

# THE MURDER OF RICHARD RUSSELL

By Terry Gale

Witness Report and Confession are from Kentish Weekly Post, dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1816

## Witness Report

*Christopher Neville, who keeps the Torbay public house in Greenwich, stated that Russell left the house on the morning of October 26<sup>th</sup>; he did not return that day, nor did he sleep there that night. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, he came and asked for his bill, which amounted to 7 shillings and 12 pence and Russell tendered a 10/- note. Witness did not know of Russell having any money before and he said he had got money from his uncle.*

On Thursday the 26th October 1815 Richard Russell was returning from work in Lower Green when he met his son, also named Richard Russell. Richard senior lived in a cottage in Hare Lane in the Parish of Thames Ditton. Several people testified in court later that they had seen the pair of them returning to the cottage, and had heard Richard say to his son, "Come let us go home. I have a little provision there even though all my children have left me".

George Francis testified that he had known the old man for 14 years and also the son who was a mariner. He also stated the son was dressed in a blue jacket and trousers.

Upon reaching the cottage the old man got down a tin which contained his life savings, whereupon the son hit him over the head with a shoemaker's hammer. The father was stunned and a struggle took place during which his throat was cut from ear to ear.

George Francis testified he saw the son leaving the cottage the following morning. Thomas Carter, another resident of Hare Lane stated that he was drawn by the commotion at the cottage as blood had been found on the door. He got a ladder and looked in the bedroom window to see the old man lying dead on the floor. Apparently when the body was found it was missing an ear. His cat was sitting on his chest "singing."

Richard Russell junior made an exit from the cottage at about 8am and after a short distance threw away the key and knife. He later said he came down the stairs and locked the front door intending to leave by the gate and a turnip field, but came back and left by the front door.

He made his way to the Coach and Horses public house at Kingston. The publican noticed blood on the note given to him. Russell engaged a return chaise to Greenwich where he used a guinea to buy a wedding ring, and was afterwards immediately married.

*The marriage may have been the Richard Russell who married Greenwich woman Elizabeth Pember by Licence on October 29<sup>th</sup> at St. Mary's Church, Lewisham*

Russell was arrested in Greenwich on October 30<sup>th</sup> and was taken to the House of Correction in Kingston upon Thames. There he eventually admitted his crime to his brother John Russell, saying, "John, I am the man that killed your father."

### Richard Russell's Confession

*"I met my father returning to Esher, I went home with him and struck a light, and we went upstairs to my father's bedroom, when my father went to his box to take out some money saying, "Let us go back to Esher, Richard, and have some drink". During the time that my father was standing over his box, I took up a small hammer, which was in the room, and hit him on the head. I afterwards repeated the blow 3 or 4 times, when he fell, and to prevent the groans of my father, I took out a knife from my jacket pocket and cut his throat. I then took from the box two notes of 10/- and a 2/- note, seven guineas in gold and one half guinea. I afterwards came downstairs, locked the street door and was about to leave the place through the garden and a turnip field, but returned and went out of the front door, which I locked after me and put the key in my pocket."*

Richard Russell was found guilty of murder and was hanged on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1916 at Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

Whilst reading Thames Ditton Overseers of the Poor Accounts I found an entry 6th December 1815: "paid for emptying the pound to look for knife and key belonging to Russell £3-14-6."

I assume from this that Hare lane Green was at that time an animal pound.

It is not clear which cottage Richard Russell lived in; there are several possibilities.

On the 1841 census John Russell is living in Hare Lane so he may have moved into his father's cottage . Either side of him in the 1841 census are William Gale senior and William Gale junior, who are my ancestors.

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