

THE MURDERS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM

1870-1970

GORDON HONEYCOMBE



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I do not now believe that any one of the hundreds of executions I carried out has in any way acted as a deterrent against future murder. Capital punishment, in my view, achieved nothing except revenge.

Albert Pierrepoint, 1974

FOREWORD

The Black Museum is now over a hundred years old. It came into being in 1875, when exhibits that had been acquired as evidence and produced in court in connection with various crimes were collected together and privately displayed in a cellar in 1 Palace Place, Old Scotland Yard, Whitehall. Ten years later the augmented collection was moved to a small back room on the second floor of the offices of the Convict Supervision Department. By then the objects on display, consisting mainly of weapons and all carefully labelled, numbered about 150.

In 1890, when the Metropolitan Police began moving into their impressive new headquarters at New Scotland Yard on the Victoria Embankment (designed by Norman Shaw RA), the museum went too. It was now called the Police Museum, its primary object being to provide some lessons in criminology for young policemen and its secondary one to act as a repository for artefacts associated with celebrated crimes and criminals. Privileged visitors, criminologists, lawyers, policemen and people working with the police were guided around the museum by the curator, who over the last century has always been a former policeman, with a special responsibility for the cataloguing, maintenance and display of the exhibits and for dealing with correspondence from criminologists all over the world.

In 1968, when the Metropolitan Police moved into their modern high-rise premises at 10 The Broadway, London SW1, the museum, now officially called the Crime Museum, occupied a large room on the second floor. Eleven years later, on the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Metropolitan Police force, it was decided to reassess, reorganize and modernize every aspect of the museum – as well as the three other Metropolitan Police museums: the Historical Museum on the top floor of Bow Street police station (open to the public on request); the Thames Museum at Wapping; and the Training Museum in Hendon Training School. The last had assumed completely the instructional role previously shared with the Crime Museum, which was now able to fulfil its entire function as a museum. Its original title was restored, and on 12 October 1981 the Black Museum, on the first floor of New Scotland Yard, was officially reopened by the Commissioner, Sir David McNee.

The Black Museum's historical collection of articles and exhibits is unique. It covers more than murder.

Other sections deal with Forgeries, Espionage, Drugs, Offensive Weapons, Abortions, Gaming, House-breaking, Bombs and Sieges, and Crime pre-1900. The museum also houses displays concentrating on particular crimes, such as the Great Train Robbery and the attempted kidnapping of Princess Anne, and possesses such peculiar exhibits as Mata Hari's visiting-card, a fake Cullinan diamond, a loving-cup skull with silver handles, two death masks of Heinrich Himmler, and thirty-two plaster casts of the heads of hanged criminals, men and women, executed in the first half of the nineteenth century at Newgate, Derby and York. The heads, still bearing the mark of the rope, are said to have been made to record the features of those who were executed. Many criminals then used aliases, and the only way of identifying them after death (before the use of photographs and finger-prints) was to keep these plaster likenesses. In addition, some if not all of the heads were probably made for doctors or phrenologists bent on proving theories about the physiognomy of criminal types by examining the bumps, shape and all aspects of an actual criminal's head after its owner was dead and gone.

Visitors' books, also maintained in the museum, contain records of a different sort: the signatures of such notable persons as HM King George V, HRH Edward, Prince of Wales, Stanley Baldwin, Sir Arthur Sullivan, W. S. Gilbert, Captain Shaw of the London Fire Brigade, and William Marwood, executioner.

Some items discovered in the stock-taking of the museum in 1981 have still to be identified, and there is an undisplayed mass of other material (newspapers, cuttings, photographs, documents, letters and miscellaneous objects) relating to the exhibits on show and to other crimes. This material is kept under lock and key in cupboards below the show-cases, mainly because space is restricted, but also because some of the items – for instance, the police photographs of Gordon Cummins's victims – are too obscene to be shown.

I first visited the Black Museum in 1979. It was a most interesting and very disturbing experience. There was a certain grim fascination in seeing the actual instruments and implements used by criminals, infamous or otherwise, and in seeing other more innocuous items given a sinister cast in the context of their use. But the effect of the exhibits on display was cumulatively shocking. They presented a dreadful picture of ruthlessness, greed, cruelty, lust, envy and

hate, of man's inhumanity to man – and especially to women. There was nothing of kindness or consideration. There was no nobility, save that of the policemen murdered on duty. There was very little mercy. But the museum made me realize what a policeman must endure in the course of his duty: what sights he sees, what dangers he faces, what depraved and evil people he has to deal with so that others may live secure. The museum also made me curious to know more facts about the people whose stories were shadowed by the exhibits on display.

This book deals with a very few of the murders investigated by the officers of the Metropolitan Police between 1870 and 1970. This hundred-year period embraces many of the major murder cases in the history of Scotland Yard as well as the major advances in crime detection. The museum has some exhibits relating to murders before 1870 (notably a letter written by the poisoner William Palmer) and several associated with murders after 1970 (notably the murder of Lesley Whittle by Donald Neilson in 1975). But I felt that the grief suffered by families whose relatives had been murdered after 1970 was too recent to be revived by a detailed account. The murder that ends this book, that of Mrs McKay, seemed a fitting conclusion to the whole sequence, having been more publicized than most and being in many ways extraordinary. In fact it may have happened not in 1970 but at the end of 1969.

The accounts of these murders of the Black Museum have been dealt with as case histories, with an emphasis on factual, social and historical detail, and on the characters and background of both the victim and the killer. Principal sources are listed at the back of the book, but in the main, statements and court proceedings have formed the basis for each story. No dialogue

has been invented; it has been reproduced from statements and evidence given by the murderer as well as by witnesses and the police. What was said or alleged at the time by those most closely involved in a murder case may not always be true, but it is, I feel, of paramount importance in understanding the events that lead up to an act of murder and the complex motives and personalities of those most closely concerned. Like the superintendent or inspector in charge of a case I have tried to find out exactly what happened and why. It is my impression that the police officers investigating a murder ultimately have a clearer understanding of character, method and motive than some of the lawyers who take part in the ensuing trial. A court of law is seldom a place where the whole truth is told or revealed. It is in some respects a theatre of deception, with witnesses, defendants and barristers seeking to deceive the jury and each other. Even the judge, the arbitrator of truth, can mislead and be misled through ignorance or bias. But in a police station, although a suspect may lie as much as he likes, a truer picture of events and character is more likely to be attained in the end. Police reports concerning a murder and sent to a chief constable or commissioner are most sensible, lucid presentations of comment and fact. It is a pity they are not also available to the members of a jury in a court of law.

In working on this book I have been afforded the generous co-operation of New Scotland Yard. For this I am most grateful, and I would particularly like to thank the following for their individual assistance: Mr Peter Neivens; Patricia Plank and the staff of the Commissioner's Reference Library; the Museums' Co-ordinator, Paul Williams; and the Curator of the Black Museum, Bill Waddell.

INTRODUCTION

Murder is a very rare event in Britain. Its exceptional nature is in fact part of its fascination. More than ten times as many people are killed on the roads each year as are victims of a murderer.

In 1980, 564 cases of murder, manslaughter and infanticide, all now classed as homicide, were currently recorded in England and Wales. On the roads of Britain in 1979/80, 6,352 people were killed and 81,000 injured.

It must be said, however, that these figures for death on the roads were the lowest for thirty years and that the homicide figure was unnaturally high. Indeed the car-death figure, when compared with that of other decades and with the number of cars on the roads, shows an astonishing decrease in fatalities. In 1931, for instance, when 1,104,000 cars and vans were on the roads, 6,691 people were killed and over 200,000 injured. Yet in 1979/80, with over 15 million cars on the road, the death-toll was much lower as was the number of those injured. The worst year for road fatalities was significantly 1941, the second full year of the Second World War, when 9,169 people were killed. It is worth noting that deaths caused by reckless driving are not classified as homicide by the police, who recorded 235 such deaths on the roads in Britain in 1980.

The year 1980 was unusual in terms of homicide in that, of the 564 homicides currently recorded, 94 occurred in fires – 37 in a Soho club and 10 in a hostel in Kilburn. In addition 23 deaths that had occurred in fires in the Hull area between 1973 and 1978, when they were regarded as accidental, were recorded as homicides in 1980. This meant that the homicide figure for 1980, without the unusually high figure of deaths in fires, would have been under 450 – a great reduction on the 551 homicides recorded in 1979. Instead, with the figure of 94 deaths in fires included, the overall number of currently recorded homicides in 1980 (564) is the highest on record.

Although this figure is very small when compared with road fatalities and when seen against the total population of this country, it nonetheless shows a small increase in deaths by murder, manslaughter and infanticide. The figure, seen as a percentage per million of the population of England and Wales, is 11.5. In 1970, when 339 homicides were ultimately recorded, the percentage was 7.

Offences currently recorded by the police as

homicide, seen against the number per million of the population, are as follows:

1970	.....339	: 7.0	1976	.....489	: 9.9
1971	.....407	: 8.3	1977	.....418	: 8.5
1972	.....409	: 8.3	1978	.....472	: 9.6
1973	.....391	: 8.0	1979	.....551	: 11.2
1974	.....526	: 10.7	1980	.....564	: 11.5
1975	.....444	: 9.0			

Peak years in homicide were 1974 and 1979. The table shows that there has been a gradual increase in homicide over the last decade – an increase that becomes more apparent when two decades are compared. There was a 55 per cent increase in homicides initially recorded in 1971–80 compared with 1961–70. However, it should be noted that in these two decades, offences of violence against the person increased by about 170 per cent, while serious offences of violence rose by about 60 per cent.

The incidence of murder in this country is small compared with that in America, where one murder is committed every 23 minutes or so. There are about 20,000 murders every year in the USA. The state with the highest figures for murder in 1979 was Florida, where 1,084 people were murdered – a high proportion of them from drug-related causes. This was an increase of 14.2 per cent on 1978.

There is no doubt that we live in an increasingly violent society, in which more violence is being committed by the young and in which more is directed against women and the elderly. In London in 1980 there were 13,984 incidents involving robbery, mugging and violent theft – an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year. Of the victims involved in these incidents, nearly 2,000 were over the age of sixty, and 3,387 were over fifty. And in the 584,137 serious offences recorded in London in 1980, 25 per cent of those arrested were aged between ten and sixteen.

Nonetheless, although there had been a vast increase in all types of crime since 1900, the comparative rise in murder has been very slight. There has, moreover, been little variation in the kinds and causes of murder. The commonest murders are still domestic ones – of a wife by her husband, of a woman by a lover, of a child by a parent. Of 456 murders examined in the period 1957–60 (70 per cent of those victims over the age of sixteen were women) the victim and the murderer

were related in 53 per cent of all cases. In 27.9 per cent they were known to each other and 19.1 per cent were strangers. This is very similar to the Home Office statistical interpretation of the figures for homicide between 1970 and 1980: when about 50 per cent of the victims and killers were related, when over 30 per cent knew each other, and about 19 per cent were strangers. A notable feature of the Home Office statistics is that infants less than one year old, viewed as a percentage of that age-group in the population, were most at risk.

The survey of the 1957-60 murders, carried out by Terence Morris and Louis Blom-Cooper, also found that a very high percentage of the murderers had previous criminal records, usually for property offences, and that 70 per cent of the men convicted of capital murder in 1960 had previous convictions. It was also found that murderers were predominantly of the lower classes; that of these many had been in the services or were merchant seamen; that not a few were coloured; and that many murders were associated with heavy drinking. Sir John MacDonnell wrote in 1905 that murder was 'an incident in miserable lives in which disputes, quarrels, angry words and blows are common'.

This still applies – as the 1980 Home Office Criminal Statistics for England and Wales show when listing the apparent circumstances of homicides in 1970 and in 1980.

	1970	1980
Quarrel, revenge or loss of temper	173	239
In furtherance of theft or gain	34	56
Attributed to acts of terrorism	0	4
While resisting or avoiding arrest	0	2
Attributed to gang warfare or feud	4	5
The result of offences of arson	0	84
Homicide of women undergoing illegal abortion	4	0
Other circumstances, including sex attack	51	66
Not known, because:		
The suspect committed suicide	19	20
The suspect was mentally disturbed	34	39
Other reason	20	49
	339	564

Over the last decade the means by which murder is done has also varied very little, although, compared with the 1950s, there is less shooting or gas-poisoning, and a much reduced use of the blunt instrument – a reflection of changing social conditions. One constant has, however, been murder by strangulation or asphyxiation.

The Home Office list of figures for offences currently recorded as homicide by apparent method of killing is as follows.

	1970	1980
Sharp instrument	107	160
Strangulation or asphyxiation	70	89
Hitting, kicking, etc	57	94
Blunt instrument	43	61
Shooting	23	19
Drowning	12	14
Poison or other drugs	9	14
Burning	1	94
Explosion	0	0
Other	15	19
Not known	2	0
	339	564

Of some interest is the fact that suicide – there were 4,200 in Britain in 1979 – homicide and mental illness are connected and complementary. Between 1900 and 1949, 29 per cent of the persons suspected of murder committed suicide, a proportion that rose to 33 per cent in the next decade. Again, between 1900 and 1949, 21.4 per cent of the persons found guilty of murder were also adjudged to be insane or unfit to plead. This figure rose in the next decade to 26.5 per cent. It seems that a person suffering from morbid depression, frustration or anxiety, whose mental balance is disturbed, may, as that mental stress or illness increases, commit either suicide or murder. If it is murder, that person may recover as a result of such an act, or become insane. There also seems to be a case for viewing murder as an act of displaced self-destruction, when the disturbed person, unable to kill himself or herself, kills someone near them as a substitute. Some women, unable to kill themselves or a husband or a lover, direct their act of destruction against someone more vulnerable, a child, almost as a token sacrifice.

Another factor connected with the causes of murder is the actual or subconscious yearning of a nonentity for notoriety, a desire inflamed these days by the ease with which other nonentities achieve a spurious fame through appearing on television or from the inflated attentions of the press. People desire to be noticed, to be distinguished in some way by what they are or do. In some cases, where a person is totally undistinguished and untalented, desperate measures are taken to remedy the defect.

Bruce Lee, aged twenty – his real name was Peter Dinsdale – killed people by setting fire to the houses in which they lived in and around Hull. Said to be

suffering from a psychopathic personality disorder, he admitted in court to twenty-six cases of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and to ten charges of arson. He was committed on 20 January 1981 to a psychiatric institution in Liverpool for an indefinite period. His counsel, Mr Harry Ognall, QC, said at Dinsdale's trial: 'No words of mine could assist this crippled, solitary and profoundly disordered young man. This pathetic nobody has, by his deeds, achieved a notorious immortality.' Perhaps this was one of Dinsdale's unacknowledged desires.

It was certainly the aim of seventeen-year-old Marcus Serjeant, from Capel le Ferne in Kent, who on 13 June 1981 fired five blank shots at the Queen as she rode down the Mall to the ceremony of the Trooping the Colour in Horse Guards Parade. Tried under Section 2 of the Treason Act, he was sentenced to five years in jail. He claimed he had been influenced by the shooting of John Lennon and by the assassination attempt on President Reagan. To a friend he wrote: 'I am going to stun and mystify the whole world with nothing more than a gun ... I may in a dramatic moment become the most famous teenager in the whole world. I will remain famous for the rest of my life.'

Such a desire was probably not shared by Crippen, Christie or Haigh. But the last two certainly relished their notoriety, and they may have been subconsciously influenced by a desire to be different, to do something alien, at least to become notable by doing something notorious.

One interesting trait shared by many murderers is their use of pseudonyms. It appears that they assume false names not only to evade detection, but chiefly to invent for themselves new personas – as though they cannot bear what they are.

In most if not all premeditated murders the act of murder is not in fact the only solution to a particular emotional or mental problem. Yet it is the one way out that a potential murderer chooses. There are many and complex reasons for this, apart from the minor factors outlined above. There is supposedly an X factor, a chemical reason, strictly speaking an extra Y chromosome in the genetic structure of a few people that turns them into psychopaths if not into killers. There is undoubtedly a rage in the blood and in the mind that leads to murder, whatever its cause. But what the murderers in this book have in common – and most are to some degree amoral, vain, cunning, cruel, avaricious, selfish, stupid and bad – is that without exception they are, and behave like, fools.

There is one other factor that the case histories in this book reveal – the apparent significance of *place* in

the perpetration of a murder. This may only be an oddity. But in this connection it should be noted that of the thirty-seven women poisoners executed for murder between 1843 and 1955 (sixty-eight women were hanged in all in this period), twenty lived in towns and seventeen in the country. Of the latter, five lived in or near Boston in Lincolnshire and six in and around Ipswich in Suffolk. The Ipswich murders may have been imitative – they all occurred within a period of eight years – but the Boston murders were many years apart.

In considering the fifty murders described in this book, one wonders how great a part chance and coincidence played in the following facts: that Miss Holland and Mrs McKay were murdered within a few miles of each other – and near Bishop's Stortford, near where the poisoner George Chapman ran a pub and where Harry Roberts went to ground; that Mrs Deeming and Mr Maybrick died within a few miles of each other in Liverpool; that Frederick Deeming, Mrs Maybrick, Mahon, Armstrong, Kennedy and Wrenn at some time all lived in Liverpool; that Parker and Probert, Haigh, Thorne and Mahon killed within a twenty-mile radius of Lewes in Sussex (at Portslade, Crawley, Crowborough and Langney); that Mrs Pearcey and Samuel Furnace killed within a few hundred yards of each other in Camden – a mile away from Crippen's house and two miles from where the Seddons lived; and that of thirty-nine murders in the London area, only eight were committed south of the River Thames.

Why is it that so many victims and murderers in this book have visited and stayed at Bournemouth? The town has had some sensational murders, like that of Irene Wilkins in 1921 by Thomas Allaway, that of Mr Rattenbury by George Stoner in 1935, that of Walter Dinivan by Joseph Williams in 1939, and that of Doreen Marshall by Neville Heath in 1946. But Samuel Dougal, George Smith, Major Armstrong, the Thompsons, Ronald True, Emily Kaye, Frederick Browne, Neville Heath – and Montague Druitt – all stayed there within a few months of a murder. They did not choose other resorts nearer London for their visits, or any further away to the north. Why Bournemouth?

What is most odd, however, is the number of murderers – mass-murderers – who were born and brought up west and south of Leeds. Although Haigh was not born in Yorkshire, he was brought up from an early age in Outwood, south of Leeds. Christie was born and lived in a suburb of Halifax. The Black Panther, Donald Neilson (real name: Nappey) was born in Morley south of Leeds and lived in Bradford to the west; and the Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe,

was born in Shipley and brought up in Bingley. To them can be added Peter Dinsdale, the killer-arsonist who came from Hull – to the east of Leeds but on the same latitude. Finally, besides the mass-murderers there are four other Yorkshiremen, who between them caused the deaths of over 600 men and women: James Berry, executioner, who was born in Heckmondwike,

south-west of Leeds (between Christie and Haigh) and lived in Bradford; and the three Pierreponts, Tom, Harry and Albert, all executioners, who came from Clayton, a western suburb of Bradford. The last two also lived in Huddersfield. Whoever said that God was a Yorkshireman was worshipping some strange gods indeed.



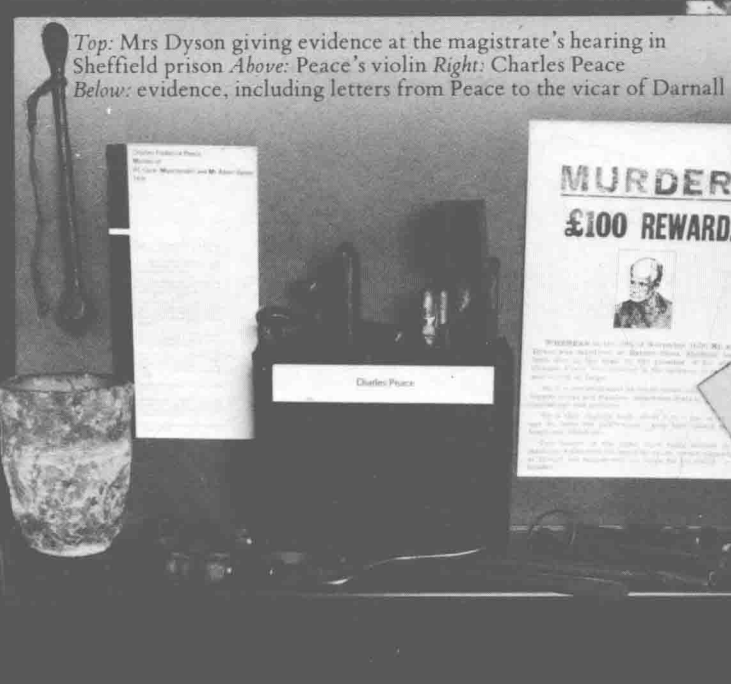
The original Black Museum



Map of London showing the locations of the murders described in this book



Top: Mrs Dyson giving evidence at the magistrate's hearing in Sheffield prison Above: Peace's violin Right: Charles Peace Below: evidence, including letters from Peace to the vicar of Darnall



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Note:

The years given above refer to the year of the crime in which the named victim was killed, not the year in which the ensuing trial took place.

In cases of multiple killing the victim listed is the one for whose death the accused was tried. Neither Tratsart or Merrett ever came to trial.

1 CHARLES PEACE

THE MURDER OF ARTHUR DYSON, 1877

Murder is often compounded with theft and sex – which is to say that it frequently results from a compulsive desire to deprive, or a compulsion not to be deprived of one's desire. Fortunately, much thieving seems to be related to a low or inadequate sexual capability. But not always. A randy thief or robber has therefore more problems than his undersexed counterpart, problems that can lead to murder – as they did in the case of Charles Frederick Peace.

He was born in Sheffield on 14 May 1832, the son of a respected shoemaker; he was not a good scholar, but was very dexterous, making artistic shapes and objects out of bits of twisted paper. Apprenticed at a rolling-mill, he was badly injured when a piece of red-hot steel rammed his leg, leaving him with a limp. He learned to play the violin with sufficient flair and skill to be billed at local concerts as 'The Modern Paganini'. He also took part in amateur theatricals. When he was about twenty, in search of other excitements and reluctant to earn a living, he began to thief. He was unsuccessful at first, and was jailed four times, with sentences of one month, four, six and seven years. During this period he wandered from town to town, met and married Mrs Hannah Ward – a widow with a son, Willie – in 1859 and returned to Sheffield in 1872. Three years later he set up shop in Darnall as a picture-framer and gilder. He was also a collector and seller of musical instruments and bric-a-brac.

In 1875 Peace was forty-three. He was, according to a police description: 'Thin and slightly built, 5 ft 4 ins or 5 ins, grey hair ... He looks ten years older. He lacks one or more fingers of his left hand, walks with his legs rather wide apart, speaks somewhat peculiarly, as though his tongue was too large for his mouth, and is a great boaster.' He was also shrewd, cunning, utterly selfish, salacious, ugly, agile as a monkey, and very strong.

Peace became involved with his neighbours in Britannia Road, the Dysons. Very tall (6 ft 5 ins) and genteel, Arthur Dyson was a civil engineer, working with railway companies. He was in America when he met his future wife, a young Irish girl called Katherine. She was tall, buxom and blooming, and fond of a drink. They married in Cleveland, Ohio. The couple often had rows. Peace – 'If I make up my mind to a thing I am bound to have it' – became familiar with the Dysons and enamoured of young Mrs Dyson, who unwisely responded to his attentions. It seems they visited pubs

and music-halls together and that their place of assignation was a garret in an empty house between their two homes. Peace took to calling on the Dysons at any time, including meal-times. Mr Dyson put his foot down. But Mrs Dyson continued, accidentally or intentionally, to associate with Peace. In June 1876 he was forbidden to call on them any more. Arthur Dyson wrote on a visiting-card, 'Charles Peace is requested not to interfere with my family,' and threw it into Peace's yard.

This was something Peace could not endure. He pestered and threatened the Dysons. 'We couldn't get rid of him,' said Mrs Dyson, talking later to the *Sheffield Independent's* reporter. 'I can hardly describe all that he did to annoy us after he was informed that he was not wanted at our house. He would come and stand outside the window at night and look in, leering all the while ... He had a way of creeping and crawling about, and of coming upon you suddenly unawares ... He wanted me to leave my husband!'

One Saturday in July 1876 Peace tripped up Mr Dyson in the street, and that evening pulled a gun on Mrs Dyson as she stood outside her house complaining to neighbours about the assault. He said: 'I will blow your bloody brains out and your husband's too!' A magistrate's warrant was obtained for his arrest and he fled with his family to Hull, where Mrs Peace ran an eating-house.

For a time the Dysons were, it appears, undisturbed. But on 26 October they moved house, to Banner Cross Terrace in Ecclesall Road, and when they arrived (their furniture had gone ahead), Peace walked out of their front door. He said: 'I am here to annoy you, and I will annoy you wherever you go.'

A month later, on Wednesday, 29 November 1876, Peace was seen hanging about Banner Cross Terrace between 7 and 8 pm. It was later suggested in court that Mrs Dyson and Peace had had a rendezvous in the Stag Hotel the evening before.

At eight o'clock on the 29th, Mrs Dyson put her little boy, aged five, to bed. She came downstairs, to the back parlour where her husband was reading, and about ten past eight she put on her clogs, took a lantern and, leaving the rear door open, went to the outside closet, which stood in a passage at the end of the terrace. It was a moonlit night. Peace later claimed that she left the house when he whistled for her. Her closet visit was brief. When she opened the door Peace