

Maggie Allen

The Bacup Times of Saturday September 4th 1948

RAWTENSTALL WIDOW BATTERED TO DEATH

MURDER CHARGE AGAINST FORMER BACUP POST WOMAN

Accused Remanded For A Week.

Drama descended on Rawtenstall with the discovery early last Sunday morning of the body of an elderly woman in Bacup Road near to Fall Barn Fold. She had been battered to death. Following was a period of exciting activity and mystery which culminated on Wednesday morning with the arrest at her two roomed cottage of Margaret Allen, 48 single an unemployed slipper worker, Bacup Road, Rawtenstall, who was later charged with murdering Mrs Nancy Ellen Chadwick 68 year old widow. It would seem to be the first murder in Rawtenstall within living memory, at any rate and efforts to find records of a previous case have been unavailing. Allen appeared before a special sitting at Rawtenstall Magistrates on Thursday-her- birthday-when more than 60 people two thirds were women and filled the public gallery. She was remanded until next Thursday morning. Allen showed no emotion during the proceedings which lasted only four minutes. She entered the dock at 10.33 am dressed in navy blue trousers a check shirt and grey-blue pullover under a fawn overcoat. She had no tie. Her hair was close cropped. Police Superintendent, G.Smith detailed the charges, which read" that she on Saturday the 28th day of August 1948 at 1337 , Bacup Road, Rawtenstall, did murder Nancy Ellen Chadwick". The facts added Superintendent Smith are that at 3.55 am on Sunday Mrs. Chadwick's, body was found lying in the roadway in Bacup Road with signs of having sustained severe head injuries.

Enquiries were made by the police as a result of which the accused woman was seen on Wednesday morning by Chief Supt J.Woodmansey chief of Lancashire C.I.D and Det Chief Insp R.Stevens of Scotland Yard. She made a statement which would at a later stage be produced before the court, but which he did not propose to read that morning. Evidence was given by Det-Sgt Thompson, stationed at Rawtenstall, who said that as 2.15 p.m on Wednesday he saw the accused at Rawtenstall Police Station in the presence of Chief Supt Woodmansey and Chief Insp Stevens. Cautioned and charged she replied " I did". When asked by the clerk Mr G A Pratt if she had any objection to a remand Allen in a clear voice replied " No Sir". The magistrates the Mayor Alderman A Peel, presiding, the Hon Miss C.K Brooks, Councillor R Howorth and Mrs M Gaskell in remanding her as previously stated, granted accused a certificate of legal aid. Allen's reply was "Thank you Sir".

A FAMILIAR FIGURE

Many townsfolk crowded round the entrance of the court in a heavy downpour to catch a glimpse of Allen. For most of her life Margaret Allen better known locally as Maggie Smith lived at Bacup. She was brought up in Plantation Street and had worked at a number of mills in the town With her masculine dress she has for years been a familiar figure in both Bacup and Rawtenstall. Almost everybody knows her. Believed to be a native of Bolton she has two sisters, who both live in Bacup. Allen removed only a year or two ago to live at 137, Bacup Road which was at one time a police station. From July, 1942, to June 1946, she worked as a war-time "clippie" on Rawtenstall Corporation buses, and previously was a post-woman at

Bacup for a few years. Last year after becoming ill she underwent a slight operation. Police yesterday were still searching for the murder weapon, thought to be a hammer head. On Wednesday night police officers and four Army Sappers wearing thigh-high waders searched in vain in the inky waters of the Irwell with mine detectors. They were focussing their efforts on a weir near the level crossing about 80 yards away from the spot where the body was found. The whole story, which transformed a quiet neighbourhood into a hive of activity began last Sunday morning.

BUS DRIVER SPOTTED BODY

Taking home drivers and conductors after a union meeting in the nearby bus shed. Mr Herbert Beaumont, of Chamber Street Lumb, spotted the body lying in the road. It was picked up by the lights of the corporation bus he was driving towards Bacup. Seeing what looked like a bundle in the roadway he pulled up and found it was a woman's body.

She was lying on her face, her coat collar apparently covering her battered head. But there was not much blood in the roadway.

Immediately the transport men dashed back to the shed and telephoned the police. Two constables went to the scene.

The roadway was measured and numbered and the spot roped off. Mrs Chadwick's body was removed to the mortuary about 8am.

Only 15 minutes before Mr Beaumont's bus arrived Arthur Marshall 32 year old bus conductor with seven others from the midnight-to-morning meeting passed that spot. Mrs Chadwick's body was not there then.

Opinions of the general public at first wavered as to whether she had been the victim of a hit and run motorist or murdered. Naturally, the police gave no statement, but as activity increased it became obvious that foul play was suspected. A "Times" reporter was on the scene by lunch-time and soon learned the identity of the victim.

Mrs Chadwick was housekeeper to 83 year old Mr J.E Whittaker, of 81 Hardman Avenue on the Hall Carr Estate about five minutes walk from where she was found. Mr Whittaker who had then no idea she was dead, but hoped "nothing had happened to her" told our representative she been his housekeeper for about 10 years.

Neighbours described Mrs Chadwick as a quaint eccentric figure who was in the habit of carrying a large sum of money about with her. One added "She had many friends in the town and used to go telling fortunes many evenings during the week".

DRESSED TO LOOK POOR

Mrs J Caine, Fallbarn Fold, who had known her for 30 years, said "Mrs Chadwick dressed to look poor. She often sat in the public parks counting her money. She was very eccentric and used to roam about on her own".

About 17 years ago Mr James Crabtree, a stonemason, for whom she was housekeeper, left her in his will four houses in Mount Pleasant near Whittaker Park, Rawtenstall. Every

fortnight she collected rents amounting to £2 14s.0d. But her banking account it is believed was small. A few months ago she paid a £60 repair bill. One of Mrs Chadwick's four sisters the others live at Morecambe is Mrs Mary Marcroft, of Boothman Terrace Waterfoot. She told a reporter that Mrs Chadwick who was a native of Haslingden, distrusted banks. About two years ago she was robbed of £25 by a young man who attacked her in the centre of town.

Chief Supt J. Woodmansey was called in during Sunday morning from County Headquarters at Preston to investigate the death, and a search was made for clues by gum-booted policemen in the nearby River Irwell.

From the shadows of the river beneath the Weir at Fallbarn Crossing, detectives recovered round about 2.30pm, Mrs Chadwick's handbag which contained only some sewing materials, three pairs of scissors and a pack of assorted playing cards.

POLICE USE BLOODHOUND

The discovery of her bag was another indication to the watching public that the mystery was something more than an accident and with the arrival of "Lubit" the police bloodhound, the suspicions were confirmed. "Lubit" after smelling a hat and coat taken from the dead woman led his trainer Sgt Charles Smith, from the spot where the body was found straight to the river bank near to where the bag was recovered. National newspaper reporters then began to appear in the town coming in cars with their camera men, and soon there was a scene reminding the watching people of what they might have visualised from films and fiction, but had never before been experienced personally. An atmosphere of mystery pervaded the air. Mr A.E. Waddington, Lancashire's second assistant Chief Constable conducted a press conference in Rawtenstall courtroom at 7pm on Sunday. It was attended by about 16 reporters and photographers. Mr Waddington, outlined the circumstances, telling how Mrs Chadwick was found. The police wanted anybody who could to come forward and throw some light on Mrs Chadwick's movements the previous day. He issued a description of the dead woman, whose address he gave as Rehoboth Street, Rawtenstall. The description was: 5ft 2ins in height, medium build, dark brown hair turning grey, and was dressed in grey, single breasted coat, with two large buttons on the front, brown woollen dress, brown stockings, pale green ankle socks, and black plain fronted shoes.

SCOTLAND YARD CALLED IN

Despite numerous questions, he would say no more, apart from the fact that a post mortem examination was then being made by Dr Gilbert Bailey, a Blackburn pathologist and police surgeon. The newspaper men went to work, interviewing and collecting the facts in preparation for next mornings editions which startled not only a wider public, but many local residents. For it was break-fast-time on Monday, when they read their morning paper, that many Rossendale inhabitants knew for the first time of the happenings.

Another press conference was called at 9pm on Sunday, and Mr Waddington then revealed that the head injuries were unlikely to have been caused by a motor vehicle. **"Scotland Yard have been asked to assist in the case" he said "and there is no doubt about it, it is murder"**. Overnight, Chief Insp "Bob" Stevens and Sgt Campbell travelled from Scotland Yard. An on-the-spot conference was held immediately they reached Rawtenstall on Monday, and the search for clues was intensified. Some police officers began digging in the area

behind Bacup Road and others combed the railway embankment and hedgerows in the Hall Carr districts, looking for the murder weapon.

Nearby mill yards were searched and plaster-casts were made of footprints found in sand near Longholme Felt Mill Lodge, and under a low bridge leading to the river bank, 300 yards from the railway crossing. Few noticeable developments occurred on Tuesday.

RADIO APPEAL

The police appeal for information about the latest movements of Mrs Chadwick had not met with a good response, and further appeals were sent out over the local radio relay systems. Slides were also flashed on the screens of Rawtenstall and Waterfoot cinemas.

On Tuesday night, special squads of Lancashire C.I.D men visited homes to search wardrobes for bloodstained clothing, concentrating on the Hall Carr Estate, where Mrs Chadwick kept house for Mr Whittaker.

A clue sought on Monday by the police was a black knitted anti-macassar, which "Old Nancy" wore as a head scarf fastened under the chin with a large safety pin. She was last seen wearing it on Saturday morning. When her battered body was found lying in the main road, it was missing.

A blue-backed playing card found on the river bank on Monday was thought to be a possible clue.

INQUEST OPENED

The inquest was formally opened by the East Lancashire Deputy Coroner Mr R.H.Rowland on Wednesday morning, when the only witness was William Barnes of Ashworth Buildings, Higher Cloughfold nephew of the dead woman. He gave evidence of identifying her body at 3.15pm on Sunday. He said she was the widow of William Chadwick, a Wheelwright who died in 1921. The last time he saw her alive was when she visited him on Sunday August 22nd. She did not visit him frequently, but during the previous week she called three times, without being able to "catch" him in. When she called on Sunday it was on a special errand. The Deputy Coroner: Did she want to see you about something in particular? Barnes: Yes.

The inquest was adjourned for a month until September 29th at 10.30 am.

The funeral of Mrs Chadwick took place yesterday (Friday) afternoon at Rawtenstall Cemetery from the home of of her nephew Mr William Barnes, of Ashworth Buildings, Higher Cloughfold. Services at the house and graveside were conducted by the Rev. R.J Coates (vicar of St Mary's, Rawtenstall). There were about 10 mourners and only about 20 people watched the burial. Among those who attended were Supt G Smith Rossendale and Det Chief Inspector R.McCartney Lancashire County Police. The funeral director was Mr James Law 206 Newchurch Road Stacksteads.

Bacup Times January 8th 1949

LAST MINUTE BID TO SAVE MARGARET ALLEN.

DUE TO DIE ON WEDNESDAY FOR RAWTENSTALL MURDER

FRIENDS REPRIEVE PETITION EFFORT.

In a last minute bid to save Margaret Allen, 48 year old Rawtenstall spinster, from the gallows, forms petitioning for a reprieve were sent last night to the Home Secretary (Mr ChuterEde), who on Tuesday decided there was not sufficient grounds to justify him recommending any interference with the due course of the law. The petition has been organised by her closet friend., Mrs Annie Cook, 15 Union Terrace, Cloughfold. It was on December 8th that Allen former Bacup Post-woman and war-time clippie 137, Bacup Road, Rawtenstall, heard the death sentence passed upon her for the murder of Mrs Nancy Ellen Chadwick, 68 year old widow. She never expected to be hanged. When Mrs Cook saw her on Monday in Strangeways Gaol, Manchester, she was well and cheerful, and told her she was confident she would be reprieved. The following day the Prison Governor Mr C.T Cape visited her in the condemned cell to tell her of the Home Secretary's decision.

If she is executed next Wednesday morning at nine o'clock she will be the first woman to be hanged in Britain since Mrs Charlotte Bryant 29 who paid the penalty in 1936 for poisoning her husband with weed killer. Only 11 women have previously gone to the scaffold this century.

"I shall have done all I can to save her", Mrs Cook told a "Times" reporter yesterday. By last-night the forms were to be sent about 5pm she hoped to have a few hundred signatures. They had been collected in two days with the help of her sister, Mrs Gladys Flood.

After working until midnight on Wednesday distributing sheaves of forms, Mrs Cook, who is 32 went to her work at Glendale Yarns Ltd, Cloughfold, on Thursday morning and obtained permission to invite signatures from her work mates. Then she was released for the rest of the day to deliver forms at mills, workshops, and public houses in Bacup and Rawtenstall, Waterfoot and Cloughfold. By 11 o'clock she had herself collected about 100 signatures. Yesterday they collected the forms.

The petition reads: We, the undersigned, knew Margaret Allen and are aware of her peculiarities, and respectfully request a reprieve be granted.

Originally, other relatives of Mrs Cook promised to help, but they gave up after being insulted. Mrs Cook on Monday received an abusive unsigned letter, with an Ashton-Under-Lyne postmark.

"I would like to know who sent it " she told the "Times". "They obviously did not agree with my work for a reprieve, I shall keep it as a souvenir".

By the same post she got a letter from Allen, telling of a "very nice weekend" in Strangeways Gaol. "We had a concert party... I am going to be confirmed she is a Roman Catholic) on your birthday" (to-morrow week).

With the forms went a letter from Mrs Cook. The forms were to be despatched by Mr Kenneth Yates, the Haslingden solicitor who organised Allen's defence. He told our reporter on Thursday the decision had surprised him, particularly in the light of the recent Government attitude towards capital punishment.

“I don't think Allen ever realised the seriousness of her position”, he said “She seemed to have nerves of iron”. Mrs Cook is to visit Allen this morning and will also try to see her next week.



Maggie Allen was hanged by Albert Pierrepoint at Strangeways Gaol on 12TH January 1949

her execution was the first female execution in Britain for 12 years.

The Home Secretary set up a new royal commission (the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, 1949–1953) with instructions to determine "whether the liability to suffer capital punishment should be limited or modified". The Commission's report discussed a number of alternatives to execution by hanging but rejected them. It had more difficulty with the principle of capital punishment. Popular opinion believed that the death penalty acted as a deterrent to criminals, but the statistics within the report were inconclusive on this issue. Whilst the report recommended abolition from an ethical standpoint, it made no mention of possible miscarriages of justice. It concluded that unless there was overwhelming public support in favour of abolition, the death penalty should be retained.

The Bacup Times

May 13th 1950

SAW MARGARET ALLEN EXECUTED

Prison Chaplain Says No Woman Should Be hanged

A prison chaplain who saw the execution in January last year of Margaret Allen, 42 year old ex- bus conductress of Rawtenstall and a former Bacup post woman the first woman to be hanged Britain since 1936 for the murder of 68 year old widow, told the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment yesterday week, "No Woman Should Be Hanged".

He is the Rev. Arthur Joseph Walker 48, now vicar of Tushingham, on the borders of Shropshire and Cheshire, until two months ago was chaplain at Strangeways Gaol. He said that having been present at the execution of five men and one woman it was his firm conviction that no woman should be hanged. If the state recognised the physical and mental differences between the sexes and refused to flog women then the more cruel punishment of hanging should be abolished.

"Like A Man" Telling how Allen went to her death. Mr Walker said she was a woman with plenty of grit and she faced it as a man would and I felt the whole thing was bestial and brutal. She was well prepared and behaved like a man. In fact she had more guts than most men I have seen. A prison official has told me that he has never felt fit since the thing happened and it happened over twelve months ago.

The prison Governor when he knew that a women was to be hanged never smiled for a fortnight waiting for the thing to happen normally he was a happy man. I do not think a man

should have to face such a thing, and the more decent a man is the more difficult it is for him. In the light of this experience I submit my firm conviction that in the 20th century no woman should be hanged.

But said a member of the commission, some of the most terrible crimes have been committed by women including poisoning. Mr Walker interrupted: " May I ask a question ? How man of you have seen a woman executed ? " The people who sit in the court give their verdict and their judgement, but the people who see the execution are the prison governor, chaplain, doctors, and prison officers.

EMOTIONAL STRAIN

Sir Ernest Gower president of the commission then turned to Mr Walker and said :-
"Are you opposed to capital punishment in principal ?" Mr Walker " I fear it must be retained in part for a time ". After the hanging of Miss Allen said Mr Walker, he had severe heart attacks and he had no doubt that the emotional strain of this execution was one of the factors to his breakdown. " I went into the prison service without any definite view on hanging. I have come out of it with a definite view that a woman should not be hanged, after seeing one woman hanged he added. Condemned prisoners said Mr Walker suffered when awaiting execution and felt a sense of the suffering their deaths would give to their families. They would repent but did not show the great remorse one sometimes heard of. If on the night before a execution I as the chaplain could be permitted to give a sleeping draft to the prisoner so that he would not wake up any more I should be much happier.