

## **WANBOROUGH ATTEMPTED MURDER AND SUICIDE.**

On Tuesday afternoon a shocking domestic tragedy was enacted at Wanborough, Alfred Avenell, a well-known inhabitant of the village, shooting his wife and immediately afterwards committing suicide. Between 3 o'clock and 3 30 on Tuesday Mrs Avenell went down the back yard to feed some fowl. She was living apart from her husband and was staying with her mother, who resided in an adjoining house. She was returning along the pathway when Avenell appeared at his own door with a double-barrelled breech-loading gun in his hand. The woman was heard to exclaim. "Dont Alf!" and was seen to put up her hands as though to ward off a blow. Immediately two shots rang out, and the unfortunate woman ran up the garden path shot in the left shoulder. Before arriving at the door she collapsed. Avenell then seems to have turned into his own house and locked the door, and the excited neighbours were horrified to hear a third shot. The door was forced open by P.C. Basing, and the neighbours, who were quickly attracted to the scene by the sounds of the shots and screams, found Avenell with part of his head blown away, completely dead.

The two houses are mid-way through the village on the left-hand side going from Stratton in a row known as Victoria Cottages. On the bottom floor there are a front room, kitchen, and lean-to scullery, the outer doors of the sculleries of the two houses facing one another and the gardens being separated by a fence. The kitchen windows overlook the grounds of both houses, and the doors are only 20ft. or 24ft. apart. The gun with which the dreadful crimes were committed is of the double barrelled breech-loading type, and when examined by P.C. Basing, who took charge of everything relating to the affair, two spent No. 12 cartridges were found in the breech. Avenell was said to be a good shot, but was evidently a little out of his aim or was put off by an incident which is related below. When the door was forced open—both front and back doors were locked, after Avenell

below. When the door was forced open—both front and back doors were locked—after Avenell had committed suicide he was found lying near a cupboard in the far corner of the room away from the window, and on the fire-place side of the room. Two or three feet away was the door leading to the front room, in which his body was found. Lying near him was a short hedge stick, about two feet long, one end being forked, and there can be no doubt that it was with this he touched the trigger, placing the barrel towards his mouth.

Henry Titcomb, an invalid brother of the woman and a professional musician, has made the following statement:—"Some time after three o'clock I was in the kitchen looking through the window, when I saw Avenell come out of his door and go to the woodhouse about five yards away. When he came out he slammed the door and seemed to be in a rage. My sister was just going out to feed the fowls, and I told her that her husband seemed to be very much upset and I advised her to wait indoors for a time for I feared something might happen. She said something about it being "all right," and she went out. I never heard a sound from next door, but as my sister was walking back I heard a click. I guessed at once what was the matter, and I seized a broom and went to the door. My sister stopped and put up her arms as though she was defending herself, and she said: "Don't, Al.!" I threw the broom at Avenell but was three or four seconds too late for he fired two shots at her. She did not fall, but ran towards the house, her left shoulder streaming with blood. She said "I am shot." Before reaching the door she collapsed. We do not know what Avenell did afterwards; we were so upset. The next thing we heard was another shot, and on the neighbours going into the house Avenell was found dead. He had shot himself with the same gun. He evidently thought he had killed my sister."

As to Avenell's character, Titcomb says:—"He was a violent and desperate man, and my sister was unable to live with him on account of his temper and his drinking habits. He has been drinking for a month. He drank whisky in pint and half-pint bottles, and I am prepared to swear to it. But I don't think he was drunk this morning. I saw him about 9 o'clock, and he seemed to be steady then, but he went out afterwards."

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Reports in the village point to the cause of the crime being jealousy. Avenell was 54 years of age and his wife, whose maiden name was Annie Titcomb, is 33. They were married on September 22nd last year—Avenell being a widower and the woman a spinster—and the story of their married life is a distressing one. They were constantly quarrelling, the chief cause being Avenell's distrust of his wife. Three weeks ago they separated, and although they occasionally spoke the bad feeling was not removed. Last week no words passed, Mrs Avenell being completely ignored by her husband. Avenell's sympathisers state that he was a hard-working man, and earned good money. They say he appeared to take his troubles with his wife very much to heart and that it was only when there had been an "upset" that he drank too much whisky. Although he may not have actually threatened his wife personally, there can be no doubt in the hearing of other people he has said he would "do for her," and the acquaintances of both parties profess not to be surprised at the occurrence.

The breach between husband and wife seems to have been very widened on Monday. On that day both went to Swindon, but separately. The object of Mrs Avenell's visit was to apply for a summons against her husband under the Married Women's Jurisdiction Act, for separation and maintenance. At the conclusion of the County Petty Sessions she stepped into the witness box, and after briefly stating her case was granted the summons asked for. On the woman's return she informed her relatives that she had seen her husband in Swindon standing near a public-house, that he had put his hand to his mouth as though inviting her to go in and have a drink, but that she walked on without taking any notice. Avenell told another story. Before starting he called at a public-house in the village, and whilst talking to some friends pulled £10 out of his pocket and said something to the effect that "After that is gone there is plenty more left." On his return he appeared to be very excited. He said that when going to Swindon someone had "picked him up" and given him a ride. On the way, he alleged, he had passed his wife in company with a man. He was certain, he said, that it was his wife, for he turned round several times to look, but he did not know who the man was. All he could say about him was that he had a light moustache, and he believed him to be a sweetheart of his wife's before he married her. With these facts to go



before he married her. With these facts to go upon, it is pretty safe to assume that the deceased man allowed his jealous passions to get the master of him, and that he resolved upon this desperate crime of revenge.

Throughout the remainder of the day the whole village was thrown into a state of great excitement, and the painful case was discussed in all its bearings. Medical aid was summoned for Mrs Avenell, and acting on advice she was removed in the evening to the Swindon Victoria Hospital. A conveyance and a nurse were sent over from Swindon, and a considerable crowd of people witnessed the removal of the woman from the house to the vehicle. On arrival at the institution the unfortunate woman was examined by Dr. G. R. Swinboe, who found the left arm and shoulder penetrated with a considerable number of small shot. Mrs Avenell is progressing favourably.

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