

**ACTIVITY:** Bathing

**CASE:** GSAF 1887.12.04

**DATE:** Sunday December 4, 1887 (or Thursday November 4, 1887)

**LOCATION:** The incident took place at Ryde, New South Wales, Australia.

**NAME:** Thomas Cochrane (or William Charles Corkhill)

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 25-year-old male.

**BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, December 1, 1887

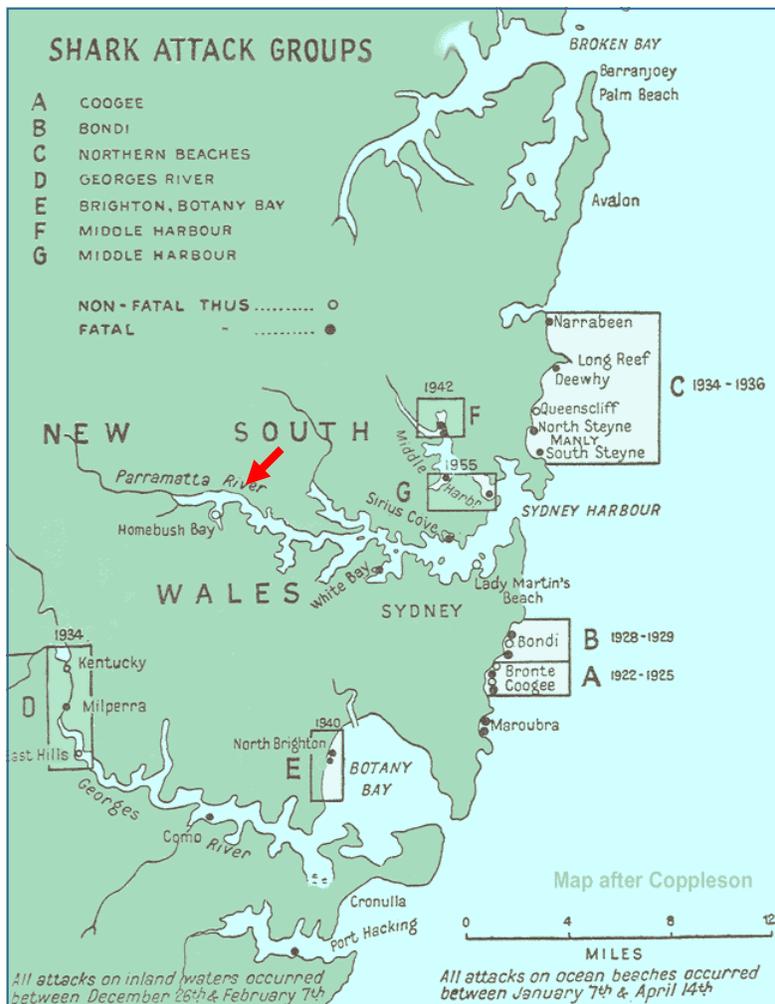
**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** See press clippings

**INJURY:** Fatal. His body was recovered two days later.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Unknown. The shark was said to be 12 to 15 feet in length.

**SOURCES:** The West Australian, Thursday 22 December 1887, page 2; Te Aroha News, December 24, 1887, Page 3; Gilbert P. Whitley (1951), page 192, citing M.C.I. Levy, *Wallumetta*, 1947, page 234; Jack Green, p.31



## **A Horrible Sight.**

ANOTHER warning against the practice of bathing in the Paramatta River occurred at the Ryde Wharf, near Sydney, on November 4th, at about half-past 11 o'clock in the morning, when a young man named William Cochrane, 26 years of age, who was in the employment of Mr T. Small, of Ryde, met with a horrible death right before the eyes of his companions. It seems that Cochrane and several other young men had been sending a dog into the water, and it was then proposed that they should have a swim. Three of the young fellows at once divested themselves of their clothing and entered the water. After returning to the wharf, two of them sat down on the edge with their feet dangling in the water, while Cochrane made another plunge into the river. One of his comrades then sang out that he saw a shark, and the swimmer at once made for the landing, but just as he had his hands on the wood-work the monster, which was about 15ft. long, made a dash at him and caught him in the side, completely disembowelling him. This sickening sight was witnessed by those on the wharf, two of whom were knocked over by the tail of the shark as it rushed towards its victim. As soon as the shark had seized Cochrane his body sank and rose again in a few seconds, but only to sink again, and though the Water Police dragged the river till dark they did not recover it. Several times while the men were at work the shark was seen out in midstream. Some two years ago a young man named

Lysaght was seized by a shark whilst bathing in the river, and a few weeks ago a dog was also devoured. This is the place where the Victorian eight-oar crew, when over here last, used to go in bathing every day.

The "Evening News" says: "It was a terrible scene for those who witnessed it. A wild agonising cry was the first thing that called attention to Cochrane. It was then seen that he had been seized on the right side by the man-murdering demon. Those standing on the wharf were electrified into a state of almost speechless stupefaction, and then the disembowelled man disappeared—dragged out of sight. The water then became tinged with blood. A few seconds' silence, and then could be seen the terrible struggles of the doomed man. He seemed to be making a fight with the caved mouth gaping monster. Then, as if by a supreme effort, the youth wrested his lacerated body from the veritable jaws of death and rose to the surface of the water. But it was a respite of but a moment, for the shark made another plunge and the shark and Cochrane disappeared forever. Deceased was 25 years of age, and was well-known at Ryde, where he had lately been in the employ of Mr T. Small. He was unmarried.

Two days later the body of the young man Cochrane was recovered by Captain Mance, of the steamer Swan. The body was noticed by Captain Mance floating in the river some half-mile from the place where the tragedy occurred, and when taken from the water presented a horrible sight. The flesh had been totally eaten away from both the shoulders and legs, and the greater part of the body had also been devoured, the only portion not showing signs of terrible mutilation being the head and face.

## SHOCKING FATALITY ON THE PARRAMATTA RIVER.

### A YOUNG MAN CARRIED OFF BY A SHARK.

The Sydney correspondent of the *Melbourne Argus* reports, under date of the 5th December, as follows: "While a number of young men were bathing off the steamer wharf at Ryde, on the Parramatta River today, a very large shark, 12 or 14 ft long, suddenly snatched away a young man named Thomas Cochrane, who was just clutching at the jetty, knocking over another bather, who was standing at the edge of the wharf. The shark, holding Cochrane by his side, disappeared with the unfortunate young man, whose body was not seen for some minutes afterwards, when he appeared on the surface for a moment and again sank. The water was deeply dyed with blood where Cochrane was dragged down."

A later telegram from Sydney, dated 7th inst., to the *S. A. Register*, says: "The body of the unfortunate man, Thomas Cochrane, who was seized by a shark whilst bathing at Ryde on Sunday, was found in the Parramatta River this afternoon. It was greatly mutilated. All efforts to catch the shark which seized Cochrane proved futile."

December 5.

A shocking fatality is reported from Ryde (Kissing Point). A young man, while bathing in the Parramatta river near that town yesterday, was seized by a shark and eaten.

*Otago Witness, December 9, 1887, page 13*

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### DEVoured BY A SHARK.

### THE "AUSTRALIA" CONTROVERSY.

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[REUTER'S TELEGRAMS.]

SYDNEY, 5th December.

A shocking bathing fatality is reported from Ryde (Kissing Point). A young man, while bathing in the Parramatta River near that town, yesterday, was seized by a shark and eaten.

*Evening Post, December 6, 1887, page 2*

## THE TRAGIC DEATH AT RYDE.

Yesterday morning an inquiry was held at the Ryde Courthouse, before Mr. J. E. Manning, district coroner, touching the death of William Charles Corkhill, who was seized by a shark while bathing at the local wharf on Sunday last. The body, or more correctly speaking skeleton, which had been picked up in the river between Ryde and Gladesville the previous day by Captain Mance, of the steamer Swan, presented a ghastly sight. The bones had been stripped almost bare of flesh, with the exception of the head and right foot, while both arms and a portion of the leg, from the knee downwards, was missing. The ribs, especially on the right side, also bore unmistakable evidence of the terrible crunch which the shark gave the unfortunate man when it seized him. The following evidence was taken:—

William Corkhill deposed: I am the father of the deceased, William Charles Corkhill; I recognise the body just inspected by the jury as that of my son, W. C. Corkhill; I last saw him alive on Sunday week; about half-past 3 o'clock last Sunday afternoon I was told that my son had been taken by a shark from the Ryde Wharf; I went down there at once, and found that it was true; my son was working for Timothy Small as a carter.

Thomas Small, deposed: I am a gardener residing at Ryde; on Sunday morning between 11.30 and 12 o'clock, I was on the Ryde Wharf; my brother, William Small, John Her, Stephen Woodcock, Frederick Dray, a Mr. Budd, and William Toole were also there; the deceased, W. C. Corkhill, was likewise there; when Corkhill, Toole, and I arrived there, Her and my brother William were in the river swimming; subsequently the deceased went into the river too; he swam round the front of the wharf twice; when all three jumped off the front of the wharf together; then they came out and threw sticks into the river for the dog; when the dog landed on the wharf, Corkhill jumped back into the river; just as he got hold of the platform to land a shark seized him by the right side, and went down with him, remaining in a perpendicular position, with about 3ft. of his tail out

of the water for, I should say, a minute and a half; it was some considerable time, because I ran round to another part of the wharf to call some people who were fishing, and when I returned the shark was in the same position; when the shark seized the deceased there was no time to give any warning; the deceased exclaimed "Oh!" and then went down with the shark; I saw the shark just before it seized the deceased, but it came so rapidly that I could give no warning; subsequently the shark went straight down; the deceased then floated up near the surface, with his face down, and then disappeared; just after the deceased was seized by the shark the blood came to the top of the water; the deceased lived with my father for about eight or nine years.

John Her deposed: On Sunday morning last I was at the Ryde Wharf, bathing; it was about 11.30; the deceased, Corkhill, was bathing, too; he jumped off the front of the wharf, and was just getting out again when he was seized by a shark; the shark dived straight down with Corkhill, and remained in a perpendicular position, with about three feet of his tail out of the water, for some little time; after a short time Corkhill came towards the surface, with his face downwards; he was apparently trying to swim with his left hand, as he was moving it, as if swimming; he then sank, and we saw no more of him; I recognise the body shown to the jury as W. C. Corkhill's.

George Charles Gordon deposed: I am the wharfinger at Gladesville; yesterday afternoon about 4 o'clock, the captain of the steamer Swan landed the deceased on the Gladesville Wharf; the crew of the steamer said that they had picked him up between Gladesville and Ryde.

The jury returned the following verdict:—That the deceased, William Charles Corkhill died at Ryde, on the Parramatta River, on Sunday, the 4th December last, from wounds caused by the bite of a shark. The jury wish to add as a rider that the attention of the Government be called to the necessity of supplying proper dragging appliances at the wharfs on the river.

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*The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW) Friday December 9, 1887, page 4*

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** [GSAF 1887.12.04](#)

**DATE:** Sunday December 4, 1887

**LOCATION:** Ryde Wharf, Paramatta River, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

**NAME:** William Charles Corkhill

## **BACKGROUND**

**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** When William Corkhill, William Toole, and Thomas Small arrived at the wharf, John Iler and William Small were already swimming in the river. William Corkhill joined them and swam around the front of the wharf twice, and then all three jumped off the front of the wharf together.

Then they came out of the water and threw sticks into the river for the dog. When the dog got back on the wharf, Corkhill jumped back into the water. Just as he grabbed hold of the platform to get out of the water, he was seized by a shark that grabbed him by his right side and submerged with him.

Blood rose to the surface as the shark remained in a perpendicular position, with about three feet of its caudal fin above the surface for about 90 seconds. Then William Corkhill surfaced face-down, moving his left hand as if trying to swim, and then he sank.

**INJURY:** Fatal. Corkhill's body was picked up between Gladesville and Ryde by the steamer *Swan*. An inquiry was held and the jury returned the verdict: "the said William Charles Corkhill died at Ryde, on the Parramatta River, on Sunday, the 4th of December last, from wounds caused by the bite of a shark."