



A Very Edwardian Murder

**The story of an unsolved 1902 murder
in the Suffolk village of Peasenhall**

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Thanks must be given to those people who spent time and effort transcribing the many newspaper articles included in this document.

Contents

Introduction: Report on the D.F.H.G. Meeting on 17th April 2024	1
Who was the victim?	6
Who was the main suspect?	8
More information and comments.....	11
The Lawyers.....	13
Sir Ernest Wild, William Gardiner's defence counsel.....	13
Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, prosecuting counsel.	15
Newspaper clippings.....	16
The Morning Leader, London, Thursday, 5 th June 1902, page 3	16
The Nottingham Evening Post, Friday, 6th June, 1902, page 3.....	17
Evening Telegraph, Friday, 20th June, 1902, page 2	18
Evening Herald (Plymouth), Thursday, 3rd July, 1902, page 3.....	19
Devon and Exeter Gazette, Friday, 4th July, 1902, page 14.....	20
The Gloucestershire Echo, Friday, 4th July, 1902, page 1.....	21
Leicester Journal, & General Advertiser, Friday, 11th July, 1902, page 6	22
Leicester Mercury, Wednesday, 3rd September, 1902, page 4.....	23
Evening Despatch (Birmingham), Thursday, 4th September, 1902, page 5	24
The Echo (Gloucester), Wednesday, 5th November, 1902, page 4	25
Grimsby Evening Telegraph, Thursday, 6th November, 1902, page 4	26
The Citizen (Gloucester), Thursday, 6 th Nov 1902, page 1	27
Evening Post (Nottingham), Friday, 7 th November 1902, page 5	29
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Saturday, 8 November, 1902, Page 3	31
Evening Post (Nottingham), Saturday, 8 th November, 1902, page 4.....	32
Devon and Exeter Gazette, Tuesday, 11 th November, 1902, page 10.....	35
Cheshire Daily Echo, Thursday, 22nd January 1903, page 4	38
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Thursday, 22 nd January, 1903, page 3	41
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 23 rd January, 1903, page 3.....	45
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Tuesday, 27 th January 1903, page 2	47
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 30 th January, 1903, page 2.....	48
Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 13 th February, 1903, page 3.....	51
Conclusions:.....	52
Events timeline:	53

A Very Edwardian Murder!

On the 31st May 1902, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed at Pretoria bringing an end to the Second Boar War, and that evening “A Very Edwardian Murder” took place.

This booklet is the result of an extremely interesting talk given to the Diss Family History Group by Nick Woods and has stimulated several members to do some research into this.

(Nick is a member of D.F.H.G. He is ex R.N. and has worked in an architect’s office and in the Health Centre at Diss, and presents a regular Rock Show on Park Radio.)

Introduction: Report on the D.F.H.G. Meeting on 17th April 2024

Nick Woods gave us a comprehensive account of the circumstances surrounding the murder of a young woman in Peasenhall in 1902, and asked us to decide who the guilty party was. He explained that investigators always look for MMO (the means, the motive and the opportunity) but this is not sufficient to gain a conviction. The murder of Rose Harsent has fascinated historians and criminologists for over 120 years and many books have been written, but it remains unsolved. One person was tried twice for the murder and not convicted.



Rose Annie Harsent

As a cold case, the evidence is largely circumstantial and pretty much a random mishmash of supposition and conjecture. There are a few hard cold facts but no witnesses and no conclusive evidence to enable a satisfactory answer.

The population of Peasenhall in the 1900s was about 700 people living in 180 houses about 10 miles from the coast at Dunwich and about 7 miles north of Saxmundham. In 1901 many men worked in Smyth's Seed Drill Works and attended the Primitive Methodist Chapel in neighbouring Sibton. The choirmaster of the chapel was William Gardiner and the choir members included 22 year old Rose Anne Harsent, a domestic servant employed by Mr and Mrs Crisp at Providence House in Peasenhall.



Providence House (now Stuart House)

Stuart House (previously Providence House) was originally built in the 15th/16th century and stands at the corner of Hackney Road and Church Street in Peasenhall.

At 8.40 am on Sunday June 1st 1902, William Harsent (father of Rose) came to Providence House to bring fresh linen, milk and bed clothes for his daughter. As he approached the house from the rear through the yard into the conservatory (which led into the scullery where Rose worked) William noticed it was still very dark. This was unusual because Rose would usually be preparing the house for the day. The window into the conservatory was blocked with a shawl of some kind. In the corner, William saw his daughter lying at the foot of the stairs which led up to her bedroom. Her head was against the bottom of the step and her feet were facing the door where he'd just come in. When he touched her, she was quite cold and there was a lot of blood on the floor. There was a strong

smell of paraffin and burning about the room. William covered Rose with a rug and went to get help. As he was going outside, he bumped into James Crisp who had come to make an early morning visit to his brother, who was still in bed upstairs.

James Crisp went to find Dr Lay who confirmed Rose's death. William Harsent went upstairs to tell the occupants that Rose was dead in the kitchen. Mrs Crisp said that she had spoken to Rose about 10 pm to wish her a good night. She thought that she had heard Rose cry out in the night but her husband had dissuaded her from going downstairs. There had been a terrific thunderstorm in the village that night.

At first Dr Lay considered that this was a terrible accident, maybe even suicide; maybe the girl tripped coming down the stairs and cut herself on the glass from the oil lamp that she was carrying. However examining the body, the deceased had wounds in her upper chest, her neck and her hands. There was a broken medicine bottle on the floor which had previously held camphorated oil but now contained paraffin. The doctor and PC Eli Nunn collected all the parts of the bottle and sent them to the Home Office for analysis. A small piece of woollen blue cloth and a spent matchstick were found amongst the broken parts of the bottle and it was ascertained eventually that the label showed the bottle had been prescribed for William Gardiner's children some six months earlier.

Once PC Nunn had noticed the position of everything in the kitchen, he and the doctor both went up to the deceased's bedroom. The bed had not been slept in, although there was a depression on it suggesting that someone sat on it for a while. Next to the bed was an envelope addressed to the deceased with Peasenhall and Yoxford postmarks. It contained an unsigned letter. In the chest of drawers was a bundle of around 20 letters: some were from family, some were from local men. There were also two letters from William Gardiner, the married Methodist minister who lived in the village. Dr Lay still thought that this was a suicide or an accident. However PC Nunn sent for senior assistance from Halesworth (seven miles away) and the body was taken later that day to the Swan public house and locked in a barn behind the building. A post mortem taken a couple of days later soon determined that the wounds were not self inflicted. The throat had been cut; there was an attempt to burn the body; and the deceased had been six months pregnant.

The unsigned letter found in Rose's bedroom by PC Nunn had been delivered during the afternoon of Saturday May 31st. It stated the following:

DR, I will try and see you tonight at 12 o'clock at your place. If you put a light in your window at 10 o'clock for about 10 minutes then you can take it out again. Don't have a light in your room at 12 as I will come round to the back.

The envelope was marked Peasehall near Saxmundham which suggests that the writer wasn't local but was this a ruse to disguise the fact that the writer *was* actually a local person?

Rose wasn't short of male admirers; one of them being Frederick Davis who lived in the middle part of Providence House, between the part lived in by William Crisp and the part owned by his brother James Crisp. Frederick Davis was several years younger than Rose and he often wrote her poems and suggestive letters.

The main suspect of the crime was William Gardiner. He was arrested and taken into custody by local police on 3rd June 1902. Rumours surrounding his relationship with Rose had begun the year before in May 1901 after two young men, Alphonso Skinner and William Wright, overheard a conversation between Rose and William Gardiner at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Peasehall, known as 'The Doctors Chapel'. Mrs Crisp, Rose's employer, attended this chapel and Rose's tasks included cleaning there.

It was alleged that Gardiner was the father of the unborn child. He lived on the main street of Peasehall with his wife and six children, in a small semi-detached cottage, within sight of Providence House where the murder was committed. He had been seen by a neighbour at about 10 pm on the night of the murder outside his cottage from where he could see the upper window of the gable of Providence House at the same time a light was seen burning in it. At 7.30 am on the morning of 1st June 1902 he was seen at his cottage going into his back yard where a fire was seen to be alight in the wash-house.

A piece of evidence came to light concerning footprints. A gamekeeper named James Morriss passed through the main street of the village about 5 o'clock on the morning of the murder. He declared that he had noticed a series of footmarks in the wet soil following the rain which led from Gardiner's cottage to Providence House. Morriss was aware of the stories that had circulated in the village concerning William Gardiner and Rose Harsent. He thought that the

prints had been made by rubber-soled shoes. It was subsequently discovered that Gardiner possessed a pair of rubber soled shoes which would match the imprints that Morriss had seen. In addition, the police found a pocket knife belonging to William Gardiner that had recently been scraped and cleaned but traces of recent mammalian blood were found in the hinge.

William Gardiner was tried twice at Ipswich Assizes. Both times the jury was unable to reach a verdict. It was said that at the first trial the jury was split eleven to one in favour of guilty, and the second eleven to one in favour of not guilty. Gardiner is one of the few people in English history to have been tried for murder and to have no verdict ever returned. He died in 1941.

By Amanda Park, 2024

Who was the victim?



Rose Annie Harsent

The murder victim was a woman called Rose Annie Harsent. She was born on 17th December 1879. No record of any baptism has been found.

The Census of 1881 shows Rose A (Annie), aged 2, living with her parents William (41, agricultural labourer) and Elizabeth (31), and brothers William (6), Edward (5) and John (3) in Bath Place, Peasehall. ¹

By 1891, aged 12, she is still living with her parents and 3 older brothers, but now with 3 more brothers Samuel (8), Peter (6) and Harry (5), on Snows Hall Road, Peasehall. ²

By the 1901 Census Rose was a live-in servant with William Crisp (69, builder and postmaster) and his wife Georgianna (69) in The Street, Peasehall. ³

1 : 1881 National Census : RG11 Piece 1893 Folio 15 Page 3 Schedule 112

2 : 1891 National Census : RG12 Piece 1484 Folio 124 Page 24 Schedule 158

3 : 1901 National Census : RG13 Piece 1794 Folio 68 Page 15 Schedule 107



Grave of Rose Harsent, with her father?

PEASENHALL MEMORIAL

The marble cross, which, paid for by public subscription, is to be erected on the grave of Rose Harsent, the victim of the Peasehall tragedy, will bear the following inscription:—

In Affectionate Remembrance
of

ROSE ANNIE HARSENT.

Whose life was cruelly taken
on the 1st June, 1902,
in her 23rd year.

A light is from our household gone;

A voice we loved is stilled;

A place is vacant in our home

That never can be filled.

The cost of the memorial is about £20. and what surplus there is will be handed over to the parents.

Evening News, Monday, March 30th, 1903.

She died on the night of the 31st May, on what was a very stormy night. Her death was registered in Quarter 3, 1902. ⁴ (Some sources give the date of death as 1st June; perhaps the actual time of death, either side of midnight, was at the time probably uncertain.)

She was buried on 5th June, 1902, in Peasehall. Later a public subscription was raised to pay for the stonework and a memorial was erected to her.

4 : General Register of Births Marriages & Deaths, Death (1902 Q3 Blything Suffolk Vol 4A Page 0523)

Who was the main suspect?



William G Gardiner

William G was born in 1867; registered in Quarter 3 1867. ⁵.

The Census returns for 1871 and 1881 are a little confusing as they appear to be the correct entries for William, but his birth place is given as Bulcamp (pronounced boocum), Suffolk. Bulcamp was a House of Industry to Blythburgh Hospital (in 1836 became the Blything Poor Law Union workhouse).

1871 sees him living with grandparents George Gardiner (65, agricultural labourer) and Ann (59), his mother Caroline (unmarried, 25, general servant) and four siblings. ⁶ (No sign of any father.)

It appears that William's mother was unmarried at the time of his birth. His birth and those of two siblings in 1871 was given as Bulcamp ⁷ ; was Caroline an inmate of Bulcamp? Was William born in the workhouse?

William's mother Caroline married Edward Coleman. Their marriage was registered in Quarter1, 1873. ⁸

In the 1881 Census he is living with mother Caroline (35) and her husband Edward Coleman (42, shoemaker), and 2 other children, Annie M (16) and Ada Jane (11) with the surname of Gardiner. Additionally there are 4 more children

5 : General Register of Births Marriages & Deaths, Births (1867 Q3 Wangford Suffolk Vol 4A Page 694)

6 : 1871 National Census : RG10 Piece 1768 Folio 11 Page 13 Schedule 81

7 More information at : <https://www.blythburgh.net/history/bulcampindus.php>

8 : General Register of Births Marriages & Deaths, Marriages (1873 Q1 Blything Suffolk Vol 4A Page 942)

with the surname of Coleman, Bertie E (6), Percy J (4), Jessie A (2) and Charley E (6mos). All were living in Brook Street, Yoxford. ⁹

He married Georgianna Cady (daughter of George Cady, a dealer) in 1888. ¹⁰
(Georgianna is sometimes referred to as Georgina.)

William (born in Yoxford, 24, wheelwright) was living at Rendham Road, Peasenhall with wife Georgianna (23) and two children Ellie M (2) and Ida M (1 month) by the 1891 Census. ¹¹

The 1901 Census shows William (born in Yoxford, 34, a foreman woodman at drill factory) living with wife Georgianna (33), 6 children and his sister-in-law Annie Cady, living in The Street, Peasenhall. ¹²



The main local employer was James Smyth & Sons, at the Seed Drill Works, where Gardiner was the foreman (some sources say manager) and most of the workforce attended the chapel.

In 1911 the Census shows William (44, Carpenter) living with wife Georgianna (43) at 63 Hartington Road Southall, Norwood, Middlesex, with 5 children. ¹³

William was working as a carpenter for A. B. Hanson & Co., Builders and Contractors in 1921 as seen on the Census. He was living at 63 Hartington Road, Southall with wife Georgianna (53:02, home duties) and children Ernest

9 : 1881 National Census : RG11 Piece 1891 Folio 13 Page 19 Schedule 101

10 : General Register of Births Marriages & Deaths, Marriages (1888 Q1 Blything Suffolk Vol 4A Page 1716)

11 : 1891 National Census : RG12 Piece 1484 Folio 123 Page 21 Schedule 143

12 : 1901 National Census : RG13 Piece 1794 Folio 66 Page 11 Schedule 72

13 : 1911 National Census : RG14PN6795 RG78PN339 RD127 SD3 ED13 SN97

(29:00, checker for the Great Western Railway), Annie (22:11, despatch clerk for the Universal Music Roll Co.), Ivy (16:06, no occupation) and Hilda (12:04, fulltime scholar). ¹⁴

The Electoral Register for Southall South East has William and Georgina living at 63, Hartington Road, Southall, with Ivy Winifred and Graham Melville Maurice Coleman. ¹⁵ (Ivy Winifred Gardiner, William's daughter, had married Graham Melville Maurice Coleman in 1935.)

The 1939 Register gives William and Georgina living at 63A, Hartington Road, Southall; he was born on 22nd December 1866, a retired carpenter, she on 5 April 1868, unpaid household duties. ¹⁶

Gardiner died in 1941. He was buried in Havelock Norwood Cemetery on 6th February 1941; burial fees were £5 9s. 0d. His wife Georgianna was buried in the same plot on 28th January 1948; burial fees were £2 12s. 0d. His death was registered in Quarter 1, 1941. ¹⁷

14 : 1921 Nation Census : RG15 Piece 06153 Schedule 96 Districh RD 127 RS 2 ED 17

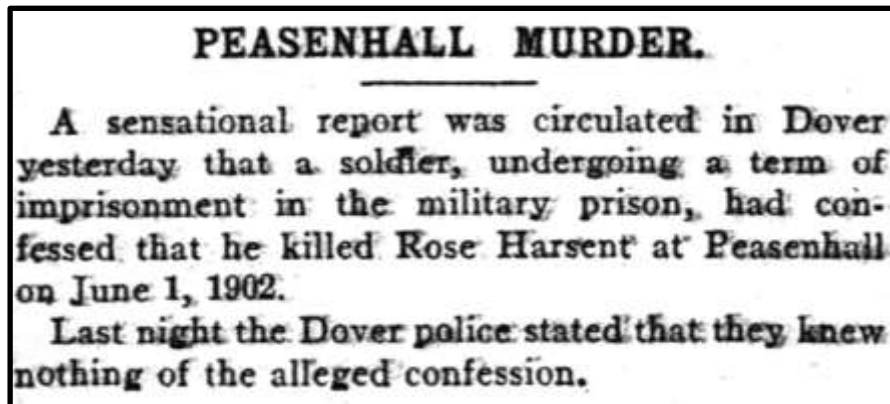
15 : London Metropolitan Archives; Electoral Registers London, Southall, District RX, page 27

16 : 1939 Register : RG101/0880G/024/14 Letter Code: BPBI

17 : General Register of Births Marriages & Deaths, Death (1941 Q1 Uxbridge Middlesex Vol 3A Page 291)

More information and comments.

A birthplace for William of Bulcamp in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses changed to Yoxford for 1891 onwards; was the change a denial of his and his family's workhouse association?



Daily Mirror, 13th August 1904, page 4

Sometime after the trials a report (above) appeared stating that a soldier in the military prison in Dover confessed to Rose's murder. The police denied all knowledge of this and nothing further was heard of it.

Defence counsel for Gardiner at both trials was Ernest Wild. It appears that these trials were of such high profile and importance that they were noted as one of his finest achievements and was referred to in an article following his death.

The case has had interest in legal circles for over 120 years and a few years ago it was subject to a BBC Documentary by Julian Fellowes, a member of the House of Lords and the writer of Downton Abbey, called 'A Most Mysterious Murder' and it conclude that the murderer was Gardiner's wife in a fit of jealousy. (There were claims she would have admitted to the murder to save him from being hanged if found guilty.)

There have also been many books written on the subject, including "The Peasehall Murder - An Edwardian Mystery" (Paperback), by Neil R. Norman. ISBN: 9781399064378.

Many newspapers published articles relating to the murder. The Coventry Evening Telegraph, with excellent coverage, followed this case as it went on and

all their articles found as well as some others are included below. Please note that some of the articles have grammar and spelling that we do not accept now as correct.

The Lawyers.

Sir Ernest Wild, William Gardiner's defence counsel.

Ernest Wild ¹⁸ was born on 1st January 1869 in Norwich and attended the Norwich School, going on to Jesus College, Oxford, qualifying as a barrister in 1893, becoming a King's Counsel in 1912. He was a member of Parliament for West Ham (1918-1922) and was knighted "for public services" in the June 1918 King's Birthday Honours. He died on 13th September, 1934, at the age of 65.

Defence counsel for Gardiner at both trials was Ernest Wild. Perhaps this case of the murder of Rose Harsent enhanced Ernest Wild's reputation and led him to the high level within the Courts that he achieved. It appears that these trials were of such high profile and importance that they were noted as one of his finest achievements and was referred to in an article following his death.



Sir Ernest Wild. c.1920

The Western Daily Press, 14th September 1934

SIR ERNEST WILD DEAD.

Famous Murder Trial Recalled.

Sir Ernest Wild, Recorder of London, who died, yesterday, at his home in Kensington, first achieved fame at the Bar by his forensic eloquence and skill in the Peasenhall murder trial, nearly 32 years ago.

18 : More information : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Wild_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Wild_(politician))

A man named William Gardiner, foreman to a firm of carpenters in that Suffolk village, and a prominent member of the local chapel, twice stood his trial at Ipswich Assize for the murder of a pretty young serving-maid named Rose Harsent.

Rose was expecting to become a mother. During a violent thunderstorm the cottage of an old couple by whom she was employed caught fire and was partly destroyed. Rose was found dead in the cottage with throat, cut and with wounds in her head.

Some of the villagers held the view that her murderer set fire to the cottage to hide his crime; others that lightning was responsible.

Gardiner, a married man with a family, was defended by a young barrister little known outside his native town of Norwich. He was Mr (afterwards Sir) Ernest Wild, and was pitted against an older and more experienced "learned friend," Sir Henry (then Mr) H. F. Dickens, who conducted the prosecution.

At the first trial, before Mr Justice Grantham, the jury disagreed. Two months later, Gardiner stood his second trial. Before Mr Justice Lawrence, when again the jury disagreed.

Gardiner was spared a third trial by the Crown entering, "Nolle prosequi,"¹⁹ and he was acquitted.

Later the leading counsel in the case were brother judges at the Old Bailey. One, Sir Ernest Wild, as Recorder, and the other, Sir Henry Dickens, who died a few months ago, as Common Serjeant.²⁰

19 Nolle prosequi : directly translates to "not to wish to prosecute - a legal notice or entry of record that the prosecutor or plaintiff has decided to abandon the prosecution or lawsuit

20 : The Common Serjeant of London is the second most senior permanent judge of the Central Criminal Court after the Recorder of London, acting as deputy to that office, and sitting as a judge in the trial of criminal offences.

Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, prosecuting counsel.



Henry Fielding Dickens, circa 1890

Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, K.C. ²¹ (16th January 1849 – 21st December 1933) was an English barrister, who served as a King's Counsel and Common Serjeant of London ²². He was the eighth of ten children born to English author Charles Dickens and his wife Catherine and the last surviving child of Dickens.

In 1873 he was called to the bar, and in 1892 was appointed Queen's Counsel. He was given a knighthood in 1922 and retired from the bench of the Old Bailey in August 1932 at the age of 83.

²¹ More information at : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Fielding_Dickens

²² : The Common Serjeant of London is the second most senior permanent judge of the Central Criminal Court after the Recorder of London, acting as deputy to that office, and sitting as a judge in the trial of criminal offences.

Newspaper clippings.

The Morning Leader, London, Thursday, 5th June 1902, page 3

VILLAGE MYSTERY.

WOMAN BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN MURDERED AND BURNT.

The theory of suicide in the case of Rose Harsent, a domestic servant, who was found with her throat cut and her body badly burned in a kitchen in Peasenhall, Suffolk, on Sunday morning, has been completely disposed of. The medical gentlemen who have examined the young woman's remains are of opinion that she was foully murdered.

An anonymous letter which the deceased received on Saturday has been discovered. The writer asked the deceased to put a light in her window in order to show that he might meet her at midnight. There were two terrible cuts in the woman's throat, and some cuts upon her hands suggest that she had endeavoured to protect herself from an assailant.

The kitchen smelled strongly of paraffin, and the fact that the deceased's nightdress and a tablecloth had been alight suggests that an attempt was made to burn the house.

William Gardiner, a Peasenhall carpenter, and a married man, has been arrested on suspicion. He was remanded yesterday by the Halesworth magistrates, and will be brought up to-day at Saxmundham.

The Nottingham Evening Post, Friday, 6th June, 1902, page 3

THE SUFFOLK MURDER MYSTERY.

The funeral of Rose Harsent, the domestic servant, who was mysteriously murdered in the kitchen of her master's house at Peasenhall, Suffolk, took place yesterday, the whole village being in mourning. Earlier in the day William Gardiner, a carpenter, of Peasenhall, who is accused of murdering her, was brought before the Saxmundham magistrates. The courthouse was crowded by the general public, who manifested keen interest in the proceedings. The prisoner, who was neatly dressed in a jacket of blue serge and tweed trousers, seemed to feel acutely the gravity of his position. The proceedings were purely formal, the police stating that they were not at present prepared to go on with the case, as it had been placed in the hands of the Public Prosecutor. The prisoner was remanded for a week.

Evening Telegraph, Friday, 20th June, 1902, page 2

**SUFFOLK VILLAGE MURDER.
ACCUSED IN COURT.
REMARKABLE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.**

At Saxmundham Police Court on Thursday the hearing was resumed on the charge against William Gardiner, carpenter, of murdering Rose Anne Harsent, domestic servant, at Peasenhall. Prisoner, a man of about 40 years of age, was calm and collected while in the dock. - Mr. E. P. Ridley (Ipswich) prosecuted on behalf of the Treasury, and in opening the case stated that for some months the prisoner and the deceased girl were guilty of immoral relations. On the evening of May 30 a letter was posted at Peasenhall to the deceased stating, "I'll try and see you to-night at 12 o'clock at your place if you put a light in your window at ten o'clock for about ten minutes. Don't have a light in your window at twelve o'clock, as I'll come round at the back." The evidence would show that the prisoner was standing outside his door about ten o'clock in such a position as he could see the light.

Continuing, Mr. Ridley detailed the theoretical story of the crime advanced by the prosecution. Prisoner was unable to leave his house at midnight on account of a severe storm, and was in the company of his wife and a neighbour until 1.30 a.m. on June 1, when he retired with his wife. As soon as he had an opportunity, accused crept from his house with a medicine bottle in his hand filled with paraffin, and a knife in his pocket. The girl met him in the kitchen; prisoner attacked her probably from behind; there was a struggle; and then he cut the girl's throat twice. Smashing the paraffin bottle, prisoner then poured its contents over the body, and, after igniting the paraffin, left the house. The bottle which had contained the oil was an important factor, because on it was a label which bore the words, "Mrs. Gardiner's children." A knife found in prisoner's possession bore traces of mammalian blood.

A gamekeeper named Morris spoke to tracing foot marks from prisoner's house to Providence House, where the girl Harsent was in service, early on the morning of the crime; and Harry Harsent, brother of the deceased, spoke to having taken letters from prisoner to his sister.

The prisoner was remanded for a week.

Evening Herald (Plymouth), Thursday, 3rd July, 1902, page 3

CHARGES OF MURDER
Some Evidence of Handwriting.

William Gardiner was charged on remand at Saxmundham to-day with the murder of a servant girl, Rose Ann Harsent, at Peasenhall. – Mr. Guerin, expert in handwriting, gave evidence as to the letter and envelope received by the deceased. He had formed the opinion that the writing was the same as that of the business letters acknowledged to be in the accused's handwriting.

Devon and Exeter Gazette, Friday, 4th July, 1902, page 14

**THE SUSSEX VILLAGE MYSTERY.
GARDINER COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.**

At Saxmundham, Suffolk, yesterday, William Gardiner was charged, on remand, with the murder of the servant girl, Rose Annie Harsent, at Peasenhall, the case being known as the Suffolk village mystery.

Evidence was given by Mr. Guerin, handwriting expert, who stated he had formed the opinion that the writing on a letter and envelope received by deceased was the same as the business letters acknowledged to have written by the accused.

Gardiner was eventually committed for trial.

(Note the above incorrect County in the heading.)

The Gloucestershire Echo, Friday, 4th July, 1902, page 1

THE SUFFOLK VILLAGE MYSTERY.

William Gardiner was charged on remand at Saxmundham (Suffolk) on Thursday, with the murder of a servant girl, Rose Annie Harsent, at Peasenhall. - Mr. Guerin, expert in handwriting, gave evidence as to the letter and envelope received by the deceased. He had formed an opinion that the writing was the same as the business letters acknowledged to be in the accused's writing. - Dr. Stevenson, official analyst to the Home Office deposed that all the clothing sent to him by the police for examination was free from stains of blood and paraffin. There were traces of blood upon the interior of the clasp-knife produced and a broken bottle. There was also a small piece of cloth, which had apparently been torn out of something, but not from the clothes submitted by the police. - The prisoner was committed for trial.

Leicester Journal, & General Advertiser, Friday, 11th July, 1902, page 6

SUFFOLK VILLAGE TRAGEDY.

William Gardiner, foreman carpenter Peasehall Drill Works, has been brought charged before with the magistrates again wilful murder of Rose Anne Harsent, a servant girl, who was found with her throat cut and burnt on June 1st.

Alphonso Skinner, a fitter, deposed to overhearing a conversation in May last year between the prisoner and the deceased girl in a building known as Doctor's Chapel. An inquiry was afterwards in Sibton Chapel as to this matter, prisoner being the Sunday-school superintendent. Witness gave evidence, and prisoner threatened him with proceedings for libel, but did not follow out his threat. The Rev. John Guy, who conducted the inquiry, said no result was arrived after evidence been given, the prisoner stoutly denying the allegations. Afterwards, however, Gardiner admitted that he had been indiscreet with the deceased.

Further evidence shewed that the envelope one containing the letter making a midnight appointment meet the deceased on the night she was murdered was similar to those in use at Peasehall Drill Works, where the prisoner was employed, and which the prisoner had access to.

Thomas Henry Guerin, a handwriting expert from London, gave it as his opinion that the letter with the envelope making the appointment was in with the same handwriting as the other documents admitted to be in prisoner's handwriting.

Dr. Richardson said deceased had three wounds about the neck and throat, which could not have about been self-inflicted. The pocket- knife taken from prisoner would have been able to cause the wounds.

There were wounds on deceased's hands caused in all probability by warding off blows.

Dr. Stevenson, analyst to the Home Office, said he detected traces of mammalian blood on prisoner's pocket-knife, notwithstanding that it had been scraped.

Prisoner was committed for trial.

Leicester Mercury, Wednesday, 3rd September, 1902, page 4

**THE PEASENHALL TRAGEDY.
ALLEGED CONTEMPT OF COURT.**

Application was made to Mr Justice Swinfin Eady sitting as vacation judge to-day for a rule calling upon a man named Stewart to appear before the Court to answer for his alleged contempt in showing at a waxwork exhibition at Great Yarmouth a portrait of Wm Gardiner who stands committed on a coroner's inquisition and a magistrates' order on a charge of murdering a servant girl named Rose Harsent, at Peasehall, Suffolk. It was alleged that in Stewart's show there was a representation of a kitchen in which a model of the girl was seated in a chair and a portrait model of Gardiner standing behind her in a threatening attitude.

There being a question as to whether such a rule could be made returnable in the vacation, Mr Justice Swinfin Eady adjourned the application until tomorrow for argument.

Evening Despatch (Birmingham), Thursday, 4th September, 1902, page 5

THE WAXWORKS' CONTEMPT.

Respondent's Undertaking: Case Allowed to Drop.

This morning Mr Justice Swinfen Eady sitting as vacation judge in the High Court of Justice resumed the hearing of a motion by Mr. Henley in which the proprietor of waxworks at Great Yarmouth named Stewart was asked to appear before the Court to answer a charge of contempt.

The grounds of the application were that the respondent exhibited a portrait model of William Gardner at present under committal on a charge of murder at Peasenhall, Suffolk, the victim being a girl named Rose Harsent. The models were stated to represent the prisoner standing behind the girl in a threatening attitude.

Stewart the respondent to-day appeared before his lordship and explained that the inclusion of the models complained of had been done by his agent without his knowledge or authority and he had already telegraphed to have the figures removed along with all posters &c., and would go to Yarmouth by the next train to see that the instructions he had given were carried out. He further undertook to pay the costs.

Under this undertaking counsel for the complainant did not press the motion and said he would take no further steps in the matter.

"The World's worst wax museum"

"Louis Tussauds House of Wax in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, achieved cult status with thousands of visitors - because none of the models looked like the people they were supposed to represent. Owners Jane and Peter Hayes closed the attraction last year after running it for more than 50 years, and the entire collection has been snapped up by an overseas buyer."

The Guardian, Sarah Gilbert, Wednesday, 8th January, 2014

The Echo (Gloucester), Wednesday, 5th November, 1902, page 4

**DETENTION OF UNTRIED PRISONERS.
MR. JUSTICE GRANTHAM'S VIEW.**

In charging the Grand Jury at Suffolk Assizes at Ipswich on Wednesday, Mr. Justice Grantham referred to the fact that complaints had been made as to the length of time which had elapsed since the last gaol delivery, and that persons who might be innocent were kept under detention an unwarrantable time. His opinion was, however, that not many people were sent for trial who did not deserve to be so committed, and it was certainly better in all important cases where much public feeling was aroused that the trial of the accused should not take place promptly. He might quote as an example the case of the man Gardiner, charged with murder at Peasenhall. No doubt he had been kept waiting a long time, but they knew what had happened. His Lordship thought he was right in saying that at Yarmouth there was a waxworks exhibition in which a representation of the prisoner was given in the position in which he was supposed to have been when the crime was committed. That circumstance indicated that public feeling was very strongly aroused. The accused had a much better chance now, therefore, of having ample justice done him than would have been the case had he been tried at the time.

In dealing with the charge against Gardiner of having murdered Rose Harsent, Mr. Justice Grantham said the suggestion of suicide was one that need not for a moment be considered. It was perfectly impossible that the wounds which had caused death could have been self-inflicted. The letter making an assignation with the girl, which was alleged to be in the prisoner's handwriting and the footmarks leading to and from his house to that in which the girl was in service were portions of evidence which might be capable of explanation, but they were sufficient to justify the Grand Jury in finding a true bill.

Grimsby Evening Telegraph, Thursday, 6th November, 1902, page 4

**CHARGE OF MURDER AGAINST A
SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT**

[THIS DAY'S TELEGRAM.]

At the Ipswich Assizes today, William Gardiner, aged 38, a foreman carpenter and Superintendent of a Primitive Methodist Sunday School at Sibton, was placed upon his trial charged with the murder of Rose Anne Harsent domestic servant. - Mr Dickens K.C., who appeared for the prosecution said the parties resided close to one another at Peasenhall. In May of last year prisoner, who was a married man with a large family commenced (said counsel) immoral relations with the girl. She got into trouble and the case for the prosecution was that the prisoner wrote a letter making a midnight appointment with Harsent, when he murdered her and tried to destroy the body. The learned counsel mentioned that one evening when accused and deceased were entering Peasenhall Chapel, two men overheard the girl say that she had been reading in the Bible about what they were doing and chapter and verse were mentioned. This counsel argued showed the parties relations.

Proceeding.

The Citizen (Gloucester), Thursday, 6th Nov 1902, page 1

**THE SUFFOLK TRAGEDY.
GARDINER ON HIS TRIAL.**

[BY TELEGRAPH.]

At Suffolk Assizes, at Ipswich, on Thursday, William Gardiner (35), a foreman carpenter, and superintendent of a Primitive Methodist Sunday School at Sibton, was placed upon his trial charged with the murder of Rose Anne Harsent, a domestic servant.

Mr. Dickens, K.C., who appeared for the prosecution, said the parties resided close to one another at Peasenhall. In May of last year prisoner, a married man with a large family, commenced, said counsel, immoral relations with the murdered girl, which raised a scandal in the church. An enquiry was held, and the minister pointed out to Gardiner that he had certainly been guilty of indiscretion, and that he should be more careful in his conduct. The intimacy, however, continued, and he got the girl into trouble. The time came when this fact could no longer be concealed, and the case for the prosecution was that the prisoner wrote a letter making a midnight appointment with the girl, when he murdered her, and tried to destroy the body by fire. The crime took place in the kitchen of the deceased's mistress's house, and the remains, much charred, were not discovered till the next morning. The learned counsel mentioned that in May last year, before the murder, the accused and deceased were seen one evening to go into Peasenhall Chapel by two men, who overheard a remarkable conversation. The girl, it was said, remarked that the previous Sunday she had been reading in the Bible about, what they were doing, and a chapter and verse were mentioned. This, counsel argued, showed the parties' relations. Prisoner and deceased sat together at chapel, and on one occasion Mr. Rouse, who was in the rostrum, noticed Gardiner behave in what he considered an improper manner. Mr. Rouse wrote to prisoner about it, and suggested deceased should sit in some other place. Counsel then described the circumstances of the crime. The girl's mistress heard a stifled scream and a thud in the night, but as a storm was raging she did not take any notice. Next morning deceased's body (clad only in her nightdress) was found by her father, who had called to see her. A man named Morris saw marks of rubber shoes in the mud leading from prisoner's to deceased's place of employment and back again, and amongst Gardiner's possessions were a pair of rubber shoes. Deceased's wounds consisted of a stab in the left breast, and her throat was cut in two places. Beside the body was a burnt newspaper and tablecloth, and deceased's nightdress was partially burnt. There was also a broken medicine bottle, and this had contained paraffin, which had been sprinkled about the floor. The medicine bottle was supplied by a local doctor, in the previous February, for an ailment for prisoner's children. Traces of blood were found on Gardiner's pocket knife. When arrested prisoner denied all

knowledge of the murder or that he wrote a letter making a midnight appointment. Experts would state the letter was in prisoner's handwriting.

Evidence was then taken.

Supt. Andrews stated the distance from the prisoner's house to the deceased's was 208 yards. There was a back staircase to the girl's bedroom.

William George Wright, wheelwright, spoke to seeing deceased and accused go into the Peasenhall Chapel one night in May last year, and to hearing the conversation referred to.

Alphonee Skinner, another wheelwright, corroborated.

Evening Post (Nottingham), Friday, 7th November 1902, page 5

**THE PEASENHALL TRAGEDY.
RESUMED HEARING TO-DAY.
THE FINDING OF THE BODY.
SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE.**

The trial was resumed at Ipswich to-day of William Gardiner, who is accused of murdering a servant girl, Rose Harsent, at Peasehall.

James Morris, gamekeeper, stated that at five; o'clock on the morning of June 1st he noticed footprints leading from the prisoner's house to the deceased's residence. There were marks of bars across the soles. —Cross-examined: He did not tell the police till June 6th.

Herbert Stannias, Gardiner's neighbour, stated that on the morning of June 1st he saw the prisoner in his washhouse, where there was a big fire.

Cross-examined: He had seen prisoner light the washhouse fire on Sunday mornings.

Mr. Richards, secretary to the Gardeners' Employers' Society, stated that envelopes found in deceased's box were similar to those used at the works. Cross-examined: Prisoner had represented the firm at the Paris Exhibition, and used these envelopes.

William Harsent next deposed to finding the body. Constable Nunn saw deceased's nightdress, and the only part about her neck remained. Her throat was cut from ear to ear, and her body and arms were considerably burned. There was a local newspaper under her head, and at the kitchen window a shawl was fastened up. Deceased was covered with blood, and her head rested on the staircase. Witness found a broken medicine bottle on the floor. It bore a label "For Mr. Gardiner's children." The bottle smelt of paraffin. In a box by the side of the girl's bed, which had not been slept in, witness discovered a letter making an appointment for midnight; also some indecent verses.

By a Juryman : The letter commenced "Dear R.," but was not signed. Witness arrested prisoner on June 3rd, and Gardiner said he was not guilty. Amongst prisoner's possessions were a pair of canvas shoes with bars. These witness obtained from prisoner's wife, after receiving a communication from James Morris. He also found a pocket knife. Witness had discovered that a light in deceased's bedroom could be seen from prisoner's house. He had also been with the witnesses Skinner and Wright to the chapel. When they were inside he could hear their voices outside. - Cross-examined: Mrs. Gardiner readily gave him all the clothing asked for. The shirts had not been washed. Prisoner's wife answered all questions which witness put to her. Among the letters found in the girl's box were two referring to a scandal between deceased and prisoner, and said to have been written by the latter.

Counsel for Gardiner remarked there were other letters too disgraceful to read. It had been admitted by a youth named Frederick Davis that he wrote them, and in the interests of public morality counsel suggested they should not be read out, but copies handed to the jury.

Mr. Justice Grantham assented to this suggestion.

One letter was read out, and it proved to be an effusive love epistle. The writer said he could not sleep at night thinking of the deceased. This letter was unsigned.

Constable Nunn added that there was a pamphlet relating to the conduct of married life. Prisoner told witness that he was at home on the evening of May 31st. At eleven o'clock he went into Mr. Dickenson's house and remained there till half-past one, and then went home to bed. Prisoner's wife, when questioned about the medicine bottle, said on one occasion the deceased girl had a bad cold, and she offered her some camphorated oil ²³ to take home in the bottle, but whether deceased had it or not Mrs. Gardiner could not say; Gardiner fainted when arrested.

Constable Nunn said he interviewed Mrs. Pepper, next door neighbour to prisoner, but she denied that she told him that during the night of the crime she heard prisoner's wife come downstairs.

Counsel for the prisoner intimated that he should call Mrs. Pepper.

Superintendent Andrews was recalled. He said the average width of the walls of Peasenhall Chapel was one foot.

Police-Superintendent Staunton stated that prisoner denied writing the letters produced, and denied using the kind of envelopes produced. Prisoner's statements as to his movements on the night of the crime tallied with those made to Constable Nunn.

Cross-examined with reference to his interviews with Mrs. Gardiner, witness said prisoner's wife stated that she thought she gave a bottle containing camphorated oil to Rose Harsent, but was not certain. When witness first saw prisoner he (witness) was investigating the case as one of suicide. Gardiner did not seem upset.

A theory has been put forward that the folder newspaper placed under Rose's head held a clue to the murder. No mention of Peasenhall or anything to do with Rose and her murder were found in it.

²³ Camphor oil is aromatic and absorbed through the skin. It can provide various health benefits, including pain relief and the easing of skin irritation. It is extracted from the wood of camphor trees, known scientifically as *Cinnamomum camphora*, and it has a strong aroma.

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Saturday, 8 November, 1902, Page 3

**THE SUFFOLK TRAGEDY.
A SENSATIONAL INCIDENT.
JUDGE REBUKES A WITNESS.**

A sensational incident occurred at the close of the sitting of the Court at Ipswich Assizes on Friday in the trial of William Gardiner, foreman carpenter and superintendent of the Primitive Methodist Sunday School, at Sibton. indicted for the murder of Rose Anne Harsent, a domestic servant at the village of Peasenhall on Sunday, June 1.

Frederick James Stevenson, Home Office Analyst, had stated that the prisoner's knife had been recently sharpened and there was blood on the blade.

Frederick James Davis, a young shop assistant, of Peasenhall, the writer of the objectionable letters to deceased, was called. He said he slept with his brother on the night of the crime, and went to bed about 10 o'clock.

Mr. Wild (for the defence): Will you swear you aren't the father of this girl's child?

Witness: I am sure I am not?

Witness, further cross-examined, said he was now living in London. He gave Rose Harsent these letters fourteen month ago. He also lent her certain books, partly at her request. He simply regarded his relations with Rose Harsent as a sporting flirtation. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself and was sorry for the young woman. He had bad feet at that time, but he did not wear barred shoes.

STRONG WORDS FROM THE BENCH.

Mr. Wild: Deceased led you astray?

Witness: That is about the truth of it.

As Davis was about to leave the witness-box his Lordship said he hoped he was sorry for the abominable conduct he had been guilty of. It was a disgrace to humanity.

Mr. Guerin, handwriting expert, deposed to his examination of the letter making the midnight appointment and his comparison with letters from prisoner. Many of the letters corresponded. He conscientiously believed that all the handwriting was the same. In cross-examination, he admitted many of the letters were dissimilar. This closed the case for the prosecution, and the Court adjourned. The defence will be commenced this morning.

Evening Post (Nottingham), Saturday, 8th November, 1902, page 4

**THE VILLAGE TRAGEDY.
CASE FOR THE DEFENCE.
AN ALIBI SET UP.
EVIDENCE BY THE PRISONER.**

The trial of William Gardiner on the charge of murdering Rose Harsent was continued at Ipswich to-day, when Mr. Ernest Wild addressed the jury for the defence. He said that it was one of the most difficult cases that it had fallen to the lot of an advocate to deal with. Twenty-two witnesses had been called, and during the five months the accused had awaited his trial the amount of prejudice exhibited and comment aroused were unprecedented in the annals of murder trials. During that time he had been depicted in a waxworks exhibition in the act of murdering the girl. Up to May in last year Gardiner was looked up to by his employers, and by those among whom he lived in a religious capacity as a person above reproach. It had not been even suggested by the prosecution that up to that time a single word could be said against him. Dealing with the evidence of the witnesses Wright and Skinner, as to seeing the prisoner and deceased to go into Peasehall Chapel one evening in May, 1901, and Skinners evidence that he overheard an immoral conversation, counsel said the story was incredible, and the test made by these witnesses after the murder as to whether voices in the chapel could be heard outside would have only been fit for a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. He would call two architects to say whether voices could be heard outside, and he was going to put prisoner in the box to tell exactly what took place. It should be remembered that there were always those ready to throw mud at persons professing religion, and he suggested that prejudice of the two witnesses made them place a wrong interpretation upon prisoner's conduct. Prisoner afterwards wrote to the girl complaining of the scandal, and said he would live it down and put his trust in God. These letters of his to the girl were never intended for publication, and they showed of themselves that they were not written by a canting hypocrite. Prisoner would have brought an action against the two men, but they had nothing. He was content that his chapel friends had acquitted him of the charge. He would go into the box and explain the chapel incident. The girl asked him to shut the door, which closed with difficulty. He did so, and they chatted outside for a few minutes about the chapel hymns. Evidence that prisoner went for a walk one night with the girl would be denied, and also the statement that prisoner placed his foot on deceased's lap in the chapel. Prisoner's wife did not believe these statements. She had stuck to her husband all through, and she would go into the box and say exactly what took place on the night of the crime. According to the letter received by the girl she was to see her visitor at midnight, and at that time prisoner was at a neighbour's, and remained till half-past one. Mrs. Gardiner would state that her husband was by her side in bed till six o'clock in the morning. The jury would remember that the girl's mistress said that she heard

a stifled scream during the storm, which was over at half past one, that prisoner could not have committed the murder. Everything, counsel argued, turned on the handwriting, and he could call experts to prove that the letter making the midnight appointment was not in prisoner's writing. The envelope was of a common kind used at prisoner's works, but many had access to the stock. Was it not likely the real murderer had used this envelope to throw suspicion on the prisoner. All prisoner's letters were of a manly character and not immoral. If the young man Davis was the father of the girl's child, as Mr. Wild submitted he was, all motive for the crime on the part of the prisoner was gone. Counsel next criticised the evidence of the game-keeper Morris as to footprints, and said he would call a witness to prove these were not on the road at four o'clock, so that the murder must have been committed after that hour, and when prisoner was at home. The floor of the kitchen was covered with blood, and yet there was no trace of blood on Gardiner's shoes or clothes. As to the broken medicine bottle, if prisoner had taken it to deceased's because he would have brought it back. Counsel continued that as to blood being found on prisoner's pocket knife, he would explain that he used it for gutting rabbits. Dr. Stevenson, the public analyst, found that the murderer left a piece of his clothes saturated with blood and paraffin on the jagged edges, but there was no piece missing from prisoner's clothes. Concluding, counsel said his witnesses would prove a complete alibi.

Mrs. Gardiner., called, said she had lived a happy and contented life. Prisoner was a good father and husband. The deceased was a friend of hers, and after the scandal remained so. Prisoner was at home on the night of the crime from half-past nine. They left Mrs. Dickerson's company at half-past one. and went to bed, but witness was kept awake till five or six in the morning, owing to pain in the body. Prisoner lit the washhouse fire in the morning, but did not burn anything. After breakfast he went to the Sunday school class with four of his children. During the morning witness was informed of the girl's death, which was first supposed to be a case of suicide, and at dinner her husband expressed sorrow at the fact. In the afternoon prisoner attended class again, and did not appear upset. Shown the appointment letter, witness said it was not written by prisoner. The medicine bottle was given by witness to the deceased.

Cross-examined, witness heard the girl was friendly with Davis, and knew she was engaged to a young man named Bob. The engagement was broken off. Witness thought Mr. Rouse was jealous of her husband's high position at the chapel, and had made up a story about him. At the conclusion of her evidence Mrs. Gardiner gave way to tears.

PRISONER IN THE WITNESS BOX.

Gardiner himself gave evidence. He had known deceased seven or eight years, but had never behaved improperly to her.

Mr. Wild: Did you have anything to do with her murder?

Gardiner: Certainly not. He denied he wrote the letter making the midnight appointment, and corroborated his wife as to his movements on the night of the tragedy, and also as to using the pocket knife for cleaning rabbits.

He did not wear canvas shoes that night.

Devon and Exeter Gazette, Tuesday, 11th November, 1902, page 10

**THE SUFFOLK MURDER TRIAL.
JUDGE'S SUMMING UP.
THE JURY'S DECISION.**

At Suffolk Assizes, at Ipswich, yesterday, William Gardiner, foreman carpenter, of Peasenhall, and superintendent of the Primitive Methodist Sunday school at Sibton, for the fourth day appeared before Mr. Justice Grantham on an indictment charging him with the wilful murder of Rose Anne Harsent, domestic servant, on Sunday, June 1st. Mr. Dickens, K.C., appeared for the Crown, and Mr. E. E. Wild defended.

At Saturday's proceedings 14 witnesses, including prisoner and his wife, were called for the defence to prove an alibi.

On the reassembling of the Court yesterday the foreman of the jury asked for the letter sent by the accused to his wife since his arrest to enable them to compare the handwriting. Prisoner's wife was sent for to produce the letter.

Mr. Wild then commenced his speech for the defence. He said the case had nearly overtaxed his strength and ability. Prisoner was either an arch criminal who had perpetrated one of the most fiendish and revolting crimes of modern times, or he was a man who had been done an irreparable wrong by unjust suspicion being cast upon him. Counsel said the case for the prosecution rested mainly upon handwriting, and if a man was convicted of murder upon evidence of that sort, which was only made up of opinions, then who would be safe? The jury would, probably, come to the conclusion that the man who wrote the letter making the midnight appointment was the murderer, but he thought he had proved that prisoner did not write it. He admitted there were startling similarities in the letters, but there were also startling dis-similarities, and prisoner's handwriting might have been imitated by someone else. Regarding the india-rubber shoe imprints counsel explained that he had combatted the evidence for the prosecution, and asked even if there had been such foot marks on the road, might not the murderer have made such marks in order to throw suspicion on the prisoner? Had the prisoner worn these shoes, as alleged, they would have been covered with blood, and would have been destroyed as incriminating evidence. But they were in Court in a clean condition. Gardiner had given evidence, and it was an ordeal that a guilty man would have shrunk from. Gardiner had left the box untouched by cross-examination. If he were guilty, there never was such an actor in the annals of crime or on the stage. During an eloquent passage in counsel's speech suggesting a hideous mistake had been made, prisoner covered his eyes, and wept for the first time during the case. Dealing with the evidence of Mrs. Gardiner, counsel declared that if prisoner was guilty the woman must know, and she was his accomplice. The truth of her evidence had been proved. The speech lasted an hour and a quarter, and at the conclusion of an eloquent peroration Mr.

Wild was overcome with emotion, and hurried from the Court, while the accused again burst into tears.

Mr. Dickens, in reply, said the murder was obviously carefully premeditated. The only motive for the crime was to dispose of the proof of immorality, and the only man, who fulfilled these conditions was the prisoner at the bar. Davis's conduct was despicable, but he was entitled to be believed when he said he had never been intimate with deceased. Prisoner went outside his house at 10 o'clock, the time appointed by the letter for the girl to show a light in the window. The writing in the letter was like the prisoner's. He had india-rubber shoes, with bars across the soles. He had access to the kind of envelope used. He had a knife with blood upon it, and he had been carrying on with deceased. Were all these suspicious circumstances against the prisoner simply remarkable coincidences. By his evidence prisoner charged not on but several witnesses with perjury. Mr. Dickens, in concluding a speech which lasted a little longer than that for the defence, said in the interests of humanity there was only one verdict the jury could return - a verdict of guilty.

Mr. Justice Grantham, in summing up, said he had, never investigated a more complicated case and one where the circumstances were more numerous. It was not the jury's duty to say whether Wright and Skinner were telling the truth; but if they invented the story it was the most extraordinary invention. The acquittal of Gardiner by those who investigated the scandal was a prejudiced one. Why should Gardiner have told Superintendent Guy he would have nothing more to do with deceased if he was innocent? Concerning the allegation of paternity, there was not a tittle of evidence against Davis. The jury might not be able to say who the murderer was, but murders of this description were invariably committed by educated people, the last persons who would be thought to be guilty of such a crime. His lordship described as remarkable that the prisoner at the church on Sunday morning was not upset at the news of the violent death of his senior choir girl. Never in his life had he heard such a charge as prisoner made against Rouse. If the allegation that that old gentleman had deliberately come into Court to help to hang accused by manufacturing his evidence were true, it was a more diabolical thing than the crime prisoner was charged with. If The jury believed Rouse, prisoner lied in his evidence, and if they could not believe him in one thing they could not in other matters. Again concerning the footprints, they were asked to believe a man who deliberately perjured himself in order to put the rope round Gardiner's neck. The police had to visit Gardiner's house four times before they got accused's india-rubber shoes. His lordship pointed out that the woman's death was fixed at about, 5 a.m., at which time Mrs. Gardiner admitted she was asleep. The jury must not forget that had she not given evidence the fact would have greatly told against the prisoner. His lordship concluded his summing up, which lasted two hours, with reference to the question of handwriting, and said he thought the evidence on behalf of the prisoner in this respect was lamentably deficient.

The jury retired at 4.15 to consider their verdict, taking with them two letters written by prisoner since his incarceration, and also prisoner's india-rubber shoes. At their request cups of tea were supplied to them.

At 6.30 the Judge and jury returned into Court, and the Judge said he understood the jury wanted to ask him a question. The Foreman said they wanted information on a question on which there was a little doubt on the part of two jurymen.

The Judge: I understand that you want to ! know what inference you can draw from the fact that no blood was found on the prisoner's clothes, and that no evidence is given of Prisoner having destroyed anything. These facts are far in favour of prisoner's innocence, but they are not conclusive. In some other cases guilt has been brought home to the accused where no blood was found on the prisoner's clothes. If other evidence is not conclusive these facts will materially assist the prisoner; but if other evidence is conclusive the absence of blood ought not to affect the evidence of guilt.

The Foreman: I don't think I need trouble you, but I believe there is one jurymen who admits that the latter -

The Judge (interposing): I am afraid you must not say that.

The Foreman: Well, we shall have to retire again.

The jury then retired.

The jury returned into Court at 8.40 p.m.

The Foreman announced that they could not agree.

The jury was accordingly discharged necessitating a new trial.

The prisoner came into the dock to hear the decision in a tottering condition, and was allowed to be seated. He had to be assisted out of the dock after the discharge of the jury.

Cheshire Daily Echo, Thursday, 22nd January 1903, page 4

PEASENHALL MURDER.

OPENING OF THE RE-TRIAL.

The re-trial of William Gardiner for the murder of Rose Harsent at Peasehall commenced yesterday at Ipswich, before Mr. Justice Lawrance.

The assizes were opened yesterday with antique ceremonial, but Mr. Justice Lawrance had no occasion to mention the case in his charge to the Grand Jury, the true bill found in November being valid.

Mr. Dickens, K.C., opened the case for the Crown. He remarked at the outset that it was impossible the jury could be unaware that the case had been tried before, but no juryman had a right to allow his views on capital punishment to interfere with his judgement.

The learned counsel went on to recite the main points on which the Crown relied. Rose Harsent was a servant girl, and also a member of the Primitive Methodist Church at the adjacent village of Sibton, where prisoner was a Sunday school superintendent, choirmaster, assistant society secretary, and a trustee of the funds. The association of the prisoner with this girl, who was a member of the choir, caused some scandal, but an inquiry conducted by the circuit minister ended only in an impasse. Rose Harsent was enceinte at the time of her death. The case for the Crown was that prisoner wrote her a letter, telling her he would visit her at twelve o'clock at night, He did, accordingly, visit at some time on that night, he killed her, and tried to burn her body. Gardiner left damning proof behind in the form of a medicine bottle, in which he had placed paraffin for destroying the remains. He forgot to remove the label bearing the words, "Mrs Gardiner's children." No other person than the prisoner had any motive for desiring the death of the deceased.

William George Wright, a wheelwright, living at Peasehall, was next called. He gave evidence of what he asserted he heard in the Doctor's Chapel.

Under cross-examination he admitted not having told the whole truth at the police proceedings. He omitted there to state that he heard Rose Harsent say, "Oh, oh."

Mr. Wild: I put it to you that you are lying from start to finish. – Witness: No, sir.

In reply to further questions by Mr. Wild, witness admitted that when Gardiner threatened him with legal proceedings he replied, "Well, we've only got what we stand up in." He also admitted that five years ago he had spread a similar story about another man and woman.

Alphonso Skinner, fitter of Peasehall, gave similar evidence. He denied that the story was concocted by him and Wright. Witness told his story at Sibton Primitive Methodist Chapel, where an inquiry was conducted by the minister. Witness received a solicitor's letter threatening legal proceedings, but he had never made any apology.

In cross-examination Skinner admitted standing with Wright and peeping into the chapel, but not "as a private detective" or "to see the fun." He heard a female voice say, "Did you notice me reading my Bible last night?" A voice that he recognised as Gardiner's said, "What were you reading about?" and the reply was, "I was reading about what we have been doing here tonight, and I will tell you where it is." Then a reference is made to a text in Genesis, but the remainder of the alleged conversation is unfit for publication. Rose Harsent and Gardiner subsequently left the chapel.

The Rev. John Guy, formerly superintendent minister of the Wangford Circuit of the Primitive Methodist Church, was next called. He said Rose Harsent was a private or non-official member at Sibton Chapel. He conducted the inquiry in May, 1901, as to the relations existing between Gardiner and the girl. The inquiry was the result of a letter received by witness from a local preacher names Rouse. Wright and Skinner were not shaken in the bulk of their testimony, but in the absence of collaborative evidence on both sides no conclusion was come to, and no report was made to the circuit. Gardiner retained his offices. Witness cautioned Gardiner to be careful of young people in general, and prisoner said he would stay clear of Rose Harsent. He admitted that he had been indiscreet, and that he had accompanied Rose Harsent home on occasions, but he would endeavour to recover his position. Mr Wild questioned witness as to whether he had on any one of his previous appearances in the witness-box alleged that prisoner admitted that he had accompanied Rose Harsent home on occasions. Witness replied that he could not recollect that he had said this in so many words, and denied that he had ever described the charges as trumped-up lies.

Henry Rouse, labourer, of Sibton, the Primitive Methodist local preacher who was responsible for the chapel inquiry, was next examined by Mr. Dickens. He said that on the night in February last year he met Gardiner and Rose Harsent walking away from their house in the direction of Yoxford, and on another occasion he had cause to complain of Gardiner's behaviour to the girl in Sibton Chapel during service. After the latter incident he sent Gardiner an anonymous letter asking him not to injure God's cause.

Harry Harsent, a boy of 15 years of age, and employed at Smyth's Drill Works, appeared in the witness-box with a crape band on the right arm. He was examined by Mr de Gray as to his conveyance of letters since June, 1901, to his sister Rose from prisoner. It was his duty also to take prisoner a local daily newspaper up to the end of May last year.

Frederick Henry Brewer, postman, Yoxford, deposed that on the afternoon of the 31st May he delivered the buff letter addressed to Rose Harsent at Providence House, Peasehall.

Mrs Georgina Maria Crisp, wife of Wm. Crisp, of Providence House, Peasenhall, by whom the deceased girl was employed, was called at a late hour in the afternoon. She said that during the night of May 30th, while she was in bed, she was startled by a scream, but her husband would not allow her to leave the bedroom, as she had previously told the girl that if she suffered any fright from the storm which was raging she was to come up to the floor on which witness and her husband were sleeping. She identified the buff envelope addressed to Rose Harsent. She took the letter in and placed it in the kitchen for the girl. She had previously seen similar envelopes addresses to Rose Harsent.

The court adjourned a few minutes before six o'clock.

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Thursday, 22nd January, 1903, page 3

**PEASENHALL TRAGEDY.
GARDINER'S RE-TRIAL.
TO-DAY'S HEARING.
SENSATIONAL INCIDENT.
ANONYMOUS LETTER OF CONFESSION.**

The trial of William Gardiner, accused of the murder of Rose Harsent at Peasehall, was resumed at Ipswich Assizes this morning before Mr. Justice Lawrence, when the court was again crowded. Prisoner was conducted from the prison to the court room by an underground passage, and thus escaped the notice of the crowd outside the court. A large number of women were among those in court. Prisoner appeared to be perfectly calm and collected.

THE EVIDENCE CONTINUED.

A bricklayer named Borgess said he listened at the ventilator of the Doctor's Chapel, where prisoner and the girl were, and heard an exclamation from one of them.

Mrs. Dickinson, who lived next door to prisoner, said that on the night of the murder Gardiner was in her house from midnight until 1.30, when it was daylight.

Herbert Stammer, a neighbour of Gardiner's, said that on the morning of June 1st he noticed there was a fire in prisoner's washhouse.

John Richards, secretary to prisoner's employer, identified the handwriting of certain envelopes, as well as the envelopes themselves, as similar to these used by his firm.

William Harsent, deceased's father, and Police-constable Nunn described the discovery of the body of the deceased, and the constable spoke to the finding of the medicine bottle smelling strongly of paraffin, with a label with directions for Mrs. Gardiner's children. He also spoke to finding certain letters.

A witness stated when he listened outside the Doctor's Chapel he could hear the words spoken distinctly.

There was some friction between counsel and witness in cross-examination, and the learned Judge told counsel he had drawn it upon himself; he had put his questions offensively.

Counsel: I did not mean it.

The Judge : I know you did not.

AN ANONYMOUS CONFESSION.

At this stage Mr. Wild caused a sensation by reading an anonymous letter of confession of the murder. The letter was extremely lengthy and purported to be written by a maltster. The writer said his motive was jealousy at the girl's unfaithfulness. It concluded: "I cannot tell you my name, but I shall commit suicide before long."

(Proceeding.)

YESTERDAY'S EVIDENCE.

The following were among the witnesses examined yesterday:

John Guy, late Superintendent Minister of the Wayford Circuit of the Primitive Methodist Church, said Gardiner was Sunday School Superintendent in his chapel at Sibton. Rose Harsent was also a private member of his church. An inquiry was held in the church into the alleged conduct of Gardiner and the deceased. Witness presided over this inquiry, which ended in a deadlock. There was no corroborative evidence on either side, so they arrived at no conclusion one way or the other. After the inquiry witness saw Gardiner privately. He said to him, "Be very, very careful in the future. Let this be a life lesson to you." Prisoner replied that it would be.

To Mr. Wild, Mr. Guy admitted that he had sworn before the Coroner that Rose Harsent was present at this inquiry, while afterwards he discovered that she was not. Although the result of the inquiry was unsatisfactory, Gardiner was not asked to resign his office, although he offered to do so. Asked why he, as Minister of the chapel, allowed Gardiner to continue in his offices in the church after so unsatisfactory a result, Mr. Guy said he had no power to accept his resignation.

Endeavouring to get witness to give the exact words used by witness at a district meeting subsequent to the inquiry, Mr. Wild asked if he ever used the words, "So far as I can make out, there is nothing in the charges against Gardiner," but the witness would not commit himself to an assertion that he had used these words or any words, which would bear that construction.

Mr. Wild : I will not ask you any more on that point, but will call evidence.

A REMARK FROM THE BENCH.

When Mr. Guy's examination was concluded, the Judge remarked that it was an extraordinary thing that to-day the witness was asked if he had made the remark that he did not believe the charges against Gardiner to two persons named Tripp and Goddard, while before the persons to whom he was said to have made the statement were Fiddler and Potter.

AN AGED LABOURER.

Henry Rouse, a labourer, aged 73, said he had seen Gardiner and the girl Harsent walking out together one evening, and told Gardiner in "meeting" afterwards that he was bringing disgrace on his chapel. Prisoner said to him, "Have you said anything about it?" Witness replied : "No, I have not even told my own wife." Gardiner said, "If you say nothing about it, I swear it will never occur again." Some time after witness was preaching in the chapel, and noticed prisoner make an improper gesture towards Rose Harsent. "I stopped," witness continued, "intending to order one of them out of the chapel; but something came to me and said, 'Do not disgrace the man in public.'"

Mr. Wild created some sensation by impugning the veracity of this witness by saying that this was not the first occasion on which he had made groundless charges against people. Witness also admitted having once been the subject of a scandalous story himself, which he declared to be quite baseless. Questioned as to prisoner's gesture in the chapel, witness acknowledged that it might have been seen by all the members of the choir. Asked if he thought Gardiner would commit such an indiscretion in full view of the choir, all that witness would say was "Well, he did."

ROSE HARSENT'S MISTRESS.

Mrs. Crisp, in whose service Rose Harsent was, stated she had accused the girl some time before the murder of being in a certain condition, but she had denied

it. Witness further said that after falling asleep she was awakened by a sound as of someone falling and a scream. She did not think it was anything serious, so she did not go down.

While Mrs. Crisp was being cross-examined her husband got up and said, "May I speak?"

The Judge (sternly) : No; sit down.

Mr. Wild: Is that the deaf gentleman?

Mrs. Crisp : That is my husband.

The case was then adjourned until to-day.

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 23rd January, 1903, page 3

**PEASENHALL TRAGEDY.
THE RE-TRIAL OF GARDINER.
THIRD DAY.
SPEECH FOR THE DEFENCE**

The third day of the re-trial at Ipswich Assizes of William Gardiner, accused of the murder at Peasehall of Rose Harsent, a domestic servant, was entered upon this morning.

The case for the prosecution practically closed on Thursday, and the chief feature of the proceedings in the afternoon of that day was the evidence of the youth Frederick Davis, who said he sent to the dead girl a number of letters of an improper nature, and who, as at the previous trial, underwent the ordeal of a severe cross-examination. His evidence, however, did not throw any fresh light on the case. There was considerable testimony with regard to handwriting, called with a view to prove prisoner wrote the incriminating letter which forms so important a link in the chain of the evidence. Gardiner throughout the hearing preserved a stolid, unmoved demeanour. Another feature of Thursday's hearing was the production of three unsigned documents, which seemed to purport to be confessions of the crime. The longest and most detailed of these was sent to a local newspaper, appeared to come from Burton-on-Trent, and said the cause of the murder was jealousy. Another was found in a pocket-book picked up in Devonshire. The third was addressed from London to a Peasehall policeman. All three were illiterate and ambiguous compositions. An interested spectator of the proceedings was the well-known playwright, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, who sat next to the Clerk of the Arraignment. Mr. Dickens, K.C., and the Hon. John de Grey appeared for the Treasury, and Mr. Ernest E. Wild and Mr. H. Cloughton Scott for the defence.

The Court was crowded at an unusually early hour this morning, the reading of the three anonymous letters, purporting to confess the murder, having increased the already great interest in the trial.

After formal evidence concerning the handwriting of the letter written by Gardiner, Mr. Dickens announced that that closed the case for the prosecution.

MR. WILD'S SPEECH FOR THE DEFENCE.

Mr. Wild then commenced his opening speech for the defence. He pointed out that Gardiner had been in confinement since June 3rd. He might have asked immunity from the ordeal of a second cross-examination, but Gardiner would go into the witness box at the proper time. No breath of scandal crossed prisoner's name until the two village "louts," Skinner and Wright, saw him and the girl enter the chapel, and imagined that something immoral would happen.

Mr. Wild's speech lasted two hours and a half. He concluded by saying that Gardiner believed the Lord was on his side, and he (counsel) believed with him that in the end his innocence would be shown.

Prisoner's wife said she had been on friendly terms with the deceased girl. On the night of the murder she and her husband went into Dickinson's, next door, after supper, and stayed till half-past one.

Witness said that she gave the medicine bottle to Rose Harsent, who took it away with her.

When Mrs. Gardiner left the box she fainted, and there was a painful scene in the lobby. She was not able to be re-examined.

ACCUSED GIVES EVIDENCE.

Prisoner then went into the witness-box. He denied going into the chapel with Rose Harsent as alleged. He merely went at her request to attend to the latch.

(Proceeding.)

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Tuesday, 27th January 1903, page 2

Of course another Defence Fund ²⁴ is being prepared for the man Gardiner, charged with the murder of Rose Harsent at Peasenhall. Mr. Edwards, the dissentient juror at the first trial, heads the list with another £20. The "East Anglian Daily Times," which is starting a Defence Fund in the interests of public justice, "without the slightest reference to the innocence or guilt of the accused man," states that £300 will hardly pay for the efforts that have just been expended to put the case for the defence before the Court. There is also the unfortunate man's wife to consider. The poor woman might have starved, or had to apply for poor relief, had not sympathisers come forward on the last occasion. No doubt the efforts again being put forth will be quite as successful as previously ; indeed, it would not be in the least surprising if a larger fund is not now raised for the Gardiners, as public feeling has strongly veered in their direction since the second abortive trial of the case.

²⁴ "Defence Fund" - an amount of money saved, collected, or provided to pay for the costs of legal action.

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 30th January, 1903, page 2

**PEASENHALL MYSTERY.
UNSOLVED.
GARDINER RELEASED.
A SECRET DEPARTURE FROM GAOL.**

Late on Thursday evening, William Gardiner, who has stood the ordeal of two abortive trials on the charge of murdering Rose Harsent at Peasehall, was released from Ipswich Gaol.

He was met by his solicitor, Mr. Leighton, and a gentleman who has acted as his agent. The Treasury solicitor had telegraphed to Mr. Leighton that the Crown had entered a nolle prosequi in the case and that the Clerk of Arraignment had been instructed to arrange for his release. Mr. Wild, the prisoner's counsel, was also informed of the Treasury's intention.

On leaving the gaol Gardiner was taken to a private house in Ipswich, where he remained that night. The whole of the proceedings are as a consequence of the nolle prosequi entered by the Attorney General, at an end, although it is stated that Gardiner is liable to be again indicted should evidence be obtained which, in the opinion of the Treasury, justifies a fresh indictment.

It was at first thought when the news of his release was announced to him that Gardiner would break down. But he soon regained the fortitude which marked his appearance at his trials, and walked out of the prison gates with a firm step. His departure was kept so secret that the release was witnessed by none of the public.

**GARDINER INTERVIEWED.
SPEAKS CALMLY OF THE TRAGEDY.**

Secret as was the departure from gaol an enterprising representative of the "East Anglian Daily Times" (as quoted by the "Morning Leader") interviewed Gardiner on Thursday night. On his arrival at the abode at which he spent the night, Gardiner showed little sign of being affected. The closest scrutiny of his features failed to reveal any of those symptoms of relief or excitement which might have been expected. He looked neat and calm. To the reporter he expressed his gratitude for all the "East Anglian Daily Times" had done for him in

raising a fund for his defence. Asked when his wife would know of his release, Gardiner said: "As seven o'clock in the morning. A telegram sent to-night would reach her no sooner than a letter will. I wish she could know to-night." He had no complaint to make as to his treatment in prison. He said the food was "perfectly good, such at it was, but not the sort of stuff I was used to." He added, "In the matter of accommodation, however, I was as comfortable as possible under the circumstances." He showed no hesitation in

SPEAKING OF ROSE HARSENT.

"She was," he said, "really more a friend of my wife's than mine. She used to do little sewing jobs for my wife, and was so occupied at my cottage on the night of the murder." He added he last saw Rose on the Wednesday previously, when she came to see his wife. "My relations with the girl were," he added, "only those of friends at a chapel. It is very wrong of the people of Peasenhall to set about the story that I was not concerned at hearing of the girl's death. My grief was intense, and so was that of my wife, but, perhaps, I am not given to great outward show. There was some comment because I did not go back to work on the Monday afternoon, but the truth is, I did not feel well enough to go out. I lay down on the couch quite prostrate, and in this condition I remained for the rest of the day. I was very little better on the Tuesday. I was lying on the couch when the police came and accused me of the murder, and then I fainted."

"How," Gardiner was asked, "do you account for the feeling against you at Peasenhall?" The reply was : "I know it exists, but why I cannot tell."

NOT RETURNING TO PEASENHALL.

Gardiner said he should not go back to Peasenhall to reside. Asked if he intended to go abroad, Gardiner said : "Why should I go abroad? I have done nothing wrong. My employers at Peasenhall had the utmost confidence in me. I shall be able to earn a living in some part of England."

ARRIVAL IN LONDON.

Gardiner travelled to London by the five minutes past one train this morning, arriving at Liverpool Street at 3.47. In an interview with a "Star" reporter he said that when he faced the Judge in November he was nervous, but that he soon recovered himself and that the feeling never returned to him. An offer to deliver lectures was still under consideration by the late prisoner. The Gardiners have

taken lodgings in London. One of his first actions after his release was to write to the London "Sun" newspaper in the following terms : Sir, - The Governor of the gaol has sent me out tonight, and once more I am free. I can never be grateful enough for what you have done and your readers. - Yours thankfully, WILLIAM GARDINER."

Coventry Evening Telegraph, Friday, 13th February, 1903, page 3

**STRANGE SEQUEL TO THE
PEASENHALL CASE.
ALLEGED THEFT OF A LETTER.**

A remarkable sequel to the Peasehall murder trial was investigated at Saxmundham Sessions. Christiana Hurren, assistant postmistress at Peasehall, was charged with stealing letters containing postal orders addressed to Mrs. Gardiner, wife of William Gardiner, who was recently liberated after having been twice tried on the charge of the murder of Rose Harsent.

The accused's duties were to sort letters, and it was alleged that test letters were found in her possession. She subsequently produced thirty-eight letters addressed to Mrs. Gardiner, thirty-six of which contained postal orders amounting to £9 18s. One of the principal witnesses was Mrs. Gardiner, who travelled from London, and whose address was not made public. She said she did not authorise the accused to detain her letters.

Prisoner, who had a number of hysterical fits in court, was committed for trial, bail being allowed.

[Hurren came up before the court in Bury St. Edmunds on 5th June 1903. "Mr. Justice Wright said that this was a very serious offence. He, however, would take into consideration the defendant's good character and that she had not intended to steal the orders. In the circumstances he would order her to enter into recognisances to come up at the next assizes for judgment and to be of good behaviour in the meantime." (The Citizen, Gloucester, Saturday, 6th June 1903, page 3) No further mention of this has been found.]

Conclusions:

Who did kill Rose Harsent?

The tragic event, happening over 120 years ago, will probably always remain an unsolved murder case. The evidence, although mainly circumstantial, could point towards William Gardiner being the perpetrator. In a modern-day courtroom, without using state of the art forensics, surely the case would never have come to court.

There appeared to be others who could be regarded as suspects. Rose possibly had a colourful side to her moral character and maybe had others who would wish her harm, either calculated or in passion, and, who was the father of her unborn child? Did the police ever seriously look at others as possible suspects?

One thing is certain, from looking at all the newspaper articles from all around the country, this case had engendered wide-ranging interest. Would this have been given nationwide news coverage if it happened today?

The uniqueness of this case also gave it a high profile in the realms of the law and the lawyers involved were later elevated to higher things, ending up as two of the most important judges in the High Court in London.

So, who did kill Rose Harsent? – This is a question we will almost definitely never know the answer to. It has been a thoroughly enthralling but tragic tale, a relic from our wonderful but disturbing past.

Events timeline:

22 December 1866	Birth of William Gardiner
17 December 1879	Birth of Rose Harsent
1 June 1902	Murder of Rose Harsent.
4 June 1902	Gardiner arrested and remanded in custody by Halesworth Magistrates.
5 June 1902	Buriel of Rose Harsent in Peasenhall.
19 June 1902	Gardiner appeared before the Saxmundham Police Court and remanded for a week.
3 July 1902	Gardiner charged on remand of the murder of Rose Harsent and committed for trial.
6 November 1902	Gardiner appeared at the start of his first trial at Ipswich Assises.
10 November 1902	Conclusion of the first trial – no decision so re-trial needed.
21 January 1903	Commencement of the re-trial.
26 January 1903	Second trial ended with no result.
29 January 1903	Treasury solicitor telegraphed that the Crown had entered a nolle prosequi in the case and instructed Gardiner to be released.
30 January 1903	Gardiner travelled to London on the 1:05 train to Liverpool Street.
6 February 1941	Burial of William Gardiner

**“A light is from our household gone;
A voice we loved is stilled;
A place is vacant in our home
That never can be filled.”**

R.I.P. - Rose Harsent (1879 - 1902)



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