

## Boatman hanged for murdering his wife

William Worthington, a Leeds and Liverpool Canal boatman, was executed in Kirkdale Prison, Liverpool, on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1875 after being found guilty of murdering his wife Ann a few months earlier.

William was born in Scarisbrick and was 29 when he married Ann Prescott, a widow nee Sherman, at St Nicholas, Liverpool, in 1873. She was also born in Scarisbrick and previously married Burscough boatman James Prescott in 1855. They had several children including Mary, who at age 16 gave evidence of her stepfather's cruelty to her mother in a committal hearing summarised below. The fatal attack occurred on 29<sup>th</sup> August in Liverpool, but Ann's death certificate gives the date of death as 10<sup>th</sup> September in Wigan, three days before she was buried in Lower Ince Cemetery.

*Inquest report in the Lancaster Gazette, 19.9.1874*

The adjourned inquiry into the death of Ann Worthington, who died at Wigan last week from injuries inflicted by her husband William Worthington, a boatman, at Liverpool on August 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> was held on 15<sup>th</sup> September at Wigan. The jury returned a verdict of Wilful Murder against the prisoner.

*Extracts from a report in the Liverpool Albion, 26.9.1874*

William Worthington, late master of the flat Ada, which plied between Liverpool and Wigan, was charged on remand at Dale St police court with the wilful murder of his wife, Ann Worthington.

Susannah Daley, wife of a carter of Vauxhall Rd, stated that at about midnight on 29<sup>th</sup> August she and her husband heard the screams of a woman from an open yard used by flatmen at the back of their house. The screams continued for about 15 minutes, and from upstairs she saw a woman stooping and moaning, the prisoner standing near her. She knew and recognised him and heard him say: 'Wilt thou?'. She replied 'No', upon which he kicked her several times on the side. Witness then called to him: 'Are you going to murder the woman? I'll send for a policeman.'

The woman rose to her feet but the man gave her another kick, which knocked her against the wall and witness heard something crack and saw that her face was covered in blood.

Police constable 500, Edward Flint, afterwards came up but declined to interfere because they were man and wife. He advised the couple to go to their boat and settle the dispute.

Mary Prescott, daughter of the deceased by a former husband, said she lived on board the flat with the prisoner and her mother. She remembered them coming in on August 29<sup>th</sup>, her mother's face and clothes covered in blood and dirt. After about 10 minutes the prisoner, without provocation, kicked her on the left side and stomach, breaking her stay bone. He then kicked her on the right side and fell asleep on the floor. Next morning he again kicked her and struck her on the hand with a poker. She had seen the prisoner beat and kick the deceased often.

Another witness, Margaret Sutcliffe, said she had seen the prisoner and his wife in a public house on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> and heard him say: 'If you come to the boat tonight I'll kill thee.'

Police constable Leyland of the Wigan police force gave evidence of the apprehension of the prisoner near his boat in Ince on September 10<sup>th</sup> when in answer to the charge he said: 'It's a bad job.'

Dr Stuart of Wigan said the immediate cause of death was pleuro-pneumonia, but results of a post-mortem examination showed that fractures and bruising were not inconsistent with the violence described causing death.

The magistrate said he had heard the facts with much pain and that the process of killing had been slow, it had nonetheless been cruel. The prisoner was committed for trial at the Assizes.

*Guilty verdict reported in the Edinburgh Evening News, 17.12.1874 . . .*

At the Liverpool Assizes yesterday William Worthington, a canal bargeman, was arraigned before Mr Justice Mellor on a charge of having murdered Ann Worthington, his wife on 29<sup>th</sup> August under circumstances of great atrocity. After a lengthened trial the jury returned a verdict of guilty against the prisoner, but recommended him to mercy. He was sentenced to death in the usual form.

*. . . and in the Warrington Examiner, 19.12.1874*

Another trial for wilful murder took place at the Liverpool Assizes of William Worthington, master of a canal boat, who was charged with causing the death of his wife by kicking her. The unfortunate woman died of pleuro-pneumonia, but medical evidence was that death had been accelerated by the prisoner who assaulted his wife with great violence aboard the boat in Liverpool, death happening about 10 days later. The jury found him guilty but strongly recommended him to mercy.

He was sentenced to death. His Lordship, Mr Justice Mellor, held out no hope of mercy owing to the brutal nature of the case, but he would take care that the recommendation was forwarded to the proper quarter.

William's death certificate, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1875, Kirkdale Prison, says: 'Executed. Hanged in prison for the murder of Ann Worthington.'