

"Merthyr Express" 16 July 1870

Extraordinary Discovery of a Skeleton at Vochriw Last week, the workmen employed by the Dowlais Iron Company in pumping the water out of the old Tunnel Shaft at Vochriw, preparatory to sinking it down to the coal, made a remarkable discovery. The Tunnel Shaft was commenced many years ago, but abandoned after a depth of about 80 yards was reached. The top was then covered with planks, and the shaft gradually filled with water. In pumping the water out, the workmen discovered the skeleton of a man at the bottom of the shaft, and beside it a chain and a tram wheel. The flesh was nearly totally decomposed, but although a neckerchief was found which had in no way lost its original colour, yet there was no cord or any evidence to show that the wheel and chain had ever been attached to the body. The remains were removed, and Mr. Creswell, the chief of the Dowlais medical staff, formed it into a complete skeleton showing that it was that of a man. Of course, the discovery led to the immediate suggestion of a murder, and persons in the neighbourhood recalled a strange incident which happened there in 1859, when one, Richard Jones, a single man, about 30 years of age, was missed on a Sunday evening in June. He had been drinking at Vochriw, and left in the company of some men going in the direction of Blaen Rhymney. He was not seen alive afterwards, and his cap was found on the road. A search was made, and although the pit was approached, it was not for a moment suspected that he would have got in as the planks covered it closely. The water in the pit was about 60 feet deep. On Saturday, the Coroner, G. Overton Esq, opened an inquest and adjourned it to the 13th instant.

The Vochriw Pit Tragedy On Wednesday, the Coroner, G. Overton, resumed his inquiry into the circumstances attending the death of Richard Jones, whose remains were discovered at the bottom of the Tunnel Shaft at Vochriw on the 1st inst. A number of witnesses were examined, and from their evidence it was pretty clear that the deceased met with his death by foul means. At the time he was missed, the Tunnel Shaft was enclosed by a wall a hard high, and the mouth was covered over with planks so close together that a child even could not fall through. It would have been impossible, therefore, for any person to have committed suicide without leaving some traces of the act behind. When the man was missed the planks were undisturbed. The sinker, Henry Jones, stated that as they got to the bottom of the shaft he first picked up a bone which he thought belonged to some animal; then he came upon a tram wheel which he raised but found it was attached to a chain. Thereupon he raised the chain and brought up some more bones; he tugged at the chain and then brought up a portion of the trunk of a human body thorax, with the ribs bare on the outside and the stomach only partially decomposed. There was a loop in the chain as though it had been round something the size of a man's wrist. The skull was then found, and afterwards on digging, he turned up out of the mud a boot with a human foot in it. The tram wheel was identified by Mr. Truran as belonging to trams used at a level about half a mile off, in work at that time, but since closed; and the chain was part of a chain that had been in use on an incline in Vochriw level about a mile away. There was no evidence of mention as to the person at whose hands Jones met his death, but it was stated that a man named Penry, now in America, and one "Wat Bach" had, some years afterwards, made references to Jones that showed that they were cognisant of his death. "Wat Bach" for instance, accused a man named Michael Harris, who gave evidence, of being the cause of Jones' death. The Coroner again adjourned the inquest for a week.

"Merthyr Express" 29 July 1876

Charge of Murder at Vochrhiw: A Strange Story A most extraordinary murder case came on for hearing on Saturday morning last at the Merthyr Police Court. For some time past travelers over the hill from Merthyr towards Pontlottyn were pointed to a house standing alone by the roadside at Vochrhiw, and bearing the sign of the Rising Sun Inn. The story in connection with this place was that some 17 years ago there was a house-warming, or something of the kind, going on here, when the whole day was spent in the celebration thereof. Many people got drunk, others fought pitched battles, and altogether, as the story goes in the neighbourhood, there was a general row which lasted all day. On that date, a man called Richard Jones was missed, and about the same time several people left the neighbourhood for America. The fate of Jones was shrouded in a mystery for up to eleven years, when in July 1870, sinking was resumed on an old shaft, called the Tunnel Pit, near Vochrhiw. When the water had been pumped out, the body of a man was discovered, with a heavy chain attached to a tram wheel, and it was identified as that of Richard Jones. An inquest was held and an open verdict returned, and everyone thought the matter would forever remain unsolved, till the advent of a man, named Rees Morgan into the neighbourhood recently, revived the whole business. What he said, and the steps following the same, will be found detailed below. It is needless to say, that the arrest of two men on suspicion has caused some considerable excitement in the locality, although those who can remember the first excitement about the matter must, many of them, have passed away.

Rees Morgan and Henry Williams, colliers, both residing at Vochrhiw, were charged with willfully murdering Richard Jones, a collier, residing at Blaen Rhymney, on the 12th June, 1859, at Vochrhiw in the parish of Gelligaer. Mr. Superintendent Thomas, deputy chief constable of Glamorgan, conducted the prosecution, and the prisoners were undefended. The court was crowded during the hearing which lasted one hour.

Mr. Superintendent Thomas, addressing their worships said: On the night of the 12th June 1859, the man, Richard Jones, left his home and went to a public house in Vochrhiw called the Farmers' Arms, where he remained until late at night. He was seen to leave the house, but he never returned to his home at Blaen Rhymney. His friends, missing him, made a search for him over the mountains, and about the different pits in the neighbourhood, but without being able to find any trace of him beyond his cap, which was picked up by some person and handed to his friends. Just previous to that time the Dowlais Company had been sinking a pit, which is known as the Tunnel Pit, but from some means or another - an accumulation of water or something of the kind - the pit was abandoned and the pit mouth was covered with sleepers. Shortly after the disappearance of the man, and while this affair was much talked about, several persons from Vochrhiw and the neighbourhood, left for America. Their departure was connected with certain rumours, but then these came to nothing, and the excitement caused by the man's disappearance died out until somewhere about the 2nd July 1870, when the pit in question was re-opened for the purpose of further sinking operations. It was found to contain a quantity of water, which was got out; after this were discovered the remains of a human being, and also a tram wheel and a chain, which were supposed to be fastened around the body. A blue handkerchief which the deceased wore and also one of his boots were found there, and these articles were identified by his brother as those which he had worn on the night upon which he had disappeared.

Dr. Davies (magistrate): Were the tram wheel and chain attached to each other? Mr. Thomas: They were sir. Dr. Davies: And where they or either of them attached to the body? Mr. Thomas: Of that no judgement could be accurately formed. The body had

gone to pieces, but the supposition is that the body had been attached to it, and that the chain had cut through it. An inquest was held upon the remains, but nothing turned out which could implicate anyone. An open verdict was returned. I should say that the prisoners, who were living in the neighbourhood at the time of the man's disappearance, left; it was supposed for America. At any rate, neither of them showed himself until very recently. Williams returned sometime ago, but Morgan did not show himself in this locality. Nobody knew anything about that until the 30th June last, when he (Morgan) presented himself at a public house at Vochriw called the Mount Pleasant Inn, kept by a man named Llewellyn Davies, and he there had a conversation with two men named Thomas Davies and David Thomas, whom I intend calling as witnesses. He asked these men if they remembered the circumstances of the murder of Dick Puddling (this being the name by which the missing man was known). Thomas Davies said "No." Morgan then said "Well I lived at Blaencarno at the time he was missed. I went to the Tunnel Pit shortly after that, and I pointed out the mark of a mandril or bar upon a sleeper as the mark which they had made in raising out of the planks in order to make sufficient room for the body to be put down." Morgan explained as to why the murder had been committed - namely, that the murdered man had caused a cow belonging to somebody or another to break her leg. He had also been advised by a relation of one of the men to keep the thing secret to his grave. The man to whom he made the statement about the planking is now dead. Dr. Davies: If I understand you rightly, Williams is only implicated by Morgan's statements respecting him. He has said nothing himself. Mr. Thomas: We have no evidence with respect to Williams beyond what Morgan has said about him sir. Dr. Davies: And Morgan's statements. You seem to point to other hands as having committed the murder. Mr. Thomas: Just so sir; but then it will be a question for you to determine as to how far you may consider them an accessory after the fact.

David Thomas, who was the first witness called, said: I am a haulier at Vochriw. On Monday, 26 June last, I saw Rees Morgan at Llewellyn Davies's house, Mount Pleasant, Vochriw. He asked if anyone had lived there for some time. I said "I've lived here for many years." He said, "Do you remember when Dick Pudding was lost? I can take my oath who killed him, if I could take an oath upon a thing I did not see. I was courting David Morgan's servant in the back of the Rising Sun, Vochriw, at the time they were going out. (He did not say who they were.) I have been there calling a pint many times, and whoever would be in, the landlord (David Morgan) would get up to me and say, "Remember to keep that secret to the grave." The prisoner further said, "I have showed to the man where I lodged the mark of a mandril or bar where they had raised a board from the face of the pit." He asked me if I knew the value of Richard Jones's life. I said "No." He said, "Well the value of his life was the breaking of a cow's leg. He set some cows from a hayfield; one of them got through a rough place and broke its leg." He did not say whose cow it was. He also said, "When I was going from the girl on Sunday morning, I picked up a cap, full of blood, which I threw down and left there." Both prisoners are strangers to me. Richard Morgan had been drinking when he made these statements to me. He also said one had come back from America who knew about Dick very well.

Morgan was asked by the clerk whether he wished to cross-examine. He declined to put any questions, and stated that he knew he had been to the public house named by the witness, and that he had been talking to someone there. He could not, however, remember with whom, or what he had been saying. "But I am sure in one thing you (Thomas) have made a mistake. You said that I was with a girl when they went out. That is not so. You said as well that I had found the cap. I said the cap had been

found. And another thing - you said that I told you I could swear to the thing; that is right enough, but I don't know about anybody that did kill Richard Jones, no more than a man from Africa."

Thomas Davies was the next witness examined, and said: I am a haulier at Vochrhiw and was with the last witness at the Mount Pleasant Inn on Monday night; I have heard his evidence which is correct. I heard Morgan say that he had shown to a man the marks of a mandril or bar with which they had raised the boards on the top of the pit, and that he told Thomas Jones (Tom Pudding), that he believed that it was there that Richard Jones was. He also said that on the morning the man was missed he had said that if Dick Pudding had been killed he knew who had killed him, and that one of the men with him had said, "Hush, mind what you say." Morgan also said, "I kept everything quiet, and said no more. One of the men who has just come back from America was one of those who killed Dick Pudding, and he works in these pits." I know that Williams has recently returned from America. Clerk (to Morgan): Do you want to ask this witness any questions. Morgan: No sir, I don't. I had a drop too much, I know that very well. I don't want to ask him anything, because I don't know what I did say.

Dr. Davies: You don't deny then that you said what they say you did? Morgan: No, sir. I had been drinking and I know that. I got talking about the affair of Dick Jones's murder, but what I said I don't remember. Dr. Davies (to Superintendent Thomas): What is there to connect Williams with the charge? Mr. Thomas: Only what I have already mentioned. I expected a witness here to say that Morgan went to the top of the Tunnel Pit and said, "Does Williams work here?" and that when a reply was given to the affirmative, Morgan made the observation to which I have already alluded to. This witness has not been able to leave his work today, and I must therefore ask the Bench for a remand so that he can give his evidence. Clerk: Do you think Mr. Thomas, that a remand would enable you to get further information regarding this matter? Mr. Thomas: If we could get this man here, he will say what I have told you. Dr. Davies: But the publican referred to by the prisoner Morgan, couldn't we get him here? His evidence might be of the greatest importance. Mr. Thomas: The publican is dead sir, and two or three others besides who could, no doubt, have thrown great light upon the matter. Some who also might give a good deal of information are abroad, no one knows where. It having happened so long back it is almost impossible to get any information at all at this moment. Dr. Davies (after consultation with the Bench): Then you do not think Mr. Thomas that you can get anything against Williams beyond what has already transpired? Mr. Thomas: I am afraid not sir. Dr. Davies: Then Williams is discharged. The Bench does not think there is any evidence against him sufficient to justify their detaining him in custody any further. Morgan is remanded to Swansea goal for a week.

Editorial For the past week, a great sensation has been created in the district by the revelation of a man named Rees Morgan, who is now in custody on a charge of being implicated in the murder of one Richard Jones, alias 'Dick Pudding' who disappeared under mysterious circumstances in June 1859. An old proverb has it that when the wine's in the wit's out; and it would really appear that what may in the end turn out to be a clue to a tragic affair has been brought to the ears of the police through the babbling of a man in liquor. It may be remembered by many persons in the neighbourhood of Merthyr, Dowlais and Rhymney, that in June 1859, Richard Jones, a collier, who lived at Blaen Rhymney, disappeared suddenly, and the most vigorous search failed to find his whereabouts, although his cap was found on the summit of Cwmbargoed. At the time an abandoned shaft existed near what was then a tunnel on

the Dowlais Iron Company's Vochrhiw Railway. It was securely covered with massive timbers when examined, but bore no apparent traces of disturbance, and it was not thought worthwhile to explore the shaft. Nothing more was heard of the incident until nearly eleven years afterwards, when the Dowlais Company pumped the shaft dry with the view of completing it as a pit for working coal from; and when the sinkers touched the bottom they were horrified to find the skeleton of a human being together with an old necktie, and an old iron chain attached to a heavy tram wheel, the metal weighing very considerably more than a hundredweight.

An inquest was held. The disappearance of Richard Jones was recalled, and strangely enough, the little bit of blue necktie enabled his brother to identify the remains as Richard Jones. The question arose, how came they at the bottom of the Tunnel Pit? It was shown by evidence that the mouth of the pit was so securely closed that no person could have fallen in by mere accident; and the timbers were so massive that no single individual could have moved them out of position in preparation for suicide. It was self evident therefore that the remains found in the pit were those of some individual who had been thrown into the pit by others; and the assumption was that there had been a game of foul play. The decomposition however was so thorough that it was impossible to obtain absolute proof of the iron having been attached to the body, and the jury wisely returned an open verdict. Now comes the strangest part of this strange story. After the disappearance of Jones, certain parties, upon whom the eye of suspicion had alighted, left the neighbourhood and went to America, from which country, after four or five years absence, some of them returned, and are now working in our locality. A few weeks ago, a workman named Rees Morgan calls at a public house in Vochrhiw, and being in his cups, suddenly commences a conversation about the "murder" of "Dick Pudding," and forthwith makes a series of statements of such a nature as to leave his audience with the impression that a man who knew so much as he chose to reveal, probably knew a great deal more which he chose to hold back. They accordingly, communicate with the police, and in due course, the man who makes the confession, and another man who he implicated by innuendo, are taken into custody on the capital charge. Against the second man, the evidence amounts to nothing at present; but the statements of the man Rees Morgan are perfectly astounding.

"Merthyr Express" 5 August 1876

The Tunnel Pit Mystery The prisoner, Rees Morgan, who is charged with complicity in the murder of Richard Jones (Dick Pudding) at Vochrhiw, 19 years ago, again appeared before the Merthyr Bench on Saturday. The evidence before adduced was founded on his own statements recently made in a public house, but the additional information links his recent utterance with what he did and said at the time Jones was missed. The prisoner, who had lost flesh considerably during his week's incarceration, had a very emaciated appearance in the dock. Mr. D. R. Lewis appeared for the prosecution and Mr. Simons for the defence. The court was crowded for the hearing. Mr Lewis: I intend asking for a further remand of the case. The facts of the case are complicated. The matter requires further very careful investigation before this man, who by his own statements clearly shows that he knows something of this matter, should be allowed to go. You have already heard what the prisoner has told witnesses in this court recently, and I will call the brother of the deceased before you to tell you how he identified the remains in the pit as those of his brother. He will also tell you that when the search was being made for the missing man, that the prisoner met him and said, "Why don't you clear that pit, your brother's there." That will connect the prisoner with the death of the man at the time, and I will ask you on that to remand

the prisoner for another week, so that we shall be able to push our inquiries further. There can be no doubt that a lot of people were implicated in the matter, and if the thing is carefully sifted that something may be found out.

Mr Lewis called the brother of the deceased, Thomas Jones, and examined him. When you were making the search for your brother, did you see Rees Morgan? Yes, just about the time we were looking for him. Where did you see him? On the mountain. What did he tell you? He told me to dry the pit. What pit? The Tunnel Pit where my brother was. What was it he said? He said. "Tom, what's the reason you don't dry the pit?" I said, "I cannot dry it. It's too much of a job." He said, "Your brother is sure to be there." I went to Mr. Thomas and asked him if he would dry the pit. Mr. Thomas was the overman of the Dowlais Company? Yes. He said it would be too much of an expense. He asked me first if I was sure my brother was there. I said I could not be sure. You know the Tunnel Pit, then? Oh yes. I have been to the top of it many a time. How was it covered? As sound as that table. With what? With boards. Do you remember when a lot of bones were found in the Tunnel Pit? Yes, very well. Were you shown a handkerchief that was found with them? Yes, and swore to it. Whose was it? My brother's. Did you see a boot that was found? Yes it was his boot. Was there any peculiarity in your brother's arm? Yes. It was broken near the wrist. Was that found to be the case with the bone of one of the arms? Yes, it was.

Mr. Simons (defence) now cross-examined the witness. The prisoner was searching for your brother, wasn't he, with the other people on the mountain? I cannot say. I saw him. Now did he not tell you that he had been with eight other people to the top of the pit? Not to me. The question was repeated and the witness said that the prisoner might have told him so, but if he did, he did not recall it. Did he tell you that there was upon the boards (covering the entrance to the pit) what he thought was a new mark? No. Did he tell you that the other people said it was an old mark? He did not say anything of the sort to me that I know. Will you swear it? I cannot take my oath. Did he give you that as a reason for searching the pit? He said something of the sort, but I do not remember what it was; it is such a long time ago. Did he not advise you to go to the Dowlais Company and tell them that they should open the pit? Well perhaps he did; I do not know. Now, apart from the prisoner, were not other people saying they were sure your brother had been put into the pit? Nobody told me he was sure to be there, only him. Did not many people say they believed it, and that was the only place he could be? He could be in another place. But they had searched every other place? Yes, and that pit was not searched. Was the top of the pit taken off? Yes, afterwards. Not at the time? No. Did you go and see the top of the pit afterwards? Yes, some time after that. Did you see some marks upon the boards? I did not look so closely as that. Did you know that the prisoner Rees Morgan was with a lot of some hundreds of people searching for the man for some days? I cannot say that Morgan was there more than anybody else - I know that there were hundreds searching. Did you learn anything of a cap that was found belonging to your brother that was lost? I had the cap. Was there blood upon it? There was none at the time I had it. Were there marks of blood upon it? I did not look so closely as that. Where was it found? On the mountains facing Rhymney. Who found it? A man from Rhymney and there was one man with him. Were there not rumours at the time that your brother was killed because of the breaking of the leg of a cow? No. You never heard that at the time? No, I did not hear it till I came to Vochrhiw. How many years is it since your brother was lost? Seventeen years. Do you mean to say that you can recollect all that was said and done at the time? No, not one quarter of it. There may have been talk at the time about the cause of your brother's death which you may have forgotten now? Oh yes, I

have forgotten more than half. Don't you remember people saying about that time, that a man's life was worth more than a cow's leg? Nothing until this man came to the Vochrhiw and talked about it. Did you not see the prisoner some eight or nine months after your brother was lost? No. I did not speak to him. Will you swear you did not? I cannot swear. Did he not tell you again, a second time that he thought the friends of your brother ought to have the pit opened? He might have said it. I cannot recollect.

Margaret Davies was the next witness called and said: I live at Vochrhiw and keep the Mount Pleasant public house. I have lived at Vochrhiw for 19 years and recollect the talk about Richard Jones being missed. I did not know Rees Morgan then, and not until June 26th last, when he came to our house. He sent for me to ask if he could have room to sleep. He then said he was travelling and had been to America for 14 years and was afraid to cross the mountains that night. He asked me if I had heard any talk about Richard Jones, who was called 'Dick Pudding.' I said I did not hear anything at this time. He said he could take his oath who had killed Richard Jones, if he could have his oath on what he had not seen, only on what he had heard. He also said that there was one more who knew as well as him, and added that it was the woman at the new public house who had heard the same as him. He said that there was one living who knew, that four knew it before, and knew it now, and that he was one.

Mr. Simons: The man did not say that he knew it, but knew it from hearing only? Mr. Lewis: I take it in that light. Mr. Simons (cross-examining): The prisoner told you that he had been to America. Did he tell you anything about the people who had gone to America at the time? No he did not tell me. He said that he knew somebody that was there. Did he tell you that he knew those who went out there at the time? No he did not tell me that he knew them; but he said that if some people knew he was in the Fochriw, they would be shaking in their shoes. What state was he in as to beer at the time? He had drunk very little. It was morning.

Mr. Lewis: Upon the evidence adduced I will ask for a remand. Mr. Simons urged the Bench not to trifle with justice, and pointed out that the utmost that had been hitherto proved against the prisoner was his own statement that he was sure he knew who it was who had committed the deed, expressing his own conviction, like anyone might say he knew the murderer of Mr. Bravo. This added to the fact that he, while searching with others on the mountain, pointed to the very pit where the remains were found amounted to evidence of the most perfect innocence. Nothing could be more absurd to suppose that any man who knew anything about it would recommend the opening of the pit of the Dowlais Company, and nothing could be more reasonable for the innocent man to do after examining the pit, seeing the marks upon the planking, and after the finding of the cap. Seventeen years afterwards his conviction came perfectly true, and this was the strongest evidence of his innocence in the world, and if the bench were about to remand him on that evidence, people had better shut their mouths at once for fear of having such charges preferred against them. In this idle way the prisoner mentioned the name of the man Williams, who, having been in custody, was discharged; then why keep Morgan after he had distinctly stated that he knew nothing of his own knowledge. He might mention that the case was only adjourned on the last occasion for the examination of the servant girl, who was not present.

Mr. Lewis: She is in the North of England, and that is a good reason why we should have a remand. Mr. Simons: But have you taken any steps? Mr. Lewis: We have found out where she is. Mr. Probert: It is better for him that it should be cleared up. Mr. Simons: But the man is in custody, and no matter what his station, his liberty is

dear to him. Mr. Lewis: At the time when the case was going on Superintendent Wren was here, and there was a different staff of officials; we therefore have to communicate, and do what we can, and if we can, go on further with it we will. We cannot do this so soon, and on these grounds, I will ask you to grant a remand after the evidence that has been brought up. Here, this man, of his own guilty knowledge starts this conversation, although there is no talk about it on the countryside. Then crops up the fact that he knows where the body was, and it is a question which I think you will have to consider very seriously that if this had been done at the time, and the body had been found, he would have been taken into custody.

Dr. Davies said that it implied guilty knowledge. Mr. Simons: Guilty knowledge when he goes to the top of the pit and urges that it should be opened? Mr. Lewis: My friend is giving evidence. Mr. Simons: Guilty knowledge, indeed. Was anything so fatuous? It is monstrous that the man should give information as to where the body was to be found, and urged the police to make a search, should be charged with guilty knowledge. It is idiotic.

Dr. Davies: Is there any probability that there will be further evidence sufficient to authorise our granting a remand? Superintendent Thomas: Yes, I think so. The application was granted and the prisoner remanded for a week. Monday - Before James Probert and Thomas Williams Esquires.