

houses frequented by his stepfather. It was only a matter of hours before the murderer was apprehended at the *Windmill Inn*, Dyke Road (now the *Dyke Road Tavern*) on the strength of that information alone. Wilton knew he would be tracked down. Apprehending him, PC Standing told him he would be charged with murdering his wife that morning by cutting her throat with a knife. He replied: 'Yes, I done it; she deserved it a long time ago.' When charged at the Town Hall, he responded: 'Yes, I did it.'

The examination of the case by magistrates at Brighton Town Hall was held very promptly on the morning of Monday, 11 July. Among the exhibits shown were the ordinary dinner table-knife, similar to a cheese knife, used to cut the victim's throat, and the other weapon used, a heavy carpenter's hammer, with which Sarah Wilton's skull was smashed. Both these murderous implements had been left quite openly in the family bedroom with no attempt at concealment. Disturbing medical evidence was heard by the court. None of the wounds could have been self-inflicted. The fracture of the skull with the hammer would by itself have caused death – mercifully before the cutting of the throat. During the 5-hour-long proceedings at Lewes Assizes in August, the defence valiantly tried to show, by citing the behaviour of relatives and of Wilton himself, that the man was insane due to a hereditary taint. As for the attack, it was theorised that Wilton had a struggle with his wife and in a moment of passion threw her back against the bedpost. The wound to her temple killed her.

This argument was speedily demolished by the prosecution. Mr Justice Hawkins, addressing Wilton, told him that even if his poor wife had given some offence in pawning some of his property, it was a cruel, wicked, merciless revenge he had inflicted on her without one moment's warning. It took the jury less than quarter of an hour to bring in a verdict of Guilty.

Wilton heard the sentence unmoved. Until the week before his execution, on Monday 29 August 1887, he showed no remorse or contrition. The scaffold was the one which had been used for LEFROY six years earlier. The hangman, Berry, who during his four years' experience had despatched no fewer than 106 persons, said that Wilton was the strongest-nerved man he had ever executed.

WOOD, GEORGE

On the afternoon of Friday, 11 December 1891, the mutilated body of 5-year-old Edith Jeal from Bedford Buildings was found by a Corporation workman. It lay in a large shed in a playing field bounded to the north by Eastern Road, Kemp Town and to the south by Chesham Road. She had been strangled and sexually assaulted, her private parts being severely lacerated.

The previous evening, Edith had been sent on some errands, in company with her 9-year-old brother, Bertram. When he went into Trengrove's, at the corner of Manchester Row, off Upper Bedford Street, he left his sister standing outside. It was there that she met the stranger who violently murdered her. Bertram, on emerging from the shop, thought she might have run home. Neighbours whom the little girl might have gone to were visited and Edith's father went out searching for her all night, to no avail.

The perpetrator was, however, quickly traced. George Henry Wood, 29, a delivery man at Brighton Station, lived a couple of hundred yards away from the crime scene, at 11 Rock Street. On the night of the murder, he had left his work at the station at about 6 pm and, still in railway uniform, had gone out drinking locally. The police were able to trace his movements without difficulty. After visiting a number of pubs in Trafalgar Street, he was seen around 45 minutes later in Sydney Street carrying a small child in

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his arms. When he fell over in the roadway, she ran off. Several people noticed him staggering about on his route eastwards to Edward Street, where he found another tavern. At about 8 pm, he was met in Lavender Street by a policeman who had known him for 10 years. PC Tuppen advised him to go home but he went off unsteadily round the corner.

Wood actually fell up against one witness, Rose Leggatt, at the corner of Montague Street and Upper Bedford Street. She saw him putting his hand towards a little child outside Trengrove's and saw her follow him to the middle of Somerset Street. There he was sighted by Mrs Alice Guy, who saw him pass her house at 8.20. She was standing by her front door and watched him walking unsteadily carrying a little girl, who was crying. She called out: 'Don't hurt that poor little thing.' The man turned round under the lamplight and she saw his face distinctly. She was sure it was Wood. Harry Spicer, a printer, saw a man carrying a child pass him in Eastern Road at about ten to nine. His face was hidden in the child's clothes.

Blood was found on the murderer's clothes when he was arrested on the afternoon the body was found. He had, in addition, apparently talked about the murder before it had been announced. His response throughout subsequent proceedings, and in personal letters, was that he had been drunk and could not now believe he had committed such a terrible act, of which he had no recollection.

Wood (who had, incidentally, been engaged to be married) was brought to trial for Edith's murder at Lewes on 6 April 1892 before Mr Justice Mathew. Defending counsel, Mr CF Gill – a noted Sussex barrister who was MARSHALL HALL's senior partner – told the jury that the prisoner had been suffering from epileptic insanity. The crime was so horrible that it must have been performed by an insane man. He said Wood was a confirmed epileptic and when drunk had no idea what he was doing. Dr CE Saunders, Medical Superintendent of the Sussex County Lunatic Asylum, said he had made a special study of insanity and epilepsy. He had examined the prisoner twice and he seemed perfectly rational. There were no indications of epileptic mania. Dr Sheppard, another specialist, gave evidence that he had found Wood depressed but quite collected. He was not insane by any means.

The judge had no time for the epilepsy/insanity speculations. If Wood had no recollection of what had happened on the fateful evening, why had he claimed that he had been at the circus? Was he unconscious when carrying the child through the street? The jury, too, were quite clear in their view. After only eight minutes, they returned a verdict that Wood was guilty of wilful murder and sentence of death was duly passed.

The Home Secretary rejected a petition started in Brighton for Wood to be sent to a criminal lunatic asylum. He saw no reason to interfere with the law and child-killer George Henry Wood was executed at Lewes Prison on 26 April 1892.