



SERGEANT WILLIAM FRANK CROUCH

William Frank Crouch was born at Foxhanger, Rowde on 13th May 1880. He joined Wiltshire Constabulary on 2nd May 1900. He was murdered, whilst on duty as a Sergeant, at 11p.m. on 31st March, 1913. He was aged. Full reports can be found in the Wiltshire Gazette on 3rd & 10th April 1913.



The following report has been transcribed from the **Portsmouth Evening News dated 2nd April 1913**

**POLICE TRAGEDY
CONSTABLE'S REVENGE
MURDER AND SUICIDE VERDICT**

As reported in several editions last evening, a remarkable double tragedy, the victims of which were two policemen - a sergeant and a constable - was discovered yesterday morning at Netheravon, a Wiltshire village, well known as the home of the Cavalry Riding School.

Facts brought out at the inquest later in the day show that the constable, Ernest Pike, had a grudge against the sergeant, William Frank Crouch, whom he murdered., after meeting him on point duty by appointment, subsequently taking his own life by shooting himself when standing in the River Avon.

BLOODHOUNDS ON THE TRAIL.

The famous bloodhounds of the Chief Constable of Wiltshire were successfully employed in tracing the movements of Pike after he fired the shots which killed the sergeant.

The approximate time of the tragedy is fixed by the fact that a shot was heard in the vicinity about eleven o'clock on the previous night. The body of Crouch, however, was not discovered until yesterday morning, when a workman on his way to the military aviation school saw it lying by the roadside. Constable Pike was then discovered to be missing, and the Chief Constable, taking a couple of bloodhounds with him, motored hence from Devizes to Netheravon, where the hounds, after scenting some of his clothing, were able to pick up a trail from Crouch's body to the bank of the river, two hundred yards away.

Pike's double-barrelled gun was found in the water, one barrel being loaded and the other containing a discharged cartridge similar to two cartridge cases found by Crouch's body. The scent failing at the water's edge, dragging was commenced, with the result that Pike's body was found in a deep part of the stream. There was a gunshot wound to the head.

PUNISHMENT AND THREAT

At the inquest in the afternoon the evidence made it clear that Pike bore malice against is sergeant. He had already committed one offence and was under orders for removal from the district.

As recently as Monday the Chief Constable held an inquiry at Amesbury into a charge of breach of discipline against Pike, Sergeant Crouch, who was called at that inquiry, gave evidence with fairness and moderation, but Pike lost his temper. His punishment was to lose his merit class stripe, and on his way back to his station at Enford he made this remark to the Upavon Constable; "Well, I have done with the force. I will make this country ring."

Other evidence showed that when Pike reached his home at Enford he was very distressed and seemed broken-hearted. He resumed his duty at nine o'clock, and his meeting point with his sergeant was close to the spot where the latter's body was found.

After medical evidence as to the nature of the wounds, the jury returned a verdict to the effect that Pike wilfully murdered Crouch and then committed suicide.

Both men leave widows and families. Pike having six children and Crouch two. Each had a good reputation in the district.

Crouch, by the way, was a leading witness in the Wiltshire well mystery a few years ago, when a woman was convicted of murdering her child and throwing the body in a well, from which it was recovered after some years.

CONSTABLE ERNEST PIKE



Ernest Pike was born on [March 21, 1874](#) at Lower High Street, Malmesbury. Before joining the police force Ernest Pike was found on the 1891 census as resident in Llanover, Monmouthshire as a labourer.

He joined Wiltshire Constabulary as a Police Constable collar number 7 on 28 November 1895 at age 21. Later he was promoted to First Class Constable. In 1901 Ernest was recorded as a married Police Constable living at the Police house with his wife Amelia at Eastcott Road, Swindon. On the 4th Aug 1903 he gained the grade and stripe of Merit Class constable, the last stage before promotion to sergeant.

Constable Pike, the local bobby of Enford since 1909, shot and killed a fellow officer who he felt had been persecuting him. Sergeant William Frank Crouch was the sergeant at Netheravon and was involved with a disciplinary case against Pike; Pike had been charged with being in a public house (The Three Horse Shoes) while on duty. Pike had previously been in trouble with his superiors for drinking on duty. He had formerly been a sergeant before being demoted back to constable and moved to Enford.

Constable Pike had every intention of killing Sergeant Crouch and then killing himself since he sent a letter to the Times Newspaper relating his intentions.

He was found guilty when appearing at Amesbury police station on 31 March 1913 and was told he would be moved to another post. Pike accused Sergeant Crouch of lying. Later that evening, Pike left his home, ostensibly to go on his round and smuggled a shot gun out with him. It is believed that he later shot Sergeant Crouch in the head and then killed himself. Pike's body was found the next day floating in the river.

Local man Fred Phillimore recalls the incident thus:
"Murder and suicide, and this time it was the policeman who were the victims. Just before they were about to meet at Coombe, Constable Pike took with him a double-barrelled gun and waylaid Sergeant Crouch as he came along the footpath from Fifield to Coombe and shot him dead. He himself then went to the little footbridge, which was a wooden one in those days, and standing there near the river shot himself. His body fell in the river and floated downstream two or three hundred yards."



Constable Ernest Pike was buried in the churchyard at Enford a simple headstone marks his final resting place.

Below is a memorial erected bridge in near to incident



copy of the plaque at the Coombe where the took place.