

## Tragedy at Oxley Ferry.

### SCHOOLMASTER LOSES LIFE.

#### IN EFFORT TO RESCUE CHILD.

A tragedy which caused a wave of sorrow over the whole district was enacted at the Oxley Island ferry on Wednesday afternoon, when Mr. C. M. Evenden, teacher at the Mitchell's Island school, lost his life in an effort to save a 12 years old girl from drowning. Mr. Evenden was on his way to his home at Taree after the school had closed for the day. With him in his car were his younger daughter (Ethel) and Miss V. Stewart. When the relieving punt had gone about 75 yards from the Oxley Island shore Enid May Brook, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Brook (who lives on Mr. G. Black's farm near the Oxley turnoff) and who was on her way home from the Oxley school, overbalanced while washing her hands on the back flap of the punt and fell into the water. Mr. Evenden saw what had happened and at once threw off his coat and hat and dived in to rescue her. It was some moments before the puntman was aware of what had happened, and he then stopped the engine and reversed the punt, but in the meantime Mr. Evenden and the girl had disappeared from view. Someone saw him catch hold of the girl and endeavour to struggle back to the punt with her, but in this he failed. Mr. Harry Lee saw the man and girl in the river, but when he got to his boat there was no sign of them. A strong tide was running in and it is believed that both disappeared some 20 yards up the river from the punt.

News of the tragedy was quickly disseminated and in a short time Constable Bedingfeld, of Cundle, was on the scene making preparations to drag for the bodies. Sergeant Reilly and Dr. Railton arrived shortly afterwards and, with the assistance of some 12 or 14 neighbors, a start was made to locate the bodies. Ropes with hooks attached were moved about in the vicinity of the accident, and at about 7.30 p.m. the body of the girl was picked up by Mr. Barclay (relieving fisheries inspector) some 200 yards above the punt and in about 30 feet of water. A sad procession wended its way to the home of the parents with the body of the little girl, who, a few short hours previously had been happily playing with her mates on the punt on her way home from school.

In the meantime the searchers continued their sad task, and at about 9.15 p.m. the body of Mr. Evenden was located by Mr. Barclay close to where the other body had been found. It would appear that Mr. Evenden was drowned with the little girl clasped in his arms. A few minutes later several boats from Taree arrived on the scene with the intention of assisting in the search. Mr. Evenden's body was found just on the

assisting in the search. Mr. Evenden's body was found just on the turn of high water. One of the M. R. Dairy Co's cream launches conveyed the body to Taree.

Among the searchers were Sergeant Reilly, Constable Bedingfeld (Cundle) Constables Michie, Williams and Bourke (Taree), Mr. L. W. Booth (Mitchell's Island), and a number of residents from nearby. Those who were bereaved feel very grateful to all who assisted in the recovery of the bodies.

We understand that the punt, which was the small relieving craft, had no pulling boat or lifebolts attached.

The late Mr. Charles Manning Evenden was a son of the late Mr. and Mrs. James Evenden, of Cooperook, where he was born 45 years ago. He remained at Cooperook until he entered the Education Department. His first appointment was to Timra, on the New England. After being married on the Lower Manning he received an appointment to the Kundibakh school, thence to Kauthi, and next to Woodside, where he remained until the school was closed. For 18 or 19 years he was in charge of the Woodside and Mount George schools. After the 1927 Easter vacation he took charge of the Mitchell's Island school.

The late Mr. Evenden was a man whose kindly nature made him beloved by his pupils and the trusted friend of many adults. A useful life was suddenly terminated in a gallant effort to save the life of a little one, and "greater love than this hath no man."

The late Mr. Evenden leaves a broken hearted wife and three young children, viz., Mr. Lindon Evenden, Miss Lilian Evenden (of the Taree telephone exchange), and Ethel.

The brothers are Messrs. Fred (Newcastle) and James (Casino). Another brother, Robert, died at Cooperook many years ago. The sisters are, Mrs. J. W. Dykes, of Taree, and Mrs. W. Pearce, of Croydon. The late Mrs. Bowers, of Richmond River, and the late Mrs. Pereira, of Taree, were also sisters.

At 12.30 p.m. on Friday a short service was conducted in the Methodist Church, after which the funeral moved to the Mitchell's Island cemetery where a large gathering paid their final tribute to a member of the community who, in the hour of another's need, had shown himself a hero. Rev. S. C. Roberts and Rev. E. Foster made feeling addresses at the graveside.

Mr. W. T. Howard attended to the funeral arrangements.

On Sunday evening, in the Taree Methodist Church, a memorial service to Mr. Evenden will be held.

The funeral of the unfortunate little girl left the home of her parents at 1.30 p.m. on Thursday for the Dawson cemetery. It was a very large and sympathetic one. She had been a pupil at the Oxley Island school for the past three years. Mr. Robertson (the teacher), who was very fond of the little pupil, attended with senior pupils the funeral.

very fond of the little pupil, attended with senior pupils the funeral. Amongst the numerous floral tributes was one from the teachers of Oxley Island school and one from her schoolmates. The Rev. Walter Latham made sorrowful reference to the tragic occurrence and many sympathisers with the bereaved family were present. Mr. S. A. Bridge had charge of the mortuary arrangements.

#### SYMPATHY OF COUNCIL.

At the conclusion of the business of the Taree Municipal Council on Wednesday night Ald. Bridge moved a motion of sympathy with the relatives of Mr. Evenden, who had lost his life that afternoon in an effort to save the life of a child, and also to the parents of the girl.

Seconded by Ald. Clarke and carried by all standing in silence for a few moments.