

# INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF ROBERT MARRAGE – 1901

## REALISTIC DRAMA

**Suitable Years:** 6 to 10

**Number of Students:** 11 or more

### **Cast:**

Narrator

Resident Magistrate /Coroner

Clerk

William Lott – *Farm Owner*

Dr Davis

Police Constable Don – *Policeman At York*

E. Inkpen – *Foreman Of The Jury*

S. Pyke - *Jury Member*

C. Inkpen - *Jury Member*

Various Members Of The Community

### **Venue:**

York Courthouse Complex, 1874 Courtroom

### **Synopsis:**

An old vagrant is found dead in a barn. Has he been murdered or did he die of natural causes? This inquest was held to determine how he died.

### **Costume:**

The play is set in 1901. The actors should be dressed accordingly. The women would wear long skirts with a cummerbund at the waist, with a high necked, long sleeved white blouse. Their hair would be in a bun or pinned up. Men would be in suits. All members of the court would be dressed very neatly.

York Courthouse Complex has some costumes available for student use.



## INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF ROBERT MARRAGE – 1901

*Members of the community come into the courtroom where William Lott, Dr Davis and Police Constable Don are already seated at the front. Police Constable Don is nervously checking his notebook and silently going through his speech to himself. Dr Davis looks relaxed and slightly bored. He checks his Fob watch from time to time. William Lott also seems nervous and a little worried.*

### NARRATOR

The inquest into the death of Robert Marrage was conducted in this court in 1901. Robert Marrage was found dead in William Lott's barn. He was a stranger in the area and there was some speculation that he was murdered. Local people were concerned that they had a murderer amongst them.

### COMMUNITY MEMBERS

*The following remarks can all be said over the top of each other. The community members are keen to be heard rather than listen to each other.*

They say it's a murder!

And they don't know who he is!

How sad to die like that.

What if we have a murderer in our district?

Hmmm. It is certainly suspicious!

Suspicious?

*The clerk and the jury members enter the court and the community members quieten with some last minute whispering amongst themselves.*

### CLERK

All rise!

*Everyone in the courtroom stands.*

Resident Magistrate presiding as Coroner shall consider the inquest into the death of the man presumed to be Robert Marrage.

The Court calls Mr William Lott to the stand.

*William Lott walks up to the witness stand.*

*Community members look to each other with questioning glances to see if anyone recognises the name of Robert Marrage... They don't.*



CLERK

*holding up the Bible for the witness*

Mr William Lott, please place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me. I, William Lott, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

WILLIAM LOTT

I, William Lott, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

*Clerk resumes his seat and takes up his pen to begin recording the proceedings in his book.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Mr Lott. Please tell the court how you came to know the deceased?

WILLIAM LOTT

Sir, I live at Woolerong. My farm is nine miles from York. The deceased came to my place on Tuesday evening the 11<sup>th</sup> instant at about 7 o'clock. He asked me to let him stay in the barn for the night because his feet and legs were paining. I showed him the barn and he went in that direction. He seemed very tired and could not move very well. He was limping and he seemed to be in pain.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

When did you next see him?

WILLIAM LOTT

I saw him the following morning at nine o'clock. I asked him how he felt and he said that he was feeling much better. He never complained of being ill at all. Not ever. He only spoke of his legs and feet being sore. I saw him again on Thursday about eleven am in the barn. He showed me his legs which he said had been terribly swollen. They still looked very swollen to me.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Did the deceased provide you with any information? Where he had come from or what he had been doing?

WILLIAM LOTT

He looked to be in a bad way all right. I could not tell if he was very old or just seemed that way. I did not ask him his name and he did not give it. He told me that Mr Gregory had employed him but after working two days he left there, as they could not agree about wages Sir. He said that he was on his way to the mission at Victoria Plains.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

So, after you saw the deceased on the Thursday, when did you see him next?

WILLIAM LOTT

I asked him to get away on that Thursday as I wanted the barn for shearing. He asked me if he could stay for another day and then he would go. I never saw the deceased again that day.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

And the next day on the Friday, did you speak to the deceased on the Friday?

WILLIAM LOTT

I saw the deceased lying in the barn on Friday morning and I thought he was asleep. I didn't speak to him. I didn't speak to him at all that day. I was in a hurry to meet the train and he...*(pause)* he,...the deceased escaped my attention for the rest of the day.

*Whispering among the people in the court room*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Did you speak with the deceased the next day? On Saturday?

WILLIAM LOTT

On Saturday morning, I went to the barn and called out to him. I got no reply so I grabbed hold of him and shook him *(pause)* ...and found that he was dead. He was lying in the same place where I had seen him the previous day. He was covered by his coat and some sacks; the same as he was on Thursday. I didn't reckon that he was so ill Sir. It only seemed to be his feet. He asked me for something to eat and I gave him some flour. That was all I could spare.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Thank you Mr Lott. That is all for the moment. You may step down.

*Clerk assists Mr Lott.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

The court now calls Dr Davis.

*Dr Davis comes forward and as before, the clerk holds up Bible for Dr Davis.*

CLERK

Dr Robert Davis, place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me. I, Robert Davis, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

DR DAVIS

I, Robert Davis, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

*Clerk takes Bible and resumes his seat and continues recording the proceedings in his book.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Dr Davis. Would you please describe your findings for the court?

DR DAVIS

Yes Sir. *(reading from notes)* I held a post mortem on the deceased on the sixteenth instant. I found no marks of external violence. Deceased had a rupture and his legs were swollen. I found the heart to be enlarged and damaged with a clot on the right side. The lungs were congested. The stomach was in a healthy condition and there were no indications of poisoning. The brain was also in a congested state. In my opinion the deceased died from chronic heart disease. His lungs were congested and his legs were so swollen because of his heart disease.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Then you may step down Dr Davis. Thankyou.

*Clerk assists Dr Davis to step down.*

CLERK

The court calls on Police Constable Don.

*Holding up the Bible for the witness*

Edward Don. Place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me. I, Edward Don, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

POLICE CONSTABLE DON

I, Edward Don, do swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

*Clerk takes Bible and resumes his seat and continues writing in his book.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Read your statement please Police Constable Don.

POLICE CONSTABLE DON

On Saturday last, I went to the residence of W. Lott owing to a report received at the Police Station. I saw the deceased in the barn. He was lying on some cornsacks. He was covered in some sacks and what seemed to be an old coat. I examined the body but could not find any signs of violence. There were no signs of a struggle.

I found some documents belonging to one Robert Marrage with the deceased's belongings. I took him to be a Ticket of Leave man Sir. I presumed that they belonged to the deceased but as the deceased is not known to me I cannot say this for certain Sir.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Thank you. You may stand down.



*Resident Magistrate turns to address the jury.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

Foreman and members of the Jury. That is all of the evidence available to the court. I suggest to you that Robert Marrage died of natural causes.

*The Jury huddles together to discuss the judge's comments. The Foreman then rises and faces the magistrate while the others remain seated.*

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

*Resident magistrate turns to the foreman of the jury.*

Mr Foreman. What is your decision?

FOREMAN

We the members of the Jury find that the deceased, presumed to be Robert Marrage, died at the residence of W. Lott on the thirteenth of this month from failure of the heart's action. We recommend that the police make inquiries about the deceased's identity.

RESIDENT MAGISTRATE/CORONER

So be it. The Coroner's report will show that the deceased died from natural causes with no suspicious circumstances.

*The resident magistrate rises to leave.*

CLERK

All rise!

*Everyone stands up and then they all freeze in their positions.*

NARRATOR

Robert Marrage was a convict, number 3208. His name and number appears on the shipping lists. All we know about Robert Marrage is that he was from Jamaica, another English colony. He was sentenced to twenty-one years imprisonment for throwing his cap at a superior officer when he was twenty-seven. He was eighty-one years old when he died in York in 1901. Like many ex convicts with no family or home, Robert Marrage led a lonely life. As was common in those days, William Lott probably let Robert Marrage stay in his barn as it was against the law of that time for anyone to be found without a roof over their heads.

