

[THE TIMES: 10 JANUARY 1985]

## Hilda Murrell case

From Dr P. R. Acland

Sir, I write concerning speculation in certain newspapers about the Hilda Murrell case. Such speculation appears now to cast suspicion on the validity of the post-mortem reports as well as the other allegations of impropriety in the police investigations.

Although I receive a retainer from the Home Office, I am jealous of my independence as a pathologist and I consider myself answerable only to Her Majesty's Coroner and the judiciary.

With respect to my involvement in the case, I carried out the post-mortem examination to the best of my ability. I was given every assistance by the police and was not denied any information which I deemed relevant to help me in my inquiries. I was not approached or influenced by any member of any Secret Service organization. I was not aware of any involvement by such persons in the case. I do not believe either that any of the involved police officers were so influenced.

I read my report at the inquest and was thoroughly cross-examined not only by the Coroner but also by a solicitor instructed by the nephew.

I did not avoid or refuse to answer any questions.

The reason for the second post-mortem was also explained at the inquest - there is nothing sinister in this: it is usual for the defence to be given the opportunity to have an independent pathologist.

When, after several months, no defendant had been "apprehended", the Director of Public Prosecutions thought it prudent to have a second post-mortem which could be available for a potential defendant so that the body could be released for appropriate funeral arrangements. In fact, the second pathologist kindly notified me that he agreed with all my findings and conclusions.

I am not sure what else I can do to satisfy the concern of the family. With the permission of the Coroner I am quite happy to discuss the case with any pathologist nominated by the family.

I don't know who killed Miss Murrell, but I have a strong suspicion that some twopenny halfpenny thief is gloating over a pint of beer in a pub not many miles from Shrewsbury about all this media interest.

Yours faithfully,

P. R. ACLAND,  
20 Clarendon Road, Edgbaston,  
Birmingham, W. Midlands.

# INQUEST

UNITED CAMPAIGNS FOR JUSTICE.

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Alexandra National House,  
330 Seven Sisters Road,  
Finsbury Park,  
London N4 2PJ.

4 Feb 1985

Tam Dalyell MP  
The Binns  
Linlithgow  
EH49 7NA

Dear Mr Dalyell,

MISS HILDA MURRELL

Further to my colleague, Dave Leadbetter's, telephone conversation with you today, I am writing to explain what appears to us to be the misleading information about the law given to you by the Home Office.

In his written answer to you of 17 Jan (Hansard, col. 174), Mr Giles Shaw stated:


Turning to the availability to Miss Murrell's family of the post-mortem report, the release of this on formal application is a matter entirely within the coroner's discretion and not one in which I would intervene.

The supply of a post-mortem report on formal application is covered by Rule 57 of the Coroners Rules 1984 (S.I. No. 552). These Rules do not, however, apply to a post-mortem conducted before 1 July 1984 and the relevant Rule is therefore Rule 39 of the Coroners Rules 1953 (S.I. No. 205). Both these rules include the following words:

A coroner shall, on application and on payment of the prescribed fee (if any), supply to any person who, in the opinion of the coroner, is a properly interested person a copy of (...) any report of a post-mortem examination....

The release of the post-mortem is not, then, "entirely within the coroner's discretion", once he has decided that the applicant is a "properly interested person". The phrase "properly interested person" is also used to describe a person who is entitled to question witnesses at an inquest. It is very difficult to see how a coroner can acknowledge a person as "properly interested" in being represented at the inquest, but not in applying for a copy of the post-mortem. We would argue that it is not within the coroner's lawful discretion to withhold the post-mortem report from a person who is entitled to examine witnesses at inquest, as defined by r.20 of the 1984 Rules.

Yours sincerely,

  
Tony Ward, LL.M.

**Tel: 01-802 7430**

Mrs Hilda Murrell : comments on pathology aspects.  
Professor Bernard Knight : 28 March 1985.

1. The apparent errors in the post mortem report of Dr Acland as recorded in the inquest transcript are due to **faulty transcription**. these will be detailed and corrected below.
2. The reason for the seemingly sudden disposal of the body was that complaints were made by the staff of the pathology department, including the consultant pathologist, that decomposition was becoming objectionable. Copthorne Hospital does NOT in fact have deep-freeze facilities. It seems that these comments reached the police via mortuary attendants and the coroner's officer. Advice was taken from the D.F.P. that disposal should be effected after a second independent autopsy, which could be used by the defence if a person was subsequently charged.
- 3 The second autopsy was made by dr.N>D>Gower, consultant pathologist at Sandwell District General Hospital, on **July 27th**. He found the body to be "**in very poor condition**" due to **extensive dessication** and growth of moulds, which is to expected in a body stored at conventional mortuary temperature, instead of in deep freeze at -20C. dr.Gower agreed in all particulars with dr Acland's findings, except where decay had rendered examination difficult.
4. I examined the ~~large chef's knife~~ found in a ditch near the scene and am confident that it could **not** have caused all the wounds on the body, **especially that on the right arm**. The blade is too wide to have caused such a narrow track at the required depth of insertion and this applies to several of abdominal wounds which have penetrated the liver. This view is shared by Dr. Acland and indeed the police. No blood was detected on the blade by the forensic laboratory, though of course it had lain in the rain for a considerable time.
5. I examined the brown overcoat and saw a group of knife cuts around a button on the front edge, corresponding to the cuts on the abdomen. There was also a corresponding cut on the upper right arm. These cuts showed quite heavy dried bloodstains around them and seem to confirm that the wounds **were inflicted during life**.
6. I examined various organs preserved in formalin, including **stomach, larynx and genitalia**. The larynx and tongue showed extensive bruising and there were fractures of the hyoid bone. As there was no bruising of the overlying skin, the best explanation would be an "**arm-lock**" around the neck, rather than a manual gripping of the throat, though this **cannot be entirely excluded**. The appearances are **quite unlike** a "karate chop" to the neck.
7. I examined a number of police colour photographs of the body, with and without clothing and at various stages of the autopsy. These agreed in all particulars with the descriptions given in the post-mortem report.

Discrepancies in post-mortem report

Dr Acland was called at 11.30, but visited the scene at 15.25. The "dress" was actually a skirt. The "socks" were in fact socks, being green-brown in colour.

The bruising on the left side of the face mentioned in the examination at the scene, is also an error in the full report, being the right side when fully described later in the report.

Dr Acland is of the opinion that the knife which caused the arm wound is likely to be 1cm approx wide, and 5 cm or so in length with at least one cutting edge.

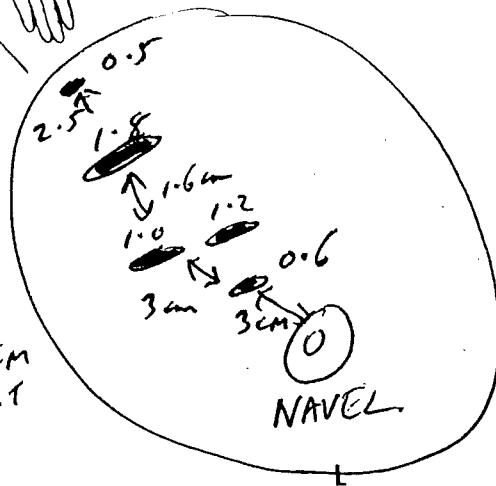
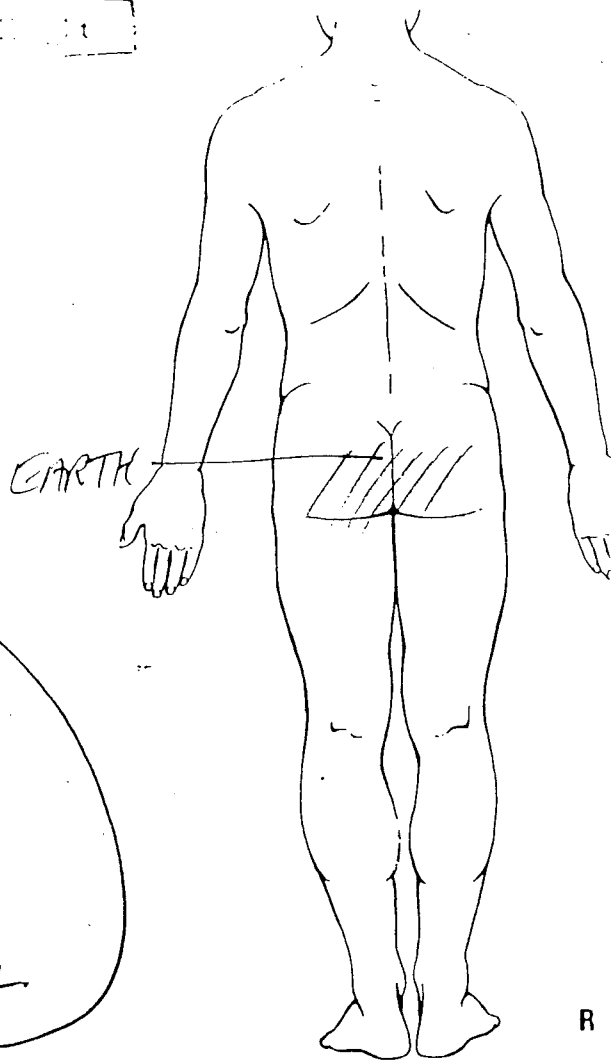
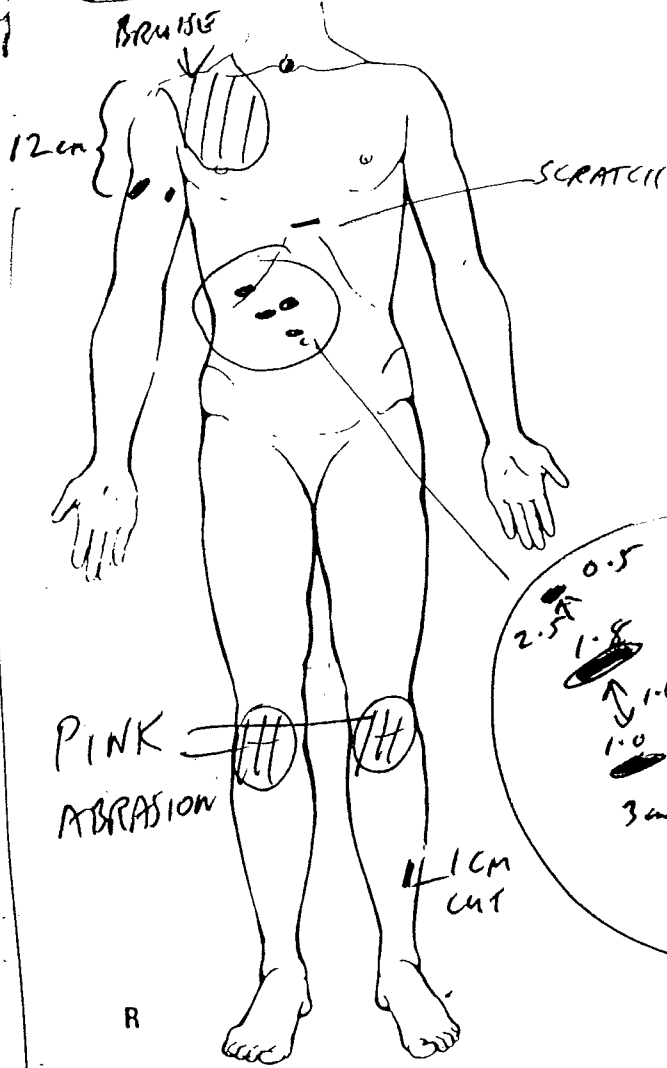
When describing the group of stab wounds on the abdomen, the transcript adds two non-existent wounds, by partially repeating the words of the actual p.m. report. the phrase "3cm beyond this were two adjacent wounds measuring 0.6 cm in length" is redundant. ~~There were five wounds~~, not seven as recorded in the transcript.

The fronts of the knees were abraded and pink, the latter being partly due to the effects of hypothermia. There were no grazes on the buttocks, but they were soiled with earth. This suggests that the lady had crawled on her knees, probably losing her skirt in the process, then at some stage falling on to her back to get soiling of the buttocks. ~~There was no positive evidence of any dragging.~~

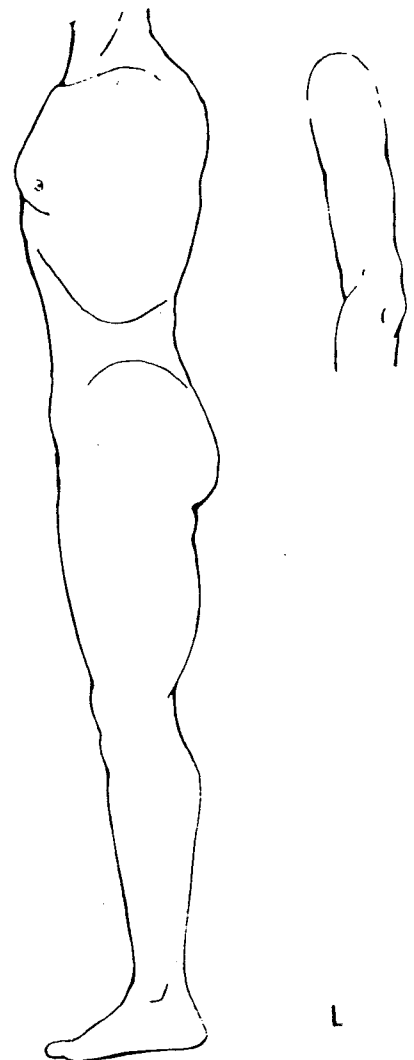
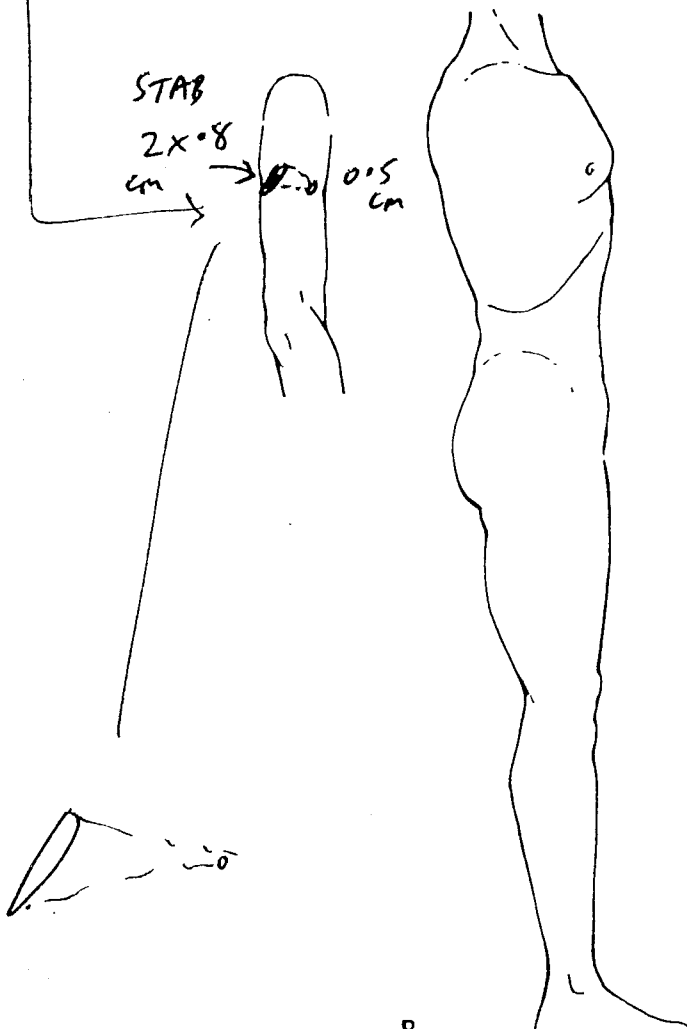
The hypostasis was slight in the right lateral position: the slight degree is not unusual, it can even be ~~absent altogether~~ especially in old people. The position corresponds with the posture in which the body was found. This does not exclude alteration of the body position after death, but unless replaced in the same posture, the body would have to be left undisturbed for at least some hours before discovery to allow secondary sinkage of the hypostasis again.

Dr Acland's estimate of 5 -10 hours probable delay ~~from abandonment to death~~ was in response to direct questioning by coroner, ~~who wanted a most likely date of death~~ for certification. Dr. Acland readily admits ~~the lack of any firm basis for this length of time~~, but it was freezing conditions on the Wednesday/Thursday and such a time is reasonable. The knife wounds have no significant pattern: the police wonder if the infliction on the right side of the body (together with the facial injuries suggests a left-handed assailant, but in my view such a deduction is highly questionable.

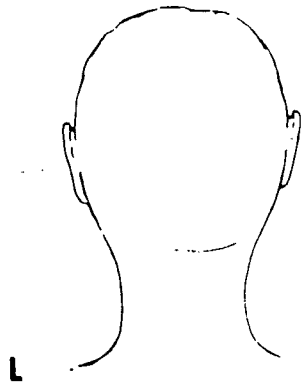
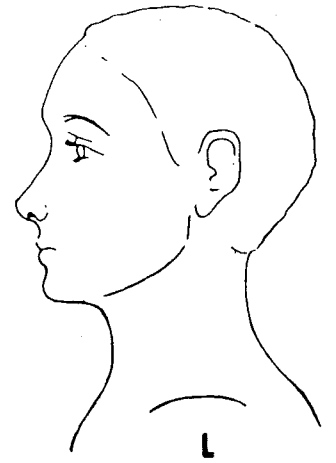
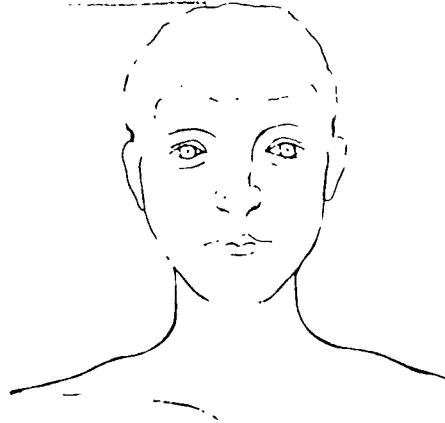
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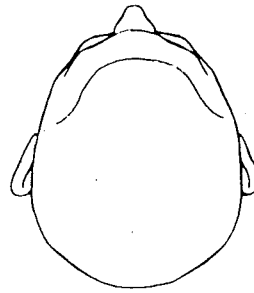
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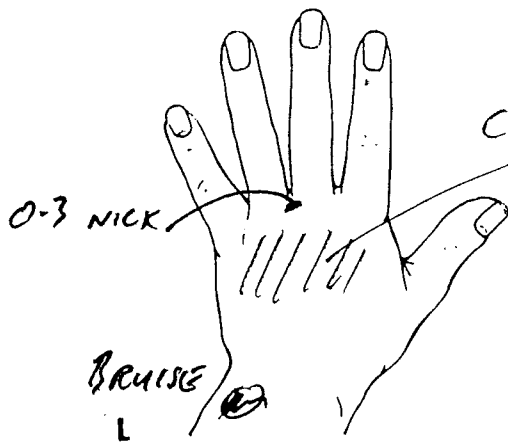
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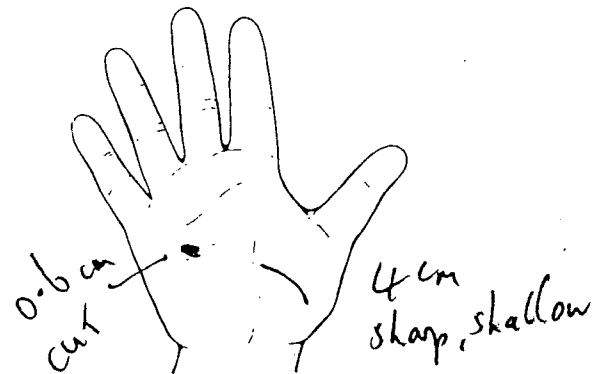
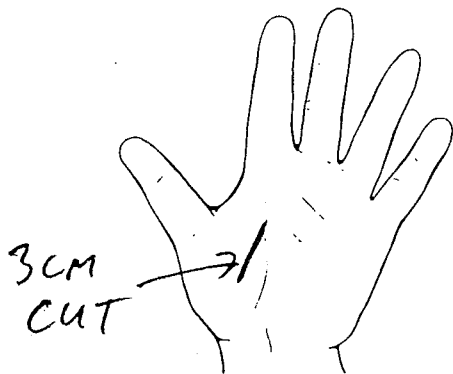
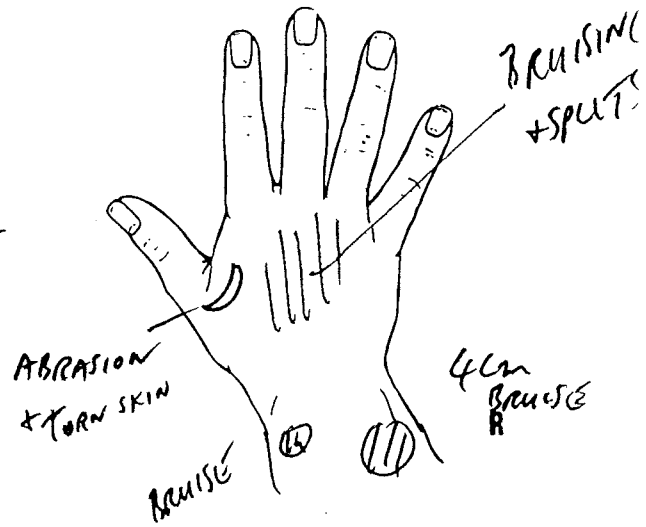
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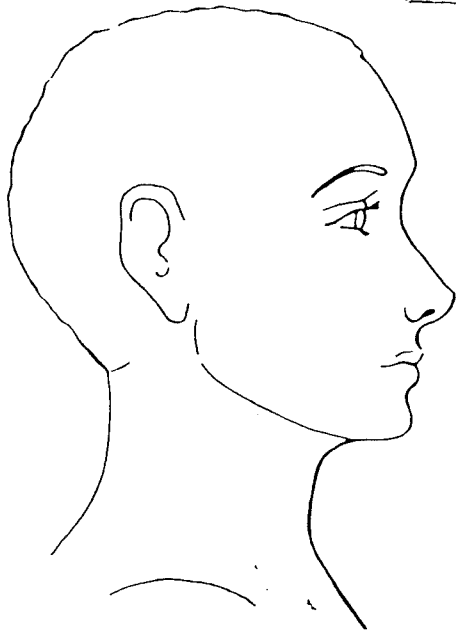


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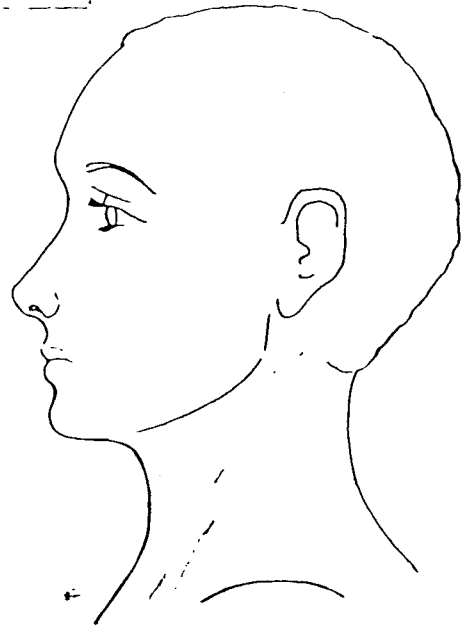


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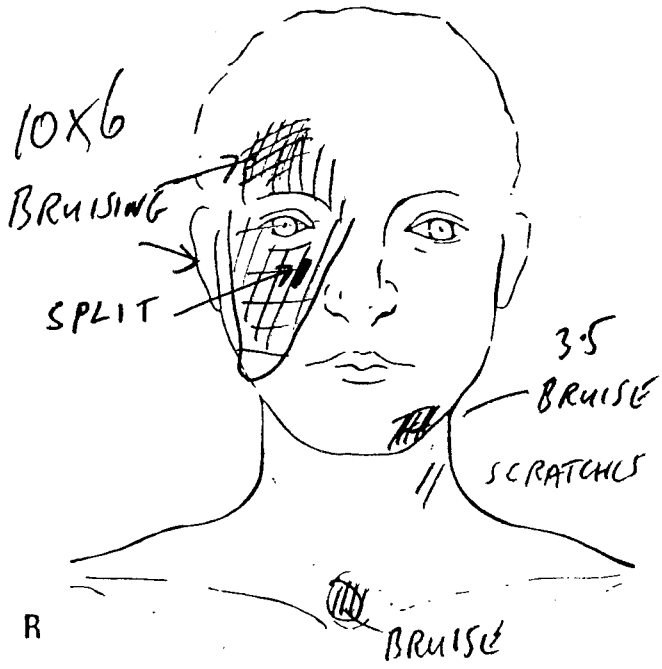




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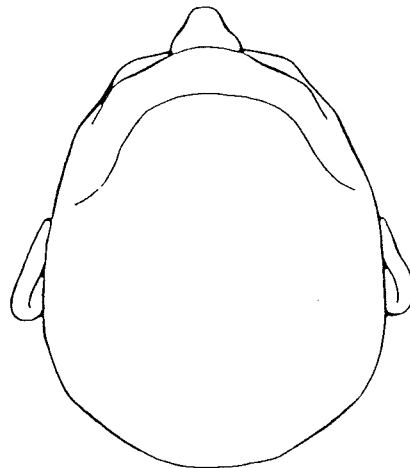
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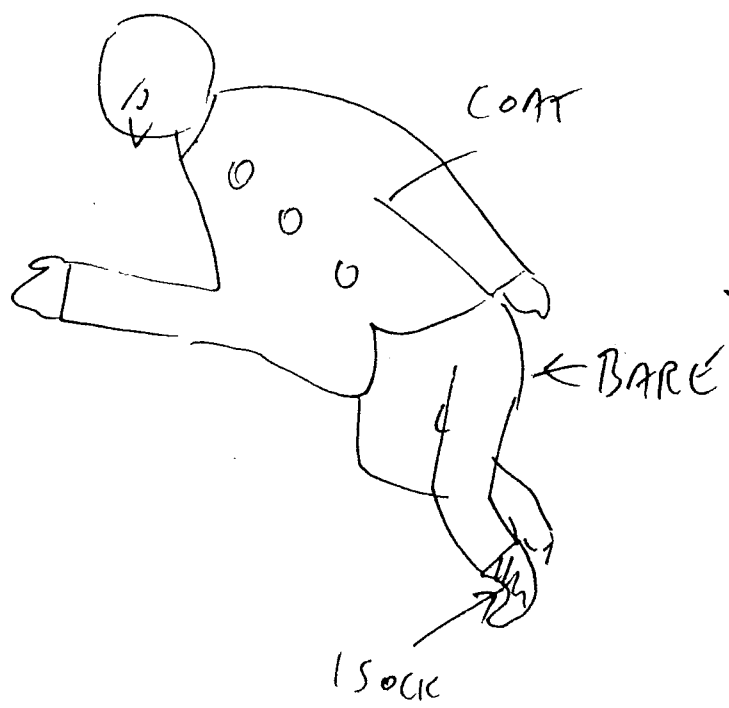
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