



Cuckold's Green, Worton ©Maurice Pullin 2009 -

Murder of Susan Dean

Horrible Wife Murder

A labouring man named Thomas Dean, 56 years of age, living at Cuckold's Green, near Worton, murdered his wife, Susan Dean, aged 51, on Friday morning in a horrible manner. It appears that Dean has for some time past harboured feelings of jealousy towards his wife. On Whit-Monday, it is stated, they had a quarrel, and on Mrs. Dean returning from a club meeting at Potterne, Dean struck her several times. She then left him and went to her son-in-law's at Devizes, where she remained the whole of the week. She was, however, induced to return to him, and they appear to have lived pretty peaceably together until Friday morning, although it is said that the poor woman complained occasionally of the moroseness and slyness of her husband. On Friday morning, between five and six o'clock, the wife got up and lit the fire as usual, and a few minutes after was followed downstairs by her husband. What transpired before the couple got up, or what took place downstairs previous to the murder, is not known. All we can gather is that the only other person living in the house, a daughter about 12 years old, upon hearing angry words between her parents, jumped out of bed, and on getting to a little landing on the staircase was horrified to see her mother lying in a pool of blood near the bottom of the stairs, and her father striking her about the head with a billhook. The state of mind of the little girl can well be imagined. She was unable to do anything but to shout "Murder!" This roused the neighbours, and on a woman living next door entering the house, Mrs. Dean was found insensible on the floor, lying in a pool of blood, with three frightful gashes in the head.

An inquest was held on Saturday, before Mr. Sylvester, coroner.

The first witness, Elizabeth Dean, daughter of the deceased, 12 years of age, said she generally slept in the same room as her parents, but on Wednesday evening she slept in the outer room by her father's orders. About six o'clock next morning she heard her mother say, "What are you going at now?" Witness jumped out of bed, and looked down from the top of the stairs. She saw her father striking her mother with the bill-hook. She only saw him strike her once. Her mother was on the ground and her father leaning over her. He seemed to be using considerable force. Witness then went to the window and called "Murder," and some neighbours came in. She had heard her father threaten to choke her mother before, but had never seen him use any violence towards her. Witness knew her mother was in fear of him, because she had heard her say so. In answer to the coroner as to what was the matter with her father, she said, "Out of his mind, I think."

Martha Dean, sister-in law to deceased, deposed that Mrs. Dean had sometimes complained to her of prisoner's treatment, but witness had never seen any violence used. On Friday morning, about six o'clock, she heard the alarm and ran in. She found deceased on the floor in a pool of blood. Thomas Dean was standing by the fire, rubbing his hands. She asked him what he had done, but he sat down and made no answer. Dean was usually in a low way, and made strange answers at times to questions.

Oliver Few, son-in-law of deceased, said he went to the house, and saw deceased lying on the floor, apparently dead. Thomas Dean was standing in front of the fire, and said to witness, "How are you this morning?" He had never seen

violence used towards deceased by her husband. On Whit-Tuesday, deceased came to his house and said she was afraid to go home. She stayed with witness two days and two nights. He thought his father-in-law had been a little out of his mind the last six weeks.

P.C. Kennedy gave evidence as to finding the body, and as to the arrest of the prisoner, who made no remark when charged with the murder of his wife. He also deposed to the finding of the bill-hook, which had been partially cleaned, and which he now produced.

Mr. G. Waylen, M.R.C.S., practicing at Devizes, said he found deceased lying on her face with left arm under her. There was a large quantity of blood under the body, at least two pints. There was a smooth-cut wound about an inch above the left ear, and another a little further under. A little lower there was another wound – a curious shaped one, something like a triangle with the base uppermost, as though there had been two cuts. There were two other wounds, both on the skull. There were also bruises, and his opinion was that the wounds had been caused by the bill-hook produced, and the bruises by the back of the same instrument. He thought death must have been instantaneous. He had made a post-mortem examination and found other wounds which he described in detail.

Deputy Chief-Constable Woodman deposed to the examination of the house after the murder, and the stains of blood on the clothes of the prisoner.

The Coroner summed up, pointing out the difference between manslaughter and murder, and thought the jury would come to the conclusion that the attack had been premeditated. They had nothing to do with the state of mind the prisoner might have been in. Another jury would inquire into that; their present duty was to inquire into the facts and give a verdict as to how deceased came to her death.

The jury, without retiring, found a verdict of “Wilful Murder” against Thomas Dean, who was accordingly committed on the coroner’s inquisition, for trial at the next Assize.

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