

Timaru Herald. 25 October 1889 (page 2)

A man named James Clark, aged 53, a married man with 9 children, who has been employed on the railways for many years, and who has been engaged as a surfaceman at Makikihi, has been missing since Wednesday morning. It was his turn that morning to walk along the line early with another hand, to see that all was right, and he left the house about 5 a m without a coat, as if for that purpose, and has not been seen since. The first intimation of anything being wrong was his mate coming to his house to inquire why he had not been along the line. For the last month or so Clark had seemed melancholy and it is feared that he has made away with himself. Constable Field of Waimate, and several other persons were out yesterday looking for him but found no traces of him unless some fresh foot prints on the beach were his. Clark was a temperate, quiet, inoffensive man, and a kind husband and father. It is not known that he had any pecuniary or other trouble.

Timaru Herald. 9 November 1889 (page 4)

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JAMES CLARKE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMARU HERALD.

SIR, - Kindly permit me to make a few remarks in regard to the missing man, James Clarke. It was with very great regret that I read in your paper of his sudden disappearance, and I waited until now thinking that some tidings of him, living or dead, would come to hand. I am now fully convinced that death has overtaken poor James in some shape, probably in what way will never be discovered. Knowing Clarke so well, having him under me for seven or eight years in the Temuka section of the railway, you will no doubt pardon me for troubling you to insert what I have to say regarding him, and it may be the means of doing good in other respects. To my mind it is one of the most singular as well as one of the most melancholy cases that have transpired for some time. If Clarke had been in difficulties, pecuniary or otherwise, there might be some insight into such a circumstance as his. But, no, he was a most careful and frugal man and made the most of his means, which were by no means scanty, he having been constantly employed in the Government service for a good many years. His domestic relations were most cordial. He committed no act to fear the civil law. His character in fact was unimpeachable. What then in the name of all that is good could be the cause of his demise? For I can, I think, safely assume that he is now dead. There has been undoubtedly a cause if it could be got at, and ultimately it may.

The officers of the department should hold a strict enquiry into the affairs and character of the gang of which Clarke was a member, and ascertain if by any tyranny, bullying, or over indulged "chaff" he was being made the victim of the same. In my experience I am aware such as been the case in other gangs in the service where one of the number had generally to undergo the torture of being henpecked. This (if the case) to a mind like Clarke's, which was extremely sensitive, would be torment in the extreme. The indulgence of what I have described does not conduce to the efficiency of the service, nor to the moral welfare of those who indulge in it, leaving out entirely the unfortunate victim of sarcasm, which generally terminates in spleen. Your readers will no doubt remember a case which will bear out my remarks which happened a few years ago, if I remember aright, on the Oxford line, where one of the surfacemen was goaded to that degree that he took up the adze and slew his mate, and then went and drowned himself in a water-hole. If Clarke had anything to unhinge his mind, such description as I have given would be very likely to cause it, providing it was practised on him. It was a misfortune to Clarke to have been employed on the railways, considering his age and temperament. Although a most willing and obedient man, he could not at his time of life be expected to compete in his work with young, stalwart, and experienced men, who have been in railway work from boyhood. Besides the law then in vogue excluded Clarke entirely from the service on account of his years. But how often do we find law makers to be law breakers. Men who will chastise with rigour any deviation from the letter of the law, if thoroughly kept in spirit, and who in the same breath will shatter their own legal fabrication mercilessly.

Such acts in the department are never known, the employees being prohibited on pain of instant dismissal from divulging anything. I will state no more in the meantime, but as I am specially interested in my old gang, who have been nearly all annihilated through accidents or suicide since I left them in April last. I will have some more to say.

I am, &c.,

A. RUSSELL,

Temuka Leader. 14 January 1890 (Papers Past) [June 2019]

Fate of Mr J. Clakke. – On Saturday afternoon last two children named Dillon, while playing on the sea beach, near Bloody Jack's Point, to the south of Timaru, found an almost new watertight boot, which on examination was found to contain a human foot encased in a dark grey ribbed woollen sock. The foot had been severed at the ankle, and the flesh was quite white. The whole were taken to the Timaru police station. The boot is a right foot one, is strong and almost new; has heel and toe plates; has two rows of nails along each edge, and three rows of nails in the centre, and looks as if it had been in the water for a long time. It was thought the foot was part of the remains of James Clarke, platelayer, Makikihi, who suddenly disappeared from home about three or four months ago, and about whom nothing had since been heard. Yesterday Detective Neil brought the boot and sock from Timaru to Temuka, where Mrs Clarke is now living, and she at once identified them as belonging to her unfortunate husband. This sets at rest all speculations as to Mr Clarke's fate, but how he got into the sea will of course remain a mystery.