



Terrible Tragedy at Amesbury Army Pensioner Murders His Six Children and Commits Suicide

A terrible tragedy occurred in Amesbury between 4.00 p.m. and Midnight on Friday 22nd last. The discovery was made by P. Wells, the local constable who found a man named Peter Robert Head and his 6 children lying dead with their throats cut on South Mill Hill, which is situated just off the main road to Salisbury and behind the Union Workhouse.

Head was formerly a Sergeant Major in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He had lived in Amesbury with his wife and children for 2 years. He had a pension of nearly 20s. a week and added to his income by carrying on the business of being an insurance agent. Previous to coming to the village he lived in Andover, where he conducted a poultry farm.

On the Friday afternoon in question Head brought his wife a cup of tea, which he had made for her, and asked her to dress the baby that he might take him to show a neighbour. She complied with his request, and he left the house about 3.30 p.m. with the baby, who was 9 months old, in his arms. He then made his way to the National School, where his 6 other children were being educated, and asked Mr. Hallett, the schoolteacher, whether it would be convenient for his daughter Elsie to leave school at once, as he wanted her. Mr. Hallett said she could go, and sent her out of school. She left by the girl's entrance, and as the Head was waiting by the boy's entrance, he missed her. Knocking at the door a few minutes later, he asked if she had left the school and was told that she had. He then waited till the school was dismissed, and getting his 5 other children together, proposed a walk through the fields. They then started off, and both the father, who still carried the baby and the children, seemed in good spirits. About

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4.30 p.m. the father and all the children were seen by a farm labourer named Henry Bryant, walking up Amesbury Hill. The girl Florence was holding the baby and the father leading one of the poor unfortunate boys by the hand. This was the last time they were seen alive. As they had not returned home by 11.00 p.m. Mrs. Head became alarmed, and went and informed PC Wells, who was standing in The Square, that her husband and children had not come home. The constable reported the matter to PS Scott, who instructed him to proceed along the Salisbury Road in search of them. After going all around the ricks and Stockport Bottom, PC Wells turned into South Mill Hill, an old pathway, and upon flashing his lantern around a rick about 20 yards from the track, discovered the dead bodies of the baby and Florence Ellen Head lying a yard or so apart in a pool of blood. Their throats were cut, and from the position of the girl, it seemed that she must have fallen with the baby as she was running away. The constable returned immediately to the Police Station, and informing PS Scott, they both with Dr. Lockyer, went back to the scene of the tragedy. Continuing the search, 60 yards further on and away from this track, they found the body of Mildred Head, also was her throat terribly cut. On the other side of another rick, and some 22 yards distance from the last mentioned little girl, were the dead bodies of the 3 boys lying under another hayrick. Like all the other children, they were fully dressed and their throats had been cut. The boy, Alfred Head aged 3, was blindfolded. At the same spot was found the body of the father, partly dressed. His shirt collar was unbuttoned and rolled back, and his throat was cut from ear to ear. The windpipe was severed, and close by his right hand was a blood stained razor. A short distance away were his jacket, waistcoat, collar, and tie, all placed underneath his bowler hat. There was also a note written to the "Coroner". A second razor was found by the body of the baby. The bodies were quite stiff and cold, and according to medical evidence given at the inquest, the murders must have been committed at dusk, as the children and their father had the appearance of having been dead some hours. Following upon the ghastly discovery PC Scott procured a horse and cart and removed the bodies to the Workhouse Mortuary, there to await the inquest, which was held on Monday. The position of the bodies of Florence Ellen Head and Frederick George Head situated as they were so far from those of the father and other children, seemed to indicate that the girl attempted to run away with the baby, but being overtaken, met with the horrible fate of her brothers and sister. The names of the murdered children were: Mildred Grace Head aged 10, Florence Ellen Head age 7, William Robert Head age 6, Peter Head age 4, Alfred Head age 2, Frederick George Head age 9 months.

The news of the tragedy was conveyed to the widow and the surviving daughter as gently as possible, whom, quite naturally, have since been prostrated with grief at the deed. Head, who had always borne an irreproachable character, and was a keen business man, and who was devoted to his wife and children, left letters to the Vicar of Amesbury, the Rev. R. Fawkes, Battery Sergeant Major Stamp, 122nd Battery, Bulford Camp and his insurance superintendent, Mr. Read, in addition to a note addressed to the Coroner. All of these were read at the inquest. They went to show the terrible crime was pre-conceived and deliberately perpetrated, whilst the fact that the second razor found at South Mill Hill was purchased by Head earlier in the day from an Amesbury barber, leads further support to the belief that the tragedy was premeditated. No reason can be found for the deed, since the unfortunate man's books were found to be in perfect order. It seems according to one account that Head wrote a letter on Friday to his superintendent, in which he stated "By the time you receive this, I shall be no more. I am worried by the wretched state of my books and by domestic troubles. "The superintendent, Mr. Read, took the first train from Wilton to Amesbury on the following morning, and learnt the sad tidings. He subsequently examined Head's book and found they were quite correct. A remarkable feature of the tragic occurrence seems to be that no cries or appeals for help were heard. South Mill Hill is situated a comparatively few yards from the Salisbury Road, on which there is always a good deal of traffic of one kind or another, especially during the afternoon. The track too, can easily be seen by people passing by in conveyances.

It is thought the losing of his capital in the poultry farm which he had established at a place close to Andover, played on Head's mind. He suffered from sunstroke when serving in India with the Artillery, and about 8 years ago he had a fall of the ramparts at Portsmouth which apparently affected his head.

At the inquest the jury's verdict was that he was insane at the time of the crimes committed on his children and when he killed himself he was of unsound mind.

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