



The Goddard Arms in Swindon's Old Town

Tragic Tale of Murder at the Goddard Arms Retold

“Murder of a Sweetheart – Prisoner’s Story of a Girl’s Deception and Death” announced The Times headlines when Walter James White, 22, a house decorator from Swindon appeared at Wiltshire Assizes charged with the murder of Frances Hunter on April 29, 1914.

Frances Priscilla Hunter, 24, was working as a maid at the hotel when her lover Walter White called on her. The couple went into one of the outbuildings where, as White later confessed, she said: “For God’s sake do it, then! She kissed me goodbye, and I then shot her and waited for somebody to come.”

Frances was born in Devizes, the daughter of labourer Richard Hunter and his wife Mary. At the time of her death she was working as a maid at the Old Town hostelry.

Walter, the son of Thomas White, a railway labourer, appears on the 1901 census, the youngest of four children, living with his parents and grandmother at 17 Turner Street.

The report in the Times states that the couple had some time previously visited Frances’ brothers who were working at Gilfach, in Glamorgan. White was surprised when Mrs Blewitt, the brothers’ lodging house keeper, refused to receive Frances.

The upstanding Mrs Blewitt later wrote to White telling him there was something he ought to know. White made a return visit to Gilfach where Mrs Blewitt told him that Frances “had for some months lived with another woman’s husband as his wife.”

But the interfering Mrs Blewitt could hardly have anticipated the tragedy that was to unfold. White bought some cartridges for his revolver before returning to Swindon.

In his statement to the police White said he had challenged Frances concerning Mrs Blewitt’s gossip. He said: “I asked her if it was right. She confessed she had disgraced me and hoped God would forgive her. “I told her she would never deceive anybody else as I was going to kill her.”

White was found standing over the girl’s body, a revolver in his hand.

The report continues that he coolly advised the manager of the hotel to send for the police.

Several letters were found on him after his arrest. In one he spoke of how "I have been ruined by my sweetheart." To the girl's father Richard he wrote "You ought to have a bullet put through you, instead of Frances. You are as much to blame as she is. You have killed two lives with the price of your silence."

Defence counsel Mr Trapnell, pleaded that White was in "such a perturbed state he was not responsible" but the jury didn't buy the excuse. White was found guilty and executed at Winchester prison on June 15, 1914.

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