



## Murder of a Wife – Edward Burt Pearce

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On Thursday last, **Edward Burt Pearce** of Back St., chemist's porter, and treasurer to the local corps of the Salvation Army was brought before the **Rev. G. F. S Powell** and **Mr. G. L. Lopes** at the Warminster police-court, charged on suspicion with the willful murder of his wife on Saturday week.

The court was crowded, and on the entrance of the prisoner there was much hooting and hissing. The evidence taken was that of **Dr. Willcox**, who stated that the prisoner fetched him at twenty minutes past eleven on Saturday night, and told him his wife was dead. Witness found her lying on her stomach in bed quite dead, but warm. In a tumbler in the window near the bed he found a small quantity of white arsenic, and in deceased's pocket he found a portion of Battle's vermin killer and a packet of calomel.

He had since made a post-mortem examination and found traces of arsenic in the stomach. He had no doubt she died from arsenical poisoning. The prisoner was remanded till Wednesday, the day after the adjourned inquest. The contents of the stomach have been sent away for analysis. A large crowd gathered in the street, and as the prisoner was taken to the police-station, escorted by eight constables, he was followed by a number of people and frequently hissed. The prisoner looked haggard, but maintained the self-possession he manifested at the inquest.

An adjourned inquest was held on Tuesday. At the previous inquiry the husband of deceased (who was in custody on the capital charge) stated that his wife came home on Saturday night at half-past ten, they went to bed a short time after, and that after being in bed a few minutes his wife called out "**Oh, Ted!**" and on his getting a light he found she was dead.

She had been suffering from diarrhea and sleeplessness for a long time, and was taking medicine which **Dr. Willcox** had given her. On the night in question Pearce stated that she refused to take her medicine remarking that she was going to have "something better." She did not tell him what she meant by that, and although she went to bed first he did not think any more about it. On **Dr. Willcox** being called, he found in the window a tumbler containing a small portion of white arsenic, and in the dress pocket of deceased were found a packet of calomel and some of Battle's vermin killer. On making a post mortem examination, **Dr. Willcox** found that death had been caused by arsenic. Deceased and her husband had only been married nine months, and had lived very unhappily. His mother lived in the same house, and to her Pearce entrusted the management of the household affairs, which fact seems to have very much annoyed the deceased. Pearce had been employed at the shop now occupied by **Mr. J.M. Rogers** chemist, for about fourteen years, and seems to have been a trusted servant. It was part of his duty to re-fill some of the drug bottles, and on the Saturday evening on which his wife died he filled, in the cellar, the arsenic bottle, which had been placed in the back shop for momentary convenience. The bottle was not empty, and **Mr. Rogers** said Pearce had no business to have put any more arsenic in it. The bottle contained white arsenic.

On opening Tuesday's inquiry, the Coroner censured the conduct of certain members of the jury, who had gone about the town and neighbourhood in the interim discussing the merits of the case-which he condemned as most culpable conduct.

The mother of the prisoner was re-called, and examined at great length. When the deceased went to bed she heard her at the box. Her son had left home for a night on account of the "niggle naggie" of his wife, and witness had fastened the outside of the bedroom door with a string on these occasions as he was afraid of her. She denied that she had ever fastened the deceased out of the house, but she had locked the door when she went out, and deceased would have to wait for her. She believed the deceased used to physic herself, but she would never let her see what she took.

**Police Sergeant Hayter** deposed to search the box of the deceased, when he found a packet of crimson powder (which had been sent to **Dr. Stoddart** for examination) and several letters which had passed between deceased and a friend at Clevedon. In one of the deceased said she wished she had never seen the day she got married, and that she believed her uncomfortable state would drive her mad.

**Martha White**, a widow said the deceased had told her that her mother-in-law had been unkind to her. She made no complaint against her husband, only that he was away with the Salvation Army so much. Witness did not believe she would commit suicide.

**Dr. Willcox**, recalled, qualified his statement that he was not surprised to hear of the deceased's death. He believed her to be a simple-minded girl, but not that she would commit suicide. She gave him the impression that she was taking something, and he was not surprised to hear that she had died from misadventure.

Several women were called to depose as to conversations of an extraordinary character they had had with the deceased, in which it transpired that she was in the habit taking some white powder; and **P. S. Hayter** said that several months ago **Pearce** asked him to try and frighten his wife, because he believed she was taking something.

The Coroner stated that **Mr. Stoddart** was unable to be present that day to state the result of his analysis of the stomach of the deceased, and the inquest was adjourned till Friday. The prisoner, who is confined at Devizes gaol, was brought before the magistrate's on Wednesday and formally remanded.