

John Gee - From Oxloode to Rochdale

On March 20th 1858 John Gee married Susanna Murfit in Little Downham and they settled down to the life of an agricultural labourer in Oxloode. They went on to have four children; Ann, Joseph, Ellen and Eliza. They also had a son Richard but he didn't survive his first year.

In 1872 John left Oxloode and walked to Rochdale to take possession of some property to which he believed he was entitled. He walked about 200 miles in five days averaging 40 miles a day. He arrived in Rochdale in a destitute condition and obtained work at Rochdale Corporation Gas Works. The overlooker of works described him as one of the steadiest and hard working men on the job. He sent money home to his family every week which his wife collected at the post office in Ely. One week, however events took an unhappy turn as described in the local newspaper.

16th March 1872:

About two months ago, a labourer named Gee, of Oxloode, near Ely, left his home, wife, and four small children, to seek employment, which he obtained at Rochdale, at the Corporation Gas Works; since then, he has remitted ten shillings a week to his wife by post office order. On Saturday morning last, Mrs Gee went to the Ely Post Office to cash her order, and at the very moment she was receiving her money, a telegram reached the office that her husband had been killed in an explosion at the works where he had been engaged. The Postmaster at once invited Mrs Gee into a private room, and communicated to her the distressing intelligence. The affliction of the poor woman may be easily imagined, though it would be difficult to describe it. For several years the unfortunate woman has been in ill health; too ill to attend the funeral of her husband, to which she was invited by the telegram. Since her husband's departure, he had remitted to her ten shillings weekly. This supply for her maintenance, and that of her little children is stopped; and a sad future for all looms in the distance. The Rev F. Fisher, rector of Little Downham, has generously relieved the widow and orphans; and surely this is a case for public and practical sympathy. The deceased was about 40 years of age; his widow is about 33, but quite unable to maintain herself.

John had been working on the erection of a new gas holder. This involved the removal of a large amount of rock which was hauled up by

steam engine. As one rock was being lifted it fell off the barrow it was balanced on falling on to John, fracturing his skull and breaking his leg. His fellow workers shouted a warning but too late for John to react. He was rushed to the Seven Stars Inn and attended to by a Dr Hodgson but never regained consciousness. The inquest was held at the Seven Stars and returned a verdict of accidental death and a collection was instigated for John's wife and children.

6th July 1872:

Death in the Workhouse, - Some weeks ago, we stated in this journal, that whilst a poor woman, named Gee of Oxloode, was in the Ely Post Office, a telegram that moment arrived for her, stating that her husband, a labourer, who had but recently left her, was killed at Rochdale, by an explosion at the gas works. We have now to record the death of the poor woman, who expired on Thursday, at the Ely Union Workhouse; she leaves four young children.

Susan Gee was buried at Little Downham on 7th July.

The children remained in Ely Workhouse. Ann died and was buried at Little Downham aged 16 in June 1876 and Ellen died and was buried at Little Downham aged 14 in May 1878.

Joseph found his way to Barnsley and in 1881 was a cork burner age 19.

Eliza was an inmate at the Ely Poor Union Workhouse at the time of the 1881 census but it would seem that she joined Joseph in Barnsley and married in 1887.

Robin Pearl