

The Murder of Mrs Reville

By JAN BONDESON

Hezekiah Reville was born in Linton, Cambridgeshire, in 1843, the son of the farmer John Mackintosh Reville. He became apprenticed to a butcher, and made good progress in his chosen trade. In 1874, he married Mary Ann Chudley at the London Street Chapel in Reading; both bride and groom were 21-years-old. In or around 1876, he purchased a butcher's shop at Windsor Road in Slough, and set himself up as a master butcher.

An *Illustrated Police News* illustration shows him looking quite dignified, with a large bushy beard to match his venerable Biblical name. The Revilles had two daughters: Alice Jane, born at Slough in 1876, and Emily Gertrude, born at Eton in 1878. They were both steady, industrious people, and the butcher's shop made good progress. The shop opened at seven in the morning, and remained open until eight in the evening. Mrs Reville served behind the counter, kept the books and handled the accounts. In 1881, Mr Reville employed two young assistants: the 16-year-old Alfred Augustus Payne and the 15-year-old Philip Glass; both of them had been at the butcher's shop for around two years.

On Monday, 11th April 1881, everything seemed well at the little butcher's shop in Windsor Road. Hezekiah Reville and his two assistants were butchering away, and Ann Reville sold meat and hams behind the counter. The shop was a small one, just about 18 feet by 12 feet,

and equipped with a chopping-block and a counter with the scales. Behind the shop was a parlour, with a window to the shop; when doing the books, Ann Reville used to sit at a desk just by this window, so that she could see the customers coming into the shop.

After a hard day's work, Hezekiah Reville went out around eight in the evening, to speak to some fellow tradesmen and empty a pint or two of beer. He told Payne to stay late at work, to rub salt into some hams. In spite of the late hour, the butcher's assistant obediently got to work. Glass left at 8.25pm, leaving Payne alone with Mrs Reville, and the two little girls sleeping in their bedroom upstairs. Payne claimed to have left at 8.32pm; he later claimed that Mrs Reville told him to turn the gas down and shut the door before he went out. Just a few minutes later, Mrs Eliza Beasley, who lived next-door-but-one to the Revilles, came to keep the butcher's wife company in the evening. She was horrified to find that Ann Reville had just been murdered with a chopper: there were two frightful wounds on the top of the head, breaking the skull open, and another deep wound in the neck.

Mrs Beasley ran out of the shop to summon assistance. She met a coach builder named George John Leight, who offered to stand guard at the murder shop while she ran to fetch a doctor; he later estimated that he reached the shop at 8.40pm, indicating that he had met Mrs Beasley at around 8.38pm. On her

way to Mr Edward Dodd, the local surgeon, she met Police Sergeant Hebbes in the street, and explained to him what she had just seen. The experienced policeman consulted his watch when he reached the butcher's shop: it was 8.45pm, and he had met Mrs Beasley two minutes earlier. Mr Dodd also had a look at the clock in his consulting-room when the excited Mrs Beasley came to call: it was 8.45pm. The surgeon then made haste to Reville's butcher's shop, where he found Mrs Reville dead but still warm; she was far advanced in pregnancy, and sitting on the chair reclining backwards. He estimated that death had been instantaneous, due to the severity of the wounds, each of which had been sufficient to stun her. A bloody chopper was lying on the table, along with a handwritten note.

Supt. Thomas Dunham of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary, who had been instrumental in the arrest of John Owen, the Denham mass murderer, back in 1870, was swiftly alerted, and he arrived at the murder shop as early as 8.45pm. Sergeant Hebbes pointed out that there an obvious clue to the identity of the murderer had been found: namely the handwritten note found on the table:

Mrs Reville: You never will sell me no more bad meat like you did on Saturday. I told Mrs Austin, of Chalvey, that I would do for her. I done it for the bad meat she sold me on Saturday last - H. Collins, Colnbrook.



The butcher's shop, the corpse of Mrs Reville, and the hall where the inquest was held, from the Illustrated Police News, 23rd April 1881

This threatening missive was filed in a folder marked 'evidence', and some constables went to Colnbrook to find the man Collins, and to Chalvey to find Mrs Austin. By this time, Hezekiah Reville himself had been alerted by a boy sent to the White Hart nearby, where he had sat swigging from his pint glass. Since Superintendent Dunham knew that the husband was often the guilty party in cases of wife murder, he considered the butcher as a prime suspect, but Reville was able to give a good account of his movements that evening, and he seemed genuinely distraught at the loss of his wife, to whom he had been devoted. When Reville was asked if he had any suspicions, he immediately mentioned the lad Alfred Augustus Payne, who had been suspected of stealing meat in the shop. Superintendent Dunham and Sergeant Hobbes went to see Payne, whose father kept the Royal Oak public house in Slough. Young Payne seemed strangely detached when the policemen told him that his employer's wife had just been brutally murdered, something they found odd and incriminating. They took Payne into custody, and ordered him to provide samples of his handwriting for comparison with the writing of the note from 'Collins', which had clearly been written by the murderer.

On the afternoon of 12th April, Mr Frederick Charsley, the Coroner for South Buckinghamshire, opened the inquest on Ann Reville at the Crown Inn in the High Street. Captain Tyrwhitt-Drake, the chief constable of Buckinghamshire, and Superintendent Dunham were watching the proceedings for the police.

Philip Glass, the first witness, testified that he had been employed by Mr Reville for two years; Payne had been engaged some time before him. When Glass had left the butcher's shop at 8.25pm, Mrs Reville had been sitting in the back room, and Payne had still been on the premises. The saw and two steels had been on the block, but the chopper was nowhere to be seen. Glass had heard Mrs Reville complaining of Payne's conduct once or twice, and a month ago Payne had been going to leave his employment, although Mr Reville persuaded him to stay.

Hezekiah Reville testified that when he had left the butcher's shop at a little before eight, Payne and Glass had both been on the premises. He had pointed out some hams to Payne and ordered him to rub them with salt, but it later turned out that the careless butcher's boy had done the wrong ones. He had seen Payne writing on a piece of paper when he

left the shop.

Reville himself had gone to see two fellow tradesmen named Wilmot and Green, before having a pint or two at the White Hart. Both he and his wife had more than once complained about Payne's work: in spite of his youth, he liked to go to the public house, leaving Glass to do all the work. Reville had once found a beefsteak hidden under a blade bone in the shop, and when he had told his wife that he would like to find out who was the thief, she had said "Oh, you'll never do that. You have not seen half that I have."

Reville had been to see Mrs Glass, trying to ascertain who it was who had been stealing meat in the shop, and he had told both her and another woman that he was going to dismiss Payne. Mrs Reville had once said that if he did not dismiss Payne then she would do it, and the truculent butcher's boy "had been greatly annoyed since, and there had been a great difference in his manner to his mistress."

Mrs Mary Ann Glass confirmed that Reville had been to see her, complaining about losing a quantity of steak, and Philip Glass had been told why his master had come to call, although he denied mentioning this to Payne.

Alfred Augustus Payne was the next

witness: dressed in his blue butcher's frock, he seemed to be as cool as a cucumber. He merely confirmed that he had left the shop at 8.32pm, and at that time the chopper and other tools had been on the block, except the knife, which had been put by the scales and weights.

The mysterious note from 'H. Collins' was read aloud in court, but police inquiries had showed that no such person was a resident of Colnbrook. There was a Mr Robert Collins in Chalvey, and he was a customer of Reville's, but he denied any knowledge of the note. The constables had found two Mrs Austins in Chalvey, but both of them denied knowing anything about a 'H. Collins', or any complaint about bad meat.

Sergeant Hobbes testified that there had been a great deal of blood about the murder room, and that the kitchen table behind the murdered woman was liberally splashed with gore; the murderer's clothes were likely to have been equally stained with blood. When Payne's shirt had been examined, two stains of blood had been found on the left sleeve, but the butcher's boy said they had come from killing sheep the week before.

The inquest was adjourned for a week.

The police belatedly removed all of Payne's clothes, for examination by an expert. They had time to compare the witness testimony, being amazed that the murder had clearly been committed between 8.32pm, when Payne left the shop, and 8.38pm, when Mrs Beasley discovered the body; a short interval indeed for some murderous individual to burst into the shop and make use of the chopper to dispatch the butcher's wife.

It was also noteworthy that she seemed to have been struck down from behind: had the murderer entered the house through the side entrance and sneaked up to her from

behind? If some thief or old enemy had come running into the shop, Mrs Reville would have been unlikely to remain sitting on her chair, since she had a good view of the shop through the window.

She had been given a florin by a customer, and put it in her dress pocket, but this coin could not be found at the scene of the crime, so it had probably been stolen by the murderer. Some small coins were strewn on the floor, and Mrs Reville's watch lay in front of her. It also turned out that one of Mrs Reville's little daughters had walked downstairs for some water and heard the shop door slam, most probably by the absconding murderer; the girl had then seen her mother sitting in the chair dreadfully injured, and giving a choking noise as she breathed her last. The frightened little girl had run back up to bed and hid underneath the bedsheets, shivering with terror all night.

Ann Reville was buried on the evening of 14th April. The neighbouring shops were closed, and all blinds had been drawn. Hezekiah Reville and his fellow tradesmen followed the coffin on its hearse, with Philip Glass carrying a basket of primroses and violets. The Rev. P.W. Phipps conducted the service as Mrs Reville was laid to rest in St Mary's Churchyard at Upton, where her headstone, albeit very worn, is still legible. Many people attended the funeral, and in the coming days, numerous London murder enthusiasts travelled to Slough to see the murder shop in Windsor Road, and Mrs Reville's gravestone.

When the coroner's inquest resumed on 19th April Mr Reville's memory had improved, and he delivered some further hostile testimony against Payne, including that his wife had once said "If you do not get rid of Payne, I will, for I know

that he is robbing us." Payne could swing a heavy chopper with alacrity, Reville said, and in spite of his youth, he was an expert on killing sheep.

Importantly, the witness Kate Amelia Timms testified that she had met Philip Glass in the High Street at 8.28pm; she had met Alfred Augustus Payne a few minutes later, and he had been walking rather hurriedly. When she had come home to her lodgings, the time had been 8.36pm.

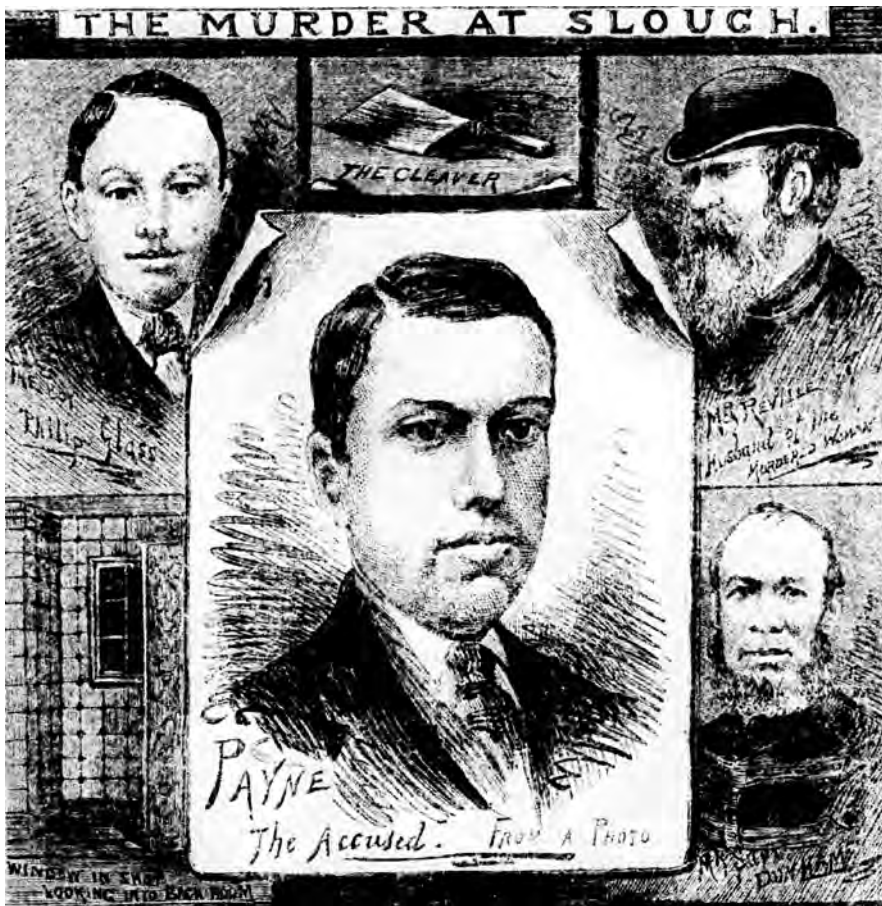
The brick-maker George Roll, who knew Payne, had seen him coming out of the Reville butcher's shop at around 8.30pm; he had wished him 'Good night' and Payne had returned the compliment.

Then it was time for the London graphologist Mr Charles Chabot to give evidence. He had been provided with handwriting samples from Mr Reville, Payne and Glass, and compared them with the 'H. Collins' note. Chabot was 66-years-old, and he had 30 years of experience in his chosen field. He declared that the handwriting on the 'Collins' note was that of Alfred Augustus Payne, although the miscreant had clearly tried to disguise his writing.

As a result of Chabot's confident identification of the handwriting, the inquest returned a majority verdict of wilful murder against Alfred Augustus Payne, and he was committed to stand trial for murder at the Aylesbury Assizes.

The mills of justice ground at a more rapid pace in those days, and as early as 28th April 1881, the trial of Alfred Augustus Payne opened at the Aylesbury Assizes, before Mr Justice Lopes. The prosecution was led by Mr J.C. Lawrance and Mr Bullock, and Payne was defended by Mr Walter Attenborough and his junior Mr Whiteway.

Hezekiah Reville, who was said to be deeply affected by the occasion, this time said that he had gone out



Drawings of Payne, Glass, Mr Reville and Superintendent Dunham, from the Illustrated Police News, 7th May 1881

at 8.10pm, leaving his wife and two children alone with Payne and Glass. He repeated his hostile testimony against Payne, but on cross-examination, he had to admit that although Mrs Reville had complained of Payne's slovenly work, this was a full month before the murder, and she had not found any faults with him since then.

Mrs Maria Barber, whose husband had a dairy next door to Reville's shop, testified that she had a dog, and that this animal would have barked if some person had tried to approach the house through the side entrance. Mrs Beasley, Mr Leight and the surgeon Mr Dodd repeated their evidence from the inquest, without any addition, as did the important witness Kate Amelia Timms, who had met Glass and Payne the evening of the murder.

When it was the turn of the star

witness Charles Chabot to perform, the peppery Mr Attenborough soon had him in serious difficulties. It turned out that Chabot had been looking at an accounts book where some entries had been made by Payne; others he had merely assumed to have been written by the butcher's boy, although this could by no means be proven. Nor could Chabot deny that graphology was far from an exact science, and that he himself sometimes made mistakes.

Mr Attenborough concluded with an eloquent speech for the defence. Although at least a florin had been stolen from the murdered woman's pocket, not a farthing of money had been found in the prisoner's possession. Both Mr Dodd the surgeon and Sergeant Hobbes had given evidence that the clothes of the murderer must have been extensively bloodstained; yet an expert had found no trace of blood on Payne's clothes,

apart from the minor stains on the sleeve of his shirt. The prisoner had not been in Reville's shop for any felonious purpose on the evening of the murder, but he had merely been doing his duty for his master. Since Payne knew that R. Collins of Chalvey, was a bona fide customer of Reville's, why would he sign his forged letter 'H. Collins, Colnbrook'? The note had been written by an uneducated person, who could not spell; yet in a letter Payne had written while in police custody, his spelling was very good. The handwriting evidence had very little value, he assured the jury, and he himself had seen several words in the 'Collins' note that very much resembled the handwriting of Mr Reville!

Mr Justice Lopes delivered a scrupulously fair summing-up, warning the jury that if the circumstantial evidence presented in court did not establish the guilt of the prisoner, then they must acquit him.

The jury was out for 25 minutes before returning a verdict of Not Guilty, and Alfred Augustus Payne was a free man.

The police investigation of the murder of Mrs Reville was completely deflated by the acquittal of Payne, and despite a £100 government reward there was never any further progress. The police would seem to have thought Payne a lucky lad to get away scot free at the Aylesbury Assizes, thanks to the muddled evidence from the elderly Mr Chabot, and the exhortations of a first-class barrister.

Payne joined the army later in 1881, enlisting in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. He would remain in Slough for many years to come, leaving butchery alone to become a general labourer; he married in 1890 and had a daughter. He served gallantly in the Great War, and was promoted to sergeant, finally dying in 1941 at the age of 77.

As for Hezekiah Reville, he was

presented with a purse containing £64 10s, collected by the Slough vicar, postmaster and coroner, among other benevolent local worthies, as “practical proof of the sympathy felt for him in the town and neighbourhood”; it is noteworthy that Superintendent Dunham was another of the contributors. Reville remarried in 1883 and moved to Brighton, where he ran a small bakery, and later worked as a bath chair attendant. He remarried again in 1913 after the death of his second wife, and died in 1933 aged 91. Both the Reville daughters married and had offspring.

At regular intervals, the unsolved Slough murder was mentioned in alarmist newspaper articles about unsolved slayings in London and its vicinity. In 1907, a *Lloyds' Weekly News* journalist went to Slough, where he found the butcher's shop in Windsor Road still standing, and not much changed since the murder back in 1881. Today, most of central Slough has been carted off by the developer's lorry, however, and the murder shop is long gone.

In an analysis of the murder of Ann Reville it is important to note that the murder was clearly premeditated. The murderer took care to write the ‘Collins’ note, before attacking Mrs Reville and putting the note next to the bloody chopper on the table. This means that the ‘usual suspects’ can be excluded: tramps, thieves, robbers and lunatics. The murderer was either Philip Glass, Alfred Augustus Payne, Hezekiah Reville, or some unknown enemy of Mrs Reville.

As for Glass, he was just 15-years-old at the time of the murder, he did not have any motive, and he left the shop prior to Payne, being spotted by a witness walking away from the butcher's shop; to my mind, he can be excluded as a suspect.

As for Payne, he was a slovenly worker and a suspected thief; if we



*Mrs Reville's desk
from Lloyd's News, 13th October 1907*

are to believe Mr Reville, he disliked Mrs Reville, and was seen writing on a piece of paper prior to the murder. The police thought him guilty, from his callous reaction when informed of the murder, and his general behaviour while in custody. At the inquest, Glass had testified that Payne had told him that he would be staying another half an hour to rub the hams; yet according to his own version of events, he left just five minutes later. Chabot may well not have been a leading light in his profession, but at the coroner's inquest he declared himself certain that the ‘Collins’ note had been written by Payne. The idea that such a note would divert police suspicion away from the real murderer is a preposterous one to a grown man, but perhaps not to an adolescent. The motive for Payne to murder Mrs Reville might well have been a combination of revenge against herself, and against her annoying husband. Payne was physically capable of committing the murder, being a strong and sturdy lad, and experienced at killing sheep.

In Payne's defence, it must be objected that after all, the lad was just 16-years-old. Was he capable of planning and executing the perfect murder? Well, some adolescents are clever sociopaths who can keep their

cool even under trying circumstances, and the mass murderer Graham Frederick Young poisoned his first victim when he was just 15-years-old.

Most of the incriminating evidence against Payne came from Mr Reville, who might well have had reasons of his own to inculcate his young assistant. At the trial, Mr Attenborough pointed out that money had been stolen, and that Payne had no money on him when he was arrested, but he could have hidden the money, or thrown it away. Mr Attenborough successfully challenged Chabot's evidence, and it must be admitted that the elderly graphologist made a most unsatisfactory impression in court; he clearly was a sick man, and would in fact die the following year.

Importantly, Payne's clothes were not bloodstained, whereas those of the murderer would have been hit by blood-spatter when he struck his victim down from behind. It is difficult to think of any stratagem by which Payne could have avoided getting blood on his clothes. Moreover, Payne was just an ordinary man, who did nothing newsworthy or interesting before or after the murder, whereas the murderer was clearly a person of superior cunning and cleverness.

In 1929, the old crime writer Guy

Logan suggested that Hezekiah Reville was the guilty man: he had entered the butcher's shop through the side entrance, murdered his wife, and then deliberately tried to incriminate Payne. The crime writer Jack Smith-Hughes agreed, pointing out that although Reville had been seen by several people, calling at fellow tradesmen, and visiting two pubs, his alibi was far from rock solid. It would have been possible for him to return to the butcher's shop, either through the front or the side entrances, murder his wife, and then return to the White Hart to fake an alibi. The motive might well have been that he secretly resented his wife, and wanted to remarry, as he did in 1883.

Neither Logan nor Smith-Hughes seems to have appreciated that Mrs Reville was heavily pregnant at the time of the murder, however; what kind of monster would murder both his wife and his own unborn child? Furthermore, Reville seems to have lived perfectly happily with his wife, and he was an ordinary man who did nothing interesting neither before nor after the murder. The police thought him innocent, and there is nothing to suggest that his clothes were stained with blood.

Finally, we have the scenario that a secret enemy of Mrs Reville committed the murder, waiting outside until Payne left, and then negotiating an entry through the side door, and striking Mrs Reville down from behind. There was a dog next door, however, and its owner testified that this animal made it its business to bark at people trying to make use of the passage between Reville's shop and that of the dairyman Barber. Moreover, Reville testified that this door was kept locked, and any person with an ambition to open it had to



understand a system to retrieve a key suspended with a piece of string.

The murder of Mrs Reville is one of twelve unsolved murder mysteries discussed in my book *Victorian Murders*, and it is the most enigmatic of the lot. It is possible to narrow down the search to just two credible candidates, namely Payne and Mr Reville, but both of them have multiple arguments in favour of their innocence, in particular a lack of both motive and technical evidence.

If either Payne or Mr Reville managed to get away with murder, they did so with impressive coolness and cunning, in a sanguineous cataclysm that lit up in brightest crimson an otherwise perfectly ordinary and humdrum existence.

It is noteworthy that neither of the prime suspects did any further butchery after the murder; did Payne flinch at the crushing sound as a sheep's skull was broken, or did Reville abhor the weight of the chopper in his hand?

Personally, I would favour Payne as the murderer, with a narrow margin; if this otherwise model citizen, with

gallant wartime service, was really the guilty man, he would have been able to write a murder story that would outshine the mawkish ruminations of Agatha Christie, based solely on his own experiences back in 1881.

SOURCES

Illustrated Police News, 23rd April and 7th May 1881; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12th April 1881; *Daily News*, 13th, 14th, 20th, 29th and 30th April 1881; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 17th and 24th April and 1st May 1881; G.B.H. Logan, *Guilty or Not Guilty* (London 1929), pp164-80, J. Smith-Hughes, *Nine Verdicts on Violence* (London 1956), pp1-22, J. van der Kiste, *Berkshire Murders* (Stroud 2010), pp65-71, J. Oates, *Buckinghamshire Murders* (Stroud 2012), pp78-88.



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