

Now coroner probes nine more hangings in valley of the suicides

By Tony Bonnici

NINE people have taken their own lives in the past two months in areas surrounding the town dubbed the suicide capital of Britain.

All nine were hangings – the same method that has claimed the lives of 14 young people aged between 17 and 27 in Bridgend, South Wales, over the last year.

The town's coroner Phillip Walters said last night: "I am investigating more hangings than I would normally expect in such a short period of time. But hanging is the most common method of suicide – certainly in this area and probably nationwide."

He has opened inquests into all nine of the latest deaths. All were adjourned for more inquiries and it is understood some computers in the victims' homes have been seized for examination.

Networking

There were fears in Bridgend of an internet suicide cult after it emerged many of the victims in that town were members of social networking sites, with tribute pages set up for those who died.

Coroner's officer Stuart Griffiths said yesterday: "People hear about hangings and then, if they are feeling suicidal, they think of hanging as a way out."

An inquest opened yesterday into the death of the latest victim, Neil Rowley, 29, who was found hanging from a tree in woods near his home on Sunday.

The hearing was told lorry driver Mr Rowley, of Trebanog, Rhondda, had recently moved back to his



MYSTERY: The hangings of Kelly Ball – pictured left with her young son – Paul Briggs and Cherell Ardle are being probed alongside six others

parents' home after splitting from his girlfriend. His family were at the inquest but were too upset to comment afterwards.

The spate of hangings in the valleys started with schoolgirl Cherell Ardle, 13, who was found at her home in Ton Pentre, Rhondda, on December 3. Paul Rhys Williams, 37, was found at his home in nearby Treorchy on Christmas Eve.

Dennis Hughes, 53, died at home in Rhydfelin, Pontypridd, on December 28. Father-to-be Paul

Briggs, 18, was found hanged near his home in Ynysuir, Rhondda, on January 6. Nigel Davies, 44, of nearby Ynysybwll, died on January 19. Also nearby in Porth, Clare Jackson, 35, died on January 24.

The next day Kelly Ball, 25, who has an 18-month-old son, was found at her home in Beddau, Pontypridd. Robert Wiggins, 36, hanged himself from the banister of his home in Ton Pentre on February 3.

Mr Griffiths said all the deaths were being examined as individual

cases. Mr Walters has ruled out a link between all of the 14 deaths in Bridgend, where a task force has been set up to investigate.

South Wales Police has called in its Major Crime Unit to re-examine the cases and a report is expected later this month.

Mr Walters expects to conclude all the inquests later this year after police have investigated each case separately.

Kevin Clarke, the father of 20-year-old Liam Clarke, who hanged himself in Bridgend on Boxing Day, said it is "mind-boggling" that so many of the town's young people have taken their lives.

"There was no reason for it," he said. "We keep torturing ourselves, running it back in our minds to see if there was any sign, anything at all that we could do."

"He was never on the computer for that long – all this stuff about a cult is just nonsense."

Culture for pupils is 'bonkers'

PLANS to make every school pupil take part in five hours of "cultural activities" each week were yesterday branded "bonkers and naive".

Ministers launched a £25million pilot project to develop the artistic talents of youngsters in 10 areas of England.

They believe many children, particularly from poor families, do not get the chance to visit art shows, concerts and plays.

But Michael Spinney, chairman of the Independent Association of Prep Schools, said: "To aim for five hours a week of high culture in the primary and secondary curriculum is laudable but bonkers."

And Geraldine Everett, chairwoman of the Professional Association of Teachers, said the intention was "admirable but naive".

She added: "There aren't enough hours in the day to provide all the sport, cookery and culture the Government would like on top of the current curriculum."

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Artist facing death charge

THE creator of a giant inflatable artwork that broke free of its moorings and killed two people was yesterday charged with manslaughter.

Artist Maurice Agis, 76, is accused of causing the deaths of Claire Furmedge, 38, and Elizabeth Collings, 68, who were visiting the walk-in Dreamscape at a park in Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, in July 2006.

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