

MISS K J GOMERSAL
HM SENIOR CORONER



Allerdale House
New Bridge Road
Workington, CA14 3YJ

County of Cumbria

Tel 0300 3033180
Email hmcoroner@cumbria.gov.uk
hmcoronercumbria.org.uk

Mr P Greenup
Assistant Director of Sustainable Transport and Highways
Westmorland and Furness Council

BY EMAIL ONLY:

Our reference: **16150909**

Your reference:

Date: 1 April 2026

Dear Mr Greenup

**INQUEST CONCERNING THE DEATH OF MR ALEXANDER SAMUEL BIRNIE
DATE OF BIRTH –27 MAY 2004 DATE OF DEATH –25 AUGUST 2025
INCIDENT AT A683 at MIDDLETON**

I am writing in relation to an incident on 25 August 2025 at 11:27 on the A689 in Middleton as a result of which Mr Alexander Samuel BIRNIE died. The incident took place close to the church.

The Council was not an Interested Person in the Inquest. This letter does not constitute a Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths. However, evidence given at today's inquest, I considered it appropriate to notify you of the incident so that the Council can judge whether warning signs would be of benefit at this location.

My determination was that:

On Monday 25 August 2025, Mr Alexander Samuel Birnie was riding his motorcycle north on the A683 towards Sedbergh. Shortly before 11:27, Mr Birnie was navigating a crest on the road before a downhill left-hand bend in the location of Middleton. Mr Birnie was seen to lose control of his bike, collide with a drystone wall, separate from his bike and come to rest on the south-bound verge. Mr Birnie was given immediate assistance but sustained injuries which were incompatible with life. His death was confirmed at 11:40. On the evidence and balance of probabilities, Mr Birnie was momentarily distracted and navigated the hill crest and bend at an inappropriate speed.

My conclusion was that Mr Birnie died as the result of a road traffic collision.

Evidence was given by PC 2613 Turnbull, a forensic collision investigator. PC Turnbull provided an expert report in which he set out the following photograph:



Figure 3 A scene photograph in the same position as Figure 2 but looking north in the direction of the collision scene. The blind crest next to the T-junction, in which a police car is parked. The subsequent bend in the A683 cannot be seen.

The above photograph is taken looking north showing the A683 northbound. It shows the junction between the A683 and the minor road (to the east) which leads to "School House". The speed limit is 60mph. PC Turnbull's evidence was that Mr Birnie was travelling a little too fast for the location.

PC Turnbull's evidence was that the the road layout from this junction, particularly on the downhill bend, is not visible from a distance. The hill is steeper than it appears, although PC Turnbull had not measured the gradient.

PC Turnbull's evidence was that on country A roads, a dip followed by a straight section is fairly common. However, a dip followed by a bend was less common and could catch motorists out.

PC Turnbull stated that he would not necessarily expect to see a sign warning of the "blind crest". One may be advantageous but not necessary.

There are no known incidents at this location.

I did not consider that my duty to issue a Report to Prevent Future Deaths was engaged. However, given PC Turnbull's evidence, I thought it prudent to write to you to highlight this location. Given the above, you may wish to send out a member of your team to make a formal assessment of whether a warning sign would be "advantageous".

Thank you for considering this letter. I should be grateful if you could let me know what action the Council takes so that I can advise Mr Birnie's family.

Could you please also let me know whether you have any objection to a copy of this letter and your response being placed on HM Coroner Cumbria's website. We have a section for "letters of concern" in the interests of transparency and open justice.

I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Coroner's Officer Mrs Jill Pearson.

Yours sincerely

Miss K J Gomersal

HM Senior Coroner – Cumbria

Cc

Ms S Kerslake, Legal Department, Westmorland and Furness Council

DI J Stabler, Cumbria Road Safety Partnership