

Foynes Fatalities

Two Fishermen Drowned

Evidence at Inquest

The body of James O'Keefe, a native of Querrin, near Kilmora, Co. Clara, standing erect in the mud, was the first indication of a shocking double drowning tragedy which occurred at Foynes either late on Friday night, or early on Saturday morning. O'Keefe, who was 51 years old, had been trawling for fish during the past week in the Shannon near Foynes. Also fishing in the 15-ton trawler, "The Twin Sisters," with O'Keefe were John Brennan, Scatterry Island, and Archie MacFarland, aged 33, a native of Schull, Co. Cork. MacFarland was also drowned.

Presumably the two men were returning from the town to the vessel, which was tied up alongside Foynes Quay, and walked accidentally in on the tide. It was a dark mild night, and nobody heard a sound.

Mr Sean Guilleman, Foynes, was the first to notice O'Keefe's body on Saturday morning. It was standing erect in the mud which remained after the tide ebbed just beside the vessel. The alarm was raised, and the third man, Michael Brennan, who was asleep in the vessel, was aroused.

He stated that he had gone to bed early and had not been disturbed during the night. A search was made by Gardai, assisted by boatmen, but McFarland's body was found a few hours later a short distance from the vessel.

O'Keefe's cap was found lying on the stern of the vessel, and it is thought he entered the boat. The tragedy has cast a gloom over Foynes as the men were fairly well known.

THE INQUEST

An inquest was held by Mr Michael Casson, Coroner for West Limerick.

Mr John Brennan, Scatterry Island, who identified the bodies, stated that he, with the other two men, had been fishing for the past six days in the trawler, "The Twin Sisters." He returned to the vessel, which was moored alongside the quay, about 11 p.m. on Friday night. On entering the cabin he shouted: "Are ye in?" but received no reply and assumed that the men had not returned, and he went to bed. At about 4 o'clock in the morning he woke and again shouted, "Are ye in, Jimmy?" receiving no reply, he thought his companions were asleep. He heard no noise during the night.

Sergeant M. Parsons, Garda Stochess, Foynes, gave evidence of the finding of the bodies, but could produce no evidence as to what had actually happened. The body of O'Keefe was found in an upright position in the water between the post side and the pier and his cap was found on the deck. The body of McFarland was found 30 yards away totally immersed.

Dr Agnes Nolan, M.O., Shanago-dea, stated that O'Keefe had died from cardiac failure, brought about by shock, and McFarland from asphyxia by drowning.

The jury brought its verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.

The Coroner extended sympathy with the relatives. Inspector Grillo, Newcastle West, on behalf of the Gardai, Dr A. Noon and Mr J. Walsh, foreman of the jury, associated themselves with the vote.

O'Keefe's remains were removed on board "The Twin Sisters" for burial at Querrin. McFarland's remains were removed to Foynes Church, where they were left overnight. On the arrival of the relatives, the funeral left Foynes for Schull. There was a large public attendance at both funerals, and flags from public buildings in the town and harbour were flown at half-mast.