

## The Murder of Police Constable Alfred Austwick of Lumby

One of the most deliberate murders to have been carried out in the West Riding of Yorkshire took place late on the Saturday night of July 31st 1886.

The victim was Police Constable Alfred Austwick who was murdered by James Murphy an out of-work collier of 18 Lambert Fold. Murphy was well known to the Police. In 1878 he was committed for five years for housebreaking in Batley, but more menacingly, previous to that he had been gaoled for threatening to murder Police Sergeant Lodge.

In March of 1885 he received a fine of 20 shillings plus costs for poaching. In fact Murphy was known as a notorious poacher who went out with a gun on a regular basis and it was for this reason that P.C. Austwick kept a very close eye on him. According to witnesses Murphy had threatened to kill the officer on many occasions, Austwick however had taken no notice of the threats but simply laughed at them. He said Murphy was too great a coward to cause any harm to him.

At the Start of that fateful week on the Monday evening, James Murphy had been drinking in the Station Inn public house, the licensee being Henry Burgess. P.C. Austwick saw Murphy drunk in the village and had occasion to report him and serve him with a summons. On Wednesday afternoon at about three o'clock, Henry Burgess was talking to Murphy in his kitchen when Murphy produced the summons from his pocket. While waving it about he said that Austwick would not serve another on any person, for, before he slept that night, he would blow a hole through him. David Sanderson who was also present begged Murphy to "drop it" saying he had "gotten over" things as bad as that in the past.



James Murphy  
from a wood carving

On Saturday evening, one of the main witnesses, Joseph Lodge, a miner of No 3 Dodworth Green Road, was making his way home from the Fountain Inn at the top of Jermyn Croft. As approximately quarter past eleven, he met a group of men outside The Travellers Inn then owned by William Buckle. Among the crowd was James Murphy together with John Brown, Frederick and George Lodge, Joe Castle and Mr. Penlington the schoolmaster. Coming down the road from the cross-roads was George Thickett of Lambert Fold and P.C. Austwick with his lantern. They saw the crowd and the constable noticed that Murphy was

being noisy and told him to go in. According to Joseph Lodge, Murphy replied: "Oh you're here; you're the man I want." Murphy then entered Lambert Fold. Meanwhile John Brown of Bower Row, turned to P.C. Austwick and said: "You had better be going or something may happen." The constable said he was not forced to go and Brown replied: "Well it is your job." Soon after Murphy called out: "Where are we now?" There was a flash, a shot was fired and P.C. Austwick fell to the ground outside George Buckle's butcher's shop in obvious pain. One of the witnesses ran for the surgeon, Mr. McCoubrey, who lived at 8-9 Station Rd. David McCoubrey recalled finding the deceased lying in the channel. There was a hole about three inches diameter in the left side of his tunic and much blood about his clothes. Some of the men tried to carry him by linking hands underneath his body but the constable was in great pain. He was placed on a cratch (A traditional Yorkshire wooden fireside chair) and carried home which was approximately one hundred yards away. There he was placed on a bed where his wife and others made him as comfortable as possible. Austwick remained conscious and expressed a desire to see the Rev. J. Bleasdale, once vicar of Dodworth but then the vicar of Bellerby. He also expressed concern about his wife and five children. At twenty-five minutes to two o'clock, two hours after he was shot (the shock had stopped his watch at twenty-five minutes to twelve) P.C. Austwick died. He had retained consciousness until five minutes before his death stating quite categorically to the schoolmaster, who also was in attendance, that it was James Murphy who had shot him.

### The Scene Of The Murder

To the right of the Inn can be seen the Butchers Shop of George Buckle. The Ginnel between the pub and the shop was where Murphy fired the gun. Due to the noise of the shot, many people soon began to gather at the scene of the crime. Very quickly a messenger was dispatched to the Police Station in Barnsley, Superintendent Kane receiving the message. Mr. W Carrington, the magistrates' clerk, together with his son, J Carrington were roused from their beds to take depositions from the constable. Meanwhile Mr. Kane along with Detective Sergeant Tideswell and Police Sergeant Parker arrived at Dodworth in a horse drawn cab. They reached P.C. Austwick as he breathed his

last. Word was left at the station and Inspectors Gunn and Birkinshaw busied themselves getting a force of constables together who scoured the immediate countryside in all directions. Unfortunately no trace of Murphy could be found. Being a noted poacher, he knew the fields and woods better than anybody.

Austwick of No 3 Church Hill Dodworth, was described as 6ft 4in. tall, well built and good natured. Born in Lumby, near South Milford, he was well educated, having spent some years at Thorpe Arch College near Tadcaster. He had resigned the force once but rejoined in 1881 since which he had been stationed in Dodworth.

The murderer, James Murphy was married and had two children a girl of 15 who was in service at the time of the crime and a boy of 11. He was described as 5ft 4in in height, moderately built, of pale complexion with dark brown hair and a slight light moustache. He was dressed at the time of the murder in a dark speckled cloth coat; sleeved waistcoat with mole-skin back, windsor cord front and bone buttons; light mole-skin trousers, clogs far worn and without irons and brown cap with peak.



Alfred Austwick

One of the first statements made to the police was from George Lodge who said: "I was cowered down taking a bit of bacca and Murphy was making a noise in the street. The constable came down and Murphy stood in front of him and said: "Oh you're here; it's you I want. Stop there while I come back." He went into the Fold and when he came back, I saw a flash of a gun which came close by me. The muzzle of the gun came past the corner of the Fold. As Murphy fired he said: "Where are you now?" and the shot struck the constable who fell in the road outside Buckle's the butcher's shop and was taken home, with Murphy escaping down the Fold"

The search for Murphy continued throughout Sunday and on the following days without much success. Meanwhile Frank Ownsworth, undertaker, prepared the deceased for transportation from Dodworth Station to South Milford and on to St Mary's Church where he was to be interred.

The inquest was held in the Travellers Inn before Mr R P Maitland, deputy coroner, and the following jury who were elders of the village: Messrs. James Hattersley, Gentleman, (foreman); Edwin Jones, grocer; Thomas Taylor, grocer; Walter Whittles, shoemaker; Ellis Bostwich, grocer; James Durrans, tailor; William Senior, grocer; Robert N. Penlington, schoolmaster; Chas. Senior, shoemaker; Robert W. Lockwood, schoolmaster; James Shaw, joiner; Thomas John Hall, school warden, and George Winterbottom, wire drawer. According to Mr McCoubrey the cause of death was failure of the heart's action from shock and loss of blood, the result of a pistol or shot wound. He said he found about a dozen pellets of about No. 5 size. In the face of the testimony given by eyewitnesses, the jury returned a verdict of willful murder against James Murphy and the coroner issued a warrant for his arrest.

The search for Murphy was widened and the days turned into weeks. Although he had been reputedly seen in various parts of the country no firm evidence was found. A reward of one hundred pounds was offered for his apprehension and handbills containing a woodcut of him and a full description of his appearance were distributed all over the country. Many hundreds of miners helped the police in the search but to no avail. Detectives made continuous calls on Murphy's known friends and relations on the assumption that someone close to him must be helping him, but not until two months later was Murphy nearly caught. One of the houses visited from time to time was occupied by a man named Goss (later it transpired that Goss was Murphy's brother-in-law) who was caretaker of Barugh Wesleyan Chapel. On Wednesday September 15th Superintendent Kane and Superintendent Stansfield of the West Riding Police in Leeds, together with Inspector Ramsden of Bradford, made a routine visit to Goss's house. They went into the kitchen where the "reputed" wife of Goss strongly denied that she had heard or seen anything of Murphy. While his companions talked, Inspector Ramsden looked around and then walked upstairs into the bedroom where to his astonishment, he saw Murphy in the act of escaping through a little window. He sprang forward to secure him and actually seized his collar but Murphy was by that time falling and he couldn't retain his hold. The murderer dropped into the garden six or eight feet below the window. On standing up, Murphy pointed a gun at Ramsden who held his ground and shouted to his colleagues. The two policemen ran out of the house and round the back of the premises. Then they ran up the opening at the end of the house but found their way blocked by a high wall. Murphy had got clear away although he did leave his clogs behind. His footprints made in stockinged feet, were traced across a garden into a field belonging to Mr. Thomas Mallinson and an adjoining lane. Word was quickly conveyed to the police station at Barnsley where an immediate force was assembled and another search was quickly got under way

together with the help of a pair of bloodhounds. Unfortunately the murderer's scent was not picked up. Goss and his wife, Maria, were locked up in Barnsley police station on the charge of harbouring a murderer, Goss it transpired having been several times convicted for poaching and felony.

It was generally accepted that Murphy must be hiding in local disused mine workings and had been in the habit of visiting Goss at night given that the house was situated in a lonely position. Over the next two days, over two hundred houses were searched in and around Barugh but to no avail. However on the Friday of that week, acting on information received, Detective Sergeants Lodge and Tideswell, together with Detective Inspector Ramsden, visited the house occupied by a man named Henderson at Kingstone Place near Barnsley. In the words of Detective Sergeant Lodge; "We rode to the house in a cab which we left waiting outside. It had been arranged that I should go upstairs while Tideswell remained outside. Ramsden went into the kitchen with me, where we saw Mrs Henderson, She called of her husband and said two men wished to see him. On coming down stairs, he tried to push us out of the door but I forced it open and went upstairs. I heard some scuffling in the bedroom and on entering found Murphy in his shirt and trousers as if he had just got out of bed, scrambling to reach his gun. He pointed the muzzle at me , and I had just time to knock it to one side with my umbrella when he tired. The shot missed me and struck the opposite wall. Tideswell and Ramsden, on hearing the noise, came upstairs to my assistance. Murphy, who now stuck to his gun, fought like a demon and in the fight, paper was torn from the walls and the bed clothes pulled off. At length however, the combined strength of his opponents proved too much for him and he had to give in and allowed himself to be securely handcuffed. When this was done, he saw the game was up and he fiercely exclaimed: ' You might as well kill me now'. We took him downstairs just as he was, put him into the cab and brought him to the lock-up. I'd a narrow escape and I thank God I'm alive."

Murphy had done his best to keep his word "that he would shoot the first man who attempted to take him." Detective Sergeant Lodge had indeed been very lucky, the muzzle of the gun could only have been two or three feet from him, The shot, evidently of a kind known as duck shot, passed close by him and struck the wall knocking a hole in it about two inches in diameter, splitting the brick and knocking off the plaster in the adjoining room while the pellets rebounded around the room. The gun Murphy used was an old fashioned fowling piece and believed to be the one with which he had committed the murder. The man Henderson, having escaped the house while the officers were arresting Murphy, was later captured and remanded by the magistrates to appear on the same date as the other prisoners.

Soon after the arrest Murphy was brought before Messrs. W. Norton, R. Inns and E. Lancaster at the West Riding Court House, Barnsley. The courtroom itself was densely packed with people and men actually stood on each other's shoulders in order catch a glimpse of Murphy. He was described as thin, wiry, muscular little fellow with black hair and a calm, self-possessed manner in strong contrast to all those who were around him. As one remarked, he was the only person in the court who was really quite calm and collected. He chatted freely with the officers who came into contact with him and was quite open in speaking about the murder. One of the officers asked him if he was sorry for what he had done. He replied that he "was not" and added that he would have shot him "a hundred times". He gave the reason for the crime as that the constable had asked his children whether their father was in the house. On Tuesday afternoon Sept. 20th 1886, James Murphy was transferred to Wakefield Prison. He was conveyed by train with eight policemen in attendance. On the arrival of the train at Westgate station, he was escorted down some private steps near the end of the platform and placed in a cab. Not long after, he was inside the walls of the prison. The prisoner's quick departure to Wakefield was due to the persistence of the general public applying to have a look at him.

On Friday 24th, Murphy was brought before the Barnsley Police Court and charged with the murder of P.C. Austwick, at Dodworth. Presiding was Walter Spencer Stanhope, Esq., the other magistrates being Thomas Thornely Taylor, Esq.; Frank Howard Taylor, Esq., Capt. Bower, Walter Norton, Charles Harvey, Richard Inns and John Dyson Esqs. Being cautioned, Murphy said he wished to state the treatment which he had received from Austwick and others. He then remarked that "A job of this sort is not all sweet," adding that at the start of the search, he went four days without food, on another he went three, and on another two days. He added: "If it had been thee, thou'd have been done long since." He also said he had seen the police during the search and had laughed at them. Since Wednesday the 15th he had been a fugitive in the country without any shoes and he said that the pursuit had been so keen that he had had no rest, his feet were sore and blistered and he admitted that after escaping from Barugh, the stubble had troubled him.

By way of explanation for the shooting, Murphy said that P. C. Austwick had taken a load of rabbits into the l

Fountain Inn, saying: "These are some of Jimmy Murphy's rabbits." He also stopped his children and questioned them about his household affairs, asking if they had any lodgers and who had been there, begging of them not to tell their father and mother that he had been questioning them. He also asked his boy whether they had rabbits or hares for dinner. After that, Austwick had stopped him in the road and told him he would search him whenever he met him. The prisoner declared he was not drunk when summoned and was once summoned for poaching by George Sutton, gamekeeper to Mr. Stanhope when Thomas Fielding was the man who committed the offence. Murphy said he applied for a warrant against him for perjury but the bench refused to grant one.

Having heard all the evidence for and against James Murphy, the magistrates found that there was a case to answer and therefore Murphy would stand trial at the York Assizes. The evidence against Murphy at the trial was overwhelming. Defence tried to argue that his state of mind had been greatly affected by P.C. Austwick, continuously harassing himself and his family but the jury returned a verdict of guilty without leaving the courtroom.

James Murphy was Executed at York, Nov. 29th, 1886, for the murder of Police Constable Austwick, at Dodworth, near Barnsley.

Aged 43 years

Now young and old, pray take warning,  
To murder's passions don't give way,  
For if you do you will repent it  
On your last and dying day.