

John Waite

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FEARFUL TRAGEDY AT BACUP MURDER OF WIFE

A tragedy of a most brutal and terrible description was enacted in Bacup early last evening. The busy hum of our mills had scarcely ceased, and the artisans barely finished their evening meal when rumours of a most startling nature got circulation to the effect that a murder had been committed in our midst.

The awful news received at first but slight credence, but the rumours became more pronounced and distinct, so this it became apparent that some atrocity had been committed, and on enquiry it was found that for once rumour had not exaggerated the enormity of the deed which had just been enacted, and which had justly shocked the moral sensibilities and excited the indignation of the community. Bacup although a thickly populated little town, and the centre of so large a neighbourhood has been little associated with crime, and has enjoyed happy immunity for many years from the master crime of murder. The unhappy victim of this deed is as so often the case in murders, a woman, a wife, and a mother. Her assassin was her own husband, who with very little premeditation yet deliberately murdered her in a most brutal manner, severing her head almost completely from her body. The murderer, whose name is John Waite, came into this neighbourhood a few years ago, bringing his unfortunate wife and three children with him from Cambridgeshire, from which county, it is stated, they walked every inch of the way, being so destitute that they could not afford to shorten the journey by train. When they came here they presented an impoverished aspect, and not being able to weave, could not easily find employment, but soon found some portering employment, serving in this capacity in connection with Mr Salmon's establishment. He did not long stay in this employment, and since engaged in several pursuits, latterly being employed in the mill, and his wages not being high, they were still very poor. They have occupied for some time one of the small houses with a bedroom, on the right hand side of Rochdale Road Smelt, and there the terrible occurrence took place. In order to help them exist they had recently taken in a lodger who occupied a bed in the living room, the parents and their three children sleeping above. It appears that the murderer had entertained suspicions of his lodger and of the fidelity of his wife with other men. and some time ago stated that the lodger should go about his business, when his wife intimated that she should go at the same time, so that there had been a cause of disagreement amongst them for some time.

However it is not known that they were especially disagreeable or unhappy in their relationship. Last night, Waite comes home from his work, and a quarrel took place between them and being a very passionate man, he made an attack upon his wife., sending the children out first. Taking the tongs he beat her most unmercilessly about the head with such atrocious energy that the tongs broke, and then when his animal passions and bloodthirstiness were fully aroused, and his victim helpless he deliberately conceived the idea of murdering her and taking his pocket knife he gave her several cuts about the head. Whether she was able to ward off the attacks we known not, but the murderer, unsatisfied with his pocket knife, took up the bread knife and deliberately cut her throat, so thoroughly that the vertebral bone is broken and the awful deed was done, the poor woman living but a few moments. The murder then coolly washed his hands, called his daughter who was playing in the road, and taking her by the hand went and delivered himself to the police. Who at once went up to the house and discovered the shocking spectacle of the victim lying in a pool of blood, the whole place

being bespattered with blood and presenting an appearance more like a slaughter house than a human home.

John Waite aged 35 years, and the victim his wife, about the same age were very poor and had lived unhappily together. Yesterday tea-time at about six o'clock in the evening Waite returned home from his work at Britannia mill with his eldest son John Thomas aged 11 years. It seems there was no tea ready, for them there being no bread in the house. Waite offered his wages to his wife, but she refuses to take them saying " she would not have that bit". They then got to words and finally to blows. Waite sent his three children out of the house, and then took up the tongs to his wife. He beat her severely about the head and body with them, and she defended herself as well as she could. It appears that they fought until Waite got thoroughly into a frenzy, and according to his own statement, he made up his mind deliberately to murder her. After coming to this determination he seems to have attacked her with a very small sharp penknife.

For she had been stabbed in various parts of the head and body, then he must have got the bread knife a common instrument with the word "bread " carved on the handle, and comparatively dull and cut her throat right across in a most desperate and determined manner. The head was almost severed from the body, there being little connection left between the head and the body except the backbone, and even the bones are more or less hacked. He then left the body lying on the floor, washed his hands and went out, locking the door behind him. The only entrance to the house is by a door in the entry immediately below the Tup Inn. Waite's two youngest children, Alice Ann aged 9 years, and Charles Julian aged 7 years, were playing in the road, opposite to Lark Hill, and the murderer called the girl saying" Come along with me , as fast, as you can". She went with him down the toad, and he took her to P.C Lows house, in Rochdale Road. On entering the officers house he laid the key of his own house on the table, and said he had murdered his wife. P.C. Low, then took him into custody, and brought him to the Bacup police station.

After delivering him up to the officers at Bacup police station, P.C. Low returned with P. S. Beardsworth, of the Rossendale division , and on entering the house where the deed had been committed a fearful sight met their gaze.

The murdered woman was lying on a the hearth weltering in gore. Near to her head, on the floor, was the bread knife, and near to her feet the penknife, both covered with blood. The tongs, which were broken, were found beneath the body. Very extreme violence must have been used with the tongs, as one of the legs was broken off. The walls, furniture, and windows of the room, were splashed with blood, and the rug was quite soaked, the whole aspect being sickening in the extreme. The general appearance of the apartment betokened that a severe struggle had taken place, the table being pushed on one side and some plant pots on the window had been knocked over, one being found broken on the floor. Dr Clegg was at once sent for, and he went and examined the body, and stated that death had ensued from the wound in the neck. The body was afterwards washed, and laid on a bed in the house. Several of the neighbours heard loud screams of " murder " about half past six, but did not seem to consider them anything unusual. P. S. Preston, of the Rochdale division, at once proceeded to Rochdale to inform the coroner. The prisoner will be formally brought before the magistrates, this morning, at the Bacup Police Court, and remanded until after the inquest. It appears that Waite, and his wife came to this district about seven years ago from Whittlesea, near Peterborough, in Cambridgeshire. He first found employment in Bacup with Mr Henry Salmon, Grocer, of Bridge Street. Mr Salmon, speaking on speaking on this point to our representative last evening, said he was standing at the back door of his shop, about

seven years when he saw a man and his wife come down Back Bridge street. They seemed exceedingly poor, and had with them three children a boy walking beside them and a younger female, and a boy in a sort of perambulator. The man touched his hat to Mr Salmon, and asked him if he could find him work for a day or two. He said they had walked all the way from Whittlesea, in Cambridgeshire, and had wheeled the perambulator, and that he had not a penny in his pocket. Mr Salmon was struck with the man's honest appearance, and said he would find him work for a short time. Waite was taken on, and for twelve months he helped to clean about the shop, and carried parcels out. He was always looked on as a honest, sober and intelligent man. Being a good piano player, and a fairly good singer, and he got into the habit of leaving his work to go to a public house in Yorkshire Street.

This led to a disagreement between his employer which led to him leaving. After this he went to work in the mill, which he had never done before. His wife who had formerly been a servant, used also to do charring and cleaning to Mr Salmon's and other places. She was employed by Mrs Salmon long after her husband had left Mr Salmon's employ. She was spoken of as a very clean respectable woman. Sometime afterwards Waite and his wife went to live at Shawforth, and he worked at Black Rock Mill. Then he and his wife got work at Britannia Mill, and they came to live in Bacup again. Taking up their residence at Smelt. The ill fated couple were married at Whittlesea, where the woman's mother at present lives, from whom she received a letter about a fortnight ago. She has also two sisters at Kendal.

The culprit and his victim appear to have been very poor, and to have lived very unhappily together. They have three fine intelligent children, John Thomas, aged 11 a short time weaver, also employed at Britannia Mill, Alice Ann, aged 9, and Charles Julian, aged 7. The two latter both attend Britannia Wesleyan Day school. Lately a man named Ashworth has been living with the family, and Waite has been rather jealous of his wife, they have had frequent quarrels, and Waite has several times threatened his wife that he would murder her and she seems to have been somewhat afraid of him for she has mentioned to the neighbours that he has threatened to take her life.

After his committal on Monday, Waite stated that he was very glad that the inquest and preliminary trial was over and assumed quite a cheerful appearance. However on Tuesday morning when he was getting ready for the move to Strangeways gaol he seemed rather down. and told the policemen who had kept watch over him that he was sorry to be leaving them to go amongst strangers. He stated that he did not think he could walk to Bacup station, and was driven there in a cab by P.S.Jones and P.S.Preston. Hundreds of people had assembled in Market Street to see the murder removed and an immense crowd gathered at the station. When he got out of the cab some of the women told him to keep his heart up. Amongst the way every station was crowded with people eager to get a glimpse of the murderer. At Victoria Station in Manchester a large crowd of some thousand had gathered, in the hope of seeing the prisoner, but they were disappointed. as the blinds of the cab were drawn. Waite smoked all the way to Manchester and said he knew he was a doomed man and did not care how soon he was done for.

He talked a good deal about his children, and said he hoped they would get good homes. According to the marriage certificate Waite and his wife were married at the general Baptist Chapel, Whittlesea, on October 18th 1871, by the Rev Thomas Watkinson. Mrs Waite's maiden name was Harriet Howitt, and witnesses to the marriage are Thomas Howitt and Lydia Howitt. The fathers names are given on the certificate as Richard Waite, and Thomas Howitt.

THE FUNERAL

The funeral of the murdered woman took place on Tuesday afternoon, at the Bacup cemetery. The parish hearse from Dearnley was used, and there were no relatives of the deceased present. About half a dozen neighbours followed the corpse to the grave. A crowd of people gathered about Larkhill to watch the melancholy procession. The coffin was carried into the chapel by six members of Bacup police force.

THE BACUP WIFE MURDERER

THE TRIAL AT THE MANCHESTER ASSIZES

VERDICT AND SENTENCE

THE PRISONER RESPITED

The trial of John Waite for the murder of his wife at Bacup, on June 4th last took place on Saturday afternoon, at the Manchester Assizes, before Justice Cave and a common jury. After hearing the evidence the jury brought in a verdict of guilty against the prisoner, but coupled it with the very strongest recommendation for mercy and the judge passed sentence of death in the usual way. The date for the execution was fixed for Wednesday week, August 4th, but yesterday Friday morning Major Preston, governor of Strangeways Prison, received a communication from the home office to the effect that Waite had been respited during Her Majesty's pleasure.