

①

David John Cole sworn saith:-

I am a Detective Chief Superintendent and Head of the Criminal Investigation Department of the West Mercia Constabulary, stationed at Police Headquarters, Hindlip Hall, Hindlip, near Worcester.

I am prepared to disclose as much evidence as possible to assist the Inquest. I am not, however, prepared to disclose all evidence in my possession. This is in no way an attempt to conceal anything, but I must be in a position to put evidence to a suspect which has not been previously released so that the accuracy of anything a suspect tells me may be tested.

On Saturday, 24th March 1984 I was informed that there was a suspicious death near Shrewsbury, and requested to attend that area. Accordingly I made my way to Shrewsbury and there met Senior Officers of the F Division of my Force.

At approximately 1.30 p.m. on 24th March 1984 I went to a small coppice known locally as The Moat at Hunkington, near Shrewsbury. I saw the body of an elderly white female, approximately 500 yards across a corn field, off a minor road that runs from Haughmond Hill towards Withington (map reference 563.141). The body was lying next to a tree on its right side, with the right arm bent and lying in front of the body, and the left arm was lying behind the body. The right leg was also slightly bent and lying underneath the left leg. She was wearing a brown woollen coat, two jumpers and an underslip. One stocking was found on the left foot and the other found close to the body. Also close to the body we found a skirt and a suspender belt. She was not wearing knickers.

I made a superficial examination of the body and could see that there was bruising and blood to the right side of the face. There were also cuts to both hands of a nature that I would describe as classical defence wounds. Both knees and shins were severely abraded and there was discolouration of these limbs.

I ascertained that death had been certified by the Police Surgeon, Dr. Charles, at approximately 12 mid-day, and I subsequently awaited the arrival of the Home Office Pathologist, Dr. Peter Acland. When Dr. Acland arrived, a further examination of the body was made in situ, and I then made arrangements for it to be removed to the Pathology Lab at The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital.

At the entrance to the field (shown on photographs 2 and 3 of album 1) adjacent to the coppice in which Miss Murrell's body was found is a concrete area, which I believe is used in connection with silage clamps. It is known locally as The Pad. Fifty yards from this entrance on the road running between Haughmond Hill and Withington was a white Renault 5 saloon car, registration number LNT 917W. The vehicle was close into the offside verge when facing towards hunkington. It appeared to have come to rest after a slight accident, and there were obvious signs that an effort had been made to move the vehicle after this minor accident. The efforts had obviously been unsuccessful.

D.J. Cole cont/...

Dealing with the question of this vehicle, my initial enquiries showed that the car had been seen in the ditch in the position in which it was found on the afternoon of 21st March 1984 by a local farmer who had notified the Police. Officers had attended the scene where the vehicle was within an hour, but they found that there were no apparent suspicious circumstances. There was only superficial damage to the car and there was no apparent danger or obstruction to any member of the public. They made a preliminary search of the immediate area, but there were no signs of injuries to anyone within the vehicle and, at that stage, they decided to take no further action. On the afternoon of the 23rd March 1984, there had been a further call concerning this vehicle as it was still in the position noted on the Wednesday. As a result Police Officers that evening went to Miss Murrell's home. They couldn't get any reply at the house and a search was organised the following morning. The result of that was that the body of Miss Murrell was found by Police in company with a gamekeeper's wife, on the morning of Saturday, 24th March 1984. The body was found at 10.25 a.m.

Miss Murrell had lived at a house called Ravenscroft, 52 Sutton Road, Shrewsbury. During the course of my enquiries I visited that house and examined it in some detail. I should also add that it was examined in great detail by forensic scientists and my own scientific officers. I found no evidence of forcible entry, but formed the opinion that access could have been gained to the house via an insecure door. I saw clear evidence that a struggle had taken place inside the house, and that a thorough and systematic search had been made of the premises. The front downstairs curtains were drawn and the electric light in one of the rooms had been left on. There were no signs of a sexual assault, but I did find signs within the house that there had been some sexual activity involving Miss Murrell, and this was later confirmed by forensic examination.

I ordered a detailed search of the area surrounding the position where Miss Murrell's body had been found. This subsequent search led to the finding of the deceased's moccasin type boots which were approximately two hundred yards from the body in the corn field between the road and the coppice. They were about 20 yards apart. Also in a different area adjacent to the hedge which led away from the Haughmond Hill/Withington road, where the vehicle was found, towards the coppice across the top of a corn field, further articles were found. Her spectacles were found on the Haughmond Hill side of that hedge, they were broken. Her wide brimmed brown coloured hat and a knife were found on the Withington side of the hedge, and the knife was actually found in a ditch on that side of the hedge. It is suspected, but not confirmed, that the knife found had been removed from the kitchen of Miss Murrell's house.

It is shown by my enquiries that on the morning of Wednesday, 21st March 1984, Miss Murrell went to local shops in the Abbey Foregate area of Shrewsbury. These shops are

D.J. Cole cont/....

situated within a mile of her home. She travelled to that area in her white Renault car. Several witnesses who knew her report seeing her in that area between 11 a.m. and 12 noon. It is also known that she visited her local Bank, where she withdrew a sum of money by cheque. She returned home at approximately 12 noon. I should mention at this stage two witnesses of specific importance:

Mr. George Lowe knew Miss Murrell for a considerable period of time, and saw her in Safeways at Abbey Foregate at approximately 11.30 a.m. on the morning of the 21st March 1984. He further saw her returning home in Sutton Road a little later that morning, possibly around 12 mid-day, when he was returning along the Sutton Road towards the Town Centre.

Mrs. Frances O'Connor who had also known Miss Murrell over a long period of time. On Wednesday, 21st March 1984 Mrs. O'Connor saw Miss Murrell at a time which she describes as between 12 noon and 1.30 p.m. From my enquiries I deduced that this was close to 12 noon. Miss Murrell at that time came to her house and she settled a small debt with Mrs O'Connor for some Charity draw tickets that she had had. She had a brief conversation with Mrs. O'Connor and returned on foot to her own house. That is the last sighting that we have of Miss Murrell under normal circumstances.

From enquiries I have directed, it is quite clear that Miss Murrell was driven away from her home at 52 Sutton Road by a man driving her car with Miss Murrell in the passenger seat. This journey travelled through Sutton Road to the Column Island to Monkmoor traffic lights and along Monkmoor Road. From there, along Telford Way to the Heathgates Island, along Sundorne Road and up to Haughmond Hill, turning right into the Haughmond Hill to Hunkington Road. This journey almost certainly commenced shortly before 1 p.m. on Wednesday, 21st March and took approximately twenty minutes to complete.

Numerous witnesses have been traced who saw the car on this particular journey. I will mention five of them. A schoolteacher has been traced who saw the car and its occupants travelling around the Column Island at just before 1 p.m. Shortly afterwards a local buyer, who was travelling from Monkmoor Road towards Abbey Foregate, saw the Renault car with a male driver and a female passenger come from the direction of the Column at a fast speed, and turn into Monkmoor Road. A local lady who lives in Sundorne and was travelling along that road just before 1 p.m. on the 21st March, from her home towards the Town Centre, saw the vehicle come around the Heathgates Island and move into Sundorne Road. A maintenance engineer who also lives in the Sundorne area was travelling from Shrewsbury towards High Ercall, at just before 1 p.m., when he had occasion to pull up behind a white Renault which had stopped at temporary traffic lights on that road near the Rugby Club. He is quite sure that he saw Miss Murrell as a passenger in this vehicle, driven by a male person at that particular time.

D.J. Cole cont/....

The vehicle travelled towards Haughmond Hill and drew away from his vision. A retired farm labourer, who lives in Upton Magna, passed along the Hunkington Road at approximately five minutes to one on the day in question. He does not remember seeing the Renault as he walked towards Sandy Bank turn, that is away from the Moat, where the body was found. However, on his return journey about fifteen minutes later, he does remember that the Renault was parked on the side of the road in the position in which it was subsequently found when the Police Officers were called to it.

In stating my conclusions about the likely sequence and pattern of events surrounding Miss Murrell's death, it is necessary to make assumptions and deductions. Whilst it is accepted that these may not necessarily be 100% accurate, they are nevertheless based on considerable experience and a thorough review of the facts.

One factor which has hampered the enquiry is the individual nature of Miss Murrell's character. Clearly this lady had the respect and affection of friends and relations, but it seems her nature did not allow these relationships to develop to such an extent that any person knew the intimate details of the patterns of her life. Therefore, the Police have experienced considerable difficulty with regard to establishing her exact possessions, clothing and her frequent and regular movements. It was probably for this reason that she was not reported missing to the Police, bearing in mind the added difficulty that she had a second home in the Llanymynech area, and she was known to frequently visit that area.

On the morning of Wednesday, 21st March 1984 Miss Murrell visited local shops in Abbey Foregate. She travelled to and from this area in her Renault car, returning at approximately 12 noon to her home. I believe, on returning to her home, Miss Murrell either disturbed an intruder in her premises or was followed into her house by the offender. There is no evidence of forced entry, but access into the house could have been gained through insecure doors.

Once inside the house Miss Murrell apparently had time to change from her outdoor clothing and put away some of her shopping. There is then evidence that a struggle with the offender ensued. This struggle took place upstairs.

Although there is no medical evidence that the deceased was subjected to a sexual assault, subsequent forensic tests revealed that she had been subjected to some form of sexual activity.

The money which she withdrew from the Bank has not been found and may therefore be presumed to have been stolen by the offender.

It then appears that either because of further violence or under extreme duress, Miss Murrell was abducted and driven away from her home in her own vehicle, a distance of approximately six miles to the scene of her death.

Witnesses indicate that the vehicle was driven erratically and at a considerable

speed along the route I have already described.

Evidence indicates that the journey took place between 12.45 p.m. and 1.10 p.m on the day in question. The Renault car came to rest approximately 1 and a quarter miles along Hunkington Lane, having collided with both sides of the banked verges of the roadway before coming to rest. There was only superficial damage to the vehicle, and an unsuccessful attempt had obviously been made to drive the vehicle out of the ditch.

The deceased woman had been beaten physically, and there were severe stab wounds in the abdominal region. It is speculated that in the absence of a significant amount of blood in the house or her vehicle, that the knife attack took place somewhere in the field where the body was found. She may well have been left mortally wounded, and subsequently died of Hypothermia.

The Police have been aware from the outset that one witness, Mr. Scott, has stated that he was in the Moat Wood at approximately 3.30 p.m. on the 22nd March 1984, and that he did not see Miss Murrell's body. This has been carefully considered and researched. He may be mistaken. The body was in a slight hollow and dressed in clothing which matched the undergrowth. The photographs may help to illustrate this point.

One of the main thrusts of the enquiry has been the effort put into tracing the movements of Miss Murrell whilst in the company of the man driving her vehicle on the afternoon of the 21st March. This enquiry has resulted in 69 witnesses being traced. Working with these witnesses photofits, artists impressions, descriptions of the alleged offender have been produced and circulated widely. It became apparent that at what could be considered a relevant time, following the assault upon Miss Murrell out of the Haughmond Hill area, a grey-suited man was seen running away from the Haughmond Hill area on the 21st March. A reconstruction of this event has been staged, and 48 further witnesses have been traced who can tell us something about this running man. Despite this effort and public appeals he has not yet been identified.

Intensive enquiries in the Sutton Road area revealed that during the recent days preceding the murder, 113 unidentified persons visited that location. That is in addition to the large number of people who were traced who were readily identified. There were 50 of these unidentified persons in Sutton Road alone, on the actual day of the murder. Tracing these people was another major part of the enquiry necessitating visiting several different parts of the country.

One particular problem was that a group of Nottingham based door to door salesmen visited the houses in that area during the course of that week. We have interviewed 370 salesmen as a result of our enquiries to establish those present during the

6

D.J. Cole cont/....

material time. There are several educational centres nearby, and these created another problem which required that Police Officers interviewed 290 absentees from these establishments to clarify their movements. Eventually, the process of elimination resulted to date in only 3 of the unidentified persons known to be in Sutton Road on the day of the murder remaining untraced.

Some 3,590 persons have been nominated as the potential suspect by members of the Police, public, or by virtue of their description, previous convictions for like offences or evidence based upon modus operandi. These have all been researched by local and national intelligence agencies. The antecedents of those nominated have been analysed having regard to the age, appearance of the suspect and varying elements of the modus operandi disclosed in this murder investigation. This has resulted in a total of 962 persons being processed in the major incident room at Shrewsbury Divisional Police Headquarters. 491 have been interviewed and 471 are outstanding: that is to say that either any active enquiry on them has been deferred for the time being for a good reason or other, or they are currently subject to an on going enquiry.

Certain newspapers and individuals have suggested that Miss Murrell's death may be connected with her views which were opposed to the use of nuclear power/arms. They have drawn attention particularly to the fact that she was at the time of her death preparing a paper to oppose the Sizewell B project.

The Police are well aware of various theories suggested concerning Miss Murrell's murder, including this one. Naturally, some of the theories are given more credence than others, but all received consideration.

A small team of Officers were specifically assigned to enquire into the Sizewell B aspect, but have failed to find any evidence connecting this project with Miss Murrell's death or, for that matter, her view on any other matters connected with nuclear arms etc.

In fact, this morning, I have reviewed all the evidence at my disposal, both photographic and film, and I am still left with the inescapable conclusion that this was an offence of burglary, and the offender was after in the main cash. There is evidence contained within my incident room which leads to that conclusion.

The West Mercia Police have maintained an open minded approach to this enquiry, and have not felt reluctant to seek or receive help from any quarter. Accordingly, data concerning the case, collected over a period of months, was forwarded through Interpol to the F.B.I. This data was analysed to prepare a criminal personality profile of the offender. Their reply was closely assigned to the views formed by the senior local investigating officers, and extracts of this profile were circulated on T.V. and in the Press. The public responded with many suggestions, some made anonymously on a tape telephone fitted at Shrewsbury H.Q., and all suggestions have been evaluated and investigated.

D.J. Cole cont/...

The depth of the enquiry is revealed by the following figures, which are for the period 21.3.83 to 30.11.84, when they were updated last.

We have pursued 4,404 lines of enquiry.

We have received 1,361 messages from members of the public attempting to give us information about this matter.

My Officers have recorded 2,162 statements from potential witnesses.

They have submitted to me for consideration 101 reports in connection with various matters throughout the enquiry.

The major incident room records now total individual indices of 55,098 records.

We have visited 4,800 houses during house to house enquiries in an attempt to obtain information.

We have interviewed 11,900 residents of Shrewsbury and

Have sent up road checks and checked 1,570 vehicles.

EXD. MRS. BUTCHER

The knife we found at the scene is similar in pattern, design and manufacture to other kitchen knives at Miss Murrell's house.

Had the injuries caused to Miss Murrell been inflicted in her own home, we would have expected to find evidence of this in the house. I can't say that the injuries were definitely inflicted within the coppice, but somewhere between the car and the coppice.

Had it been found that there was some connection with her death and her work in the anti-nuclear field, we would not have felt in any way inhibited in our enquiries.

EXD. MR. ONIONS

With the passing of time since the discovery of Miss Murrell's body I can say that there has been no lessening of the commitment by the Police to find the person or persons responsible for the death of Miss Murrell, and I can categorically state that there won't be in the immediate future. I am committed by my Chief Constable to pursuing this matter while there is any useful work that can be done in connection with find the perpetrator of this particular act.

H.M. CORONER

On that evidence I formally find that Miss Hilda Murrell died at Hunkington, near Upton Magna, Shropshire, probably on the 21st March 1984, but possibly in the early hours of 22nd March 1984.

I find that the medical cause of her death was as given to me by Dr. Acland in evidence:-

- Ia) Hypothermia due to
- b) Penetrating wounds to the abdomen with  
Multiple Bruises to the Face

It is clear from the evidence that we have heard that those injuries that brought <sup>about</sup> this lady's death were occasioned by being attacked by a person who had abducted her from her home and driven her to Hunkington in the early afternoon of Wednesday, 21st March 1984. It is clear that having driven her to Hunkington, at some point between removing her from the car, or her getting out of the car, and the place in which she was subsequently found, he attacked her and caused the injuries which brought about her subsequent death.

The only verdict that I can record in such a case is that THE DECEASED WAS KILLED UNLAWFULLY.