

39. The Murder of Granville Jenkins

[Illustration not included in sample for copyright reasons.]

15. Granville George Jenkins with his son Howell (South Wales Argus, 14 June 1954).

Saturday 12 June was one of the wettest days of the year. In the patchwork of little fields by the Severn Estuary to the south west of Newport, it began to rain heavily in the middle of the morning, and continued for much of the afternoon. Through the farmland ran a network of large drainage ditches, known as reens. As the rain fell steadily, the ground became sodden and the reens filled with water.⁷¹⁰

Soon before 10 a.m., two men drove up to a bridge over the main railway line called Cuckoo Bridge. Edward Nicholas, a farmer from Llantarnam, had come to collect a cart mare he'd bought from a local man. His friend, Granville George Jenkins, was helping him. Jenkins also lived in

⁷¹⁰ Police report, 2 July 1954; statement of Edward Thomas Nicholas (DPP 2/2361).

39. The Murder of Granville Jenkins

Llantarnam, but he had an office job – he worked as a chief wages clerk in Cwmbran. For some years he'd enjoyed helping out on Nicholas's farm in his spare time, particularly at weekends. He was 45 years old and married, with a nine-year old son.⁷¹¹

The men went to meet the driver of the cattle truck that had been hired to take the mare back to Llantarnam, but when they tried to load her into the truck she refused to go. So Nicholas led the mare down to Whitecross Farm, by Pheasants Bridge, about a quarter of a mile away, thinking he might find a better place there to get her into the truck. The truck followed, with Jenkins on board. But things were no better there – there wasn't a suitable place to load the mare. By this time it was about 11 o'clock and the truck driver had to leave, to go on to his next job. So Nicholas asked Jenkins to lead the horse along a lane⁷¹² to Pencarn Farm.⁷¹³ He would walk back to Cuckoo Bridge, pick up his van, and catch up with Jenkins in the lane.

[Illustration not included in sample for copyright reasons.]

16. Police photograph of Pencarn Lane, Dyffryn, exhibited at the trial of Tahir Gass. The body of Granville Jenkins can be seen in the distance (National Archives, DPP 2/2361).

⁷¹¹ Statement and deposition of Edward Thomas Nicholas; statement of William Ernest Jenkins (DPP 2/2361); South Wales Argus, 14 June 1954.

⁷¹² Known as Pencarn Lane, or the Belt Road.

⁷¹³ Also called Watkins Farm.

Hanged for the Word If

But when he came back in the van, Nicholas had got only a short distance along the lane before he met the mare walking towards him on her own. What could have happened? The mare was very quiet and no trouble to handle, except that she didn't like cattle trucks. Even so, Nicholas could only think that she'd got away from Jenkins and left him further along the road. He got out of the van and caught the mare, and then he noticed a neatly placed raincoat with a canvas haversack⁷¹⁴ on top of it, lying on the grass on the right-hand side of the lane, about 30 yards ahead of the van. But that couldn't be anything to do with Jenkins.

In his puzzlement he stood and called for his friend – "Gran, Gran" – for 10 or 15 minutes. Then he started to lead the mare further along the lane. About 20 yards beyond the raincoat and haversack, he noticed that the reeds and grass on the right-hand side had been trampled down, between the lane and a neighbouring drainage ditch, Blackwall Reen. Letting go of the mare he went to look, and was horrified to see the body of his friend floating in the reen, face upwards. He went straight into the water and tried to pull the body on to the bank, but couldn't get it all the way out of the reen. Jenkins's face was black and blue, and there seemed to be scratch marks on it. The eyes were "wide open and staring," and Nicholas could tell his friend was dead.⁷¹⁵

Immediately, Nicholas drove off to get help. He found no one at Pencarn Farm, so he went on to King's Workshop behind Tredegar House. One man there tried to telephone the police, but couldn't get any reply. He suggested Nicholas should drive to PC Howard Walton's house at Coedkernew. While he did so, another man at the workshop set off for the lane in his car. Nicholas got to PC Walton's house at about midday, and having told him what had happened, drove back towards the lane himself. After telephoning Sergeant Ernest Johns at St Mellons, Walton went to the scene by car with two other men, overtaking Nicholas on the way – they saw him standing by his van a short distance before they got to the murder site. By the time he caught up with them, they'd pulled the body right out of the reen and were applying artificial respiration. But Jenkins was beyond help.⁷¹⁶

At about 12.50 a local GP, Dr David Buckley, arrived and found the police still trying to revive Jenkins, but he told them the man was dead.⁷¹⁷ When Dr Charles Freezer, the pathologist, made a post mortem examination

⁷¹⁴ Elsewhere described as a holdall.

⁷¹⁵ Statement and deposition of Edward Thomas Nicholas (DPP 2/2361).

⁷¹⁶ Statements of Edward Thomas Nicholas, Howard Walton, Ernest Johns, Wilfred Alan Tanner and William Roy Watkins (DPP 2/2361).

⁷¹⁷ Statement of David Buckley (DPP 2/2361).

39. The Murder of Granville Jenkins

the next day, he found no less than 32 stab wounds to the face and neck. Most of them were superficial, but three were deeper. One had cut through the left ear and scalp, another had penetrated into the main airway, and a third had perforated the right common carotid artery. That wound had caused a severe loss of blood, and Jenkins would have died very soon after it was inflicted. There were also several cuts to his hands where he'd tried to defend himself.⁷¹⁸

Before the body was pulled out of the reën, PC Walton had noticed a jacket floating in the water, tangled around Jenkins's right boot. It was pulled out of the water by one of the other men and left on the grass. But when Sergeant Johns arrived he examined it, and found several documents in the breast pocket. There was a receipt for a National Insurance Contribution Card, together with two National Assistance Board forms. All of them bore the name T. Gass. It seemed the killer had been identified already.⁷¹⁹

In fact there was no shortage of clues at the scene of the crime. Apart from the raincoat and haversack by the side of the lane, there was also a tea cosy⁷²⁰ floating a short distance away in the reën, and a man's brown leather shoe in a wood just on the other side of the reën, about 250 yards away. All these items were later proved to have been Gass's.⁷²¹

Surely Gass – in a heavy downpour, without a coat or jacket and with only one shoe – couldn't be far away. But to be on the safe side, a message was circulated throughout the county and to neighbouring forces, saying that he was wanted in connection with the murder.⁷²² Meanwhile, nearly thirty Monmouthshire police officers were called away from an athletics meeting at Abertillery to search the area.⁷²³

⁷¹⁸ Statement and deposition of Charles Royal Ernest Freezer (DPP 2/2361).

⁷¹⁹ Statements of Howard Walton, Wilfred Alan Tanner and Ernest Johns (DPP 2/2361).

⁷²⁰ Gass was said to have sometimes worn the tea cosy on his head instead of a hat (Thomas, *Seek Out the Guilty*, p. 107).

⁷²¹ Police report, 1 July 1954, with list of exhibits (DPP 2/2361). Strangely, the haversack itself wasn't identified as Gass's, but a mirror inside it was.

⁷²² Thomas, *Seek Out the Guilty*, p. 107.

⁷²³ South Wales Argus, 14 June 1954.

[Illustration not included in sample for copyright reasons.]

17. The signal box at St Brides Wentlooge from which Tahir Gass was spotted after the murder. Fox Covert can be seen in the background.

It wasn't until 4.30 that Gass was spotted, by a signalman at the St Brides signal box. He'd been alerted by the police message, and was keeping a lookout for the wanted man. Through his field glasses he saw a man, apparently in a state of exhaustion, crossing the line by Maerdy Bridge. He was coming from the direction of a nearby copse – evidently Fox Covert, which was just to the north of the signal box.⁷²⁴

Immediately a number of police officers were sent to the area. One group of them spotted Gass walking through a meadow, and were able to get within 100 yards of him without being seen. Then PC William Dixon shouted out to him "Gass, come here," but instead he ran away in the other direction. The officers gave chase. Gass was barefoot, and plunged straight through the reens and hedges between the meadows in his desperation to escape. At one point, as he came to a reen, he dropped a haversack he was carrying, and seemed to throw something else away. After about a mile he crossed a lane and then bore to the right, with Dixon and PC Ronald Pope still in pursuit. They saw him draw a knife from a sheath, and he ran with it in his right hand for about half a mile further. Suddenly he stopped,

⁷²⁴ Statement of Derrick Pearce (DPP 2/2361).

39. The Murder of Granville Jenkins

exhausted, and turned to face the officers. As Dixon went up to him, Gass threw down his knife and then, groaning with exhaustion, allowed himself to be handcuffed.⁷²⁵

Gass was driven back to Risca Police Station, where he was examined by Dr Edward Theodore Griffiths at 6.30. He had a three-inch long cut across the knuckles of his left hand, severing the tendon of the ring finger. Griffiths thought it had been made between three and twelve hours earlier – presumably when he'd attacked Jenkins.⁷²⁶ Two hours later, after Gass had been cleaned up, PC Dixon charged him with the murder of Granville George Jenkins. "Me not kill nobody," he said.⁷²⁷

Over the next few days, the police continued to collect evidence against Gass. They carried on searching the area around the crime scene, and on 16 June they made two discoveries. In Fox Covert, about half a mile from the murder site, they found that some branches had been pulled down to form a rough shelter. Nearby were the remains of several fires, together with Gass's suitcase. Evidently this was the place where he'd been sleeping rough since he left Newport. And with the help of a mine detector, they recovered a large knife from the mud at the bottom of the reën where Jenkins's body had been found. It was identified by Edith Egeh and her daughters as one of Gass's knives.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ Police report, 2 July 1954; statements of William Dixon, Augustus Bert Hillman, Stanley Bevan and Ronald Pope (DPP 2/2361).

⁷²⁶ Statement of Edward Theodore Griffiths (DPP 2/2361).

⁷²⁷ Statement of William Dixon (DPP 2/2361).

⁷²⁸ Police report, 2 July 1954 (DPP 2/2361).