

# The Heaver Murder

Sensational Tragedy at Westcott. Murder of a brother-in-law. A gentleman shot on his way to church. As described in the Dorking Advertiser and Tooting & Mitcham Weekly

The picturesque and peaceful village life of Westcott was, on the morning of Sunday 5th August 1901, the scene of a tragedy of the most sensational description, one of its most respected of its residents being shot down on his way to church by an assailant who subsequently took his own life. The sad event has cast a deep gloom over the whole neighbourhood. The victim is Mr A. Heaver, who, five years ago, took up his residence at Holcombe Cottage, and during his residence has gained the high esteem of his fellow parishioners of every class. Kindly to a degree, and thoughtful of those whose life struggles have not been so fortunate as his own, it would have been difficult to have imagined that he could have had an enemy; certainly he has none at Westcott, where his cheerful and generous disposition has won him universal popularity. But to come to Sunday's melancholy story.

In accordance with his invariable practice, when health and residence at Holcombe Cottage made it possible, Mr Heaver set out to attend Morning Service at the Parish church, which is almost within a stone's throw of his residence. The church is approached by a narrow winding path, which threads its way through the furze and wild brambles of the common on which the church stands. He left the house a few minutes before eleven o'clock, and was accompanied by Mrs Heaver. They had almost reached the church, when they were confronted by a man who, if he had not purposely concealed himself behind the bushes, was at all events unperceived by Mr. And Mrs. Heaver till right upon them. It is clear that the would-be assassin had awaited the approach of his victim with the foulest intention, for no sooner had Mr. and Mrs. Heaver passed, than the man whipped out a revolver from a black bag which he was carrying, and fired at Mr. Heaver at the short range of two yards.

His aim was all too true; Mr Heaver fell wounded in the back. As if not content with his dastardly act, the would-be murderer quickly covered the intervening space, and as the wounded man lay prostrate on the ground, he levelled the revolver close against his head, and emptied the contents of the second chamber, this charge entering the back of the head. It all seemed but the work of a second, Mrs. Heaver was naturally too awe-stricken by what she had witnessed to raise an ~ but this, fortunately, was not necessary, as the terrible tragedy had been witnessed by a lad named Arthur Grace, who ran down the hill as fast as his legs would carry him, and informed Mr. E. Dixon, whom he met as he was making his way to church. He then proceeded to summon Dr. Royston Fairbank. In the meantime the discharge of the revolver had attracted others to the spot. The first to arrive was William Burrell a labourer. As he approached the prostrate form of Mr. Heaver he saw the stranger running up the hill. He at once went in pursuit, but before he could overtake him, the man placed the revolver to his head and blew out his brains, this culminating act of tragedy taking place about forty yards from where Mr. Heaver lay. The man had clearly placed the muzzle of the revolver against his right ear, inflicting a wound which could have only one end. He was still clasping the revolver. This Burrell relieved him of, and discharged the three remaining barrels in the air.

Meanwhile others had arrived to afford Mr. Heaver what relief and assistance it was possible to render. Amongst those who rendered assistance were Messrs. Spinney, Johnson, sen. and jun., Scarr (a visitor), Rhoades, Burrell, Dixon, Clayton, and two of the Imperial Yeomanry. Though there was not much to denote the extent of his injuries, beyond a slight streak of blood which flowed from the back of the head, Mr. Heaver was clearly in a most serious condition. With

praiseworthy fortitude he bore his sufferings uncomplainingly, and it was not until he reached Holcombe, where he was temporarily placed in the morning room that he showed any signs of collapse. Meanwhile, Dr. Fairbank had arrived, and Dr. Hugh Blakeney, the family doctor, had been summoned by mounted messenger from Dorking. Unfortunately, Dr. Blakeney was on the Holmwood at the time, where he was ultimately acquainted with what had happened by a cyclist. He hastened over to Westcott with all possible speed, and found that Dr. Fairbank and Dr. Rawlings, who had reached Holcombe at a very opportune moment, had done all that it was possible to be done for Heaver. A London physician was sent for, but unfortunately a wire failed to reach either Sir William MacCormac or Sir Edward Treves, both of whom were out of town.

Until some time after the terrible affair, Mr. Heaver's assailant remained where he had fallen, wasting his life's blood from the large gaping wound by the side of the right ear, while his breathing plainly denoted that his end could not be long delayed. He remained unconscious. It was impossible to obtain medical aid for him, the doctors were too much occupied in attending to his unfortunate victim, but had it been otherwise his case was absolutely hopeless; all that could be done was done in the way of tending to his comfort, and in this respect he was well looked after by Supt. Alexander, who had driven over from Dorking, and by P.C. Steele, the resident constable, who was one of the first to reach the spot after the fatal shots had been fired. The man was eventually removed in Mr. Dixon's cart to one of the out-buildings at the Crown Inn, where he lingered till one o'clock.

In the black bag which the man was carrying, which is now in the possession of the police, there were letters and other papers which established his identity as James Young, apparently hailing from the district of Battersea. A most regrettable feature is the fact that he was Mr. Heaver's brother-in-law, he having married that gentleman's sister. The letters are understood to refer to grievances, imaginary or otherwise, which the deceased had an idea that he had against Mr. Heaver, and to show that he intended to take this terrible revenge. As a matter of fact, however, Mr. Heaver had, we understand, often befriended his poorer relative. That the act was premeditated is beyond question. In the bag the man was carrying was also discovered a large butcher's knife, pointed in a most evil looking way, and having a piece of cloth fastened round the handle to enable a person to have a firmer hold upon it. Young, who was rather shabbily dressed in blue serge trousers and black cloth coat, with a round bowler hat, was seen earlier in the morning coming over Milton Heath from the direction of Dorking, so there is every reason to believe that he came down by train, some money being found upon him. The scene of the tragedy was visited throughout the day by a large number of people, many of whom it is to be feared, were attracted there by morbid desire to see some evidences of the terrible deed.

Holcombe Cottage, where Mr. Heaver resides, is very pleasantly situated on the summit of the hill overlooking the village. Large sums of money have been spent by him in works of enlargement and improvements, and it is now one of the most desirable residences in the neighbourhood, with its well-kept lawn, pleasure grounds, and convenient paddock. Here Mr. and Mrs. Heaver are in the habit of taking up their residence for the summer months; in the winter they live at their town house. Mr. Heaver had been very successful in business; he has long been engaged in large building operations at Balham in a large part of which rising suburb he has very considerable financial interests. Immense building estates there belong to him.

The inquest on the body of the deceased man was held on Tuesday morning at the Crown Inn. Ernest Young, a painter and decorator of Carlton Lodge, Grant Road, Clapham Junction,

identified the body as that of his father who was about 63 years of age. In response to questioning from the coroner, he went on to say that his father was separated from his mother and that he had a sister who has been in Cane Hill Asylum for the past two years. He was not aware that his father had a revolver but knew that about twelve years previously he had been charged with shooting a man who had seduced his sister, but added that his father had been acquitted when the trial took place at the Old Bailey. There had been animosity between his father and Mr Heaver because of the manner in which the latter had provided financial assistance to his mother and sister.

In addition to evidence from Arthur Grace, a garden lad in the employ of Sir Thomas Paine, Joseph Hall, a miller at Westcott said that he had been standing on the other side of the church on a level with Mr Heaver's house when he saw Mr. and Mrs. Heaver leaving to attend church. He then heard screaming and hurried to the scene where he saw the deceased raise a revolver to his head and shoot himself. William Burrell confirmed that he, too, had heard a shot fired and heard a woman scream. He ran towards where the sound came from and saw Mr, Heaver lying on the ground. "I looked up the path and saw the deceased running away. I picked up Mr. Heaver's stick and went after him I saw Mr. Hall coming down by the Three Trees, and apparently the man saw him also, for he stepped aside among the bushes and fired at himself " P.C. Steele stated that he had been walking through the village on that Sunday morning and when near the Cricketers heard the report of firearms near the church. "I looked up and saw the smoke arise, and a second later I heard another report, and directly afterwards screaming. I ran in that direction, and about a minute later I heard a third shot." The constable added that after seeing that Mr Heaver was being properly attended to, he remained by the deceased till he was removed to the Crown, where he died at one o'clock. As to the articles found upon the deceased, there was 4s 9d in money, and a large number of library tickets from the City of London and Battersea Free Libraries. The Coroner observed that the deceased was a man of more than ordinary intelligence, the books which he favoured being of a very high character, and not at all in the nature of penny horribles and other trashy literature.

In the black bag which the man had been carrying was a second revolver, cocked with four chambers loaded, and a fearful looking butcher's knife; it was quite new and had been ground to a point and recently sharpened. There was also a case of cartridges. The Coroner remarked that several letters were also found in the bag, signed by the man himself, including one addressed to his wife, and another to a nephew. They contained a long, rambling, incoherent statement, but he did not propose to read them, because there was nothing in them which could be of assistance to the jury in arriving at their verdict.

Dr Fairbank, in addition to reporting on the attention that he had given to Mr. Heaver, gave evidence that when he went to the coach house at the Crown at about one o'clock he found the deceased to be dead. He also drew the jury's attention to the bullets of the cartridges used by the deceased. A small opening had been bored in the apex to make the bullet spread when fired and thus cause a much more serious wound than an untreated bullet. "It was this treatment which had caused so much talk about the inhumanity of the Boers, because they treated their bullets in exactly the same way." Following the Coroner's summing up, the jury returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased died from injuries inflicted by himself, and that from the evidence he appeared at the time to be suffering from hallucinations. They also unanimously added a rider expressing their deep sympathy with Mr Heaver and his family in this sad occurrence.

For the first two days after being shot, Mr Heaver, who retained complete consciousness throughout, seemed to make fairly good progress after recovering from the immediate effects of the shock but on Wednesday morning he was reported to have had a restless night and to be correspondingly weaker. Three eminent physicians from London attended Mr. Heaver and X rays were successfully used to locate the several pieces of the first bullet, which had entered the back just below the left shoulder blade and passed down the back of the chest into the abdomen, and the second which was embedded deep in the neck. On Thursday his condition was extremely critical, and late in the afternoon it became known that he had passed away. Mr Heaver was buried in Holy Trinity Churchyard close to where he was attacked. There was a large number of village people at the graveside and at the hour of interment the shops in the village were closed and with hardly an exception the private houses had their blinds drawn.