

## ACCIDENTAL DROWNING.

### THE HEXHAM FATALITY.

Sitting at the Newcastle Courthouse yesterday, Mr. C. Hibble, the district coroner, inquired into the death of Edward William Oliver, aged 24 years, who was drowned at Hexham on September 16. Mr. B. Helmore appeared for Messrs. J. and A. Brown; Mr. P. Connolly for the Federated Ironworkers' Union, of which deceased was a member, and Sergeant R. Bell for the police.

Harry Walton, a labourer employed at Messrs. J. and A. Brown's works, at Hexham, said on the morning of September 16 he and deceased were engaged in chipping the outside of the steamer Alice. They were standing on a punt, which was secured fore and aft to two piles. At about 10.45 o'clock deceased expressed his intention of moving the up-river mooring rope to a lower position on the pile. As soon as the rope was released the punt swung under the stern of the steamer, and overbalanced, precipitating the two occupants into the water. Witness hung on to a pile, and for a while deceased supported himself on witness's foot. He then left, and made for the punt, but sank. In answer to the coroner, witness said there were no lines on the punt from the steamer. Witness could swim very little. The deceased could not swim at all.

Dr. John Harris, Government medical officer at Newcastle, said he examined the body of deceased, and found that death was due to drowning.

Constable McLeod, of the water police, stated at 5 p.m. on September 16 he recovered the body in fifteen feet of water, fifteen yards away from where deceased was seen to disappear. Witness gave personal particulars of the deceased, gleaned from an examination of his belongings at his late place of residence at the Exchange Hotel, Lambton. Deceased was twenty-four years of age, was a native of London, and had no relatives in Australia. Witness produced a gratuity bond, and a Gallipoli star. He examined the punt, which was about twelve feet long, three feet wide, and eighteen inches deep. Under normal conditions it would be safe.

John James Kinder, foreman painter, gave evidence of the circumstances under which deceased was working.

The coroner returned a verdict of death from accidental drowning, and stated he thought it would be as well in the future for men working under similar circumstances to have life-lines handy.