

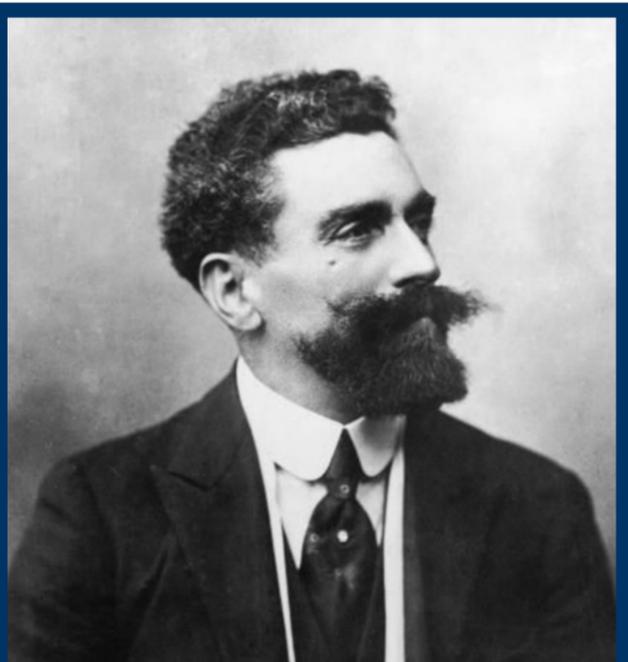
THE BLUE ANCHOR MURDER

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Perhaps the most famous crime ever to have taken place in the Woking area was that of the murder of Alfred George Poynter Jones, the landlord of the Blue Anchor Hotel at Byfleet in March 1924.

He had bought the business the previous August for £800, although some say that the money was actually his wife, Mabel's, who by then quite a successful business-woman.



Jean-Pierre Vaquier was an engineer and inventor, who claimed to have come to England to try to sell the patents of a 'sausage-machine' that he had invented. He also claimed to be conducting wireless experiments, for which he needed chemicals such as strychnine.

Alfred Jones took over as landlord of the Blue Anchor the August before his death.

During the war, when her husband was in the army, she had started a small catering business, running a cafe in Kingston called 'The Chalet', and later taking on a venture called 'The Paddock' at Brooklands Race Track. Unfortunately the 'The Paddock' did not go very well (an £800 hole in her accounts apparently appearing at roughly the same time that her husband bought the Blue Anchor), and by November 1923 she was almost bankrupt. In an attempt to get away from it all, she went off to France 'for a rest'.

There at the Hotel Victoria in Biarritz she met Jean-Pierre Vaquier with whom she apparently began an affair, even though he could speak no English and she no French (actions probably speaking louder than words with little need for translation)!

When she returned to England a few months later, Vaquier followed, staying first in London before remarkably moving to Byfleet and lodging at the Blue Anchor. Vaquier was an inventor and mechanic and said he came to England to try to sell the patent rights of a 'sausage-machine' he had invented.

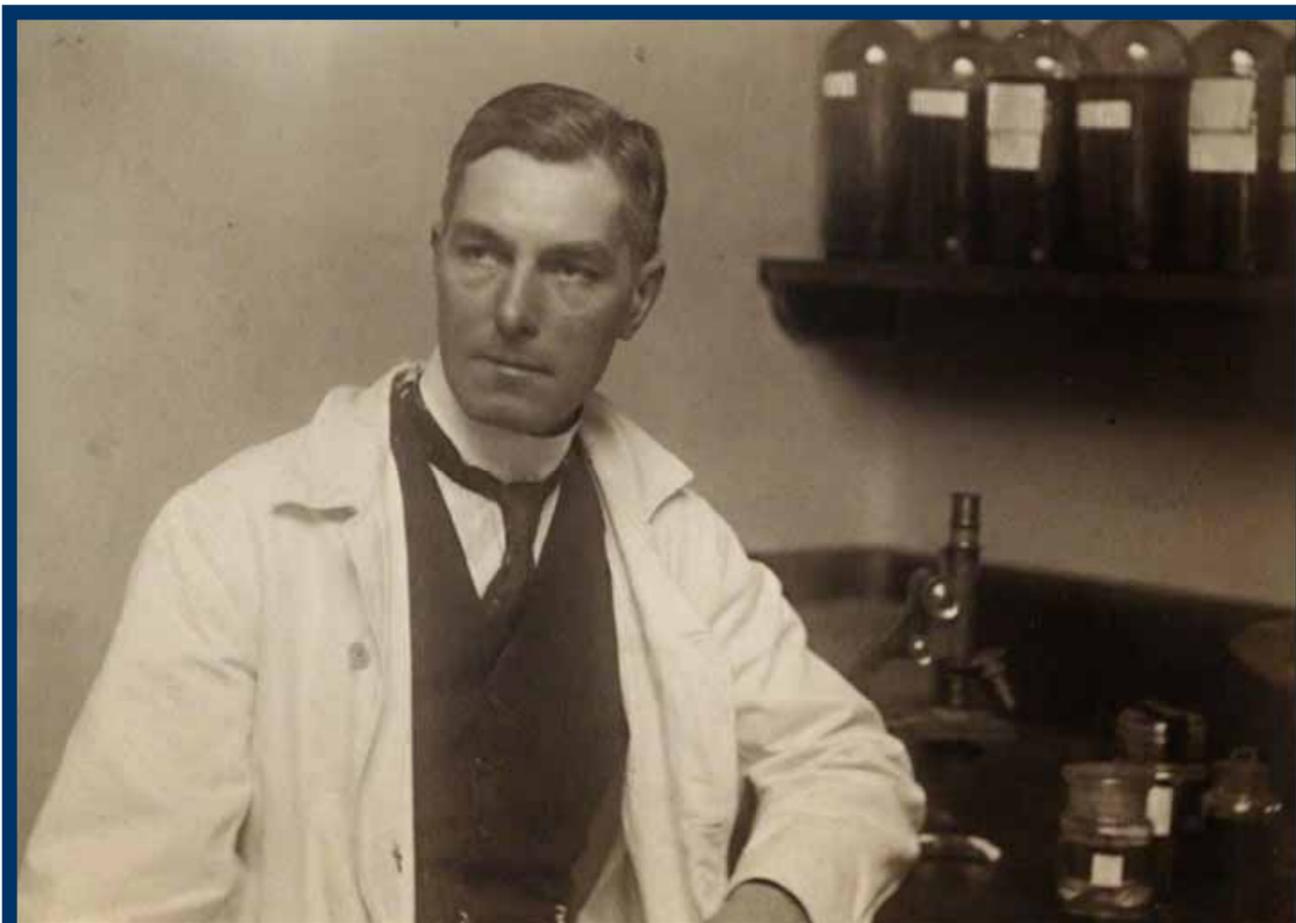
Meanwhile Alfred Jones, also having money troubles, had gone off to Margate for a few days returning with flu and spending a few weeks

recovering, presumably in a separate bedroom from his wife. By the end of March, however, he was much better and possibly much more aware of what was going on between Mabel and their new guest!

On the night of the 28th March there was a party at the Blue Anchor that involved some very heavy drinking on the part of Alfred (a not



Mabel Jones.



Sir Bernard Spilsby, the renowned forensic pathologist who gave crucial evidence at the trial.

unusual occurrence) and in the morning he went downstairs to the bar parlour to take some 'Bromo-salts' to help him recover. Sadly they had the opposite effect with him immediately becoming violently ill, convulsing and dying within half-an-hour.

Vaquier, who was accustomed to get up early and sit in the coffee room, had instead been seen sitting in the cold bar parlour dressed in a thick overcoat staring at the bottle of salts. As the doctor was called some say that Vaquier took the jar and washed it out, but if he did it was not washed out thoroughly enough as upon later examination traces of Strychnine were found in the jar - and in Alfred Jones' body at the autopsy.

Jean-Pierre Vaquier was 'small, volatile, and excitable, very vain of his appearance and wearing a spade-shaped beard and bushy moustaches combed outward and carefully tended'. He apparently gave four statements to the police investigating the murder (Mabel Jones at first being the chief suspect), and willingly answered questions and posed for photographs from the press who by now were

swarming around the area. It was his distinctive appearance and his love of being photographed that was to be his downfall. One newspaper report was seen by a chemist in London, who recognised him as buying a quantity of strychnine which he claimed had been bought for 'wireless experiments'.

Vaquier, who by now had moved out of the Blue Anchor but in an act of bravado (or perhaps stupidity) was now staying at the Railway Hotel - opposite Woking's Police Station - was arrested for the murder and sent to trial at Guildford Assizes.

The case was conducted by some of the top lawyers of the day with witnesses including the

renowned forensic pathologist, Sir Bernard Spilsby. The trial took four days (mainly because so much time had to be spent on translations), but in the end Vaquier was found guilty of murder and sentenced to hang.

What happened to Mabel Jones I do not know. Her reputation, and that of the hotel, had suffered greatly from some of Vaquier's statements under cross-examination by the prosecutor. At one stage he claimed that Mabel had had other lovers and that the Blue Anchor was 'a house of pleasure' where 'things happened that are unknown in brothels'. The trial, not surprisingly, had been a sensation!



TRAGEDY AT PENLEY'S LOCK

The Blue Anchor murder was not the only tragic case in Woking that year as on the 22nd December 1924 two men (Henry West and Frederick Brown) heard screams coming from the Basingstoke Canal at 'Penley's Lock Gates'.

Some historians have assumed that this must have been by Kiln Bridge at St Johns, but as avid readers of this column will know, W S Penley (the Victorian actor and theatre owner) lived by Langman's Bridge, so that lock seven (and not lock eleven) is the real location of the drama in 1924.

They found a woman clinging to the gates and immediately managed to pull her up, but she told them that her baby was still in the water, admitting "I threw it in; I chucked it in, in a fit of temper". A doctor was called and the police arrived to dredge the water, but they were too late.

The lady, twenty-four year old Flora Derigo, had married an American soldier during the war, but he had to return to the States, making arrangements for her to follow. Flora's brother, however, had prevented her departure and at the time of the incident she was lodging at a house called 'The Orchard' in St Johns with a man called Sidney Smith.

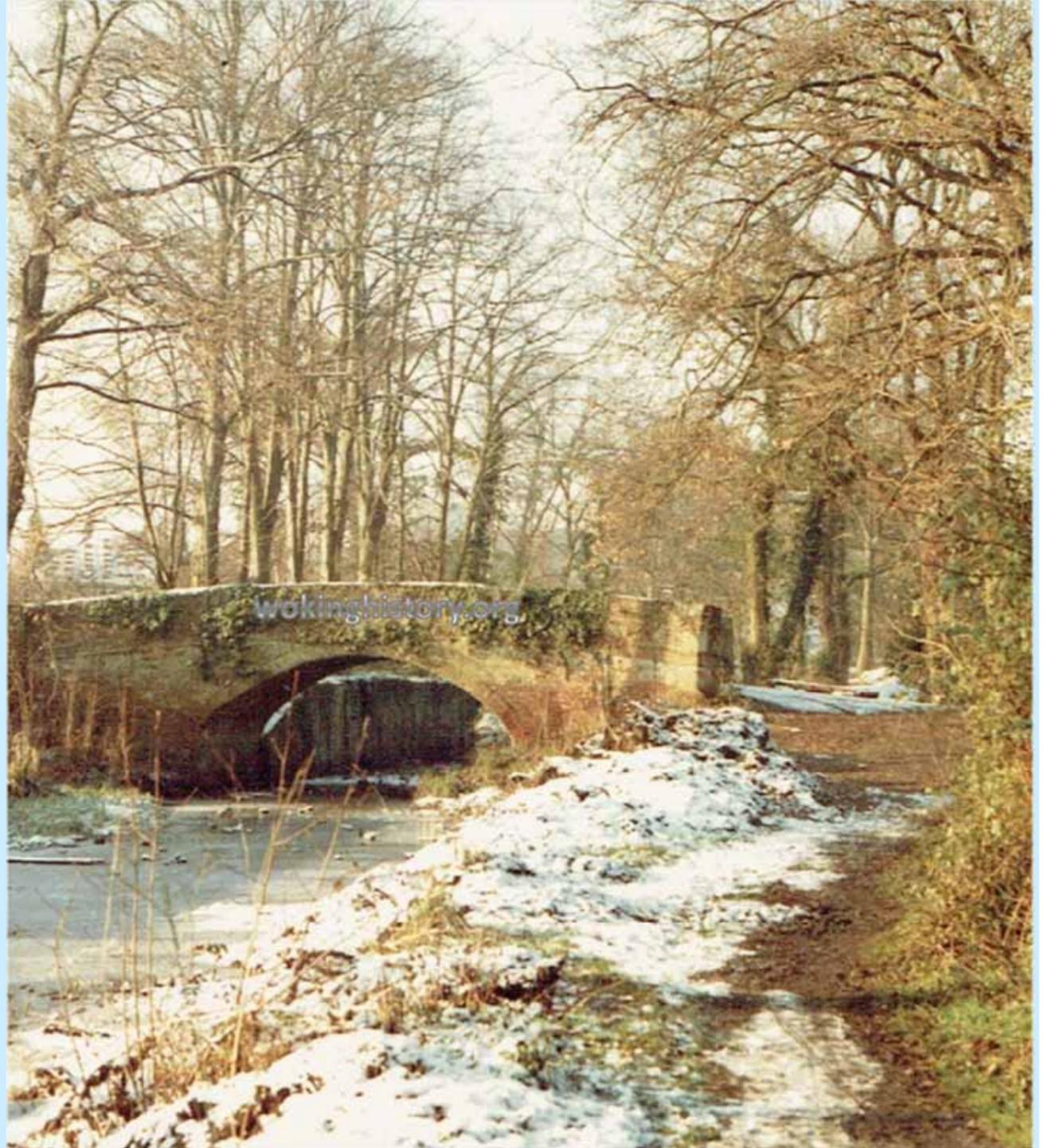
A few days earlier Flora and Sidney were heard to be arguing with the result that Smith left the lodgings and poor Flora 'without a penny piece', although a note said that he was going to find work in Southampton and would send for her later.

On the day of the tragedy the landlady at The Orchard, Mrs Martin, found the baby asleep but without any blankets covering him. When she mentioned to Flora that he would catch a cold she just shrugged her shoulders and said 'it won't hurt'.

The inquest in January returned a verdict of 'wilful murder', but when Flora appeared before

the Surrey Assizes on the 25th March her plea of infanticide was accepted and the judge obviously had great sympathy for poor Flora's circumstances. It was clear that she was probably suffering from what we would now call post-natal depression and the fact that she had obviously immediately jumped into the lock to

try to save the child, and then called for help, probably weighed in her favour. Her sister, Constance, was also in court to show her support, promising to look after her sister, with the result that Flora was bound over in the sum of £50 and placed in her care – a partially happy ending to an obviously tragic case.

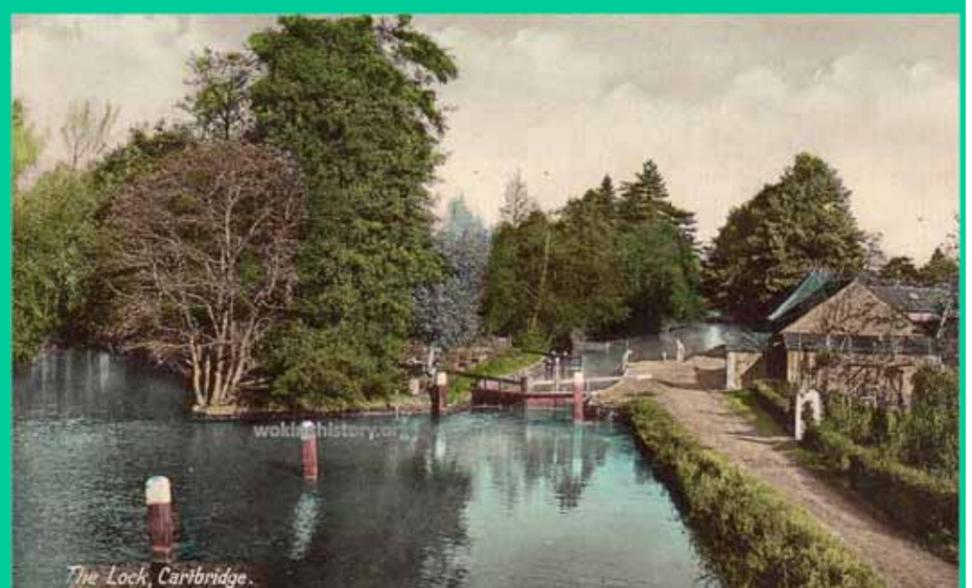


ARTHUR HAZEL (ALIAS ANTHONY ST GEORGE) AT SEND

It should not be assumed from the above that you stood a greater chance of being murdered in Woking in 1924 than you do today (so stop looking at the present with rose-tinted spectacles) -cases such as these were thankfully very rare. But when it comes to burglaries it seems that nothing is new, and the idea of criminals motoring out from London to prey on the well-to-do of Surrey has been going on for years.

One such burglar in the early 1920's was a gentleman called Arthur Hazel, who often went by the alias of Anthony St George. He has been described as one of the original 'cat burglars', and was quite clever, spending his time checking out the expensive country estates and making certain that his actions and appearance were as inconspicuous as possible.

In August 1924 a series of burglaries in Send were causing concern to the police until PC William Elkins attended the scene of one crime and found a discarded cigarette end and a small portion of a Swan Vesta matchbox. Soon after, he spotted a gentleman on a punt on the River Wey, and asking the man for a light managed to match the matchbox to the portion



of card, and so link Hazel to the scene of the crime. He was arrested and hundreds of pounds of stolen goods recovered.