

Timaru Herald. 30 March 1914 [29/04/2023]

Mr W. A. Foster, who is leaving the Main School, to take charge of the School at Chamberlain was last Friday afternoon presented with an upholstered wicker chair by members of the Main School committee and the teaching staff. The presentation was made by Mr Stead (chairman of committee) who spoke of the many good qualities of the recipient, Mr Dalglish (headmaster) endorsing the remarks. Mr C. G. Morgan (a member of the committee) spoke of the splendid work done by Mr Foster in connection with the Boy Scouts, expressing regret that they were about to lose him. Mr Foster suitably responded. At the school this afternoon Mr Foster was the recipient of presentations from his old class, and the standard at present under his care. The presentation was made by Mr Dalglish.

Lyttelton Times. 26 October 1915 (Papers Past) [30 April 2023]

THE WOUNDED AND SICK.

Yesterday Mrs John Foster, of Andover Street, Merivale, received a cablegram from her son, Private W. A. Foster, of the Medical Corps, who has for some time been in hospital at Malta, stating that he was now nearly well. Private Foster was educated at the Christchurch Boys' High School and at the Normal Training College, and when he enlisted was schoolmaster at Chamberlain. He was ever an enthusiast regarding military matters. He was a prominent leader in the Cadet movement, and was mainly instrumental in establishing a strong company at Linwood, of which he became the popular Scoutmaster. While living in Christchurch he filled the position of organist of the Linwood Congregational Church during the incumbency of the Rev I. Sarginson, and when he removed to South Canterbury he filled a similar position in the Timaru Congregational Church. Private Foster left New Zealand at the end of July, and for some time did duty on the hospital ship *Dongola*, from which he was invalided to Malta.

New Zealand Times. 9 October 1917 (Papers Past) [24 March 2023]

News has been received that Staff Quartermaster-Sergeant W. A. Foster, N.Z.M.C., was married at St. Matthew's Church, West Kensington, to Miss Olive Gale, of London. Staff Quartermaster-Sergeant Foster is the son of Mr J. Foster, Merivale. Christchurch. He was educated at the Boys' High School, Christchurch, and afterwards at Canterbury College, and subsequently he became a teacher, first at Linwood and afterwards at Timaru, says an exchange.

Star. 20 October 1917 (Papers Past) [03 December 2015]

Staff Quartermaster-Sergeant W. A. Foster, who was recently mentioned for valuable service in connection with the war, was born in Christchurch twenty-six years ago, and is a son of Mr J. Foster, of Merivale. He was educated at the Boys' High School and Canterbury College, and also at the Normal School, where he received his training for the teaching profession. At the time of enlistment he was in charge of the Chamberlain School. He left New Zealand in

July, 1915, with a special squad of five doctors and twenty-five men, and spent about a year in Egypt attached to the Medical Corps. Later he was transferred to London, where he was placed in charge of the records dealing with the New Zealanders on active service.

Lyttelton Times. 22 June 1918 (Papers Past) [20 April 2023]

LINWOOD SCHOOL.
ROLL OF HONOUR UNVEILED.
ADDRESS BY HON G. W. RUSSELL.

Despite the very wet weather, there was a fairly large attendance in the Linwood schoolroom last evening, on the occasion of the unveiling of a roll of honour of past pupils who have gone to the war. Mr R. Carter, chairman of the School Committee, presided, and there were also on the platform the Hon G. W. Russell, the Hon J. G. Grimmond, M.L.C., and Messrs E. H. Andrews and A. Peverill, members of the Education Board, representatives of the School Committee, and the head master (Mr F. T. Evans).

The Mayor (Mr H. Holland) said it was fitting that the names of public schoolboys who had gone to fight should be handed on to posterity — the children of the future would then think of the gallant men who had risked everything and made such sacrifices. Mr Holland then referred to the many services at work in the sphere of war.

The Hon G. W. Russell, in unveiling the roll of honour, said it stood as a permanent and lasting tribute to men who had gone to battle for the Empire. The ceremony that evening would certainly be historic in connection with the school. On behalf of the Government he expressed the deepest sympathy to the relatives of those who had lost their lives. After referring to the causes of the war and Britain's initial unpreparedness, Mr Russell said it was still two years off the century since the first ship entered Waitemata harbour, and about eighty years since the first Constitution was granted to New Zealand. But this faraway little outpost of the Empire had so grown that it had been able to send away over 100,000 men, perfectly trained and ready. The country was under the deepest debt to the women for the part they had taken, and still were taking, in providing comforts for the soldiers, and to them he extended his own thanks and the thanks of the Government. Their hearts bled for the boys who had made the supreme sacrifice, but they must be prepared for the sacrifices that may come. Any assistance that was within his power would he warmly give. They were thankful for America joining in on moral grounds, and he hoped that they could look forward to an honourable and noble peace before very long.

Brief addresses were also given by Mr Andrews and the headmaster (Mr F. T. Evans). Between the speeches a song was given by Mrs M'Gillvray and a recitation by Miss Dorothy Rutland.

The roll contains the following names: —

W. A. Foster, [34], of whom F. Kiddey, E. Johnston and E. Hardy have been killed in action.

Lyttelton Times. 5 October 1918 (Papers Past) [24 March 2023]

BOY SCOUTS

Mr W. A. Foster, formerly Scoutmaster of the Linwood troop, and of the main troop, Timaru, is now Staff Sergeant-Major N.Z.M.C., and stationed at Bloomsbury Square, London. He says: — “Scouts are going strong. I have been Scoutmaster of a troop in Shepherd’s Bush for eighteen months now, and things are booming. We have seventy-two on the roll.” It is a Church troop, and it is a condition of membership that the boy attends Sunday School every Sunday. The compulsion did not work well at first, but now that the Sunday School counts a parade, the leaders see that all the members of their patrols attend.

“The troop,” he writes, “is run on the patrol system, governed by a Court of Honour. This, while not taking away any of the Scoutmaster’s authority, lets the leaders feel that they have a voice in the running of their own troop. The court decides such questions as the suitability of candidates for admission (incidentally I may say that they very seldom turn down a boy, no matter what his reputation, until they have given him a fair trial for a month), reprimands in the case of unruly members, minor punishments for minor offences, purchase of troop property, arranging outings, etc. My trooper-leader, while not actually conducting a patrol of his own, helps the other leaders, marks attendances, keeps the troop funds, and is really as useful as an assistant Scoutmaster would be for me. We have a very fine bugle band, ten bugles, a bass-drum, five side-drums, triangle, cymbals, etc., and he is also leader of this band. I am hoping he will conclude his King’s Scout test next week, and thus act as an incentive to the others.”

Sun. 29 April 1919 (Papers Past) [03 December 2015]

Advice has been received by Mrs J. Foster, of Hewitt’s Road, Merivale, that her son Staff Sergt.-Major W. A. Foster, N.Z.M.C. at present attached to New Zealand Headquarters, London, has been decorated with the Meritorious Service Medal.

Press. 22 September 1919 (Papers Past) [03 December 2015]

TEACHING IN ENGLAND.

A COMPARISON OF SCHOOLS.

NEW ZEALAND IMPRESSIONS.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, August 1.

Staff-Sergeant-Major W. A. Foster, M.S.M., N.Z.M.C., who was headmaster at Chamberlain School before going on active service, has a long article in the “Teacher’s World” comparing education conditions in New Zealand and in the Old Country.

Mr Foster, although favouring the single-storey schools which are so common in New Zealand, is particularly struck by a type of single-storey school which he has seen in London, and which is superior to anything in New Zealand, namely, the central hall with class-rooms grouped round it. “I was struck,” he said, “by the of use to which this central hall was put. I had looked on such a hall as space virtually wasted, but can now see its immense practical value.”

Another thing that impresses him is the difference in the curriculum. In New Zealand the teachers are bound, in fact, chained to a fetish, known as the syllabus, outside of which they dare not step. Here things are totally different. "One is allowed much more liberty to experiment, much greater freedom in the choice of subjects taught, and in the amount of time allotted to each. Under this heading, it may not be out of place for me to say how deeply impressed I have been by the singing of the London school children. Whether there is some constitutional difference in their vocal chords, or whether it is due to the different life they live, I know not; the fact remains, however, that the singing, taking it as a whole, far outclasses any that I have heard in a New Zealand school. As a matter of fact, singing is one of my 'pet' subjects, but I have never succeeded in achieving anything like the results I have heard here. . . . The teaching of printing, however, in place of writing, is an innovation which has struck me as worth looking into, but most of the work I have seen has been in the commencing stages. I should like to see the work done by a child of leaving age, who has been taught this method from the beginning. I am informed that, as far as London is concerned, the whole thing is still in the experimental stage, and I therefore do not feel justified in either condemning or advocating the replacement of script by printing. Perhaps under 'methods' it will not be out of place to compare the discipline of the London schools with that of the New Zealand ones. Our discipline is, on the whole, much more severe than that demanded by the London teachers. I have seen a great deal of the so-called 'free' discipline, but doubt whether it would be as successful with our children as it appears to be here. This may be due to the fact that the Colonial child is much more boisterous, much less amenable to discipline, than the London boy. His outdoor life, his freer speech, his more unconventional style, render it imperative that a more rigid discipline should be enforced. Perhaps 'free' discipline could be used with advantage; personally, however, I must confess that I should be exceedingly doubtful as to the results. Perhaps the innovation that I am most tempted to endeavour to introduce into my own school when I return is the 'school journey.' I have had opportunities of studying this phase of school work at first hand, and am tremendously impressed by its possibilities. It is an entirely new idea, so far as New Zealand is concerned, and one which I should like to see adopted in our schools. The advantages are obvious, and I shall certainly endeavour to have the scheme instituted in New Zealand.

"The prefect system, too, is one which, while adopted in our secondary schools has not to my knowledge been tried amongst primary school children. From what I have seen, it works well, and, whilst lifting a certain amount of responsibility from the shoulders of the teachers, succeeds in inculcating esprit de corps, and in raising the tone of the school. School uniform, too, is an innovation so far as our primary schools are concerned and one would be blind indeed who could not see its beneficial effect. In one school I visited, it was the exception to see a boy or girl dressed in anything but the prescribed school uniform, and one could see that the children took pride in it, and that the fact that their dress indicated their school had an influence on their behaviour in the street. In conclusion, I may say that my three months' experience of work in the London schools has, above all, convinced me of the unanimity of our aims; has shown me that we of the Antipodes are, with our confreres of the London world however we may differ in manners and methods, striving to produce the same thing: that 'all roads lead to Rome,' Rome being in our case the production of worthy citizens of the British Empire."

EDUCATION IN SAMOA. NATIVES ANXIOUS TO LEARN.

AUCKLAND, April 23.

“The aim of the whole of the education system of Samoa is not to turn out students, but to turn out useful citizens, and for that reason technical instruction is going hand in hand with academical instruction,” stated Mr W. A. Foster, who arrived in Auckland by the Tofua after four years’ service in education work at Samoa. For two years Mr Foster was headmaster of Malifa School, at Apia, and for the remaining two years he was headmaster of the district school at Vaipouli, on the island of Savaii. He has been transferred to Taranaki district.

“The natives are extremely keen to have an English education, and it is only possible to give it to a very small proportion of those who desire it,” continued Mr Foster. “Funds are limited, and accommodation will not permit a white education of natives on any very large scale. Education in the vernacular, however, is extremely complete, due mainly to the efforts of missions, who educate their own people. The four leading missions are the London Mission Society and Methodist, Roman Catholic and Mormon Missions. They do splendid work and run their own denominational schools and teachers. Certain of the teachers are handed over to the Administration, where they become acquainted with modern English ways of teaching, and when, after a course, they go back to their own schools, they are paid by the Education Department.”

Discussing the ability of the natives to learn, Mr Foster stated that they had wonderful memories. They recognised also the value of education and its relation to the serious business of life. Every Samoan was also a born musician, and music figured largely in the native school curriculum. “If four part songs are taught, you will find that the boys who sing the tenor on one day will be singing the alto on the next,” added Mr Foster. Ex-pupils of Government native schools were already holding positions of responsibility in the Post Office and other Government Departments, in hospitals and in schools as pupil teachers. Technical instruction included wireless, carpentry, engineering and plumbing, all taught by experts. There were also tradesmen who gave their services gratuitously in the welfare of the natives. Agriculture was a prominent subject and all agricultural schools were self-supporting in the matter of food. Mr Foster was impressed with native students. They were an excellent type, and ever ready to learn.

DOUBLE TRAGEDY MURDER AND SUICIDE WIFE KILLED WITH AXE FIVE INFANTS LEFT

(By Telegraph. — Press Association.)

CHRISTCHURCH, This Day.

A double tragedy occurred at 31, Godley avenue, Papanui, early this morning. **William Alexander Foster**, aged 37, using an axe, killed his wife Olive, aged 32, in bed, and then drowned himself in the bath. He left a note in the milk billy, "For God's sake, send for the police immediately." There are five children, ranging from eight to two. **Foster** was first assistant master at the Papanui School. He worked for a time in Samoa, and was married in England. The Fosters lived at the Northcote Settlement, Papanui.

The tragedy occurred between midnight and 6.15 a.m.

When the milkman called at 6.15 a.m. and found the note, the doors of the house were open, and he went inside. There a gruesome sight met his eyes. On a bed lay Mrs. Foster, her head reduced almost to pulp, and the bedding soaked with blood. In the bath was her husband in a crouching position, with a bootlast on his head, and drowned. On a small grass patch in front of the house were the five children, dressed in their night clothes, and quite oblivious of the tragedy which had robbed them of their mother and father.

Propped against the wall of the bathroom was an axe, the blade of which was covered with blood. It was with this that **Foster** had attacked his wife. Mrs. Foster was lying face downwards on the bed with her arms outstretched, and her skull shattered by many blows.

Mr. Arthur Pateman, who lives across the road, had known the Fosters intimately for about three years, and went into the house when he heard of the tragedy.

SEVERAL LETTERS LEFT.

In the dining-room, he said, were five or six letters lying on the arm of a chair. One was to the Chief Detective, one to his mother, one to the headmaster of the school (Mr. Gates), and two or three others. The crime must have been premeditated. It happened after 12.15 last night; he had a friend of his there till then, and we heard the motor leave. Mrs Foster went to the pictures last night. Usually she went out on Thursday nights, but last night **Foster** drove her and the children down to the tram terminus, and we saw him and the children come back. Usually, he left the car on the road all night, but last night he drove it into the garage."

Mrs. Pateman said that Mrs. Foster was "the dearest little woman," and devoted to the children.

The five children are Hazel, aged 8; Cyril, aged 7; Jackie, aged 5; Joyce, aged 3; and Bobbie, not quite two.

THE DEAD MAN'S HISTORY.

Foster had not enjoyed good health for some time, and was understood to be suffering from the results of gassing at the war. **Foster** supplemented his earnings as a school teacher by teaching the pianoforte. He was a very popular master at school, amongst both staff and pupils. He was in charge of the boys' sports, and was an enthusiast. He was also choirmaster at St. Paul's Church, Papanui. **Foster** served during the war at Samoa, and also in France, having left New Zealand with the First Contingent. He married Mrs. Foster in England about 1918. After the war he taught at the West Christchurch School. For some time he took an active part in the Boy Scout movement.

It is stated that Foster was interviewed by the police yesterday.

INQUEST OPENED.

An inquest was opened before Mr. Young, S.M., when, after evidence of identification had been taken, the proceedings were adjourned until Tuesday.

Archibald Campbell, of Fendalton, gave evidence of identification in respect of **Foster's** body. Witness, who was a brother-in-law of **Foster**, said he last saw **Foster** about three weeks ago, when he seemed to be all right as far as witness knew. **Foster** and his wife lived on good terms, and seemed bright and cheerful.

Press. 12 December 1927 (page 10) [03 Dec 2015]

DOUBLE TRAGEDY MURDER AND SUICIDE. SCHOOL TEACHER'S DREADFUL ACT.

"For God's sake send for the police immediately." This was the desperate appeal, written on a scrap of paper and left on the billy, which introduced a milkman named Fraser to a dreadful tragedy at the pretty little bungalow residence of William Alexander Foster, assistant master at the Papanui school, at 31 Godley avenue, Northcote, Papanui, a little after 6 a.m. on Saturday.

Realising there was something amiss the milkman, finding the doors open, entered the house, to realise that his fears were only too well grounded, for a gruesome sight awaited him in Foster's bedroom, which is at the back of the house. Mrs Foster lay on the bed, face downwards and arms outstretched, with the back of her head, which lay on a pillow, gashed almost in two by a frightful blow from an axe. Fraser concluded at once that she had been murdered in her sleep, there being no evidence of a struggle or that the unfortunate woman had been conscious of the approach of the murderer. In its descent the axe had struck her skull high, cleaving a boudoir cap which she wore. Along the floor on one side of the bed blood, which drenched pillows and bedding, had formed into a pool. The woman's shoulders were covered by some of the bedclothes.

The discoverer of the tragedy rushed to the neighbours, reporting it to Mr and Mrs F. Woodham, whose house is not ten yards away from that of the Fosters'. They went over at once their son Albert accompanying them, and Fraser left to advise Constable R. Miller, the Papanui Police Officer.

In the Bathroom.

In Foster's house the Woodhams soon came upon evidence of a second tragedy, the son finding Foster's body in the bath. He wore shirt, trousers, and socks, and lay face downwards in the water, which nearly filled the bath, his body being in a crouching posture. Tied to the neck was a heavy three-legged boot-last. Although the weight kept the head under water, it was evident that Foster's death could not have been brought about without the desperate resolve of a suicide. His false teeth were found in the bath.

In the bathroom, too, the Woodhams found, propped against the wall, the instrument used to murder Mrs Foster, a three-quarter axe from which Foster had endeavoured, with only partial success, to remove the evidence of his dreadful act. Perhaps Foster had conceived an alternative means of ending his life or that of his wife, for a half-opened razor was lying not far from the axe

The Woodhams called in Mr Arthur Pateman, who lives across Godley avenue and had known the Fosters intimately for about three years. In describing the scene he said that

several letters lay on the arm of a chair. These, it was subsequently discovered, were addressed to Foster's mother, Detective-Sergeant J. B. Young, Mr J. J. Hall, Mr Gates (headmaster of the Papanui school), and others. They were in Foster's handwriting, as was the note on the milk billy, and supply undoubted evidence that he premeditated the crime. It has since been ascertained that the letter to Mr Hall, the contents of which he was not prepared to divulge, contained an expression of thanks to him and Mr L. Gibbs for their friendship, but made no reference to the cause of the tragedy.

Intention Expressed.

As showing that the crime was premeditated, the intention is expressed in the letter to Detective-Sergeant Young.

On Friday evening Mrs Foster had been to the pictures, in company with Mrs J. W. Butt, of 79 North road, Foster having motored his wife in his Ford car to Mrs Butt's residence at about 7 p.m. Their children, of whom there are five, accompanied them, but returned to the house with Foster, who evidently put them to bed. Messrs Hall and Gibbs, who were returning from a lodge meeting, called on Foster about 10 p.m., Mrs Foster arriving from the pictures later. It was a habit of Foster to leave the car out on the road all night, but on Friday night he drove it into the garage. He was seen carrying the youngest child from the garage to the house, while the others walked across.

Mr Pateman said the tragedy must have taken place after 12.15 a.m., as the Fosters had a visitor up till that time. He had heard the motor leave. He noticed the children on the front lawn about 6 o'clock on Saturday morning, playing in their night clothes, and remarked to Mrs Pateman that Mrs Foster must be up early for a Saturday, as they usually rose a little later when there was no school.

In the sitting-room were found two cups which had contained tea. and a third nearly full, with slices of bread on the table. Foster's coat and waistcoat were on an armchair by the fire. A bound volume of a magazine was on one arm of the chair, and a paper-covered magazine was on the floor leading to the conclusion that Foster had sat in the chair reading after his wife retired.

Arrival of the Police.

Constable Miller was the first police officer to arrive after Fraser had given him news of the tragedy, and he was followed by Sergeant J. Hyland, Chief Detective Lewis, and other police officers. Dr. T. L. Crooke also arrived during the morning. He was unable to state definitely whether or not Mrs Foster's death had been instantaneous.

The most pathetic aspect of the tragedy is that through it the Fosters' five little children are left parentless. Their ages range from eight years to two. In order of age their names are Hazel, Cyril, John, Joyce, and Bobby. They were given breakfast by the Woodhams, and had no realisation of the terrible misfortune which had befallen them. Foster's mother and his sister, Mrs Evans, later took care of them.

Mrs Foster, whose age was 31 years, was of small stature. She was known to be a devoted mother. She was married to Foster when the latter was on the Medical Staff of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces in London during the war, and was an only child. Mrs Foster was a woman of culture and considerable attainments, and was well-respected by those who knew her. The Fosters had two children when they came to New Zealand after the war.

Foster was 36 years of age. From 1908 to 1910 he was a pupil teacher at the Linwood School, and then he was at the Training College until 1912. Obtaining a position as assistant master at the Timaru Main School, he remained there until May, 1914. His next appointment was to Chamberlain, South Canterbury.

War Service.

In August, 1915, he joined the Expeditionary Forces. While on active service he was gassed. He was made a Sergeant-Major in the Medical Corps, spending a good deal of his service in London. Foster returned to the Dominion in 1919, and taught at the Greymouth School for a time. He was appointed to the staff of the Hampstead School in December, 1919, giving up that position in March, 1921, to take up teaching in Samoa, where he was stationed at Apia and Malifa. He returned to New Zealand in 1925, and after a short spell of relieving work in Taranaki, commenced duties as assistant master at the Papanui School on July 1st, 1925.

Having considerable musical ability, he was the organist of St. Paul's Church, Papanui. Before the war he had been the organist in the Ferry road Congregational Church, and taught in the Sunday School, while he was also scoutmaster of the troop, which had its headquarters in the Congregational Hall.

Some of the pupils at the Papanui School had noticed that Foster appeared to be worrying on Friday, but those who saw him at night could notice nothing unusual about him. He had several troubles lately, which may have acted on his highly-strung nature. An enquiry affecting him had been conducted by his lodge, but it was unconnected with financial matters. A motor collision in May had been of considerable expense to him, and one of his children, Joyce, was seriously burned about the lower limbs when her clothes caught fire in the home. Last week the police had interviewed him regarding some matter which he had kept to himself. The Fosters were a happy and highly-respected couple, but Foster was said to have too many activities for such a highly-strung man. He taught music at the homes of pupils, and threw himself into a great many activities, showing himself a born organiser, especially of children's entertainments. On Friday evening his conversation with Messrs Hall and Gibb had turned on radio and the proficiency examinations. An enthusiast in anything he took up, he was always very popular.

Inquest Opened.

After receiving the bodies at the Hospital Morgue on Saturday. Mr H. A. Young, Coroner, heard evidence of identification. Foster's mother was present at the Hospital, but was not called. Sergeant Hyland represented the police.

Archibald Campbell, of 30 Strowan road, Fendalton, brother-in-law of Foster, identified the latter's body.

The Coroner: Do you know anything about the state of his mind? — No, he and his wife were apparently all right. There was nothing wrong that I know of. The last time I saw him was about three weeks ago, and he was apparently all right then. They were always bright and cheerful.

Sergeant Hyland: So far as you know they lived on good terms? — Oh. yes. It seemed so the time I saw them.

Campbell also gave evidence of identification of Olive Foster. He was married to Foster's sister and did not know much about Mrs Foster.

Sergeant Hvland said that was all the evidence he proposed to call that day, as the police had had very little time in which to make enquiries. There were different people to whom Foster had written and from whom he must obtain particulars.

The Coroner adjourned the hearing until 9.30 a.m. to-morrow.

**MURDER VERDICT AGAINST FOSTER.
INQUEST HELD ON PAPANUI TRAGEDY - DETECTIVE HAD BEEN
INVESTIGATING DEAD MAN'S CONDUCT.
LETTER HANDED TO CORONER SAID: — "MY PAST WAS TOO STRONG — IT ROSE
UP AND HIT ME."**

MURDER AND SUICIDE was the verdict returned at the inquest to-day concerning the deaths of Olive Edith Foster, aged thirty-one, and her husband, William Alexander Foster, aged thirty-six, at their home at 31, Godley Avenue, Papanui, on Saturday morning. Foster killed his wife with an axe and then took his own life by drowning himself in the bath.

The Coroner, Mr H. A. Young, in returning his verdict, said that he did not think that a jury would have found Foster not guilty on a charge of murder on the grounds of insanity.

In a letter written to Detective-Sergeant Young, and handed to the Coroner, Foster wrote: —

"I saved you a bit of unsavoury work, old man. There will be no need of a warrant. You knew I was guilty, but you had only a very small corner of the case . . . I'm trying to bluff the Coroner and my family into thinking it was money troubles, so keep up the farce, there's a sport."

Mr W. J. Hunter appeared for the relatives of Foster. Sergeant Hyland conducted the inquiry. Norman Allen Fraser, a dairy farmer, or Styx, said that on Saturday morning he called at Foster's residence. He found a note under the milk billy. He put the milk in the billy. He then tried the front door, which was locked. Going around the back, he tried the back door, which was shut, but was not locked.

Got No Answer.

"I opened the door and called out, 'Is anybody there!'" said the witness. "I got no response, and I went inside. As I went through the room, I saw four letters on an armchair. I went into the first room, where there were some little girls. I saw they were asleep all right. Then I went into the boys' room. They were all asleep bar one. I asked where daddy was, and they showed me the room.

"The door was shut, and I opened it," he added. "I could see nothing but hands stuck out from under the blankets. I went over and pulled the blanket back and had a look. I saw a woman knocked about the head. The body was not quite cold. I went out and had a look round. The kiddies were out in the hall. I sent them back to their rooms to get dressed. I then ran in next door and told them to come and get the kiddies. I was late on my round, and after I saw that the kiddies were all right, I did two more customers and then reported to Constable Miller."

In reply to Sergeant Hyland, the witness said that as far as he knew the couple were on affectionate terms.

John James Hall, a builder, of Papanui, said that he knew both Foster and his wife. He last saw them on Friday evening, when he was at their house sometime after 10 p.m. He left them about 12.15 a.m. The call was more of a social one than anything else. Mrs Foster was at the pictures that evening, and returned home while he was there. He had a cup of tea and then left. Both husband and wife were on friendly terms.

Received a Letter.

Sergeant Hyland: You received a letter from Foster. Was that of a private nature? — Yes.

Did it indicate that he might take his life? — Well, he thanked me for kindnesses I had shown him.

The Coroner: Have you got the letter? You had better let me see the letter to see if it is of a private nature.

After reading the letter, the Coroner said: There is really nothing of a private nature in this, except saying what he had done and what he was going to do. It only affects himself. I'll treat it as an exhibit.

“A Bit Gloomy.”

The Coroner: Did he show any signs of gloom? — He was a bit gloomy when I first arrived.

Did you discuss the charge that was alleged against him? — No, the chief topics were radio and the proficiencies. We saw he was gloomy, and tried to cheer him up.

Had he threatened to commit suicide? — No.

Mr Hunter: Would you say Foster was of a highly strung temperament? — Certainly.

Unusually high strung? — Certainly.

Had Been Doing Too Much.

Was he a hard worker? — Yes, I think the trouble was that he was doing too much.

Do you know what he did outside his school duties? — He took part in bazaars of a charitable nature. He taught the piano, and entered into sport of all classes. I don't know how he had the energy to do it. I'd told him several times he was doing too much.

You know his relations with his wife. We're they affectionate? — I'm just wondering if there is anyone I know more affectionate.

As a father, what was his attitude? — He was a stern father, but affectionate and kind.

Had he been through a period of mental strain? — He was worried.

At the time you left, you say he was cheerful? — Apparently so.

Nothing transpired during your interview that caused you to suspect the least danger? — Nothing at all, sir. If he had been, I would not have left.

A Huge Wound.

Dr T. L. Crooke, police surgeon, said that he went to Foster's home at Godley Avenue. He examined the two bodies. Mrs Foster was lying in bed face downwards, with a huge wound on the back of the head, the wound having penetrated the scalp, the skull and also the brain. The left arm was under her and the right arm was outstretched as if she was trying to ward off something. At that time (9 a.m.) the body was cold and rigid. She had been dead probably three or four hours. He also saw the blood-stained axe, which, he thought, was the instrument used.

Sergeant Hyland: It couldn't in any way be self-inflicted? — Oh, no.

Dr Crooke added that he also saw the body of Foster lying on the floor of the bathroom. The face and neck were livid and presented the appearance of death by drowning. There were no other marks of violence on Mrs Foster's body.

The Coroner: How do you account for Mrs Foster being on her face? — She might have been sleeping on her side and rolled over when attacked. Her face was buried in the pillow. All that one could see on entering the room was the back of the head with this gaping wound.

The wound was such that it might have been inflicted while she was on her side with the back of her head towards the door? — Yes.

Mr Hunter: In your experience, are cases such as this due to homicidal mania? — That's rather a difficult question. The question is, if he wanted to kill himself why did he kill his wife?

Is it not the case that with homicidal mania, it is common to kill those dearest to them? — Yes, frequently.

Is it not a fact that homicidal mania comes on very suddenly? — Yes, quite frequently.

“Financial Worry.”

Thomas Adkinson Gates, headmaster of the Papanui School, said that he had known Foster for the past three years, Foster having taught at the school for that period. He last saw Foster at 2.30 p.m. on Friday. He was then in good health but he was not as cheerful as usual. “He was a most efficient teacher,” added Mr Gates.

Sergeant Hyland: Do you know of any reason for this? — For quite a long time — for some months — he has been under the strain of heavy work and financial worry.

He was on the best of terms with his wife? The whole family was quite affectionate? — He was a most devoted husband and father.

The Coroner: Were you present when the allegations against Foster were discussed between him and Detective-Sergeant Young. — No.

You had spoken to Foster after that? — Yes.

Did Foster say what he was likely to do? — Oh, no.

Did he say that there was any truth in them or otherwise — Both of us mentioned the vast amount of rumour that had been going on. I told him so with the idea of cheering him up.

Did he deny or admit the allegations? — He didn’t deny them or admit them. You did not take any steps yourself? The police took the matter up and you let them carry on? — Yes.

Did you see anything to indicate insanity? — No. He was a very highly strung man. He had just finished a very heavy year’s work and had loaded himself up with other work as well.

Mr Hunter: You knew his character? — Yes.

Would you say he was a dissipated man? — No, he had worked hard at school and had loaded himself up with other work as well. He had no time for dissipation.

The detective-sergeant discussed only one matter? — Yes.

Speaking generally, the allegation was not of a terribly serious description?

Witness paused before replying. Then he answered: No, I should not say so.

A Defence Possible.

Mr Hunter: As far as you know there might have been a complete defence? — Yes, I think there might have been quite a good defence.

In fact, I don’t think the detective-sergeant gave you to understand that a charge would be laid? — The detective-sergeant just told me that the matter had been put in his hands and he had come to investigate.

Would you say that a normal man with any reason at all would be likely to commit suicide? — No. There was no occasion to commit suicide at all.

Detective-Sergeant J. B. Young said that at 11 a.m. on Friday he had occasion to interview Foster at the Papanui School in regard to certain allegations that were made against him. “He was upset when he heard the allegations,” said the detective-sergeant. “The following morning I received a letter from him which I produce.

The Coroner: What were the nature of the allegations? — The nature of it was that he had been guilty of indecent assault.

On schoolboys? — Yes.

Did you tell him what allegations were made? — Yes. I read the statements of two schoolboys. This was at his request. He was not prepared to discuss the matter at all. He would not admit or deny the truth of it. The interview did not last more than fifteen or twenty minutes.

“Not Most Serious.”

You intended to make further inquiries? — Yes.

Mr Hunter: You didn’t inform him that a charge would be laid against him? — No. I had no idea then.

The allegations themselves were not of a most serious description? — No. The most serious part about it is that he was a master and that the boys were pupils.

The Coroner: If they were true, it would be regarded as indecent assault? — That is so, sir.

Mrs Margaret Grant Foster, who resides at 19, Shrewsbury Street, said that Foster was her youngest son. He was 37 on July 18 last. She last saw him alive on Thursday evening at 6.30 p.m., both husband and wife being hearty and well. “They were most affectionate. She thought she was the apple of his eye and she thought the same of him,” said witness.

Sergeant Hyland: You received a letter from him? — Yes.

Have you got it? — Must I show it? It’s not to be made public.

Sergeant Hyland: Just for the Coroner.

Constable Robert Miller, of Papanui, said that he received a message from Fraser just before 7 a.m. on Saturday morning. There was also a note, “For God’s sake, send for police immediately.” He went to Foster’s house and there met Bert Woodham, who lived next door. Woodham said, “I have just found him in the bath. He’s drowned.” Foster was in the bath with a bootlast on the back of his head.

Holding up a blood-stained axe, Constable Miller said that it was apparently with it that Mrs Foster had been killed.

The Verdict.

The Coroner returned the following verdict: —

“The male deceased as a school teacher had more than ordinary responsibility with respect to children, and yet he evidently indecently assaulted schoolboys under his care. This shows that he was not normal.”

The act of killing his wife and then leaving five young children without parents shows, too, that he was not normal; so, too, does his suicide and the manner of it.”

“On the other hand, the letters written by him, and the note left for the milkman shows that he committed acts after deliberation, and with a realisation of their nature and consequences. Had he been unsuccessful in his efforts towards suicide. A jury on the evidence before me would not have been justified, in my opinion, in judging him not guilty of murder on the ground of insanity. The inference might be drawn from the letter written by the deceased to his mother that his wife consented to die, but all the circumstances of her life and death negative [sic] this. If his possible suicide was intended between them, she, in order to put off such a step, might have said that he would take her too. It might be said in favour of the deceased that the nature of the indecent acts alleged against him consisted of only the minimum essentials, and from one of his letters, that the acts with respect to boys were due to him being obsessed by certain ideas on juvenile sex matters. One of the letters shows that it was his intention to kill the children, but fortunately, they were spared.

“I find that at Christchurch, on December 10, 1927, the deceased Olive Ethel Foster was killed by her husband, who struck her on the head with an axe, with the intention of causing her death.

“I find that at Christchurch, on December 10, 1927, the deceased William Alexander Foster, committed suicide by drowning himself in a bath.”

LETTERS FROM FOSTER.

The following letters written by Foster were handed in to the Coroner:

To Detective-Sergeant Young, Foster wrote in a legible, steady hand: —

“I’ve saved you a bit of unsavoury work, old man. There’ll be no need of a warrant. You knew I was guilty — but you had only a very small corner of the case. The more you dug, the more you would have found. So, cease fire; this job is over; pigeonhole the papers and thank God you, didn’t have to see it through.

“Good luck.

“W. A. Foster.”

Then followed: —

“I’m trying to bluff the Coroner and my family into thinking it was money troubles, so keep up the farce, there’s a sport.

“W. A. F.”

The letter to Mr Gates was as follows:

“Dear Mr Gates. — This is the end. Thank you for all your kindness, which turns out to have been wasted. You are well rid of me. God bless you!

“W. A. Foster.”

In a lengthy letter to Mr J. J. Hall, Foster wrote: —

“A message from the dead for you and Gibbs. . . . My past was too strong — it rose up and hit me. I can’t face prison, so I’m facing the judgment of God. He will best know what to do with a poor, miserable sinner like me. I have no hopes of heaven; but in hell, if I see you go past on your way to heaven, I’ll give you a wave in remembrance of all you have tried to do for me here. I hold no bitterness against anyone — I’ve landed myself in this mess and deserve all I get.”

To his mother, Foster wrote: —

“I’m not mad — I know quite well what I am doing. I’ve made a mess of my life and this is the only way out of it.

“I promised Olive I’d never go without taking her too. The kiddies will be better off dead.

“Good-bye, mother. Don’t fret. God bless you and help you to forget me. Forgive me.

“Your loving son,

“Willie.”

Star. 14 December 1927 (Papers Past) [04 October 2022]

FOSTER CHILDREN ARE IN GOOD HANDS. WOMAN TAKES FIVE TO KEEP THEM TOGETHER

Worried over the thought that the Foster children would be separated, a woman has taken the five little ones to her home, where she is keeping them for the next few weeks.

Having no family of her own, the woman, who is very fond of children, set out on Sunday to find where the five boys and girls of William Alexander Foster were living. After a long search, she found that they were with different relations, two being with one family, two with another, and the baby boy with a third.

The woman got in touch with the relatives and as the result of her entreaties, she was allowed to take them until the affairs of the estate are straightened out.

To-day the five children are in pleasant surroundings in the care of one who sympathises with them and tries to remove all memories of the tragedy which has come into their young lives.

PAPANUI TRAGEDY.
CORONIAL INQUIRY.
VERDICT OF MURDER AND SUICIDE.

By Telegraph—Press Association.

CHRISTCHURCH, Dec. 13.

At the inquest on William Alexander Foster (36), a school teacher, and his wife (Olive Foster, 31), the Coroner, Mr H. A. Young, returned a verdict of murder and suicide.

John James Hall, a neighbour, said that Foster on Friday evening appeared gloomy. They had not discussed the charge that was levelled against him. He was of a highly strung temperament.

Detective-Sergeant Young said he had been investigating charges of indecent assault against Foster, but at the time of the tragedy, he had not decided whether to go on with them.

In a letter to Detective-Sergeant Young, Foster wrote: —

“I’ve saved you a bit of unsavoury work, old man. There will be no need of a warrant, and you knew I was guilty, but you had only a very small corner of the case. The more you dug, the more you would have found, so cease fire; this job is over. Pigeon hole the papers, and thank God you didn’t have to see it through. Good luck. (Signed) W. A. Foster,”

In a letter to his mother, Foster said he had promised Olive he would never go without taking her too.

The Coroner said the male deceased, as a school teacher, had more than ordinary responsibility with respect to children, and yet he evidently indecently assaulted school boys under his care. This showed that he was not normal. “The act of killing his wife and then leaving five young children without parents, shows, too, that he was not normal. So, too, does his suicide, and the manner of it. On the other hand, the letters written by him, and the note left for the milkman, shows that he committed the acts after deliberation, and with a realisation of their nature and consequences. Had he been unsuccessful in his efforts toward suicide, a jury on the evidence before me would not have been justified, in my opinion, in judging him not guilty of murder on grounds of insanity. One of the letters shows that it was his intention to kill the children, but fortunately they were spared.”

The late Mr Foster was at one time on the teaching staff of the Timaru Main School, and when he was in Timaru he was choirmaster at the Congregational Church, and Superintendent of the Congregational Sunday School. He left Timaru in 1914.