

Priston Murder 1851- notes

<p>Mon 1 Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• George Bush, 36, a milkman living in Timsbury, left his lodgings about 1pm for the purpose of attending an auction sale in Priston, and promised his landlady (Mrs Flowers he would return early that evening. £4-5 in his pocket. [1]</li> <li>• He was observed at the sale, but it is not certain he made a purchase.</li> <li>• After the sale he went to the Ring O’Bells beer-house. Between 8-9pm a dispute arose between him and some friends re payment for a pint of beer – Bush left to go home. [1]</li> <li>• There were several others in the pub: gamekeeper, a farmer, tailor and butcher, all from Farmborough who contradicted story re dispute. [2]</li> <li>• Path taken was “extremely lonely, leading through a field called “Cow Lees”, the pathway of which slopes down in to a dell and skirts Priston Wood” [1]</li> </ul>
<p>Tues 2 Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early in the morning Mrs Flower sent two of her children to look for Bush The children were very much frightened at finding the unfortunate man lying near the footpath, in the middle of the field, with his throat cut, in a most shocking manner. The mother immediately conveyed the information to their mother, and in a short time several men were on the spot. [1]</li> <li>• The wound had evidently been inflicted by a large sharp instrument, which had entered immediately under the chin, laying open the interior of the mouth, and extending round to each ear, with the collar of the shirt being completely severed in two. The villains had filled up the wound with grass, Underneath the head was a large quantity of blood, and a short distance from the body lay his hat and another pool of blood, the intermediate space being likewise sprinkled with blood. The trousers pockets had been rifled of their contents, and turned inside out, and on the back of the left hand , near the thumb, was a shilling, affixed by the blood. [1]</li> <li>• At 4pm after having been inspected by the coroner, the body was conveyed to the porch of Priston church, with the permission of the clergyman. Two sixpences were found on the grass under the deceased, and in his waistcoat a few pence. He was short in stature and an inoffensive man. [1]</li> </ul>
<p>Wed 3 Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inquest held but little evidence taken other than to identify the body.[2]</li> <li>• Inquest adjourned</li> <li>• It is stated that George Bush was acquainted with Stephen Box of Timsbury, and on the night of the murder he and a man named Windmill who had married a daughter of (sic) Fowler were at the house, and while they were there Mrs (sic) Fowler had a conversation with them and his affairs. [2]</li> </ul>
<p>Thur 4 Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• examination of prisoners Eliza Flower (landlady), Jacob Windmill (son-in law), Harriet Windmill (daughter), and Stephen Box all of whom said to be at the house at the night of the murder [4]</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<p>Mon 8 Dec</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-examination of prisoners: [3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Harriet refused to make statement</li> <li>○ George W. thought sister-in law/brother went out between 8 and 10pm.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reward offered of £100 - £50 from the Secretary of State, and £50 from the Churchwardens of Timsbury was offered for information leading to conviction of perpetrator [3]</li> <li>• Prisoners remanded.[5]</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James Evans, butcher of Farmborough arrested</li> </ul>
Tues 9 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James Evan examined [5]</li> <li>• Evidence that JE was at Ring O’Bells in the company of GB and Ricketts. Between 7-8pm, GB disappeared, shortly after which JE asked for bill. GB had not paid his share. JE said to Ricketts that Bush was a *** mean fellow and ought to have his head chopped off”. Ricketts told JE to hush up but they then left pub but returned after ~20mins. Evans and Ricketts and Perry went back home together. After they returned home JE took some silver out of this pocket and counted it. On his arrest half a sovereign and some silver was found on him, together with a phleme, used for bleeding cattle, and which had blood on it. Blood was also found on his clothes but he was a butcher. JE remanded till Friday, bail refused [5]</li> </ul>
Thurs 12 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inquest resumed, evidence given of JE threats against GB [6]</li> <li>• Open verdict that that GB was “Found Murdered” [6]</li> </ul>
Friday 13 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JE brought again before the Magistrates Court [6] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Conflicting evidence as to how long Evans had gone out of the pub</li> <li>○ Evans fidgety when he got home</li> <li>○ Bush left about 7.30</li> <li>○ JE was missing for a period.</li> <li>○ Gun fired off at the candle by Downey, Bush lost a pint upon it.</li> <li>○ Bush left, JE left but returned soon afterwards</li> <li>○ Downey found blood on his left side – brushed against JE</li> <li>○ Evidence given as to good character of JE</li> <li>○ JE remanded till Wed 24 Dec of £100 plus two sureties of £50.</li> <li>○ Other prisoners discharged</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Wed 18 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police offered no further evidence against JE [7]</li> <li>• Distance between Ring O’Bells and murder 10mins walk [7]</li> <li>• JE not absent from RoB for more than 15 mins [7]</li> <li>• JE discharged, but would be re-apprehended if further evidence found. [7]</li> <li>• Insufficient blood on clothes to determine if human/animal [7]</li> </ul>
Thu 22 Jul 1852	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John alias Christopher Smith alias Hasley examined [8]</li> <li>• In Dorset County Gaol for vagrancy [8]</li> <li>• Confessed: in public house selling lucifers and other items. Saw GB pull out purse which tempted him. Followed him from PH until he went two or three fields over a stile and when he ogt 70 or 80 yards I tripped him up with my foot. He fell on the back of his head and called out murder very loudly., and said to me, do you want to murder me? I replied to him, yes. I was then much stronger and more active than I am now, and I held him for a few minutes and drew my knife across his throat two or three times, and he never moved afterwards. There was not much struggling, as it was soon over. I knelt on him , and I was on him the blood came over him and I tore up some greas and stuffed it into the cut. I then took his purse but did not get more than seven or eight shillings. [8]</li> <li>• JS: I am sorry for it, it was a cold-blooded deed, and one of the worst murders that was ever done . . . I am perfectly prepared to die for it.[8]</li> <li>• JS offered food – refused – it is no use to give food to a man like me, I am a murderer, I committed the deed and a blood-thirsty fellow like me ought to be quartered alive.[8]</li> <li>• Prisoner remanded [8]</li> </ul>

<p>Sat 24 Jul 1852</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JS brought up for examination at County Magistrates [9]</li> <li>• Evidence that JS had been seen in and around Priston on the day of the murder. [9]</li> <li>• Fanny Knowles, servant to Farmer Keeling of Rock Hill was only a short distance from where the body had been found. A man [JS] had come to the house the day of the murder selling lucifers, , needles, pins. [9]</li> <li>• Priscilla Lamber had seen him the next day, with blood spots on his clothes.</li> <li>• Surgeon testified there was damage to the back of the skull which might have been caused by the deceased falling backwards onto a sharp stone. [9]</li> <li>• Wounds on JS hand said to have been caused during murder when he cut himself. [9]</li> <li>• Committed to Somerset Assizes. [9]</li> </ul>
<p>Sat 7 Aug 1852</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crown Court – Christopher Smith pleaded guilty [10]</li> <li>• Judge – this man does not know wat he is about, I the surgeon of the gaol here. NO, but have a certificate. Judge – that wont do, surgeon’s appear to think there certificates are all powerful. I want to examine this gentleman under oath.[10]</li> <li>• Later Surgeon of Shepton Mallet Gaol observed him frequently and conversed – potato famine in Ireland had been caused by his sins – committed other murders – remarkably strong (but not according to surgeon. He says he is quite tired of life and his object in confessing that he be hung. Said he committed murder with a clasp knife that was sharp at the point, but the knife he was found with was not. Surgeon’s view was that he was definitely insane.</li> <li>• Surgeon of Dorchester Gaol considered there was nothing to show that he was not perfectly sane.[10]</li> <li>• Surgeon of County Lunatic Asylum: blamed breaking vow of abstinence of tobacco on Irish Potato Famine. [11]</li> <li>• Jury decided he was of unsound mind, and he was ordered to be detained at Her majesty’s pleasure. [10]</li> </ul>
<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before commitment JS taken to field, where he pointed out site of murder, clasp knife previously found.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

1. Morning Advertiser 04 December 1851
2. Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 04 December 1851
3. Morning Advertiser 09 December 1851
4. Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper 07 December 1851
5. Morning Advertiser 10 December 1851
6. Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazetter 18 December 1851
7. Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazette 25 Dec 1851
8. Southern Times & Dorset County Herald 24 Jul 1852
9. Southern Times & Dorset County Herald 31 Jul 1852
10. Sherborne Mercury 10 August 1852
11. Taunton Courier 18 August 1852
12. Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazette 12 August 1852
13. Berkshire Chronicle 14 August 1852