

MRS. RATTENBURY'S TRAGIC END

DAGGER SHEATH IN HANDBAG

"Would Have Done All To Save Stoner"

C.T. June 8, 1935



Mr. William Charles Mitchell, of Staple Cross, pointing to the spot on the pond from which he dragged the body. (Inset) Mr. James Peany, of Sopley, who assisted Mitchell.

The sad end of one of the most dramatic murder trials of recent years was discovered in Christchurch on Wednesday by the recovery from a pool off Stoney Lane of the wounded body of Mrs. Alma Rattenbury.

Mrs. Rattenbury was acquitted at the Old Bailey on Friday last of a charge of murdering her husband, Mr. Francis Mawson Rattenbury, at the Villa Madeira, Bournemouth.

George Percy Stoner, who had been charged with her, was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Remorse and a sense of impotence drove her to final madness; the fact that her evidence had resulted in Stoner, her lover, receiving the last dread sentence of the law, brought about the collapse of hope, and it seems clear that in her despair she was driven to suicide.

To-day, the county coroner (Mr. Percy B. Ingoldby) sat without a jury to examine witnesses.

The scene of the tragedy has attracted a crowd of morbid-minded persons who, during yesterday, in the drenching rain, watched the efforts of the local police to recover from the pond the knife in which Mrs. Rattenbury is supposed to have stabbed herself.

The principle of the Cleveland Nursing Home, of Hyde Park, London, to which Mrs. Rattenbury went after her acquittal at the Old Bailey, states that Mrs. Rattenbury left that institution in company with a woman friend on Monday evening.

It appears that Mrs. Rattenbury went to a second nursing home, staying only the Monday night, leaving them on Tuesday. She arrived in Christchurch during the evening of Tuesday, the bookstall clerk and the stationmaster believe they saw her. She then appears to have made her way to the marshes, where she selected the utterly remote and dismal pool under the railway arches of the main line embankment at Sopley for her last moments.

THE MAN WHO SAW HER DIE.

The "Christchurch Times" representative was the first to interview William Charles Mitchell, a cowman employed by Mr. Farwell, of Staple Cross, Burton, and despite all that has appeared in the national press, Mr. Mitchell stated plain and simple facts. "At 8.30 last night," he said, "I went by the embankment to the meadows to see some heifers. I noticed a woman's hat above the tall grass. When I first saw her, I thought that it was lover's sweethearting and I passed the other side of the embankment. When I looked again, I saw the woman had taken off her hat and coat and was walking down to the water. She had a small knife in her hand and then she sort of half walked and half slid into the pond.

"I ran down and tried to reach her feet, for she was floating on her back. I threw her coat and said, "Catch hold."

"She did not speak, but only just looked at me. I nearly lost my foothold and grabbed the grass to save myself—for the water in this pond is 15 foot deep. I can't swim, so it was no use my getting into the water. Then I saw blood on the water. I ran over to the cottage and called Mr. Penny."

Together Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Penny contrived to rescue the body.

Mrs. Rattenbury body was conveyed to the Fairmile House Mortuary, and the result of the post-mortem examination was that she died from the results of self-inflicted wounds.

By the side of the pool was Mrs. Rattenbury's handbag and umbrella, and in the handbag were some notes which will be read at the inquest.

WOULD HAVE RISKED SENTENCE.

Mr. Lewis Manning, who was Mrs. Rattenbury solicitor, states that "up to within ten days of the trial she was determined to give evidence which would have incriminated her. She would have done all to save Stoner, and at the end of the trial her every thought was for him."

The last letter which Mr. Manning had received from Mrs. Rattenbury instructed him that no money should be spared for an appeal for Stoner.

EXECUTION DATE.

The execution date of Stoner has been provisionally fixed as Tuesday week at Pentonville.

A CHRISTCHURCH PHRENOLOGIST AND MRS. RATTENBURY A GENEROUS LADY

Professor W.G. Clarke, phrenologist, of Church Street, Christchurch, exclusively disclosed to the "Christchurch Times" that he had met, professionally Mr. and Mrs. Rattenbury, who brought the boy, John, to his establishment for the purpose of "reading his head."

It was a somewhat strange interview, for Professor W.G. Clarke records that when he had to tell of the lad seemed to apparently mollify Mr. Rattenbury and delighted the lad's mother. Indeed she demonstrated the pleasure Professor Clarke's reading had given her by returning the day following and paying £5 for a reading which would have cost as many shillings.

"She paid me by cheque on the Bank of Montreal."

"My examination of Mrs. Rattenbury's head disclosed a most artistic nature, with many marked talents, especially for music. In demeanour and comportment and by natural instinct I would truthfully describe her as a lady. Vivacious, and apparently quite happy, and there was no note of discord between husband-and-wife."

Mrs. Rattenbury paid me 7s. 6d. for the examination. Later, another youth called on me, saying Mrs. Rattenbury was his mother and she had asked him to step in when passing to chat with me. I thought him at first a Japanese, his features were so Oriental."

It is reported that Mrs. Rattenbury was seen and recognised on Tuesday in the 4.30 train from Waterloo, the Bournemouth Express.

She was writing with a pencil on paper which she took from her handbag, and it is stated that she covered in this manner several sheets.

Shortly before the train reached Christchurch she left the compartment.

She was seen standing in the corridor looking upon the pond where later on she died.

It is said that Mrs. Rattenbury was very familiar with all our many walks and paths over meadows and by our waterways, and that in the summer she would make many excursions and outings with the children picnicking.

THE INQUEST.

When the inquest is opened this afternoon at Fairmile House, one of the witnesses will be the matron of the Nursing Home from which Mrs. Rattenbury made an abrupt departure

The inquest will be reported in a special inset sheet included in this issue.

Additional Images not from Christchurch Times.



Alma Rattenbury



Francis Rattenbury



George Stoner



Three Arches