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HORRIBLE MURDER AND SUICIDE IN TASMANIA.

The Chudleigh correspondent of the *Launceston Examiner* gives the following account of the tragedy reported by telegraph in *The Argus* of Thursday last :-

For some years back a man named John Lambert has resided in a two-roomed hut at Mole Creek, a few miles from Chudleigh, on a small farm belonging to the Messrs. Field, a portion of which is used by them as a calling place for cattle and drovers from Gad's Hill station. Lambert has frequently had someone or other living with him, but his morose and sometimes quarrelsome disposition generally caused them to leave him as soon as possible. For the last five months a man named Isaac Richards and his wife have been living with Lambert, but have had a great deal of trouble with him on account of his quarrelsome disposition, his last freak being to spread a report that they were trying to poison him. Richards was so annoyed by it that he informed Mr. James How, a neighbour, on Monday morning last, that he was then going to Deloraine to lodge an information against Lambert for spreading the report.

On Tuesday morning, as Mr. How, who resides some distance from the hut, on the Deloraine road, was driving a team along the road at 9 o'clock he saw, as he supposed, a man standing on a log fence a short distance from him under a wattle tree, but on driving a little further, he discovered to his horror that the man was hanging from the tree, with a rope round his neck, and apparently dead. He immediately went to a neighbouring farmer named David Rose, who went with him to the spot, and they identified the body as that of the man Lambert hanging by a small rope about the size of a clothes line, and quite dead. On looking towards the hut, a distance of about 300 yards, they saw that the door was closed and no smoke coming from the chimney, which aroused their suspicions that the worst was not yet known.

They then left the body where it hung and entered the hut, and on going into the bedroom a horrible sight presented itself to their view. There lay the unfortunate woman Richards on the floor enveloped in the bedclothes, which were saturated with blood; a large pool of blood was also on the floor. On finding life extinct they left the hut, closing the door after them, and one kept watch while the other went to Deloraine and informed the police.

On the arrival of the police a further search was made, and the man Richards was found in a dying state on the bed, unable to speak. The instrument of death was a round bar of iron used as a poker – the injuries inflicted being of a most brutal nature. A bottle of laudanum was found on the table, a portion having been used. Richards, on being asked by the superintendent of police, if he knew him, answered in the affirmative, but nothing more could be elicited from him - although it might have been very different had medical aid been obtained. Neither of the medical men in Deloraine (for some reason or other) would go. It is much to be lamented that the only individual who could possibly throw any light on the subject is dying without medical attendance. One of the magistrates of the district also refused to accompany the superintendent of police to take any depositions that might have been given by the dying man. The man Lambert has been a notoriously bad character, having served six years at Port Arthur for cattle-stealing, and been twice arrested for the murder of a man during his sentence. The tragedy has caused a great sensation in the whole Deloraine district.

An inquest was held on the body, when the jury returned a verdict to the effect that the woman Richards was murdered by Lambert and that Lambert committed suicide. The man Richards was not dead, but his recovery was regarded as quite hopeless.

Wednesday, 17 November 1875, page 3

THE CHUDLEIGH TRAGEDY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MERCURY.

Sir, My attention has just been drawn to the letter of your Launceston correspondent, published in your issue of the 8th instant, containing some severe strictures upon the conduct of some of the public officials, at Deloraine, in reference to the late tragic occurrence at Mole Creek.

Had your correspondent applied to me, I would have given him all the particulars of the above case, and then I would have been spared the trouble of writing this letter in my own defence, and in order that the public may know the true facts of the case, which are as follows :-

On Tuesday, the 2nd of November, at half-past 1 p.m., I received information that a woman, Riches (this I have ascertained is the correct name), had been found murdered in a hut at Mole Creek, 17 miles from Deloraine, that a man named John Lambert had been found hanging in a hut close to the hut, and that the woman's husband, Isaac Riches, was missing. I at once got ready to start for the scene of the outrage, but before doing so, I had to see the Coroner (Mr. Douglas) and get him to sign a precept, so that I could summon a jury for the inquest on the bodies of Lambert and Mrs. Riches. While waiting for the Coroner's signature to the precept, I was shown a document which was in the possession of the man Riches on the previous day, purporting to be an agreement between Isaac Riches and John Lambert, and containing a clause to the effect that if anything happened to John Lambert within twelve months from date, all his (Lambert's) property was to go to Riches. I gave the telegram to the clerk at the Deloraine station, at 2.15, and at once started for Mole Creek. When about two miles from Deloraine I received a message from Constable Flynn, who

is stationed at Chudleigh, to say that when he arrived at Lambert's hut, about half-past 10 in the morning, he found Riches in the bedroom of the hut with his head fractured, but still alive. I sent a messenger back to Deloraine to tell Sub-inspector Lane to see Dr. Rock at once and ask him to follow me to Mole Creek to attend the man Riches. From Chudleigh I sent a constable to Mr. James Ritchie, J.P., to ask that gentleman if he would accompany me to Mole Creek to take the dying deposition of Riches. After half an hour absence the constable returned to say that Mr. Ritchie would not come. I then proceeded to Mole Creek at which place I arrived about 5 p.m. I found Riches alive but almost unconscious. When I asked him if he knew me he replied in the affirmative, but I failed to obtain any information from him. I remained with him till 7 o'clock, and as it was then dark and the doctor had not arrived, I started back to Deloraine to procure medical assistance, leaving two constables in charge of the place. At Chudleigh I learned that Dr. Rock had refused to attend that evening owing, I believe, to the inclemency of weather. Upon my arrival in Deloraine I arranged with Dr. McNall to attend Riches in the morning. I was at Lambert's hut the next morning when Dr. McNall arrived, and after examining Riches he gave as his opinion that he would not live 24 hours.

On the same day, an inquest was held on the bodies of Lambert and Mrs Riches, and before leaving in the evening I employed a man to attend Riches. On Friday, the 5th inst., when the Chudleigh mail arrived, I received intelligence that the unfortunate Riches was still alive; I accompanied the Rev. Mr. Adams to see him, and we remained with him until he died at 4 o'clock the same day.

You are, doubtless, aware of the difficulty there always is in an affair of this kind of getting a true state of facts at once, and also of forming correct conclusions – as in this case. The first report I received stated that the man Riches was missing, as the persons who found the bodies of the murdered woman and Lambert did not see him in the hut. Hence, the telegram alluded to with the description of the supposed missing man. On my way to Mole Creek, I first heard that Riches was found, as before stated. It is a pity that your Launceston correspondent did not take the trouble to ascertain these facts before he forwarded for publication such an

incorrect statement in reference to my conduct in the above melancholy affair. He said he would be sorry to unwittingly do me an injustice; and as I have no reason to think otherwise, I must only conclude that the injustice already done is unintentional.

Your insertion of this letter will greatly oblige,

D.D. GRIFFIN,
Superintendent of Police.
Deloraine
13th November 1875

Source – National Library of Australia