

ALTONA BAY DISASTER FISHERMAN'S COURAGEOUS ACT

On Thursday at the police court Mr T Lonsdale JP, held a magisterial inquiry into the surroundings of the deaths of Henry Fraser Tatlow and Samuel Boyd, who were drowned at Altona Bay on December 31st.

Clara Tatlow, widow, stated that her husband, aged about 44, a boiler maker, had been employed at the Newport Workshops. Witness on the 31st ultimo went down to Altona with Mr and Mrs Boyd and their son Walter. She last saw her husband alive between 2 and 8 o'clock that afternoon. Deceased had gone out fishing with the Boyds. Witness did not see the accident. On New Year's Day she identified the corpse of her husband at the local morgue.

Walter Boyd, laborer, Milford Street, said that on December 31st, Mr Tatlow, his father, and himself went out fishing about half a mile from the shore at Altona, between the two piers. Towards evening a storm got up and the sea became very rough. They decided to allow the boat to drift. Mr Tatlow pulled up the anchor, and witness's father had the oars and was endeavouring to keep the bow of the boat to the waves. When about a quarter of a mile from the shore the boat swung round side on and was turned over. The three of them were thrown out. On coming to the surface they all clung to the boat which was still drifting towards the shore. After a short time it again turned over; the anchor dropped out of the boat and it became anchored. After hanging on to the boat for some time Mr Tatlow was washed away. After Mr Tatlow was gone father lost his hold and went under. When he came up witness caught him round the neck, and they again clung to the boat. Father then said "You never mind, son; look out and save yourself." Some time after father went under again. Witness caught him when he came up. He appeared to be stunned. His eyes were staring. He thought he must have been hit with the boat. He never spoke after that. Witness held on to the boat and supported his father until Smith arrived, who said "How are things?" Young Boyd said "I'm alright. I think father must be near dead." Smith then caught hold of his father and struck out for the shore. Witness then took off his clothes and swam ashore.

William Smith, fisherman, stated that on New Year's Eve he was camped at Altona with his family. During the afternoon the sea got very rough. He noticed a green painted boat close in shore. He said to a friend named Chadwick, "Those men out there must be in a funk; they're foolish to remain out there." Some time after he was engaged at the back of his tent. He heard someone cry out "The boat is upset." He ran down to the beach and got into the boat which was occupied by two men named Chadwick and Miles. They rowed to the breakers where the boat was driven back by the force of the waves. Chadwick and Miles tried again and again to force the boat

through the breakers but failed. Witness then took off his shirt and flannel, dived into the water, and swam out to the overturned boat. He found the boy clinging to it. He had his arm round his father's neck, holding his head above water. He said to the boy, "How are things?" Young Boyd replied "I'm all right, but I think father is done." He said, "Will you take him?" Witness replied "I'll have a big try." He then caught Mr Boyd under the armpit and started for the shore. After going about 20 yards he became exhausted, and was forced to let him go. He then tried to find bottom but failed, and turned on his back and floated in on the waves. The overturned boat was about 130 yards from the sand bank. There would be from 10 to 14 feet of water where the boat was upset.

Abe Johnston, quarryman, Footscray, was at Altona Bay on January 2nd. About 5.30pm found the corpse of Mr Boyd which was removed to the homestead.

Constable Percy Charles Miles said that on December 31st he proceeded to Altona in the Dockyard motor boat, Victory. From Mr Walker's residence he removed the dead body of Mr Tatlow to the morgue.

Sergeant Thomas Curtin stated that on Friday January 2nd he proceeded to Altona and removed the dead body of Samuel Boyd from Mr Walker's residence to the morgue.

After hearing the evidence of the witnesses the Acting Coroner returned the following finding; - "I find that the evidence brought forward in these cases goes to show that this unfortunate occurrence was purely accidental. Sergeant Curtin has been most careful in collecting the facts, which go to show that Henry Fraser Tatlow and Samuel Boyd were drowned, owing to the upsetting of a boat.

I would also like to acknowledge the courageous conduct of Mr William Smith. I feel sure that he is deserving of the highest praise. I have directed Sergeant Curtin to bring the whole matter under the notice of the Royal Humane Society, and hope he will receive that reward he so justly deserves."

On Sunday last the remains of Mr S Boyd was interred in the local necropolis. The funeral was very large, some 250 shop mates preceding the hearse. Other mourners were largely made up of members of lodges with which the deceased had been associated. The hearse top was covered with handsome wreaths sent by the Boilermakers' Union and others. The Rev R Murray read the burial service. The pall-bearers were Messrs G Wood, C Lee, J Hillman, T George, W Miles and W Warren. Mr T Lonsdale had charge of the mortuary arrangements.