

## **The Death Of Lieutenant Hubert George Chevis**

**Ken Clarke. December 2014**

### **Camberley and event in 1931**

The death of Lt. Chevis took place in 1931 so let us look what was going on in the world, as well as locally in Camberley, Surrey. The Socialist Government had resigned and a National Administration had been formed, with Ramsey MacDonal as Prime Minister, as well as including Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, later to become extremely well known for “Peace in our time”, and “Therefore this country is at war with Germany”, but now we were between wars, although it was not known at the time.

In America Al Capone, gang leader and public enemy number one, had been sentenced to 11 years imprisonment, and a fine of £20,000 for evasion of the income tax laws. This was after three years of an intensive and dangerous investigation by the Federal Government Department.

Nearer to home the country was settling down after the devastation of the First World War, and Camberley was becoming a popular place to retire to. The population was 13,676, who lived in 3,406 houses. This did not include the 161 who lived in the Staff College, or the 2,443 who lived in barracks at Deepcut.

Other snippets include the sale of building plots for £20 in Frimley, with the following description, “Camberley offers you the joys of country life with urban benefits”. A four bedroomed detached house would cost £1,000, with electricity costing 6d a unit. A new bicycle cost £3 19s 6d, and you could buy a 1924 Armstrong Siddeley car for £30, or a 1926 Darracq for £35. Rates in the £ were the unacceptable sum of 8s 1d.

The Post Office was open from 8am to 7.30pm, and on Sundays from 9am to 10.30am, now that’s what I call service. The Surrey Constabulary asked for an increase in officers from 356 to 391, and also a further request for women officers. It was decided that no useful purpose would be achieved by their introduction. Superintendent Kenward, who was stationed at Camberley as a sergeant, wished to retire after 31 year’s service, and was granted a pension of £340 a year.

### **The foul deed**

Lt. Chevis, and his wife of six months lived at “D” hut, Aisne Road, Deepcut. The bungalow consisted of five rooms, with a larder leading off the kitchen. They were looking forward to attending the Aldershot Tattoo later that evening, but by net morning the following events would make headlines in the daily papers, as well as making Mrs Chevis a widow.

They were intending to have dinner, and their cook, Ellen Yeomans was in the kitchen, preparing dinner, which would be served by their batman, Nicholas Bolger. At 7.30pm he served the first course, which consisted of pieces of fish, which were both eaten by the Chevis’s. Fifteen minutes later they were served two partridges, together with potatoes, peas and a bread sauce.

Lt. Chevis had the larger of the two birds, and within a short time he had recalled Bolger back into the room, saying, “Remove this bird. It is the most awful thing I

have ever tasted, and have it destroyed, don't even let the dog get it". Bolger did as he was ordered and the birds were placed in the furnace and destroyed.

Mrs Yeomans then sent in some cheese and salad, no doubt to take away the taste of the birds. At this stage both Lt. Chevis and his wife appeared to be in normal health, but by 8.15pm Mrs Chevis called the batman in and said that her husband was not well, he was icy cold and his face was almost black. He was dressed in his army uniform.

Doctor Bindloss was summoned, and his first thoughts were that he may have suffered from food poisoning, but after treating him for a while, Mrs Chevis also became ill. The doctor then requested a colleague attend and Doctor Murray attended to assist. At 9.45pm Doctor Cuthbert Attenborough came to the house and it was decided to remove both of them to Frimley Cottage Hospital. Artificial respiration was performed on the Lt, by a team of five doctors all night, after he stopped breathing at midnight, but by 9.50am the next morning he was pronounced dead, the result it was thought, of strychnine poisoning. Mrs Chevis, although ill, was a little better, and transferred to a London Hospital where she made a complete recovery.

That was the basic facts, but before we continue I think this is an opportune time to look at some background to both of the Chevis's. Hubert George Chevis was born in Punjab, India, and at the time of his death he was in the Royal Artillery. His father, Sir William Chevis, was in the Indian Civil Service, and rose to become a Judge of the High Court of India from 1910 to 1923. He died on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1939, and married his wife, Amy Florence Dannenberg, in 1893, and Hubert had a brother William James Christian His mother died on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1943, whilst living in the family home at 14 Argyll Road, Bournemouth.

Frances Howard Rollaston was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1902 in Erdington, Warwickshire. Her parents were Frank Rollaston, a wire manufacturer, and Kate Alexandra, her mother. Frances was an only child, and rather sadly her father died in April, just one month after she was born. His estate was valued at £235,532 10s 8d, with the net amount being £198,336 15s 5d. When Frances reached the age of 25 she would most of his estate, with the exception of provisions for her mother, and £500 each year to Frances right away. She would become a rich woman in her own right.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1923 she married George Thompson Trevelyan Jackson, who at the time was 46 years old, 23 years older and a divorced man with a daughter. This liaison did not last long because on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 1930 she married Lt. Chevis at Chelsea Registry Office; they were both 28 years of age. Previously he had been an army vet.

### **Inquests.**

Let us return to Deepcut, and on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June the opening inquest opened at Camberley Court House in Portesbery Road, in front of the Deputy Coroner, William James Francis, who first ordered out all possible witnesses, before giving an outline of the case to the jury. "It is a most unusual case. At the moment I do not think there is any suggestion of foul play, but one never knows in a case of this sort what the evidence may lead to, and I thought it better for the jury to be here today so that they may see the witnesses and hear the whole of the evidence."

In addition he mentioned that the police had removed all remains of food from the

house for examination, also a neighbour's dog, which was in the habit of lapping from the drain outside the bungalow went to the drain on the same evening and died shortly afterwards. A vet had expressed the opinion that the dog had died from strychnine poisoning.

There had been six birds in the same batch, and three of which remained in the shop. The remaining bird had been sold and had not resulted in any ill effects. He would hear certain evidence today then adjourn the inquest in order for Mrs Chevis to be called.

First to be called was Captain William Chevis, brother of the deceased, who stated that his brother had been married six months, and that they were very happy, and he had no knowledge if his brother had made any will. He did not know if he had any enemies, and that he wore spectacles, and had normal sight with them on.

The batman, Gunner Nicholas Bolger was next and confirmed he had been employed so since March the same year. He had bought the dinner into the dining room and placed it on the table. Mrs Chevis had served her husband first. He left the room but a few minutes later was recalled, removed the bird and put it straight onto the fire. As he was putting the silver away Mrs Chevis asked him to not go away as her husband had been taken suddenly ill, and he may be needed. She called the doctor and Doctor Bindloss was the first to arrive. **He had been there about 15 to 20 minutes when Mrs Chevis entered the kitchen and told us the doctor said it was strychnine poisoning.** "Was Mrs Chevis taken ill?" Bolger replied, "She was quite normal then, but was taken ill about 9.30pm".

He was asked if there was any poison in the house or if he had ever purchased any, he replied no to both questions. He stated that the couple appeared happy, and that a Captain and Mrs Bowser had visited the couple before dinner.

Doctor Bindloss had been called at 8pm, and arrived some 15 minutes later to find Mr Chevis in the drawing room. He was reclining on a couch, in a stiff and unnatural position. His body was fully extended, with his heels touching the floor, bathed in perspiration, but was quite natural and cheerful, and was able to give a full account of the dinner. He had called a colleague, Doctor Murray to come and to bring chloroform, but before his arrival Mrs Chevis showed similar symptoms, and at 9pm she was in a convulsion. Chloroform was administered to both of them.

It was decided to remove both of them to Frimley Cottage Hospital, where they were both placed on tables in the theatre, washed out under anaesthetic, and injections to the spinal column were given. Mrs Chevis slowly improved, but her husband got rapidly worse, and although 5 doctors performed artificial respiration all night he was pronounced dead at 9.50am on the Sunday morning.

The Doctor formed the opinion that death was due to strychnine poisoning, as he knew of no other poison that would cause such symptoms. Only two grains would be fatal, the medical dose was one sixteenth. **In a reply to a question from the jury, he stated that he did not tell Mrs Chevis that it was strychnine poisoning.**

Mrs Ellen Yeomans, the cook, had been employed for 6 months, and normally arrived for work about 7.30am, and left between 8 and 8.30pm. On the Saturday she had two partridges, already prepared for cooking delivered from Colebrookes of Farnborough. She cooked them for 45 minutes in a tin with some dripping. The dinner included fish,

anchovy sauce, partridges, tinned peas, new potatoes, bread sauce and gravy.

She confirmed the evidence of Bolger before being asked if Mrs Chevis had said what was the matter with her husband, "No, she did not say so to me, at least, I am not certain, I was so worried."

The Inquest was adjourned until the 21<sup>st</sup> July, when it was hoped Mrs Chevis would be well enough to give evidence, and the report sent to the analyst would be available.

Camberley Court House was the venue of the adjourned Inquest, when Mrs Chevis's evidence would be heard. One report stated that she appeared to be very weak, and at times almost overcome to continue. She stated her full name and that she was staying at Basil Mansions in Knightsbridge. She had divorced her first husband and married Lt. Chevis at Chelsea Registry Office on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1930. She had three children from her first marriage. She admitted that she had seen her first husband at Bournemouth in January, but it was quite accidental.

She had ordered the birds and fish, but did not see them arrive, and the first she saw of them was when they were served at the dinner table. She had nothing to do with the cooking.

She continued, "My husband had not eaten much, I only had time to have two mouthfuls of mine when he said, I don't like the taste of this bird, it tastes horrible." He asked if I would have a piece to see if it really was the bird, and passed a portion from his plate to mine, I cannot remember how much. She went on to say that it had the most filthy, bitter taste of anything she had ever had, and that it burned the back of her throat, leaving a filthy taste everywhere.

They adjourned to the drawing room where Lt. Chevis complained of being unwell, and that his legs hurt. He then went into a spasm, and about 8pm she rang for Doctor Bindloss. She then went on to state there were no poisons in the house, she had had no troubles with the servants, and to her knowledge her husband did not have regimental troubles, and that she had no friends in Ireland.

Further questions revealed that the food safe was on the outside wall and was unlocked, and that they had planned to attend the Aldershot Tattoo later that night. When asked about the portion of the bird passed to her by her husband, she said that if she had not eaten it all, the remains would have been left on her plate, which was probably washed away. The Coroner then said to Mrs Chevis, "I want you to tell me if you know any circumstances which might help me or the police, either now, or if anything should come to your knowledge in the future." She replied, "There is nothing I can tell you." The final Inquest date was set for Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August.

The local paper, and the Nationals were full of the death story, and there were many journalists trying to obtain a seat on the 11<sup>th</sup> August at Camberley Court House. The jury was warned not to take any notice of what they may have read or heard of in the press, and to pay attention only to the evidence given. Mr Francis, the Coroner, stated that it was unfortunate that the pair of partridges had been destroyed, as they would have allowed the jury to arrive at a definite conclusion and a definite verdict. The dog seen lapping at the drains of the Chevis residence, that had died shortly after had not died from strychnine poisoning, and he would not call any evidence on that account.

The Coroner went on to say that what they would hear would not disclose how the strychnine came to be in the partridge, only that through a process of elimination,

which would be shown by Dr. Ryffell, they would come back to the partridge as being the means by which the poison was conveyed, either accidentally or feloniously to Lt. Chevis and his wife.

It was then that the Coroner mentioned that a telegram had been sent to Sir William Chevis, father of the deceased, from Dublin. It had arrived while Sir William was attending his son's funeral, and was addressed to Chevis, Argyle Road, Boscombe, and bore the words, "Hooray, Hooray, Hooray". It had the name of J. Hartigan, Hibernian. There was a hotel of that name in Dublin, but enquiries there had proved unsuccessful. In addition to this, a postcard had been received by the editor of the Daily Sketch, which read, "Dear Sir, why do you publish the picture of the Hooray telegram? - J. Hartigan. Hooray."



The sender of the telegram was described as a low sized man with a small grey moustache, wearing a grey suit. It had been sent at 4pm on the day of the funeral, and had arrived an hour later in Boscombe. A further telegram had been sent to Sir William from Belfast on the 4<sup>th</sup> August, which read, "It is a mystery they will never solve, J. Hartigan."

Mrs Chevis then was called, described as "a slim pathetic figure in black." She stated that she had given Superintendent Stovell all possible help, and that she had destroyed all of his correspondence, except for some bills. After that fatal dinner she had taken one glass of sherry, and her husband two glasses. She did not know anyone by the name of Hartigan, and that her husband had no relatives by that name. Her husband had not made a will, and was not insured. She then referred to the taste of the partridges, stating that the taste was not very offensive, although it had a vaguely musty taste. They usually had partridge about once a week, and as she was not that fond of it, she only used to have a breast. She had known her husband for about 5 years, and was on friendly terms with him.

The analyst, Doctor Ryffell stated that he had formed the opinion that the amount of strychnine taken must have been very considerable. He examined sink water from the drain, dripping, a dish containing peas and potatoes, sauce, flour and carbolic. All the food sent to him showed traces of the poison, and there signs of poison in the deceased's stomach, about two grains were contained in the partridge, although this was a rough calculation, depending on how the bird was prepared. Half a grain was a fatal dose. He agreed with the Coroner that as only a small portion of the bird had been eaten then it must have contained a great amount. He had examined three other birds from the same source, but none of them contained any poison.

Gunner Nicholas Bolger, the batman was then called to the witness box. He was

asked about the dinner and said **that he placed the partridge on the sideboard, from where Mrs Chevis served them.** Later he took coffee into the drawing room, where he saw the lieutenant, but his wife was on the telephone. He admitted he was Irish, but had not visited Ireland since 5 or 6 years ago. He did not know anyone but the name of Hartigan. Lt. Chevis had said, "Take the bird away and destroy it. Don't let the dog get any." He had taken it back into the kitchen, told the cook what had been said, but did not tell her to burn it. He then went on to say that **Mrs Chevis went into the kitchen and said that the doctor said Lt. Chevis had symptoms of strychnine poisoning.**

Mrs Yeomans, the cook was then called. She was almost sure that she had not washed any glasses, butter had not been placed inside the birds prior to cooking, and the meat safe did not have a lock. She did not notice anything unusual about the partridges either before or after they were cooked. **She also said that she had put her fingers around the tin in which they were cooked, and tasted the gravy. It tasted all right.**

After hearing from employees of Colebrook's where the partridges had come from, and how they had been delivered the Coroner summarised all the evidence that had been served, and then informed the jury that the only verdict they could give was an open verdict. Present in Court was Major G.T.T. Jackson, Mrs Chevis's first husband, and his solicitor Mr H. Flint. Mr L. Ricketts represented Colebrook's. The Deputy Chief Constable was also present, his name, Mr Bird!

### **Interview for the People**

The case made headlines in all the papers, with the People reporting that an arrest will follow, also that the sender of the telegrams was known, and that the movement of several people have been closely followed. An interview with Mrs Chevis in the Daily Sketch caught my eye because of its content. It was written by a person G.G., I think was a George Godwin, described as a writer and a barrister, who had written three novels

She was interviewed in her flat, and the article commences thus, "A slim tragic figure, dressed in black, Mrs Chevis sat hands folded on the settee in the drawing room of her Kensington flat. She had come in quietly, noiselessly and taken her place opposite me. In a moment one realised her charm, the soft tremulous half-pathetic tones of her voice, the wide expressive eyes, now quietly interrogative, now downcast with memory, which shadowed her lovely face. She is one of the most beautiful women in England, a lovely blond with hair divided around an oval, inquiring face."

Was the interviewer not taken in by her appearance and demeanour or what? He went through that tragic evening with her, and asked her if she knows of anyone on whom suspicion may rest, then takes her through the details of that fatal meal, "No one at all," she replies, "We are all dumbfounded. There is complete absence of motive." On being asked if it was one of two motives, cupidity or jealousy, she said there was no one who was jealous of her.

She then finished the interview in her own words, "May I say once more that I will do all in my power to throw any light on this ghastly, this awful thing. It is all I wish to do. It is perfectly ghastly, too horrible to think about. Please understand that I cannot yet think of it clearly."

Was this all an act or was she genuine about it all?

Her first husband Major Jackson was interviewed, but could not be connected. Doctor Ryffell experimented with cooking birds with strychnine injected into them. Also it transpired that Mrs Chevis had conceived in May but had miscarried. Mrs Chevis, while staying in Hove had been followed, and a full report had been sent to Surrey.

### **Chief Constables interview and opinion**

In an interview with the chief constable she was first asked about the number of wills she had made. She said she was very much in love with her husband, and they had been living together for the past four years, and would have married earlier, but for the fact that he went to India.

She was asked why the birds were put on the sideboard, and not the table, when it seemed more reasonable to put them on the table. Her reply was that the table was so small that they always put things on the sideboard, and helped themselves from there. Were there any motives or did she suspect anyone. She expressed the view that she thought it was an accident, but was rather forced to the conclusion that someone must have done it, and the only person she could think of is Jackson. (Her first husband.) She went on, "He has no guts, but living with him as long as I did I have to realise that he was an awful man, and vindictive. He hated Chevis. He had reason to hate him. I consider he is a blusterer.

She did not suspect the staff and denied the suggestion made by the Major that she might have dosed him with strychnine as a means of encouraging his sexual efforts. She said she had no knowledge that it had any effect in that way. The chief constable answered that it had not.

The interview concluded with her asking if there were any objections to her going to India, because she had had a flare with some man who was now in India. The chief constable advised her on this point, and said the police had no objection. (I thought this was a rather odd request to make.)

The chief constable was impressed with her calm and collected attitude, and the fact that she was willing to answer any questions on any subject. He thought she was undoubtedly a woman of the world, who has tasted the sweet things in life, and that she missed her late husband very much.

Included in the file is a letter from Mrs Chevis to Superintendent Stovell. I mention part of it. "Are you satisfied about Major Jackson? I know him well and watched him in court yesterday. His face was a study. He always told me that if I went on seeing Hugh Chevis, he would finish his career. He loathed him to an extreme, and that's putting it mildly. He is a very queer man. Are you sure his "alibi" is alright - or is his friend a "really good friend?" Hope you will treat all this confidentially. I would be most grateful if you could probe a little further, if possible, into the matter of him. (I think she was hinting that he might have been homosexual, which was illegal at that time.)

### **My view and other facts**

Mrs Chevis in my opinion is the chief suspect and if Mrs Yeomans is to be believed then I think she would have been worth charging, and let the courts decide on her possible guilty actions. She stated that her husband had died from strychnine

poisoning, the cook had tasted the gravy of the cooking birds, and she had served the meals from the sideboard.

The victim is buried in Aldershot Military Cemetery, and on his headstone are the words, "Until the day breaks." Which comes from the Bible. Mrs Chevis went on to marry a further three times, now that's something to ponder on. In 1934 she married Gerald Montague Braham, and they had a son, David born at the end of that year. In 1951 she married a William Nelson Bicket, but this ended in divorce, and in 1971 she married for the 6<sup>th</sup> time to a retired Lt. Colonel, John Holladay Knowles Rayson, but his liaison only lasted until the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1972, when she died, while they were living in Monte Carlo. The net amount in her will was £172,886.32. To say she had lived an eventful life would be quite an under-statement. My only regret was not being allowed to borrow the letter she sent for analysis, I had a graphologist all lined up for this, but permission was refused. Shame.





**Ken Clarke's Book about the murder**