

The Tollgate Murder 1937

In 1937 Leslie Morris of Congleton murdered his wife Alice Maud at the Toll Gate cottage, just opposite Lupin Farm, Kings Bromley. Alice had moved to the Toll Gate with a Mr William Cliffe. Leslie Morris went to Kings Bromley to get his wife to return to him. He found a letter from his wife to William Cliffe using 'affectionate and loving terms', in a fit of madness he grabbed a flat iron and hit her over the head with it ten times, killing her. He admitted this immediately and was arrested.

As can be seen from the newspaper clippings below the case caused considerable interest. William Cliffe did not endear himself to the jury under cross examination and when he admitted having once hit Leslie Morris over the head with a beer bottle: it appears had a history of abusive behaviour towards Leslie Morris. However, Leslie Morris' display of contrition clearly swayed the jury who considered it a crime of passion.

The jury took only fifteen minutes to find Leslie Morris guilty only of manslaughter and the judge sentenced him to five years imprisonment, the lightest sentence that he thought he could give.

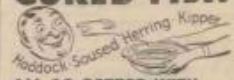
The Tollgate, pictured below, a relic of when the A513 was a toll road, was demolished when the road widened and straightened.



Derby Evening Telegraph

LATE
FINAL
EDN.

CURED FISH



ALL GO BETTER WITH

HP SAUCE

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1937.

REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION AS A NEWSPAPER

PRICE ONE PENNY

LIKE MADMAN, SAYS ACCUSED HUSBAND

KING'S BROMLEY MURDER ALLEGATIONS

"I think I was like a madman," said Leslie Morris (36), motor mechanic, of The Cottage, Astbury Marsh, Congleton, in giving evidence at Staffordshire Assizes to-day, when he pleaded "Not Guilty" to murdering his wife, Alice Mand (33) at King's Bromley.

Morris said that he went to King's Bromley, where his wife had gone with another man, with the sole object of persuading her to return to him.

COUNSEL for the Crown was Mr. A. F. Bourke, and Morris was defended by Mr. H. M. Cartwright Sharp, K.C., and Mr. H. A. Tucker.

Opening the case for the prosecution, Mr. Bourke said that Morris and his wife married on October 7, 1932. They had three children, of whom two lived with them.

They were happy enough until three or four years ago, when the wife formed "a guilty attachment" for a man named Cliffe. That attachment was the source of great trouble, and certainly of much grief and jealousy to Morris.

There was persistent misconduct between Mrs. Morris and Cliffe. When they were away from each other they would correspond, and quarrels between Morris, his wife, and the other man were frequent, and so violent sometimes that the police had to intervene.

ALLEGED THREAT

Some 12 months ago Cliffe, who had been living in Astbury, moved to King's Bromley, near Burton. The guilty association continued even then, and the correspondence between the wife and Cliffe went on.

"On October 11," Mr. Bourke continued, "his wife left her husband and went to the 166 Gate Cottage, King's Bromley—Cliffe's house—and prisoner found it out. He arrived on Saturday, October 16, and begged his wife to return with him. She consented at first, but afterwards changed her mind, and prisoner said on that occasion, 'I will smash you off if you don't come home.'"

"He went in the house and saw his wife there, and there was a long talk of about 20 minutes between them. She was still hesitating whether she would come back or not, and said she did not think she would.

"They were both in the living room, and prisoner opened a drawer and found a letter from the wife written to Cliffe.

"That letter is rather material, because it is in very affectionate and loving terms.

"After reading that letter prisoner laid hold of a flat-iron and attacked his wife, beating her about the head and inflicting something like ten wounds.

CHILDREN'S SCREAMS

Mr. Bourke described how a man named Hunt, who was riding his bicycle near by, had his attention attracted by children screaming and running out of the house.

He saw Morris outside the house, and asked him, "What is the matter, old chum?" Morris was alleged to have said, "It is a wild murder; I have murdered her."

When a policeman arrived, said Mr. Bourke, Morris was the first to speak, saying to the officer, "At your service. Wild murder, I told her what she would get in the end if she left the house."

Mr. Bourke continued: "There occurred then one of those poignant, heart-breaking things we find so often in murder trials. Prisoner followed another man into the house and knelt by the side of his dead wife and looked into her face and said, 'What is it, my dear?'"

(CONTINUED IN BACK PAGE)

ARAB SHEIK TO BE HANGED

ANTI-TERRORIST SENTENCE

Sheik Farhan was sentenced to death to-day at Haifa in the first trial by the anti-terrorist military courts.

The stout, six-foot, bearded man, was captured two days ago by the East Yorkshire Regiment.

He will be hanged after the sentence has been confirmed by the General Commanding Palestine.

Sir Arthur Wauchope has taken over the government at Jerusalem.

KING'S BROMLEY MURDER TRIAL ALLEGATIONS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

"When Morris was arrested, he said, it was alleged, 'I understand it was a straightforward job.' The officer in the house was handed a flat iron, and Morris said, 'That is what I done it with.'

MANSLAUGHTER QUESTION

"In considering this matter," continued Mr. Justice, "the prosecution submit that when you have heard the evidence there will be established a clear case of wilful murder. It may be that my friend for the defence will say that a verdict, if there is one, should be manslaughter, because of the provocation."

"It is true that provocation may, in very extreme cases, be regarded as a reason justifying the jury for convicting of manslaughter instead of murder, and the typical case is where a husband kills his wife in the act of sin with another man. It is thought that the sudden circumstance bearing upon him may have such an unbalancing effect upon a man that it would hardly be right to ascribe to him the full possession of his reason at that moment."

"The prosecution point out here that although there was great provocation it had been long existing. There had been a state of things getting gradually worse, and it had been the cause of quarrels. On the previous Saturday prisoner had known this woman was living in this other man's house."

CHILDREN TAKEN TO FARM

Albert Edward Hunt, a Rugby coal-miner, told how two little girls ran screaming from the Toll Gate Cottage as he was passing on his bicycle and shined to him, "Come back. He is murdering her."

Albert Dunn, a Litchfield sales manager, said that he also went to the cottage on hearing the children scream. While he was in the cottage Morris came to him, stooping over his wife's body, said, "What is it, my dear?" He was painfully disturbed.

Mrs. Mary Ada Tigger, of Lopton Farm, King's Bromley, spoke of Dunn's taking the two children to the farm. Later, Morris came there and said to Cliffe, who was in the yard, "It is done now, Mr. Cliffe."

To witness he made a request that she should look after his children until their granma came to fetch them.

WINDOW'S SMASHED

Evidence was given by William Cliffe, a farm labourer, of the Toll Gate Cottage, King's Bromley, that he was a married man, but had been separated from his wife for six years.

He had known Mrs. Morris from his early youth, he said, and it occurred to him and his two children went to live at Morris's house.

About September, 1908, he took a bungalow at Ashby, and Mrs. Morris came to visit him there. About that time he had some trouble with Morris, who on one occasion knocked him from his bicycle when he was with Mrs. Morris, and on another occasion smashed the windows at the bungalow just after Mrs. Morris had left.

Cliffe stated that when he secured employment at King's Bromley he went to live at the Toll Gate Cottage, and he corresponded with Mrs. Morris. Sometimes she came to visit him, and once stayed the night there with her children.

SEEN THROUGH WINDOW

Cliffe agreed in reply to further questions that he had said that Morris was never a husband.

"NASTY LITTLE REMARKS"

Mr. Cartwright Sharp: He was this much a husband, that you took jolly good care to conceal your adulterous intercourse?—He was not fit to be a husband. He did not treat her right.

Any more nasty little remarks against him that you can think of?—I am only speaking the truth.

Evidence concerning the injuries was given by Dr. John Minors, of Stafford, the county pathologist, who said that considerable violence had been used.

He described the woman's injuries, and, in reply to Mr. Cartwright Sharp, said they pointed to a sudden, uncontrollable burst of fierce anger.

Dr. John Humphrey, Medical Officer at Birmingham Prison, was cross-examined as to the accused's behaviour since his arrest. During the first three or four days, said the doctor, Morris was in a state of marked depression. He regarded his outlook as hopeless, and was prepared to pay the penalty.

I had been very miserable that he later spoke unkindly about his wife.

This concluded the Crown's case, and Morris was at once called to give evidence.

HAPPY COUPLE

He said his wife were a happy couple he said. He really did not want Cliffe to come to stay with them in the autumn of 1905, but his wife insisted as if she desired it, and he agreed.

Towards the end of 1906 Cliffe went to live at a bungalow. He (Morris) made it clear to his wife that he would not have her going about with Cliffe.

Asked by Mr. Cartwright Sharp about an occasion in March, 1907, when he was going out with his wife and she would not wait for him, Morris said that he thought it was funny, and went after her, and saw her coming from Cliffe's bungalow.

BLOW WITH BOTTLE

Later that night he met them cycling together, and Cliffe struck him on the head with a bottle, causing him to fall down.

It was untrue that he first knocked Cliffe from his bicycle.

When he got home his wife attended to him, and after an explanation they became friends again. He asked her many times if she and Cliffe were behaving properly, and she assured him they were, and that she wanted nobody but him (Morris).

On another occasion, said Morris, he saw his wife's bicycle outside Cliffe's bungalow shortly before nine o'clock in the morning. He did not find his wife there, and when he asked Cliffe for an explanation Cliffe replied, "What the hell has that got to do with you?"

In his anger he broke a window on getting outside.

In consequence of what he learned on October 15 he went to King's Bromley.

"SLEPT ON SOFA"

When he was trying to persuade her, Cliffe returned for his dinner. Witness told him that he was going to do his best to get his wife back. Cliffe explained that she was there as house-keeper, and that she and the children had slept in his bed, and he on the sofa in another room.

Morris said that he believed this at the

SEEN THROUGH WINDOW

Continuing, Cliffe said that Mrs. Morris stayed at the cottage from Friday, October 15, until the following Tuesday. Morris came to the house on the 15th and told him that he had asked his wife to go back with him and that she had refused.

Eventually he calmed down and told witness he could go back to work, as he (Cliffe) had won her and he would go.

They parted more or less on friendly terms, said Cliffe. When he returned for his dinner on October 19 the door was locked, and through the window he saw Morris with an envelope in his hand.

He went for a policeman, and on returning 20 minutes later he saw Morris by Tipper's farm. Morris said to him, "The Morrises are dangerous people to deal with. I am now going to my ——— grave."

"DID NOT OBJECT"

Cross-examined by Mr. Cartwright Sharp, Cliffe said that Morris did not object to his association with Mrs. Morris.

He admitted that on one occasion Morris met him in company with Mrs. Morris, and that he left Morris lying bleeding in the road, unconscious.

That was not because he struck Morris with a quart bottle of beer, he said. He hit him with his hand.

In reply to further questions, Cliffe said that on one occasion Morris called at his house, having seen his wife's bicycle outside.

Cliffe denied that he had tried to get Mrs. Morris to leave her husband and to go to live with him.

He said that Morris had told his wife to go.

Mr. Cartwright Sharp: Are you feeling pleased with yourself in the result of your intrigue?—I am not. I am very sorry about it all.

Having brought about the death of his woman?—I did not bring it about.

Are you trying to bring about the death of this man?—I am not. I am only speaking the truth.

Counsel: That, the jury will be able to judge.

Mr. Cartwright Sharp then quoted the following passage from a letter which he said was written by Mrs. Morris to Cliffe:

"My own darling Bill,—I got your letter. The manager gave it to me, and I said it was from someone who had lost my address. Bill, have you honestly had your week off? I don't believe you have. If so, why didn't you come and see me? I have been breaking my heart all these weeks in silence for you.

"When I told you there was only one man for me, your own common sense ought to have told you it was for you.

I shall love no one else. Love, I am not as you say. I only wish I were.

"I would be something to remember. There is time yet. Surely there is a way out.—Your ever-loving Alice found."

Morris said that he believed this at the time.

BELIEF SHATTERED

Describing the events of the day of the tragedy, Morris said his wife and two children were at the house when he arrived at King's Brunley.

He persuaded his wife to return with him, and when she went into the bedroom to get her coat, Morris looked into the chest of drawers in the living-room.

He saw there two letters in his wife's writing addressed to Cliffe, and he read one of them, in which there was a passage which said, "Love, I am not as you say. I only wish I were. It would give me something to remember. There is time yet."

"When I read the letter," he said, "my belief was shattered."

Morris continued: "I saw Cliffe coming back, and I bolted the door, and I shook the envelope in his face and told him to clear out.

Having seen the letter, I asked what it meant, and my wife said that it was not true that she had miscondacted herself. I went across and tried to get the second letter, but she was quicker in going to the drawer than I was, and she got hold of it.

"I asked her to let me read it, and she said, 'You ——— well won't.'"

"LIKE A MADMAN"

"She concealed the letter, and I struggled with her for it. The two children went out of the room, and started crying. I think it was she who picked the flat iron up and tried to hit me with it.

"I warded it off with my hands. She ran at me, and kicked me and knocked me down."

Counsel: What was your state of mind then? Were you cool and calm, or what?—I should say I was behaving like a madman. I managed to get hold of the iron as she was standing over me with it.

"I got up and we both fell down together. I must have struck her on the head with it. It is quite likely I struck her a number of blows."

ONLY OBJECT

Had you any real object except to try and get her back to you?—No. That was the only object I went there for that day.

And were you still very fond of her?—I was.

And then you realised that she was terribly injured on the floor? And is it quite true that you knelt by her and said 'Oh, my dear, my dear, what is it?'—Yes.

The Judge: It is also true you said "Willful murder," is it?—Yes, it is true.

Counsel: Had you any desire to go on living?—No, I had not.

But for the shock when you read that letter, had you ever hurt your wife?—No, and if I had had time to think about it, I would never have done it.

[Proceeding.]

SENTENCED TO 5 YEARS

HUSBAND GUILTY OF
MANSLAUGHTER

KING'S BROMLEY TRAGEDY

STATING that he made the punishment as light as he conceived to be consistent with his duty, Mr. Justice Finlay, at Staffordshire Assizes, at Stafford, yesterday, sentenced Leslie Morris (36), a motor mechanic, of Ashbury Marsh, Dinsleyton, to five years' penal servitude for the manslaughter of his wife, Alice Maud Morris, at King's Bromley.

Morris was accused of the murder of his wife. The jury were absent only 15 minutes in considering their verdict.

Mr. Justice Finlay said that he required, and everybody in court must rejoice, that the jury had found it consistent with their duty to find a verdict of guilty of manslaughter only.

"GREATER PUNISHMENT"

Great and immediate as might have been the circumstances which induced this terrible crime, it remained a most terrible crime. It was a dreadful thing that, taking the law into his own hands, Morris used terrible violence to his wife.

"I am not unwilling to believe that the fact that you did in that violent way kill your wife will be to you greater punishment than any I inflict," went on the Judge.

Morris knew perfectly well that he (the Judge) was bound to inflict for a crime so terrible as that a very severe punishment.

The interests of public justice required that he should suffer for the terrible crime he had committed.

QUESTION OF PROVOCATION

In his summing-up to the jury, Mr. Justice Finlay had pointed out that it was not questioned that Morris killed his wife. There were circumstances in which killing might be reduced from what would otherwise be murder, and might be manslaughter only.

The general principle was if there was such provocation as would deprive an ordinary and reasonable man of his self-control, and in those circumstances he killed, that killing would be not murder but manslaughter.

If a person either found his wife actually committing misconduct, or discovered it suddenly by being told, that was a matter which ought to be regarded as a sufficient reason for reducing homicide to manslaughter. If there was thus for causing the defence of provocation did not apply.

"It is not necessary to waste any sympathy on Cliff," said the Judge. "He made a singularly poor appearance in the box, but we are not here as a Court of morals, to try moral questions, but a legal inquiry as to the death of this woman."

An application that Morris's father, or any other relative, should be permitted to see him was granted.

DEALERS SERVICE

KING'S BROMLEY TRAGEDY

Husband Sentenced to Penal Servitude

Leslie Morris, thirty-six-year-old motor mechanic, who killed his wife because she had been unfaithful, was found not guilty of murder at Stafford Assizes on Wednesday.

Mr. Justice Finlay said to him: "I rejoice, and everybody in court must rejoice, that the jury have found it consistent with their duty to find a verdict of guilty of manslaughter only. He sentenced Morris to five years' penal servitude.

Mrs. Morris left her husband on October 15 after quarrels over a man named William Cliff. She went to Cliff's cottage at King's Bromley. Morris said he followed her, found a love letter, realised that her denials of misconduct with Cliff were untrue. He tried to read a second letter. There was a struggle. His wife tried to hit him with a flat iron. He was not clear what happened after that, but said he "must have struck" her with the iron.

William Cliff, who said he had been separated from his wife for six years, admitted misconduct when he lodged with Mrs. Morris.