admissions made by the man himself in the hearing of neighbours, but whether the crime comes within the category of murder or that of manslaughter is an issue which can only be solved, if at all, by long and careful sifting of the testimony of the neighbours, of which there is plenty in the hands of the police. The woman was killed, apparently after a quarrel, by the single discharge of a shot gun, and her husband, who made no attempt to escape, is in the hands of the county police.

The man, Robert H. Stanley Curtis, is only about 20 years of age and his wife Laura was about a year younger. They lived together in a cul de sac known as Constitution Opening, which branches off to the right from the North Walsham Road at a point about a third of a mile beyond Christ Church, Catton. At the top end of the opening is the Constitution Tavern, and the cottages in it, five or six in number, are very humble places indeed, each with only two rooms, one-up and one-down. The Curtises lived in the last but one of the row. The man is of about the average height, but of somewhat consumptive appearance. It is said that a year or more ago he was in hospital suffering from some kind of phthisical complaint. He so far recovered as to be able to take part in the annual training of the Militia, since when, however, he appears to have followed no occupation. How they and their eight-months-old baby lived the neighbours have been at a loss to understand. They were, undoubtedly, very poor, and Mrs. Curtis was occasionally indebted for a meal to the kindness of people who lived near by and took pity on her. She was a slight anaemic little body, described as weighing only about six stone.

Her marital life does not seem to have been a happy one. On Saturday night there was a violent quarrel. A neighbour says he heard a woman's scream at about ten o'clock. It was so sharp and horrifying that he thinks it must have been caused by a blow. That was followed by loud and angry vituperation in a man's voice, and so violent did it become that he went out of doors to listen. At about ten minutes past the

hour he heard a gun-shot, and instantly several other neighbours flocked out. One of the earliest of these was a neighbour named Crompton, a bricklayer, who lived in a detached cottage at the far end of the Opening, where in his leisure he does a little market gardening. He entered the house, and there a horrible scene met his eyes. Mrs. Curtis lay across the floor with a ghastly wound about her eyes and forehead, the fatal shot having evidently been fired within very near range. Blood was streaming from her, and was saturating the baby, which lay upon the floor within a foot or two. It is possible, of course, that the baby lay upon the floor before the woman was shot, but so great was the quantity of blood upon its clothing that more probably she was nursing it at the time, and that it rolled from her lifeless arms.

What happened next is a little difficult to ascertain, for a state of intense excitement ruled in Constitution Opening. Curtis had come out of the house into the little forecourt which fronts it, and so also had Crompton. The latter was hurriedly discussing with a neighbour what to do, when Curtis rushed back into the house and locked the door. Some the bystanders construed this action on his part as an attempt to escape, and instantly some of them ran round to the back of the house in order cut off his retreat. It did not appear, however, that that was his intention, for presently another gunshot was heard, it being the momentary impression of Crompton and his fellow-watchers that Curtis had taken his own life. Still listening, they heard a sound as if the weapon were being loaded for the third time. Then Curtis opened the door and once more came out of the house, making some excited remark about the gun having gone off accidentally, and that he would never play with a gun any more. The weapon was taken from him by Crompton, it being still loaded, and a large body of neighbours surrounded him, and made sure of his detention. Those who saw him at this time are agreed that he was not under the influence of drink. He waved his arms up and down in nervous gestures, and he was heard to remark that he wished he had blown his own brains out, and that he would have done so, but that he had not pluck enough. Meanwhile the baby, reeking in the blood of its mother, had been picked up and carried into a neighbour's, and someone had gone for the police. In the first place an attempt was made to find a constable resident in Sprowston, and Police-constable Saylor of the City Constabulary, who lives in the vicinity, arrived, and took Curtis in charge. Subsequently Detective-Inspector High and Sergeant Tolworthy (chief clerk) went to the house, and Curtis was handed over to their custody. Upon the arrival of Inspector Flint, of the County Police, the prisoner was handed over to him, and was conveyed in a cab to the County Police-station, where he was formally charged and then locked up.

The prisoner will be brought up at an Occasional Court to be held some time this afternoon, when the presence of a county justice can be secured. There has been a crowd of persons round the Shirehall for some hours, waiting in the hope of seeing the prisoner, who is, of course, still in the cells at the County Police Station.

The Coroner has ordered a post mortem of the body to be made to-day.

**THE**  
**Sprowston**  
**Murder Charge**  
**TO-DAY'S INQUEST**  
**STORY.**  
**STARTLING DIS-**  
**CLOSURES**  
**THE WOMAN'S JAWS**  
**BROKEN**  
**WHAT THE NEIGH-**  
**BOUR'S HEARD**

This morning, at Sprowston, Mr. Coroner Barton held an inquest on the body of Emma Curtis, who died under such tragic circumstances at the two-roomed cottage occupied by herself and husband at Constitution Opening, Sprowston, on Saturday night.

The inquiry was opened in the tap-room of the Constitution Tavern, and the proceedings begun at half-past eleven o'clock, at which time a considerable crowd of the curious were gathered about the entry to Constitution Row. The tap room was all too small, and the Coroner, upon his arrival, at once decided that other quarters must be found. The jury, having been sworn, and Mr. Mickleburgh being chosen foreman, viewed the body, and then an adjournment was made to the club-room of the Norwich Arms, on the Sprowston Road.

The body lay upon a table in the downstairs room of the cottage, and it was not yet coffined.

**ACCUSED IN COURT.**

On the jury being re-assembled at the Norwich Arms, the prisoner Curtis was brought into the room, looking ghastly pale and with every sign of the great mental stress to which the last few hours have subjected him.

The Coroner did not make the usual opening speech but at once proceeded to call the evidence.

**THE BODY IDENTIFIED.**

The first witness was Robert Smith Neal, 82, Marlborough Road, Norwich, shoemaker, father of the deceased, who identified the body as that of his daughter, Laura Emma Curtis. She was 19 years of age, and was the wife of Robert Horace Stanley Curtis, labourer, of Sprowston.

The Coroner— When were they married? In July or August. Unfortunately I was away from home at the time, and I do not quite know.

The Coroner - That is near enough.

## **NEIGHBOURS DESCRIBE THE GHASTLY**

### **SCENE.**

Alfred Crompton, Constitution Place, Sprowston, a bricklayer, said on the night of August 27<sup>th</sup> he went home about ten minutes to ten. He heard no quarrelling between the accused and his wife. Between 10.10 and 10.15 he heard the report of a gun. His house was about twenty yards from that occupied by the Curtis's. Witness rushed out of doors and saw the smoke coming out of Curtis's door. Witness went into Mr Curtis's yard, but a Mr. Rose, another neighbour, rushed past him into the house and picked up the Curtis' child. Witness followed immediately. Curtis was in the house lying on the floor. He had nothing in his hand. Mr. Rose handed the child over to some woman. The body of the deceased was lying on the floor, on her left cheek, apparently quite dead. There was a large pool of blood, and much blood was flowing from her head. "Look what I have done," Curtis said. Witness said, "yes, you have done it now: you have killed the woman." Rose picked up the baby and then witness sent him to find a constable. Up to that time nothing else had been said. Her people had come in, and witness remained in the room.

### **"THE GUN WENT OFF ITSELF."**

The Coroner—You said something just now about the prisoner saying it was an accident.

Witness - Six minutes after I heard the shot the prisoner said, "It is a pure accident. The gun went off itself. I pointed the gun many a time, but only in play. I will never play with the gun any more.' That was all he said.'

### **GUN FIRED A SECOND TIME.**

A minute or two afterwards Curtis and all of us came out of the house; and as we were standing there Curtis suddenly ran into the house and barred the door, leaving me in the yard. The next thing I heard the click of a gun and then the report of a gun in the house. Up to that time I had not seen the gun. I said to myself, "He has shot himself." But after about half a minute I heard a click of the gun once more, and I said to the bystanders, "Look out, he is loading the gun again." In another half minute Curtis opened the door. At once young Mr. Betts [?] got hold of him by the arm, where-upon Curtis said, "I would not hurt a hair of her head."

### **THE WEAPON SEIZED.**

Then I went in and picked the gun up, which laid on the other side of the table, at the far end of the room. It was then in two pieces. Then we all came out of the room, and the next thing that happened was the arrival of Police-constable Sayer. I said, "Here's your prisoner." But I and some others looked after Curtis while Sayer looked round the room. Curtis kept saying he was innocent. Curtis said to me when I picked the gun up. "It is loaded."

The Coroner—Did he say anything about shooting himself?

Witness—Yes, he did. He said he should have shot himself, only his heart failed him.

### **WHERE THE BABY WAS FOUND.**

The Foreman—Where was the child when you saw it?

Witness- It was lying, I think, near the woman's right arm.

Do you think she had the baby in her arms at the time she was shot?—I should think so.

A juror—Was Curtis sober?

Witness—I believe he was.

Another juror—I should like to know whether, when Crompton entered the house, he saw the prisoner lying near the woman, and what was he doing on the floor?

Witness— He was on the floor against the fire-place. It seemed to me as if he undid the door; and then "swounded," or something of that sort, and fell on the floor,

### **DOCTOR DESCRIBES THE WOUNDS.**

Alexander Michael Ross M R.C.S., L.R.C.P. Lond., of 7, Magdalen Road, Norwich, said that on the night of the 27th inst. he received a message, and went to Curtis's house in Constitution Place. Witness went in and found a woman lying on the floor in the house, in a large pool of blood. She had a large circular wound on the right side of the face, which had practically destroyed the ——

The Coroner—Could you tell it was a gun shot ?

Witness-No, except that I saw the gun. The wound had destroyed the eyeball and right side of the nose, and also part of the cheek.

### **INSTANT DEATH.**

The Coroner—It must have caused immediate death? -Yes.

The Coroner—Was it such as might have been caused by the shot of a gun? – Yes, I have examined the body since.

Were there any signs of burning? – Yes, round the wound. It was there apparently from the gun-powder. I noticed that many of bones in the skull seemed to be broken.

### **FIRED AT CLOSE QUARTERS**

I made a post-mortem examination on Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>. The wound I have mentioned was a gunshot wound, and must have been fired at a distance of twelve or eighteen inches from the woman's head. The charge had penetrated the brain in a horizontal direction and fractured the skull at the back, but had not made a wound of exit. The brains contained a quantity of small shot, some of which I handed to Inspector Flint. There were no other marks of violence except that the lower jaw was broken in two places, one place on each side.

### **LOWER JAW FRACTURED**

The Coroner- How do you account for that?

Witness- I think it must have been caused by direct violence.

The Coroner- Would it be caused by the gun-shot wounds?

Witness-No, I don't think it could have been.

The Coroner-Did the gunshot wound touch the jaw at all?

Witness-No, it did not. The fracture was not, in my opinion, caused by the gunshot wound at all.

These fractures must have been the result of direct violence? –Yes

You found no wound corresponding? – No. One blow might have caused both fractures. They were caused by direct violence, and the direct violence used to fracture one side might have carried along to the other side.

The Coroner- These fractures were not caused by the gun shot, but by direct violence as a blow? – I cannot say how the violence was applied. I found no corresponding bruise.

How long before the death had the fracture been caused? Either immediately before death, or it might have been caused after death by the fall.

It might have been caused after death? – It might have been.

It could not have been caused long before or you would have found a bruise? –Yes

You found no corresponding bruise? No.

The fractures were caused immediately before death, or after? Yes, immediately after.

You cannot tell us which? - I cannot.

## **A CUT WOUND ON THE CHEEK**

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Now as to any other marks of violence? – There was also a wound on the right cheek.

Was that caused by the gun shot? In my opinion it was not. It must have been caused [??] by some sharp instrument. I am unable ...whether it was caused immediately before or immediately after death, but it must have been caused at one of these times or the other. The instrument must have been very sharp. The cut ran into the edge of the gunshot wound and I therefore could not say how deep it was. The cut remaining was about an inch and a half long, and one-sixteenth of an inch deep.

## **A KNIFE PRODUCED**

Inspector Flint here produced a pocket-knife which the witness said, could have caused the cut in question.

The Coroner cautioned the jurors in examining the knife not to touch the blade, which ..... he would have examined.

Witness added that the body was fairly (mal?) nourished, and that he did not see any .... bruises or wounds.

## **ANOTHER DOCTOR TO EXAMINE THE BODY.**

The Coroner said that this evidence was so important that he should like another (doctor to) examine the body in consultation with Mr Ross.

Inspector Flint was therefore instructed to send for Dr. Mills.

In further examination Dr. Ross said (he was) of opinion that the fracture was caused (by a) direct blow on the jaw of cheek.

Edward Rose, 8 Constitution Place, the (next?) door neighbour of the Curtises, said about ?? o'clock on Saturday night he heard the ... of a gun.

You heard nothing before? – No

Where were you? – On the road.

How far from the house? – About 35 yards.

## FIRST MAN IN THE HOUSE

What did you do when you heard the report? – I went to the house, pushed the door open .. went in. I saw Alfred Crompton outside the gate, but I was the first man in the house.

What was the first thing you saw? – I saw Curtis lying on the floor near the door.

## CHILD IN ITS MOTHER'S ARMS

What did Curtis say? – “What have I done? What have I done? Come in.”

Yes. The next thing? “I never done it.”

Yes? – I looked round the door and saw ... body of the deceased, and I said “It (looks to) me as though you have done it.” **[right side of column of photocopy gets even worse. Dots indicate unreadable sections, square brackets guesses]** I left ... then and went to the woman, I found .... In her arms crying. I took the child ... handed it to my wife, and I went ... man. I found Police-constable Sayer ... City Police, and I came back with him ... and I went into the house together, ..... no more to me.

## HEARD OF QUARRELLING

Did you hear any quarrelling ... evening? – Yes I heard a little .....I was having my tea, but I paid .... That, for I have ben [sic] used to it .... been there.

Before the report had you heard ...[quarrel]-ling.? -Yes, and I had heard quar[relling] nearly every night. About twenty ... ten I was indoors getting my tea .... quarrelling going on between .... They were kicking up enough .....

How long have you known them? - ....weeks.

## GENERALLY JANGLING

How did they get on together? ..... That was a frequent occur[ence]

Have you known any striking ....- I have, but I have not seen it my .... heard of it.

Did you yourself ever see him ..... did not

The Foreman – Was Curtis sober?

Witness- yes, he was sober.

The Coroner – How do you ... being on the floor.

Witness – I don't know, sir.

## DOOR LOCKED, SHOT FIRED

Florence Rose, wife of the ..... That on Saturday night at about ten .... Was at home, and I heard Curtis .... wife. I cannot say what though ... could not hear any words at [all] .... came and locked the door, and ....

The Coroner – How do you know ... locked the door?

Witness – Because he spoke when .... the door. I heard his voice. .... About ten minutes past ten, and ....the report of the gun. There was .... minute between the locking of the [door] ...gun shot. Immediately after that ..... put the key in the lock again and ... door; and then came out of the [house] ..... “Oh, look what I have done.” He .... out; and he added, “No, I didn't do .... mere accident. I would not hurt .... head” Then my husband came up, .... into the house, and brought the [baby] It was when I had the baby that I [heard] ... report of the gun.

## WHAT A NEIGHBOUR HEARD

Mary Franklin, a single woman, who .....door to Curtis, said about ten o'clock .....day night she heard Curtis and his [wife] ..... Witness was standing on her doorstep .... heard Curtis swearing at his wife. .... said witness could not understand.

Was he talking in an angry tone: - I .... so.

You could not hear what he said ..... heard Mrs. Curtis make one remark.

What did she say: - "You know that .... Bob, what you say; though you say ....

What was the next thing you heard? ... the man lock the door.

Howe do you know it was the man .... it? Because I saw his hand put .... the key. Then he locked the door.

## "I WILL DO IT"

Yes, what next? – I heard Curtis say "I will do it."

Yes? – Mrs. Curtis said, "What will you do?" Curtis said, "I will do it."

This is after the door had been locked? [Yes]

Well? – Shortly after that I heard .... Say, "Oh! Bob, don't do it, let's go to ..." then there was quiet.

How long for?- I could not say. But .... after that I heard the report of the gun.

Immediately after that? – Yes, .... out, but I did not go. Mr Rose was .... come.

## A BANK HOLIDAY INCIDENT

Witness added – On August Bank Holiday ... the morning, Mrs. Curtis called out to [my] mother, who was not at home. As [she was not] at home I went and knocked at the door. [Curtis] called out to her, "Come down, Laura." [She] said, "Do you give me the key first." ..... came down and unlocked the door, and I [asked] her what she wanted. She said, "Nothing, [only] to get away from this brute. He is not [going to] kill me." Curtis was present at this time. [Mrs.] Curtis then came outside, and entered my [house]. Her hair was hanging down, and she ... that she had a hairpin sticking into the .... her head. Her left eye was swollen .... been recently struck, and her face was very ...

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## YESTERDAY'S INQUEST STORY

### THE VERDICT.

On Tuesday, at Sprowston, Mr. Coroner Barton concluded the inquest on the body of Emma Curtis, who died under such tragic circumstances at the two-roomed cottage occupied by herself and husband at Constitution Opening, Sprowston, on Saturday night. The husband, Robert Horace Curtis attended the Inquiry.

#### PRISONER'S STATEMENT IN' THE CELL.

Police-constable Fuller of Trowse Newton said: Early on Sunday morning I was watching Curtis in his cell at the County Police Station. At about two in the morning Curtis said, "Police-man, I want to tell you something. I want to made a statement about this affair." I then cautioned him in the usual way, and I wrote down the following statement which he made and signed :—

"I am going to tell you the truth. God above knows it is the truth. The gun I shot my wife is one I got of a friend. I gave 5s. for it. I used it to shoot birds with. When I am home I pass my time away cleaning the gun. Sometimes I put a cartridge in the gun and play with it. When my wife have seen me playing with it, she has told me not to act with it as it is dangerous. I will tell you how this affair occurred. I went to my mother's as I generally go to tea on Saturday night. My wife and child were there also as usual. We were on the best of terms. When we went home she laid the child on the hearth while she made the bed. I put the grocery things in the cupboard while she made the bed. She came downstairs and took the child up, and sat on a low nursing chair under the window. My wife said, "Come on. Bob, let us go to bed; it is getting late.' I said, 'I think I will go out for a walk.' She said, 'You are not to.' She went and took the key from outside the door, and locked the door from the inside. I then undid my boots. I again said 'I think I will go out.' She said, again, 'Let us go to bed.' I picked the gun up and said to my wife—'You know the old, old story,' She said, 'Put it down, you will only have an accident with it. Your mother has told you about it enov times.' I sat facing my wife. The back of the gun was against my right side, and the muzzle was pointed towards the window, where my wife was sitting. I put a cartridge in half-way, and drew it out again<sup>1</sup>. I put the cartridge in again. My wife said, 'Don't, Bob, as that acting always come to something.' I said, 'Go on; it cannot go off unless you pull the trigger.' I then pushed the bolt of the gun back, and it went off directly. I realised what had happened. I unlocked the door and opened it and shouted for help. I stooped down and kissed my wife, and called, 'Laura, do speak to me.' The sight made me feel so broken-hearted I took the gun off the floor, which was in pieces, and put the cartridge in the breach and forced the bolt home, and that exploded the same as the first. I took the empty cartridge case out, and put another in, and forced the bolt home more quietly. I put the muzzle to my mouth and took it away again, and thought I would not kill myself. I tell the truth how the accident occurred. I then came outside on to the road and some people got hold of me and thought I had done it wilfully, I suppose. I suppose if I had I should have run away. A thing like that never crossed my mind." Then followed Curtis's signature.

### HOW THE FRACTURES WERE CAUSED.

Dr. Lawrence Hitchen Barfoot Mills, M.B., Edinburgh, of 35, Surrey Street, Norwich, said he had examined the body of Mrs. Curtis. He found, in addition to the

gunshot wound, a clean cut 1½ inches long and 1-16 of an inch deep running from below upwards, just below the gunshot wound, and below the right eye. It was probably caused by some sharp instrument, but he could not say whether it was caused before or after death. On the right side of the jaw there was a fracture in its middle third, and one tooth knocked out. He thought that the fracture and the injury to the tooth were done at the same time. He could see no marks of bruising. The left jaw was also fractured in its middle third. He could see no marks of bruising there. Both jaws were fractured at the same place. The fractures, in his opinion, were caused by the discharge of the gun so near to the face. The cut was caused by some sharp instrument. It was not caused by the discharge of the gun. It might have been done with the knife produced. The cut would not have caused death. He could not say whether it was done before or after death. There was an old bruise on the left eye.

The Coroner, addressing the prisoner, said he came there to hear what evidence there was against him, and to give evidence if he liked. Whether he did or not was a matter for himself to decide.

## **PRISONER GIVES EVIDENCE**

Curtis said he would give evidence, and on being sworn, said the statement in pencil which he made to Police-constable Fuller was true. Prisoner added When I got indoors with my wife on Saturday she said "I believe the matches are upstairs." She had the baby in her arms, and she went up to find the matches. She came down again, I having found the matches and lighted the gas. I was playing with the gun. She said "I will undress the child and we will go to bed." I said, "I will go out." I was only joking. She had left the key outside, and she took it in and locked the door, and then sat in a low chair. She said, "Why don't you put that gun down. You are always acting with that. Your mother told you about it several times." Curtis then repeated the substance of the statement he had already given. He put a cartridge half in the gun, and pulled it out, and she said, "Put it down" I said, "It cannot go off until I pull the trigger." I then pulled the bolt home and it exploded, and the charge hit my wife. I then unlocked the door and called for help. I thought I would die with her and put another cartridge in, but that went off too, just in the same way. The gun was the one I had from the witness Young. It has never gone off by accident before; but it has gone off with a very light touch. He had shot three skylarks. When he shot them it was in good order.

To the Coroner- It is a lie to say that I said to my wife, "I will do it." She had had a black eye about a fortnight ago, but there was no cut on her face. We were on the best of terms that night. I carried the child half-way home for her. It was not true what the witness said who swore she heard him say, "I will do it." What I said was, "I will go out." She said, "Don't go out."

## **SUMMING UP**

The Coroner, in addressing the jury at the close of the evidence, said it was now for them to consider what they had heard, and decide the question, the very important question, as to how this poor woman met with her death. The main facts were quite clear. He thought that they make take it as fairly well proved that the fracture of the jaw, which seemed to be a case of great moment and suspicion against the prisoner at one time, was caused by the shot of the gun. That only left two other injuries to the body. One was the old black eye. Curtis himself had explained that to them, and there was nothing very serious about that. The other was the cut which was underneath the

wound, and that still remained something of a mystery. The doctors agreed in one thing, that they could not tell whether this wound, this cut, was caused before death or after death, and in his (the Coroner's) opinion it was an open question, notwithstanding the evidence of the doctors, whether it was not caused at the time of the explosion of the gun. When a gun was fired very near a person's face they could hardly tell what injuries might not occur. Those two young people went home on that Saturday night, and some altercation took place in the house. Mary Franklin gave evidence, and gave evidence of what she undoubtedly believed to be truth, and she swore that there was a quarrel going on, and she said— and one of the most important parts of her evidence was where she said it— "I heard him say, 'I will do it.'" Mrs. Curtis said, "What will you do?" Curtis said, "I will do it," and then Mrs. Curtis said, "Oh Bob, don't; let us go to bed." Immediately after that she heard the report of a gun. That conversation was heard through doors and walls, and the jury would have to consider whether or not she made a mistake, and whether what she heard was not the altercation about going out. For a slight altercation did take place, Curtis threatening to go out again and Mrs. Curtis persuading him to go to bed. It was possible that Franklin understood "Oh, Bob, don't go out," as "Oh, Bob, don't do it." There might be no conflict between the witnesses after all. The presumption was when they thought these young people were quarrelling just before the explosion of the gun that these words "Don't do it" meant "Don't shoot me;" but taking it that Mary Franklin made a mistake, with the admission of Curtis that Mrs. Curtis was saying "Don't go out, let us go to bed," he thought they might take it there was no serious altercation proved between these young people. Then came the question as to Curtis' own statement. He had made the statement over and over again. He said from the very first— and he (the Coroner) attached great importance to what was said from the first— that it was a pure accident. That was followed up by a lengthy statement to the police, in which he said how it occurred, and then he made a long statement and signed it. And now he had come there again and given evidence. He always rather pitied a man who had to give evidence in a case in which he was charged with murder. Curtis said he was sitting on a high chair, playing with this gun in this very foolish way, and Mrs. Curtis was sitting on a low chair. The shot, the doctors told them, took a horizontal direction. That was what they would expect, and that evidence seemed to corroborate Curtis. Now, directly he heard that here had been a death caused from a gun, he thought it right to order that an expert should examine the weapon and see whether it was in order. If a gun was in a dangerous state, and that danger was not known to the owner, and the owner played with it in the foolish way in which Curtis played with it, this was sort of thing that was likely to happen. The gunsmith had told them that this gun was in a very dangerous condition. When it got in this state they did not know. Youngman told them it was in fairly good order. But there came a day when these things became worn out. They had seen the cartridge which had been taken from the gun by the police when they took possession of it. It was loaded, and there was an indentation in the cap, and that was what they would expect, and that corroborated the evidence of the gunsmith. If you struck the cartridge slightly, he said, it would not go off; if you struck it hard it would. Robert Curtis put the cartridge in after the death of this poor woman, so that he could shoot himself. The cartridge did not go off— probably he closed it slightly, and there was the cartridge with the slight mark on it, showing that the striker struck the cartridge. There were three shots fired. The first shot killed this poor woman, either wilfully or accidentally. Curtis said the cartridge went off when he closed the gun. The second time the shot went through the ceiling when he was loading the gun to shoot himself. Then he

loaded it again, and this third time it indented the cartridge, but did not explode it. He thought it all tended to corroborate Curtis's story that he did it accidentally. At any rate he could not help saying, after the medical evidence, and after the evidence of gunsmith as to the desperately dangerous condition of the gun, and the fact that this was an ignorant, foolish man, who did not know that the gun was dangerous, that it would not be safe for them to return a verdict of wilful murder against this man. It was entirely a matter for them, and they must say whether they thought it fairly well proved that this man wilfully murdered this woman.

A Juror - Which shot killed the woman?

The Coroner – The first; the second went through the ceiling; the third was never shot at all.

The Juror - there is no evidence that it was the first.

The Coroner - Oh, undoubtedly it was the first that killed her.

## **THE VERDICT**

The room was cleared for about ten minutes, and when the public were re-admitted the Coroner said that the jury would give Curtis the benefit of the doubt, and had unanimously decided to find that death was accidental.

The inquiry lasted for over five hours.