

FORTUNATELY THE ONLY ONE?

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As a young PC straight from training school and joining my first station I was taken to one side by the Station Sergeant in charge of my relief and given some practical words of wisdom. I was told that during my career there would be occasions when things went wrong and that often they would be as a result of my own shortcomings. In particular I was told that most officers got into trouble as a result of their dealings with property and/or women. Experience showed that the above was true and history illustrates that this was the case in the following most serious event.

Metropolitan Police Orders for 10 July 1893 contained a short entry which as far as I am aware is the only one of its kind; The order read,

‘Dismissed, X. P.C. 385 -73717 Cook. Convicted of unlawful murder at the Central Criminal Court Sessions and sentenced to death. No pay.’

This entry related to the body of a woman in her early 20's, Maud Smith (Merton) being found on open land at the side of Wormwood Scrubs prison. There were signs of a vicious assault leaving wounds to the head, face and chest. As part of routine deployment of officers two constables were routinely posted night duty to patrol the grounds around the prison and on the night of 6/7 June 1893 PC George Cook (name sometimes spelt with an E) was detailed to this duty with PC 149 X Kemp. Due to PC Kemp having to complete reports at the station he did not accompany Cook to the patrol not arriving until about 11.20p.m. when it had just started to rain. His evidence was that Cook, with whom he had worked on previous occasions, behaved quite normally although he made an excuse and went to an area of the old prison quarters where he said he could use the W.C. and then wash his hands. They resumed their patrol and later reported to the Patrolling Sergeant, X division, ‘All right sergeant’. PC Kemp went off duty at 4a.m. but PC Cook remained on the patrol by himself until 6a.m. PC Kemp was later to state that a no time did Cook give any sign of being agitated, excited or upset. The body was found on the morning of 7 June; the Divisional Surgeon was called and attended along with Inspector Gilliam X. who took up the enquiry. The Divisional Surgeon was of the opinion that the injuries had been caused as a result of direct violence inflicted by some hard substance. The body was taken to Hammersmith mortuary for further examination. The Doctor noted that, although the ground and grass around the body was wet, underneath it was quite dry. Later he was given a truncheon as possibly being the weapon used but there was no sign of recent use, but on the uniform trousers and one of the boots taken from Cook, he found what appeared to be spots of blood. The Doctor placed one of the boots on the body and the heel of one of them was placed over marks on the face and neck and, in his opinion, they corresponded.

The boots and some uniform trousers, had been seized by Insp. Hatcher at the home of PC Cook after having received information from his landlady, the wife of another PC, who thought that Cook was trying to plant or bury something in the garden: he had a look and saw what she thought was a truncheon. The

Inspector dug up the only partly buried truncheon and saw that it was stamped with the number of an officer from W division.

Cook made two statements in both of which he denied any knowledge of the murder and the only independent witness available, a chemist who resided at Wormwood Scrubs, could only say that he saw a police officer taking to a woman just before 11 pm on the 6th June. He was unable to identify the officer but did identify the woman when he was taken to the mortuary to view the body.

PC Cook had joined to police on 25 June 1888 and had served on three other divisions before being posted, some 5 weeks prior to the murder, to X Division. One of the previous divisions was W and it was as found that the truncheon belonged to an officer on that division and it had disappeared about 3 years previously at the time Cook was serving there. It also transpired that Cook was well known to the deceased; in fact at one time they had lived together giving the impression that they were husband and wife. Smith and Cook had however had a number of arguments, she had been to the police complaining about the treatment and Cook was for a short time suspended, on re-instatement he was transferred to X divi-

sion. Evidence was given that on the night of the murder Smith had been to the police station enquiring after Cook and had been told where he was patrolling, the two had argued and Smith has heard to say that she was going to wait until Cook finished his duty.

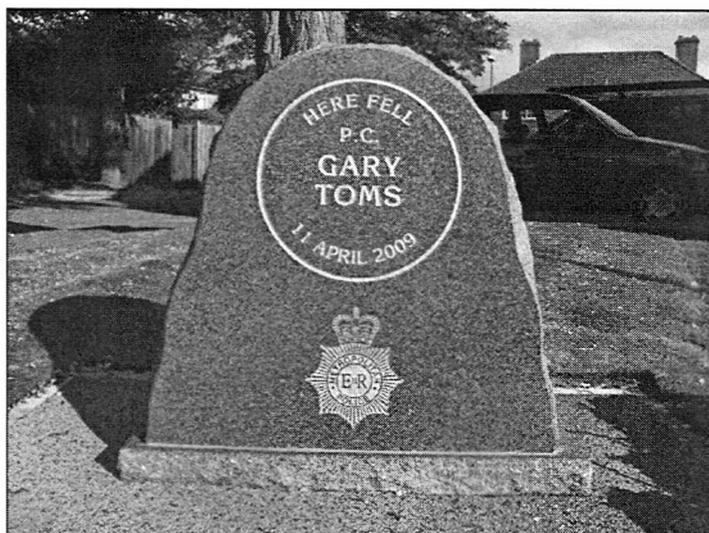
After consultations with the Commissioner Cook was charged and duly appeared at Magistrates court when he was remanded in custody. To the Inspector who accompanied him to Wandsworth Prison Cook said that the truncheon he had tried to bury in the garden was not the one he had used and although he claimed the blood had come from a cut finger he said, 'I suppose its no use trying to get out of it'

The trial lasted two days, 8 and 9 July, before Mr. Justice Hawkins, Cook pleaded not guilty and was represented by two barristers but did not call any witnesses. The jury returned a verdict of Guilty but with a recommendation for Mercy. Cook was executed at Newgate on 25 July 1893.

Even without the forensic science that is available to-day there can be little doubt that the right man was convicted. It was impossible at that time to test the blood to confirm that it was that of Smith. The only evidence as to the time of the offence was the fact that the ground was dry underneath the body; it had not started raining until after 11p.m.before which she had been seen talking to a police officer. The fact that the victim was known to Cook was not in doubt neither was the fact that she had been looking for him that evening. Just why Cook buried the truncheon he had stolen is not known apart from the fact that he thought his property might have been examined as a result of the murder. One witness told Cook that had the hidden truncheon not come to light suspicion would not have fallen upon him in quite way that it did.

All the above information can be found either on line or at the National Archives. In particular the original statements can be found on CRIME 1/39/2 at Kew and details of the trial either in The Times or transcripts of trials of the Central Criminal Court both on line.

PC GARY TOMS



On 18th October 10,2010 the Prime Minister unveiled a memorial to PC Gary Andrew Toms, aged 37 who was murdered on duty, April 2009 in Ashlin Road, Stratford, London. He was fatally injured whilst arresting suspects escaping in a vehicle. This is a memorial provided by the Police Memorial Trust founded by Michael Winner. It is the second of its type to have been installed in Stratford, the previous one in honour of PC Nina Mackay on 24th October,1997.

(photo of the memorial attributed to "Police Roll of Honour Trust")
 Thanks to PHS member, Keith Foster who is also a researcher for the
 Police Roll of Honour Trust.