



*Book of*  
**EXECUTION**

# Elizabeth Osborne

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1813 Elizabeth Osborne went out at night with just one purpose in mind, and that was to exact revenge on her former employer John Lobb. Why she bore such a grudge against John Lobb is not known, but she had been discharged from his employ three years earlier. Elizabeth had been apprenticed to John Lobb and had lived with him for about seven or eight years. For whatever reason only known to her, she went out that night and set fire to a mow of corn; even to the point of afterwards telling people what she had done. Elizabeth was tried before a grand jury on August 16<sup>th</sup> the Judge was Sir Robert Graham, Knight, one of the Barons of the Court of the Exchequer. The grand jury consisted of: -

Sir William Lemon, Bart. Foreman of the jury		Francis Enys
Sir Christopher Hawkings, Bart.	Thomas Graham	Thomas Rawlings
John Hearle Tremayne	Thomas Spry	William Rawlings
Francis Glanville	Henry Peter	John Gould Jnr
Francis Hearle Rod	John Vivian of Truro	Mathew Mitchell
William Moreshead	John Hext	John Lemon
Edmund John Glynn	John Vivian of Pencalenick	Charles V Penrose
Edward William Stackhouse	William Slade Gully	John Enys

The first person to witness the fire was a Mr Francis Aplin, who called John Lobb to try and put the fire out. Mr Thomas Pearce who gave in evidence that he heard Elizabeth confess to how she started the fire and how she had made it spread, soon joined them. Another witness at the trial was John Chapman, who Elizabeth lodged with at Trevornick in St Merryn. He said that she left the house between nine and ten in the evening, and did not return until between twelve and one in the morning. As she arrived back at her lodgings she said to Mr Chapman that she had set fire to farmer Lobb's wheat mow, and that *"now he can eat barley bread like everyone else"*.

On the way back to her lodgings she called at Arthur Callaway's a licensed victualler of St Merryn and told him she had set farmer Lobb's mow on fire. Mr Callaway did not believe her, and told her to go away. The next morning she was in the custody of the constable and when Mr Callaway saw her she commented, *"You would not believe what I told you last night, but now you find I have done it sure enough."*

Throughout the night she expressed pleasure in what she had done, and showed no remorse whatsoever. As she was charged for the fire she was remanded to Bodmin Gaol to await her trial. She was placed in the gaol under the care of the Governor Mr James Chapple; he gave evidence in court that she showed no signs of insanity, but was always 'of a violent temper'. The jury found her guilty and she was sentenced to death.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1813 Elizabeth Osborne paid the ultimate penalty of the law for her crime when she was hanged in public before a large crowd of people. The report states that after conviction her behaviour was such that they hoped her death was her passport to eternal life, and the crowd gathered was suitably solemn that the impressive scene demanded.

## Sir Robert Graham (1744-1836)



Robert Graham (1744-1836), knighted in 1800, wears the vermillion robes of the House of Lords  
The portrait, shown at the Royal Academy in 1804,

**GRAHAM, SIR ROBERT** (1744–1836), judge, born at Hackney on 14 Oct 1744, was son and heir of James Graham, a schoolmaster of Dalston in Middlesex, a descendant of George Graham of Calendar, second son of William, Lord Graham. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was third wrangler, besides being high in classics, was elected a fellow and graduated B.A. in 1766, M.A. in 1769, and was made an LL.D. in 1835. In 1766 he entered at the Inner Temple, where he was called to the bar. In February 1793 he was appointed attorney-general to the Prince of Wales, and was made a king's counsel in the following April.

In November 1799 he was appointed a Baron of the Exchequer, and knighted 19 June 1800. In February 1827 he retired, but in the following reign he was sworn of the Privy Council. On 28 Sept. 1836 he died at his sister's house at Long Ditton in Surrey, and was buried on 7 Oct. at Kingston. He was an urbane but inefficient judge; on his appointment Sir Edward Law (afterwards Lord Ellenborough) said of him 'that he placed Mr. Justice Rooke on a pinnacle.'

[Foss's Lives of the Judges; Gent. Mag. 1836; Bruce's Handbook to Newcastle.]

**NOTE 1**

## Sarah Polgrean - 1820

Convicted of causing the death of her late husband Henry Polgrean, by poison, at the Summer Assizes, held in Bodmin on Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1820. Executed at Bodmin on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Sarah Polgrean was born of poor parents, in the parish of Gulval, about the year 1786 or 1788. Her father was killed in an accident, in London. Her Mother deserted her when 4 months old, and left her chargeable to the parish. She had no education, not being able to read or write. She was apprenticed at 9 years of age and during her apprenticeship yielded to the seduction of a fellow servant. After her time expired she lived in many places, but never settled in any of them; and about 10yrs since she left Cornwall, to join her Mother at Dock\*, who was an indifferent character, and is since dead, She lived in Dock for a few months, where she had some religious impressions, and married a soldier, who took her into the neighbourhood of London. Her husband and she parted by mutual consent, and she first returned to Dock, and afterwards to Cornwall, where she met the late H Polgrean, and married him.

She was convicted on the clearest evidence, of purchasing arsenic, at Penzance, for the alleged purpose of poisoning rats, though it was proved the house had never been infested with them. The surgeons and other witnesses proved the illness of the deceased and the prisoner's concealment of it: they also proved that he had died by poison, having examined the contents of the stomach, after the body of the deceased had been disinterred, although he had been buried eleven days. It was also proved that they had lived unhappily together, and that she had threatened to poison him. The deceased had been sick on the Friday evening, and was bled on Saturday by the Surgeon, in consequence of his dinner and supper disagreeing with him on the preceding day. This agrees with the evidence of the surgeon, who thought the poison had not been administered when the deceased was bled.

The judge recapitulated the evidence with great precision; and the jury without hesitation pronounced a verdict of GUILTY. His Lordship then proceeded to pass the awful sentence of the Law, and ordered the prisoner to be executed of Saturday morning, and her body to be given for dissection. The wretched prisoner was so overwhelmed by her dreadful fate, that she seemed to be quite insensible, and was obliged to be supported during the time sentence was passing – she was carried out of court.

The prisoner has confessed that she mixed the arsenic in a piece of butter, taken from a half pound, on Saturday afternoon, the 15<sup>th</sup> of July; that at supper time she proposed to her husband to eat a piece already cut off, and buttered his bread with it, whilst she eat from the larger piece herself. She attributed her crimes to the want of religious education, and her early seduction. She solemnly declared that she was not instigated to commit the crime by any man, and that his well-founded jealousy and her aversion to him induced her to do

it. She expresses her free forgiveness of all whom she conceived to have injured her, lamented, and after trial, the expressions she had uttered towards some of the witnesses against her, and hoped that her end would be a warning to all who might be tempted to commit such crimes as hers, especially those of adultery and murder.

About a quarter past twelve she was drawn upon an hurdle to the drop, amidst an immense crowd of spectators, walked to the platform with a firm step, and for a few minutes joined very audibly in prayer. After this she sung a hymn with most extraordinary resolution, and begged all present to take a solemn warning from her untimely fate, shook hands with a man at the drop, and also with the executioner, gave the signal, and was launched into eternity.

**Brougham, Printer, Falmouth**

(\* 'Dock' was on the outskirts of what's known today as Plymouth, Devon)

**NOTE 2**

# **Elizabeth Commins, aged 22.**

## **Murder of her male illegitimate child.**

Elizabeth Commins was born in the parish of Roche in 1806, and lost her mother whilst she was very young. She lived with her father until she was aged 13 when he died. At such a young age she was put into the care of a Mr Stephens, of Belovely. Soon after she was recommended to go into decent service, and was placed with a Mr Busistow of Tywardreth, where she lived for about two years.

During her time with Mr Busistow she was very idle and totally indifferent to anything good, also becoming pregnant to another servant; she had to conceal the ever-growing bump from all at the household. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1828 she started in labour at about five o'clock in the morning and pretended that the pains were caused by bowel trouble to the apprentice girl who shared her room. After a while she got up and went to the pump house where she lay down as the labour pains continued. From here she then went to the cowshed where she gave birth to a son.

Soon after the birth the master of the house found her. The child cried once when the master was present, and she put the child into a crib where she covered it with chaff as he cried again. When the child had cried for the second time she picked him up and battered his head against the wall of the crib thus silencing him forever. The deed done, she sat down where she was before and did not look at the little life that she had stilled, and awaited her master's return.

On his return Mr Busistow sent for the constables, Elizabeth was arrested and charged with infanticide. She was remanded to Bodmin Gaol to await trial for the murder of her new-born son. As the law demanded a post mortem had to be carried out on the little boy, and it was found that his skull and both legs were fractured.

Commins's trial was held at the Bodmin Assizes before Mr Justice James Park; she was found guilty by the jury and sentenced to death and afterwards her body to be delivered to the surgeons for dissection. As the dreaded sentence of the law was pronounced, she walked from the dock of the Assize Court completely unaided, and did not appear to be affected by the gravity of the sentence whatsoever.

She was hanged outside the front of Bodmin Gaol on Friday morning 8<sup>th</sup> August 1828 before a very large crowd by John Foxon / Foxton.

It is worth noting at this point that the dissection may possibly have been carried out in public as a warning to others.

**NOTE 3**

# Lightfoot Brothers Case - 1840

Nevell Norway, a 38yr old timber & general merchant from Egloshayle, Nr Wadebridge. Visited Bodmin market on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February 1840.

Before Judge Sir Thomas Coltman (Kings Counsel, Bencher of the Inner Temple)  
Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March 1840, Crown Court - 9am at the Assize Hall, Bodmin.

James Lightfoot – 23  
William Lightfoot - 36

## The Clerk of the Arraignment read the indictment:

“James Lightfoot, and William Lightfoot: you are indicted for feloniously murdering Nevell Norway, of the parish of Egloshayle, on the 8<sup>th</sup> February, by striking and beating him on the head with a pistol, and a stick, giving him several mortal wounds of which he died. In another count, you James Lightfoot are indicted for murdering the said Nevell Norway, and you William Lightfoot for aiding and abetting in the murder. In another count, you, William Lightfoot, are indicted for murdering, and you, James Lightfoot for aiding and abetting.”

Both entered a plea of ‘Not Guilty’

## Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 1840

The Prison’s Governor was John Bentham Everest.

The Arrangements were all conducted under the direction of Acting Under Sheriff, Philip Protheroe Smith Esq, of Truro, aided by the Mayor of Bodmin Mr C Coode Esq.

The Executioner was Mr George Mitchell, a respectable gentlemen dairy farmer from Ilchester, Somerset.

The crowd was 20/25,000 with 1100 in train wagons below the jail walls.

William Lightfoot to the Rev. Francis Cole – “Tell my wife and family that I die happy, beg them to go to Church and keep the Sabbath; not to go in the way I have gone, and brought myself to ruin. Tell them to avoid idleness, and get their living honestly, and pray that they meet me in heaven.

James Lightfoot to the Rev. Francis Cole – “Say that I am happy. They(meaning his wife and children) must pray to God that we may meet in Heaven.”

**Their souls were then dispatched to eternity.**

**NOTE 4**

## The murder of Charlotte Dymond is written into the folklore of Bodmin Moor.

It has all the ingredients of a classic tragedy; a brutal murder in a desolate location, a pretty young victim and a spurned lover who was hanged despite claims of his innocence. The murder took place on Sunday the 14th April 1844 and it is said that the ghost of Charlotte Dymond roams the moor on this date wearing the Sunday best clothes she was killed in.



The Memorial Nr Roughtor marks the scene of the murder

Charlotte Dymond was a domestic servant working on a farm on the edge of Bodmin Moor, between Camelford and Davidstow, when she was 18 years old. Penhale farm was owned by an elderly widow and her son, and along with Charlotte there were two other live-in servants, John Stevens and Matthew Weeks, both aged in their early 20s.

At some point Charlotte and Matthew had become boyfriend and girlfriend. It is said Charlotte was a pretty girl with a flirtatious nature, whereas Matthew was described as not at all good-looking. Short, missing many teeth and with a heavy limp most people would not have put the two together. It is said that he liked to dress well though.

One possible reason for this unlikely couple could have been the combination of Matthew having come into a modest inheritance and Charlotte being illegitimate with no family.

Charlotte, however, had another suitor; Thomas Prout. The 26 year old was the nephew of Penhale Farm's owner and was a labourer who had worked with Matthew Weeks on occasion. It is said the two got on, but it appears Prout had intentions towards Charlotte. Another servant, John Stevens, had overheard Prout stating he could take Charlotte away from Weeks and at a later time it was revealed that the two may have been planning to elope.

The day of Charlotte's death was a Sunday and the entire household would have had on their 'Sunday Best' outfits. Charlotte wore a green striped dress and a red shawl. The last



time she was seen alive was soon after her and Weeks had left the farm together, heading towards the moor. The couple were spotted by an elderly farmer through the fog, he recognised Weeks from his pronounced limp.

Later that evening Weeks returned to the farm alone, although it appears that was not unusual. As the days went by and Charlotte still did not return, people began to notice things. Weeks's shirt was torn and his trousers were muddied, although he claimed he had not been on the moor. In response to the growing suspicion Weeks told the household that Charlotte had been offered a position in Blisland, some miles away and had set off with the intention of staying at an acquaintance's house on the way.

A week after Charlotte's disappearance the household decided action was needed and John Stevens and the farmer set off to check on Week's story. It was found that no position had been offered in Blisland and that Charlotte had not stayed at the acquaintance's house. On the same day Matthew Weeks put on his Sunday best and left Penhale farm with no intention to return.

The following day, the farmer's wife took Weeks' clothes to be washed. It was then that she noticed the torn collar, missing buttons and also some spots of blood on the shirt. The suspicion that Weeks had murdered Charlotte seemed beyond doubt now.



Roughtor Ford where the body was found

On the Tuesday, over a week after Charlotte had last been seen, a search party found her body on the banks of the river Alan in the shadow of Roughtor, Cornwall's second highest point. She had been killed by an extremely deep cut to her throat from ear to ear. Later examination suggested it was probably caused by two cuts.

With a body being found and the amount of circumstantial evidence linking Matthew Weeks to the murder a warrant was issued for his arrest but first he needed to be found. He was found in Plymouth, at his sister's house; apparently he had been planning to flee to the Channel Islands. Upon searching Weeks, a pair of ladies' gloves and a blood-spotted lady's handkerchief were found.

The murder of Charlotte Dymond had shocked the local community and they demanded justice. Weeks was tried at Bodmin Assize Court on August 2nd. Bodmin was the county town in those days and this reflected the attention the case had received. In addition to

further circumstantial evidence the coroner made it clear that he believed the wound that killed Charlotte could not have been self inflicted.

Weeks had pleaded not guilty but it took the jury little over half an hour to return a guilty verdict. The sentence was death by hanging.

In the ten days Matthew Weeks spent in Bodmin Gaol awaiting execution two letters were attributed to him. Being illiterate these were dictated. The first was to his family and the second a confession. It is this confession that has probably provided more weight to the argument of Weeks' innocence than anything else. It was written in a style far more eloquent than one would have expected from the mouth of an uneducated farm labourer:

"I hope young men will take a warning by me and not put too much confidence in young women, the same as I did; and I hope young females will take the same by young men. I loved that girl as dear as I loved my life; and after all the kind treatment I have showed her, and then she said she would have nothing more to do with me. And after this was done, then bitterly I did lament, thinking what would be my end. And I thank the judge and jury too, for they have given me no more than was my due."

At 12.00 noon on 12th August 1844 Matthew Weeks was hung in front of a crowd of several thousand outside Bodmin Gaol. His body was buried in the prison's coal yard.



The Charlotte Dymond Memorial

From the above short account of the events surrounding this tragedy the case would seem fairly clear cut. However, people love a mystery the story of a spurned lover and murder at such a bleak, desolate spot lends itself to this.

One explanation of the events put forward is it was suicide; Charlotte had believed herself to be pregnant and to avoid the shame she had cut her own throat. This seems fanciful given there appeared to be two suitors willing to marry her and the extreme force used to inflict the wound. Along with this are suggestions the three eyewitnesses were unreliable and the confession was obviously fabricated. With no other obvious suspects and so much circumstantial evidence even in the absence of witnesses and a confession the weight of evidence seems to be compelling.

It seems there is little mystery to the tragic death of Charlotte Dymond and it is just another sad example of the age old crime of passion. The local community were in little doubt of Weeks' guilt and a memorial was erected on the spot of crime and reads:

"This monument is erected by public subscription in memory of Charlotte Dymond who was murdered here by Matthew Weeks on Sunday April 14 1844

# James Holman

First recorded as being in Bodmin Gaol on 5th January 1854, he was committed by the coroner Mr Hichens on the 2nd Jan 1854 on a charge of “the willful murder of his wife Philippa in the parish of Crowan” (between Camborne & Helston). His prison number was 10481

It transpired that on Boxing Day 1853 he murdered his wife, then seven months pregnant, in their cottage in Crowan, by beating her skull, and then throwing her face down into a fire.

When the well outside their house was drained later that week, a blood-stained hatchet was found. James, a 29yr old labourer admitted he had murdered her, saying that when he accused her of drunkenness she attacked him, and he pushed her into the fire. He did not offer any explanation for the wounds he inflicted upon her; one being large enough to put three fingers into.

He was tried at the Lent Assizes on the 21st March 1854 in Courtroom No1 of the Assize Court, Bodmin.

Throughout the trial, Holman displayed a complete indifference to either the death of his wife, or the nature of his own fate.

The sentence was death, and 165lb, 5ft 9”, grey eyed, brown haired, the unemployed James, was executed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1854 by William Calcraft. Latterly, he was buried in an unmarked grave near the western cross wall of the gaol.

Prior to execution it was noted that his complexion was “swarthy”, and his visage as “long”. Further, he had sandy whiskers, large eyebrows, with a face that was described as “falling in”, a “wrinkled forehead and both little fingers crooked,” probably due to onset of rheumatism.

His marital status was down as “widowed with two children” and his religion as “Catholic.” His abode was registered as “Gwinear late Crowan”. His behavior whilst in gaol was described as “orderly”.

**NOTE 6**

# John Doidge

## The Last Public Execution in Cornwall

August 18<sup>th</sup> 1862, 6,000 - 8,000 people thronged the area around the Gaol to watch John Doidge at the end of the hangman's rope

John Doidge was born at Castle Street, Launceston in 1834. One of many illegitimate children, he was born into a life of dishonesty and crime, and destined to end his life on the gallows.

On Sunday June 8<sup>th</sup> 1862 Roger Drewe was found dead in the living quarters of his shop, having suffered repeated blows to the head; his living quarters were also ransacked. The police were called and it was established that money had been taken. Latterly the police questioned John Doidge, who lived a few houses away from Drewe, and a billhook that he owned was found to have bloodstains on it.

John Doidge was arrested and charged with Drewe's murder. He was committed for trial at the Bodmin Assizes, and after a two-day hearing, was found guilty and sentenced to death by Mr Justice Williams on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August 1862.

At 8.30am on the morning of the execution the carpenters commenced to build the platform, which was sited on the South wall of the Gaol by the female wing; which in time became the Naval Wing. The actual gallows were situated outside the South wall facing the Bodmin Highlands. The platform was built level with the outer wall to line up with the grating of the gallows, and by 10.30am all was complete and ready.

At 9am Doidge attended the regular service in the Gaol Chapel, and it is said that he appeared more penitent and earnest in his prayers than he had been previously. The Chaplain remained with him for a good part of the morning praying with him and offering comfort and solace.

On the same morning of the execution a woman attended the Gaol claiming to be the estranged wife of John Doidge and that she had been wed to him 8 years ago and that she wished to see him. She said that she had been residing in the neighbourhood of Liskeard ever since. Governor Colvill thought this most strange, as Doidge had previously stated that he had never been married. She was denied an audience with the condemned. On that same morning two other women presented themselves to the Governor and asked if they could be touched by the dead man's hand as a cure for sore necks after his death by hanging, again Governor Colvill refused their requests.

The executioner was to be William Calcraft, who was at that time Chief Executioner for Great Britain. He arrived at Bodmin on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1862 on orders from the

Under Sheriff of the County of Cornwall; Edmund Carlyon Esq. The Under Sheriff had power of attorney granted to him by the High Sheriff of Cornwall Thomas Tristrem Spry Carlyon, of Tregrehan to oversee the execution of John Doidge by William Calcraft.

At 10am on the morning of the execution the Under Sheriff arrived at Bodmin Gaol with six of the Sheriff's officers. These were Mr Murray, Mr Lake, Mr Grose, Mr Bond, Mr Short and Mr Harris. The officials had to await the arrival of the gaol's surgeon Mr Ward who arrived at 11.30am.

At 11.45am the official party went to the front entrance of the Gaol within the walls, and at 11.55am the Under Sheriff knocked on the door of the Governors office and in reply to formal questions from the Governor said: - "I come in the name of the Sheriff of Cornwall, to demand the person of John Doidge, on whom extreme sentence of the Law has been passed, in order that such sentence may be duly executed."

The Under Sheriff was then conducted to the condemned cell. On arriving the Under Sheriff addressed Doidge and said: - "I come in the name of the Sheriff of Cornwall to demand that you be handed over to me, in order that the sentence passed upon you may be duly executed and I hand you over to the executioner."

Calcraft then took over and pinioned the arms of Doidge who said, "I am prepared to give up all for what I have done and that I know in whom I have hope." The escort party now formed with the Chaplain Rev Everest at the front. He was followed by two of the Sheriff's officers, with Doidge behind them, and Calcraft a little behind him to his right. Behind Calcraft was the other four sheriff's officers followed by the Under Sheriff, the Governor, the Gaol surgeon, and Mr William Peter the Clerk of the Gaol.

As the procession made its way through the gaol area to the South wall, Reverend Everest read the first three sentences of the burial service; Doidge walked with them quite firmly and uttering prayers as they went. When they arrived at the platform, Doidge went up the steps and across the platform to the gallows where Calcraft placed the white hood over his head and fastened his ankles. He then placed the rope around Doidge's neck whilst Rev. Everest continued to recite the burial service.

As Doidge stood on the scaffold he was saying "Oh Lord have mercy upon me and Lord save me." Just as Rev. Everest said the benediction for Doidge, Calcraft drew the lever to dispatch him into eternity.

**NOTE 7**

# Selina Wadge - 1878

## Crown Court – Before Mr. Justice Denman

On Monday July 27<sup>th</sup> 1878 Selina Wadge was indicted for the wilful murder of Henry Wadge, her child, two years old at the parish of St. Thomas the Apostle, on the 21<sup>st</sup> June last. Mr Clark and Mr Templer were counsel for the prosecution, and Mr Massey defended the prisoner at the request of his lordship.

Prison Governor – Capt. Hugh George Colville      Chaplain – William Frederick Everest  
Under Sheriff – Mr T Cornish    County Clerk – Mr JR Paul

## 15<sup>th</sup> August 1878

Selina Wadge was executed at Bodmin Jail for the murder of her child at Launceston. The representatives of the press being refused admission to the prison, some difficulty was experienced in obtaining any reliable information of the circumstances attending the execution, but the scene appears to have been an unusually painful one, all the officers, including the Chaplain and Under Sheriff, being much affected. There had been no execution in the jail for 16 years previously. Up to 7 o'clock yesterday morning it was generally believed that a reprieve would arrive, but at that hour no communication was received by the Clerk of the Peace, to the effect that the Home Secretary could not see his way to interfere with the course of the Law. An hour later the unfortunate woman had paid the penalty of her crime. The Chaplain remained with her from 7:15 until the drop fell. She sobbed greatly as she walked from the cell to the scaffold, and on ascending the steps was heard to say, "Lord, deliver me from this miserable world." Marwood, the executioner, gave a drop of eight feet, and Wadge died without a struggle, grasping tightly in her hand a handkerchief. The accused it will be remembered, threw her child down a well, and at her trial alledged she had been induced to do it by a man named James Westwood, who was courting her, and who, she said, promised to marry her if she got rid of the child. The Jury who found her guilty, recommended her to mercy, on the ground of her previous love for her children, and because they considered the murder was unpremeditated: but, Mr. Justice Denman, in passing sentence of death, implored the accused not to rest upon the recommendation, although he would forward it to the proper quarter. Since then appeals from all parts of the country have been sent to the Home Secretary, praying for remission of the sentence, but without avail. The execution was fixed for Monday last, but it was postponed till yesterday morning, as Marwood's engagements prevented him from coming earlier. After her condemnation Wadge received a letter from the man Westwood, who was a witness at her trial, begging for forgiveness. When his letter was read to her, her reply was: "Yes, he needed forgiveness for many things," or words to that effect. It is said that she made a statement to the Chaplain, which the reverend gentleman intends forwarding to the Home Secretary.

Liverpool Post 16<sup>th</sup> August 1878

## Mr Justice Denman



### The Sentence of Selina Wadge July / August 1878

His Lordship put on the black cap, and amid profound silence passed the sentence of death, as follows: -

“Prisoner at the bar you have been found guilty upon evidence which it was impossible to resist, of throwing the body of your child, two years old, down a well. That could only have been done with one intention, which may possibly have been re.....ed of speedily, but that it was an act of murder no twelve men of common sense could possibly doubt. With every disposition to strain every fact in favour of a prisoner, and especially a woman, under such a charge as this, the jury have, as honest men, found it impossible to resist a verdict of guilty. They have at the same time accompanied that verdict with a recommendation to mercy, and in order such a recommendation may have full effect I desire to know the grounds upon which it was made. One ground is that they think the murder was unpremeditated, by which I understand them to mean that it was not long premeditated, and the other ground is on account of your previous kindness towards your children, which is established by the evidence of the witness. Whether that recommendation will or will not have any effect in staying execution, it is impossible for me to say. It is no business of mine. It rests not with me, but it rests with another power entirely. All I can say is that that recommendation shall be forwarded to the proper quarter. But my duty is – and that duty I do most strenuously perform, and with all the earnestness with which I can urge it upon you, in passing upon you the sentence of the law – to implore you not to rest upon a recommendation, but to take the readiest and most earnest means of preparing for death. The sentence of the Court is death, and I must pass in the ordinary form. It is that you be taken from hence to the place from whence you came, and thence to the place of execution; and you there be hanged by the neck until you be dead; that your body be afterwards buried within the precincts of the prison in which you are last confined after this your conviction; and may the Lord God Almighty have mercy upon your soul”.

**NOTE 8**



# William Bartlett - 1882

13 November 1882

William Bartlett was a quarry manager at Colecarrow granite quarry, and as such was of fairly high social standing within Cornwall. He was married and had seven children.

Whilst his wife was pregnant with their eighth child, William employed a nurse to take care of her throughout the pregnancy, and to assist with the birth. During this time, he embarked on an illicit affair with the nurse who also fell pregnant with William Bartlett's child.

Bartlett, fearing being discovered, arranged for the nurse to go to Newquay once his eighth child had been born; all being well with mother and baby. The nurse gave birth to a baby daughter; Bartlett then told the nurse he had arranged for the child to go to a childless couple who would adopt her.

However, this was not to be, as Bartlett took the 16 day old child to his office at the quarry, tied a piece of bootlace around the baby's neck, and strangled her to death. He then placed the baby into a small wooden crate that was in his office, and dropped them down a nearby disused mineshaft.

Soon after, Bartlett attempted suicide by trying to drown himself in the quarry pond. A worker soon arrived, pulled him out and revived him. Bartlett was then promptly arrested and charged with the murder of his illegitimate daughter; her body having been discovered the day before his attempted suicide.

Bartlett's trial for murder was held at Bodmin assize court, continuing through the night until 22:30, where the jury failed to reach a verdict as one juror was not in favour of capital punishment – all jurors were required to agree to pass this sentence.

The trial was rescheduled for later in the year, to be held at Exeter assize court. This time, it took the jury only 15 minutes to come back with the verdict 'guilty of wilful murder', and Bartlett was sentenced to death.

William Bartlett's execution scheduled for 08:00 on 13 November 1882. Reports say that whilst awaiting execution, Bartlett's black hair turned completely white. Visited by relatives the day before the execution, he admitted to his crime and said he was 'prepared to meet his fate'.

Executioner William Marwood arrived at jail the day prior to the execution to rig the gallows. On the morning of the execution, Bartlett went without struggle, and readily succumbed to the hangman as he fastened his arms and legs in the gallows.

Bartlett died instantly as Marwood gave him an eight foot drop; he was the last person to be hanged from the side goods door of the prison, and his body was buried in quicklime within the stone yard.

**NOTE 9**

# The Aberdare Committee of 1886.

## Table of Drops

Weight of culprit		Drop		Energy developed
Stone	Pounds	Feet	Inches	ft/lbs
7	98	11	5	1119
8	112	10	0	1120
9	126	9	6	1197
10	140	9	0	1260
11	154	8	2	1258
12	168	7	6	1260
13	182	6	11	1259
14	196	6	5	1258
15	210	6	0	1260
16	224	5	7	1251
17	238	5	3	1250
18	252	5	0	1260
19	266	4	8	1241
20	280	4	6	1260

**NOTE 10**

# Valeri Giovanni - 1901

In 1901 at Bodmin Gaol an Italian sailor named as Valeri Giovanni became the first person to be executed on the new gallows that had been constructed in 1897. The gallows were built in accordance with the regulations set out by the Aberdare report of 1888.

There had not been an execution in Cornwall since William Meagre Bartlett was hung at the side of the gaol in 1882 by William Marwood the executioner who developed the "Long Drop".

At eight o'clock on Tuesday morning at Bodmin county prison, Valeri Giovanni, an Italian sailor was hanged in accordance with the sentence passed on him by Mr Justice Wills at the recent summer assize for Cornwall. The execution was as private as possible, and though several persons were able to catch a glimpse of the condemned man in his final walk to the scaffold, outside the needful officials, no one witnessed the actual carrying out of the death penalty.

Giovanni was convicted of the wilful murder of Mr Victor, a seaman native to Jersey, on the high seas during a voyage from South America to Falmouth. The murder was accomplished in February last, and the accused having been taken practically red-handed was put in irons until he reached Falmouth where magistrates committed him to the assizes.

There were circumstances connected with the affair which led to efforts to secure a reprieve, these being backed by the strong recommendation to ask mercy of the jury who had found Giovanni guilty.

Late on the Saturday it was intimated that the home secretary had been unable to find reason to advise the King to interfere with the sentence.

## **The Execution**

The execution was conducted very quietly. The High Sheriff of the County based at Tehidy delegated the duty of seeing the sentence duly carried out to the Under Sheriff Mr Thurston Colline of St. Columb, who arrived in Bodmin early on Monday and caused it to be known that representatives of the press would be rigidly excluded from both the execution and the subsequent inquest. No information concerning the condemned man was forthcoming other than he had been constantly visited by the Reverend Father Smith, and that he had made no manner of an attempt to deny the crime.

Father Smith was with him to the last. The executioner Billington, whose son assisted him, arrived at about three o'clock on Monday – they were driven quietly from Bodmin Road, and quartered in the jail.

The scaffold, which had never before been employed, was located in the northeast corner of the jail in a shed, which was occasionally used for the convenience of the county magistrates driving over to the jail. It has since been used for the housing of the prison van.

The burying place is very near at hand. The new gallows, beam and drop were erected about fifteen years ago, close to the high wall.

The actual shed was quite free from the exterior of the prison, but the exit from the condemned cell and a part of the yard to be traversed was visible from just a few high positions in adjacent hedges.

**July 1901**

**NOTE 11**

# William Hampton - 1909

WILLIAM HAMPTON, 24, was a tin miner from St Erth, where on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1909 he murdered his girlfriend EMILY BARNES TREVARTHEN TREDREA by strangulation.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1909 at Bodmin Assizes before Mr Justice Phillimore he was duly sentenced to death. HAMPTON launched an appeal against his death sentence; this was turned down on 2<sup>ND</sup> JULY 1909. Herbert Gladstone, Home Secretary stated he saw "no reason why the Law should not take its course".

As was customary with all condemned prisoners, rules stated that there had to be three clear Sundays between sentence and the execution being carried out. This was to allow time for contemplation and making peace with God.

On Monday the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1909 at 4pm the executioners Mr Henry Albert Pierrepoint and Mr Thomas William Pierrepoint duly arrived at Bodmin General Station from their home in Bradford, West Yorkshire, and proceeded to the Jail where they stayed overnight in designated pre-prepared quarters. Once at the Jail both met Governor Browett, and were given details of the condemned; these would have included his height, weight, physical build etc, and thus they were able to rig the gallows precisely with the assistance of the Prison Engineer.

At 07:55am on the morning of July the 20<sup>th</sup> both executioners made their way to the condemned cell to pinion HAMPTON'S arms behind his back and lead him out to the execution shed. The formal escort party was lead by the Chief Warder of the prison, followed by the Chaplain, who would read the 'Litany For The Dying'. HAMPTON would follow with a Warder either side, and the executioners bringing up the rear of the escort party. The whole procession could not be viewed by anyone outside the prison's walls except those on distant high ground; however their view would be limited, and they would see no more than the escort party moving across the yard toward the execution shed.

T.W.PIERREPOINT fastened his legs with a leather strap while H.A. PIERREPOINT placed the 'White Cap' over his head and The Noose round his neck. When H.A.PIERREPOINT saw that all was ready, he would proceed to the lever and push it firmly over, thus dispatching HAMPTON to eternity. HAMPTON was given a drop of 7 feet as he was a man of slight build standing some 5 feet 8 inches and approx 10 stone.

The time that elapsed for the whole execution from HAMPTON entering the execution shed to the point where the doors fell away beneath his feet, was approximately 10 seconds.

The 'Official Witnesses' on that day were: -

The Under Sheriff of Cornwall MR C Davis Gilbert

The Mayor of Bodmin Mr W E Bennett

The Prison Governor MR H.L. Browett

The Prison Doctor MR Bartholomew Gidley Derry

The Prison Chaplain Rev Thomas Austin

The Chief Warder Mr Richard Amos Doidge

The two Warders who escorted HAMPTON on his final journey

After the customary hour, the body was retrieved by block and tackle, confined and an inquest held to satisfy those involved that the condemned had not suffered unduly in the process of dying. HAMPTON was then buried within the confines of the prison as was required by Law. His grave was marked by a plain stone with the initials W. H engraved on it. On the day of burial a single cross of red roses was placed on his grave supplied by his family and given to the Warders to place afterwards.

**THIS EXECUTION WAS THE VERY LAST ONE TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE  
AT BODMIN JAIL AND THE VERY LAST ONE TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE COUNTY OF  
CORNWALL.**

**NOTE 12**

# SUPPORTING NOTES

## NOTE 1

Harsh justice for the time – this case is used to describe the severity of the Law, and also change in our view of crime over the ages. Today the same crime would get no more than a Community Service Order or, Police Caution

## NOTE 2

Here in 1820 we see the Law sentencing to death and a further sentence of dissection in furtherance of the medical profession. Used after the 'grave-robbing' period to assist in our understanding of the human body – we can link this case to the late Victorian period, and then to the 1960's; easily showing change and the amazing advancement in medicine, whilst also linking it to the Victorians, to WW1, and the impact that had on Bodmin Jail.

## NOTE 3

Learning difficulties?

Post-natal depression?

A selfish person?

Was this a correct verdict?

Did the plea of Manslaughter exist at the time?

## NOTE 4

Used in this context, we step outside the basic facts of the case, which are explored in depth during the tour, and look at the connection between the builders of the jail, Jackson, the Metropolitan Police's investigating officer, and a doctor resident at No.1 Durnford Street, Plymouth.

Together with a university lecturer, was Jackson one of the major influences behind one of the greatest detective stories of all-time?

## NOTE 5

One of the great cases of all-time, this gives students an amazing ability to be detectives, examine the evidence, reach a conclusion and solve the crime.

One of the most well documented cases; this is an excellent resource of history, drama, and creative writing sessions.

Did Weeks murder her, or were the blood stains, gloves and handkerchief just from the moments he discovered the body?

**NOTE 6**

Provocation or just cold-blooded murder – was the judges decision correct?

A great case for discussion and creative writing.

**NOTE 7**

A great insight into this period in time, here we see a man left to fall lower and lower in life, commit the worst of crimes, and pay the ultimate price.

A good discussion topic for the class.

**NOTE 8**

1878 – What a sad case – read the summation of Mr Justice Denman – This puts in context the period of history, the view of the legal system, and most graphically suggests a man's struggle with handing out the Law, and passing the sentence of death upon a woman.

A great piece of written work for the period, it allows the opportunity for discussion and debate within the classroom.

Dr KM

Senior Lecturer/Course Co-ordinator English and Writing at Falmouth University  
Said in September 2015: -

Re the Denman summation – wow! It is both chilling and tragic, and seems to speak from another time and culture quite alien, and yet not so very far, from our own. It is terribly moving and awful in the original sense of the word. Thank you. I will ask the students to read it.

**NOTE 9**

This case allows so many directions to be taken – the shame of a child out of wedlock, the tense drama of a master and the illicit affair with a staff member, the deceit, the cold-blooded murder of that baby child. These were dark times, and Bartlett was not going to loose his standing in society. Or, was it a messy affair, and a really bad set of decisions intertwined with a web of lies that followed?

Capable of being used in so many different directions, this case also allows us to demonstrate the change in places of execution within the Jail; Bartlett meeting his end out of a first floor side goods door, along with others!



**NOTE 10**

A great deal of thought, trial and error went into the Aberdare Report, and the inception of the Long-drop method of hanging pioneered by William Marwood.



This table gives the reader an insight into the work/science that had gone into delivering 1000-foot-pounds per square inch of pressure to the joint between the second and third vertebrae in the human neck.

**NOTE 11**

1901 – language difficulties, learning difficulties, provocation, a recommendation to mercy – should Giovanni have been hung? There were no hangings in Cornwall for the 19yrs previous – did the authorities need to make an example out of someone? Rough justice?

**NOTE 12**

This interesting case, packed full of detail, provides an excellent insight into the case of the last execution in Cornwall. Despite 24yr old William Hampton not taking the stand in his own defence, being recommended to mercy by the jury, the cards were stacked against him as Justice Phillimore delivered the death sentence, and Herbert Gladstone, Home Secretary, saw” no reason why the Law should not take it’s course”.