

PACE Harry & Beatrice – Murder Trial

HUSBAND POISONED

A rather sad story extracted from the Argus, Saturday 2 June 1929.

Arsenic for Sheep Dipping.

Wife on Trial.

LONDON. May 31.

The prosecution of Mrs Beatrice Pace, aged 35 years, who is charged with the murder of her husband, Harry Pace, aged 36 years, a sheep farmer of Forest of Dean, by arsenical poisoning, has been begun at Coleford.

The accused is the recipient of much local sympathy. The prosecutor said that Pace was a man of peculiar temperament. He attacked his wife with tongs on Christmas Day, and when his daughter intervened Pace picked up a razor and threatened the family. At least three doses of arsenic were administered. Between Christmas Day and the death of Pace. His wife bought two packets of sheep dip, but they were not used for sheep dipping, as would be stated in evidence. The two packets were seen in Pace's house in August, and there had been no sheep dipping since July 23, 1927. After the death of Pace, the police searched the house and found only one packet. They also found a bottle containing a liquid in which there was arsenic.

Mrs Pace several times broke down, particularly when her husband's mother was giving evidence.

Extracted from the Argus, Wednesday 5 September 1928

CASE OF MRS. PACE

New Police, Inquiries.

Woman Not Involved.

LONDON. Sept. 4.

The newspapers emphasise the fact that Mrs. Pace will not be affected by the latest police inquiries, which are believed to be directed to questions of alleged perjury and conspiracy arising out of the inquest into the death of Mrs. Pace's husband and her subsequent trial for murder.

Mrs. Pace was charged with having poisoned her husband, a sheep farmer, of Forest of Dean, and was acquitted by direction of the judge after a dramatic trial, at which evidence was given that she had been treated cruelly by her husband. It has now been announced

that Scotland Yard officials are examining very closely a sensational document in connection with the case.

Mrs. Pace is now living quietly with her children at Gloucester. She regrets the renewed publicity being given to the case, but realises that the developments cannot affect her innocence, which, she says, was finally established.

Extract from The Canberra Times, Monday 9 July 1928.

PACE TRIAL

WIDOW ACQUITTED

CROWD DEMONSTRATES

London, Saturday.

There was a demonstration which lasted for some hours when Mr. Justice Horridge directed the jury to acquit Mrs. Beatrice Pace, who was charged with having murdered her husband by administering poison. On leaving court Mrs. Pace returned to Coleford, to stay at a small hotel kept by friends. Every now and then she went and waved to the cheering crowds outside, and said, amid smiles and tears. "Thank you very much. I am glad to be home with my babies." It was a day of extraordinary scenes at Gloucester, and along the road through the Forest of Dean to Coleford, where triumphal villagers came out to cheer as she motored through. A demonstration on behalf of Mrs. Pace was a daily feature of her trial. The rapidity with which a fund was raised for her defence was largely the result of the publication of the story of her sufferings throughout her married life.

The sudden end of the trial has focussed attention on the conduct of the coroner, who refused to accept a verdict of "poisoning by some person or persons unknown." He asked jurymen (sic) to name some persons and sent them back again to reconsider their verdict. The Prime Minister will be questioned on the matter at the first available opportunity in the House of Commons.

In a leading article on the subject today the "Daily Express" says: "The matter cannot rest where it is. The fundamental purpose of an inquest is to determine the cause of death. When it goes beyond this and fixes a definite charge of murder against a specific person, it is usurping powers properly belonging to police, and to the Judges and jury in a higher court.

A Coroner's Court which turns itself into a criminal court is not wanted. It is a perilous innovation in our judicial procedure. Under the present system a person, proved innocent of murder in a criminal court, may always bear the stigma of having been found guilty in a Coroner's Court. A coroner's jury may, on mere ex parte evidence, unchallenged by cross examination, formulate an accusation of murder against a named individual. This is a travesty of every principle of British justice."

Extract from The Argus, Monday 9 July 1928.

DRAMATIC MURDER TRIAL

MRS. PACE ACQUITTED.

Amazing Scenes at Gloucester.

Cheering Crowds in Streets.

LONDON, July 6.

When the case for the prosecution of Mrs. Beatrice Pace, aged 33 years, who has five children, including a baby in arms, for the murder of her husband, Harry Pace, a Forest of Dean farmer, aged 36 years, ended at the Gloucester Assizes the defence submitted that there was no case to go to a jury, as there was no proof that accused had administered the poison.

Mr. Justice Horridge agreed with this contention, and when the jury of 10-men and two women formally returned a verdict of not guilty amazing scenes were witnessed. Loud cheers broke out in court, and an immense crowd quickly assembled. People, rushing from shops, offices, and homes, cheered uproariously, shouting, "Hurrah for the little woman!" "The judge has done right!" "Hurrah for the jury!"

Accused, in an interview, said that she felt all the time that she was safe, as her conscience was always clear, but the trials had seemed a lifetime. Thus has ended one of the most extra ordinary cases in recent years. Pace died on January 10. The inquest was adjourned 14 times before the verdict of wilful murder was given by the coroner's jury.

HISTORY OF THE CASE.

WOMAN'S LONG ORDEAL.

Sympathy of the Public.

Mr. Pace died on January 10. The police stepped in and stopped the funeral, and the Home Office ordered an inquiry, which proceeded, with many adjournments, for 10 weeks. The taking of evidence' at the coroner's inquiry occupied 13 days, and throughout her ordeal considerable attention was focused upon the widow. Her face showed the strain, and once or twice she collapsed. Finally she was screened off from the view of the remainder of the court. Mrs Pace has continuously protested against the agony of adjournments.

At the earlier hearing of the case it was stated that Mrs. Pace had bought three packets of sheep-dip, which had not been used for sheep-dipping; and only one could be found after Pace's, death. Liquid containing arsenic had also been found in a bottle. Mrs. Pace, who received much local sympathy, said that her husband had been, very cruel to her, and had also threatened to commit suicide by poisoning Evidence was also given that Mrs. Pace had been dutiful and devoted to her husband in every way during his illness.

The medical evidence showed conclusively that death was due to poisoning by arsenic. The evidence of relatives suggested ill-feeling between Pace and his wife. Other evidence showed that there was sheep-dip lotion on the premises in connection with farming operations. The widow, to use her own phrase, insisted upon giving evidence. Closely questioned, she denied that she was in any way responsible for her husband's death.

The coroner, in summing up, reminded the jury that Pace's life had been insured in 1924, and that he suddenly became ill in 1925. In July, 1927, after a meal he again became suddenly ill and was sent into a hospital, where he recovered. When he returned home he again became suddenly ill, and on January 10 he complained of burning sensations in his stomach and throat, and he died on January 10. The post-mortem examination revealed 3.62 grains of arsenic.

Verdict of Coroner's Jury.

There was a dramatic scene on May 22, when the jury returned its first verdict, which read:- "We find that Pace met his death by arsenical poisoning administered by a person or persons other than himself."

The coroner asked whether the jury could name the person. The jury again retired, and later named the wife.

On hearing the verdict the widow shouted, "I didn't! I didn't!" Then she swooned, and was unconscious for a quarter of an hour. Women and girls in court wept bitterly.

Later Mrs. Pace was formally charged with murder. She moaned, "I know nothing about it. I wouldn't! I couldn't!" She was carried out of court prostrate and driven to Cardiff gaol, women weeping in the streets as she passed by.

Every hotel in Gloucester was full during the trial. Long queues formed outside the shire hall, which was practically filled with ticket-holders, including leading novelists and dramatists. Crowds thronged the streets on the opening day hoping to see and cheer Mrs. Pace, but the police evaded them, so they demonstrated outside the hotel where the three children of Mrs. Pace, who were witnesses, were having tea, until the landlord took them on the balcony. The public has subscribed £1,300 for the defence.

At the Gloucester trial the chief point of the prosecution, apart from the previous allegations, was that the sheep-dip consisted of sulphur and arsenic. The sulphur was easily drawn off by the solution of the powder with any liquid. No sulphur was found in Pace's body. Pace was too ill two days before his death to undertake the process of separating the arsenic from the sulphur if he desired to commit suicide. The prisoner had plenty of motive for the murder owing to her tragically unhappy marriage. Pace was a morose and brutal man. Two years before his death Mrs. Pace was heard to say that she wished she could poison her husband.

Some little detail into the official inquiry: extracted from The Argus, Friday 25 May 1928.

WOKING FARMER'S DEATH

Another Police Inquiry.

Body Secretly Exhumed.

LONDON, May 24.

Following upon the sensational development in the inquiry concerning the death in January of Harry Pace, a Forest of Dean sheep farmer, whose widow, Mrs Beatrice Pace has been arrested on a charge of murder by poisoning, public interest is now centred in the inquest on Hilary Rougier aged 77 years, a bachelor farmer, who died at Woking. The case has taken a remarkable turn owing to the examination of William Lerwill a well dressed man in the early 30's, in whose house Rougier was living when he died on August 14, 1926. The body was secretly exhumed two months ago and an inquiry was ordered by the Home Office.

Lerwill in evidence to-day admitted that he had received between £5,000 and £6,000 from Rougier by cheques. Other evidence was given that when Rougier's body was exhumed morphine was found. Lerwill said that he had no idea how the morphine got there. He had a recollection that Rougier had asked him to obtain some laudanum for dogs suffering from eczema. Lerwill admitted that many of the cheques were in his handwriting but the signature was Rougier's. He did not know that Rougier had only £50 left after he had received the £6,000. This was mostly in the form of gifts, as Lerwill was in financial difficulties.

Mr. Hardwick a solicitor gave evidence that personally he had met Rougier who had explained Lerwill's financial difficulties. Rougier said that he had known Lerwill since his boyhood, and was willing to help him to avoid bankruptcy. Witness added that he thought that Rougier must be very wealthy in view of the free manner in which he gave away money.

Scotland Yard Methods.

Members of Commission Chosen.

LONDON, May 23

In the House of Commons, Mr. Thorne asked whether Scotland Yard had subjected Mrs. Pace to 13 hours of interrogation.

Sir William Joynson-Hicks, This matter is not likely to be excluded from the general inquiry into Scotland Yard methods.

Mr. Thorne, Who issued the third degree instructions, Scotland Yard or the metropolitan police?

Sir. William Joynson-Hicks, Neither. There were no such instructions. The woman actually thanked the police for the consideration that she received.

Miss. Wilkinson (Labour), Is it reasonable to keep her two children for 13 hours at the police station?

Sir. William Joynson-Hicks promised to make inquiries. He then submitted his amended motion concerning the Hyde Park case. The motion limits the special inquiry to the interrogations by the police at Scotland Yard of Miss Irene Savidge. He said that it was proposed to limit the inquiry, because the Government appreciated the contention of the Opposition that it would be unfair virtually to retry Sir. Leo Chiozza Money by means of an inquiry into the constables' perjury, or otherwise. He did not intend to say a word in defence of the police but, of course, there were two sides. Both would be put honestly before the commission. If the accusations were proved, naturally it would be detrimental to the force as a whole. Therefore, he appealed to members to suspend judgment (sic). The tribunal would consist of Sir John Eldon Bankes (Lord Justice of Appeal), Mr. J. J. Withers (Conservative member of the House of Commons and senior partner in a firm of solicitors), and Mr. H. B. Lees-Smith (Labour member of the House of Commons). The Government would pay reasonable expenses to Miss Savidge. The police would be represented by counsel. Sir William Joynson-Hicks added: - "The matter has caused the House and me much anxiety, and I hope that good will come out of the trouble."

Lady Astor (Conservative) and Miss Wilkinson urged that a woman should be included in the tribunal, and Mr. Brown moved an amendment to meet this opinion. He withdrew it, however, when Sir William Joynson-Hicks pleaded for unanimity.

The motion was agreed to without a division.

Another newspaper report extracted from The Argus, Saturday 30 June 1928.

A SHEEP FARMER'S DEATH

WIDOW CHARGED WITH POISONING

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

LONDON. May 21. An inquiry into the death of Harry Pace, a sheep farmer in the Forest of Dean, in Gloucestershire. who died on January 10, was ended this week when the jury found that death was due to arsenic and that the poison was administered by Beatrice Annie Pace, the widow. During the five months of inquiry intense public sympathy was aroused on the widow's behalf. She has five children, the youngest being a baby in arms. Manifestly she underwent a shocking ordeal owing to the jury's decision being deferred week after week. Harry Pace was a sheep farmer. It was suggested that his illness might have been due to the absorption of arsenic through the skin while he was dipping sheep. Home Office experts, how ever refused to accept the suggestion. When arrested in court on the coroner's warrant Mrs Pace fell to the ground in an agony of tears, wailing. "No, I didn't, no, I didn't." The foreman of the jury wept when he announced the verdict, and there was hissing by the public in the court. No more painful scene has occurred in a court in recent memory.

The case became sensational last week when Sir William Willcox, the Home Office medical advisor, gave the results of his investigations. He had found 3.62 grains of arsenic in the liver and 1.018 grains in the kidneys, an indication that a large dose had been taken within 48 hours of death. As the stomach, was free from arsenic none could have been taken during the last six hours of life. Sir William Willcox's opinion was that Pace was suffering from acute arsenical poisoning from July 24, and that one or more doses were taken between Christmas Day, 1927 and January 10. He said that there was no evidence of any extensive wound upon Pace's body so that the possibility of the illness being due to the absorption of arsenic through the skin from dipping sheep might be dismissed. Professor Walker Hall, a Bristol pathologist, gave evidence that arsenic must have passed into the dead man's liver for a period of at least 14 to 21 days, and he added that the condition of the heart suggested that the period might be extended to more than three weeks and, perhaps, up to six months. Mrs. Pace's counsel quoted a case in which (6.5) grains of arsenic were extracted at a post-mortem examination, after it had gone through the skin, but Professor Hall said that this was the case of a child, and that the skin of a child and that of an adult differed. The skin of a healthy adult would not absorb arsenic.

MRS. PACE'S STORY.

Such was the state of the evidence when Mrs. Pace went into the box last week, after having been cautioned. She said that her husband's life was insured for £69. She had paid 8/6 arrears upon her husband's insurance policy on the night before he died. Her husband was ill in bed between July 25 and August 19, complaining of pains in the stomach. He then lost the use of his hands. On July 22 she had bought two packets of sheep dip. which her husband had put in a sheep box. She saw her husband empty a tub of dip a day or two after the dipping of the lambs The empty tub was left down by the railway line, where the dipping took place She helped her husband to do the dipping of the lambs. They used a "dolly tub" for the purpose. The coroner pointed out that the tub was only 21in wide, and asked whether Mrs. Pace asserted that that was the one used. "Yes, I swear it," She replied. The coroner then referred to the breakfast which Pace took to work on the morning on which he was taken ill in July Mrs Pace said that it consisted of bread and butter, and cake and tea, which she prepared herself. When her husband returned home he complained of pains in the stomach and head, and he was very ill. On the Sunday before he died she took him a glass of cornflour and milk. She placed it on the table beside him and went down stairs. She believed that he took some of it later. During the whole of his illness, both before and after his admittance to the infirmary, she prepared all his food. She did everything for him. About a week or a fortnight before Christmas he cried nearly all the afternoon, and said that he would never be any good to her or the children any more, and he went to the window to throw himself out. She caught hold of him and got him back on to the bed, and told him that he would soon be better. "With this knowledge" asked the coroner, "did you remove any thing with which he might do himself harm?" "I really did not think he meant it, for he had threatened it so many times," said Mrs Pace. She added that she subsequently found a bottle in the fender, and said, "Harry, you haven't taken anything out of the bottle, you won't leave me and the children?" She could not account for the finding of a bottle in a cupboard containing potassium permanganate and sheep dip.

In his summing up, the coroner told the jury that Harry Pace was organically sound, and he asked whether it was conceivable that a man would dose himself with arsenic from July to January. Was it conceivable that a man would dose himself in July with sheep dip lotion to see how much he could take, or how long he could linger before he killed himself; and was it conceivable that he would take one big dose within a short space of his death. Pace's life was insured in 1924, and in 1925 he became ill suddenly. There was no evidence that any

other member of the family became ill in the same way. The jury must consider who had the opportunity of preparing the dead man's food drink, and medicine, and who had the opportunity of administering that which might have contained arsenic.

The Argus, Monday 4 June 1928

POISONED HUSBAND

Charge Against Wife.

Boy Gives Evidence.

LONDON, June 2.

A feature of the trial of Mrs. Pace, who is charged with having poisoned her husband, Harry Pace, a sheep farmer of Forest Dean was the reading of prisoner's statement to the police. Mrs. Pace said: - "My marriage was most unhappy owing to my husband's jealousy and cruelty. From the first day he beat me when in a temper. He has beaten me occasionally, throughout my 17 years of married life. The last time he thrashed me was with a walking-stick just before my baby was born."

Allegations regarding the husband and a girl aged 12 years was not read. The names of a number of women were also kept secret. Mrs. Pace denied rumours that men came to see her for immoral purposes. The statement ended: - "I brought my husband home because he threatened to get poison from a cupboard in the hospital and end his misery. This is the only thing I regret. "

Leslie Pace, aged 10 years, who referred to "dad" and "mam" in his evidence for the prosecution, said that when his father came from the hospital he asked witness to bring the sheep dip box into the bedroom where his father put it in a chest of drawers. He told how his father on Christmas Day flourished a razor, saying that he would "cut all our throats."

Throughout this evidence Mrs. Pace was unmoved, but tears filled the eyes of her son.

Mrs. Pace's counsel, when cross examin-ing Frederick Thorne, who was a constant visitor to Pace throughout his illness, elicited the fact that the wife had left nothing undone to assist in her husband's recovery. She was dutiful and devoted in every way. Pace had never complained about her. When Pace come from the hospital and was placed in her care he improved rapidly.

Transcribed by Don Cameron

Forest of Dean Family History
<http://www.forest-of-dean.net/>