

= Red Barn Murder =

The Red Barn Murder was a notorious murder committed in Polstead , Suffolk , England , in 1827 . A young woman , Maria Marten , was shot dead by her lover , William Corder . The two had arranged to meet at the Red Barn , a local landmark , before eloping to Ipswich . Maria was never heard from again . Corder fled the scene and , although he sent Marten 's family letters claiming she was in good health , her body was later discovered buried in the barn after her stepmother spoke of having dreamt about the murder .

Corder was tracked down in London , where he had married and started a new life . He was brought back to Suffolk , and after a well @-@ publicised trial , found guilty of murder . He was hanged in Bury St Edmunds in 1828 ; a huge crowd witnessed Corder 's execution . The story provoked numerous articles in the newspapers , and songs and plays . The village where the crime had taken place became a tourist attraction and the barn was stripped by souvenir hunters . The plays and ballads remained popular throughout the next century and continue to be performed today .

= = Murder = =

Maria Marten ( born 24 July 1801 ) was the daughter of Thomas Marten , a molecatcher from Polstead , Suffolk . In March 1826 , when she was 24 , she formed a relationship with the 22 @-@ year @-@ old William Corder ( born 1803 ) . Marten was an attractive woman and relationships with men from the neighbourhood had already resulted in two children . One , the child of William 's older brother Thomas , died as an infant , but the other , Thomas Henry , was still alive at the time Marten met Corder . Although Thomas Henry 's father wanted nothing more to do with Marten after the birth , he occasionally sent money to provide for the child .

William Corder was the son of a local farmer , and had a reputation as something of a fraudster and a ladies ' man . He was known as " Foxey " at school because of his sly manner . He had fraudulently sold his father 's pigs , and , although his father had settled the matter without involving the law , Corder had not changed his behaviour . He later obtained money by passing a forged cheque for £ 93 and he had helped a local thief , Samuel " Beauty " Smith , steal a pig from a neighbouring village . When Smith was questioned by the local constable over the theft , he made a prophetic statement concerning Corder : " I 'll be damned if he will not be hung some of these days " . Corder had been sent to London in disgrace after his fraudulent sale of the pigs , but he was recalled to Polstead when his brother Thomas drowned attempting to cross a frozen pond . His father and three brothers all died within 18 months of each other and only William remained to run the farm with his mother .

Although Corder wished to keep his relationship with Marten secret , she gave birth to their child in 1827 , at the age of 25 , and was apparently keen that she and Corder should marry . The child died ( later reports suggested that it may have been murdered ) , but Corder apparently still intended to marry Marten . That summer , in the presence of her stepmother , Ann Marten , he suggested that she meet him at the Red Barn , from where he proposed that they elope to Ipswich . Corder claimed that he had heard rumours that the parish officers were going to prosecute Maria for having bastard children . He initially suggested they elope on the Wednesday evening , but later decided to delay until the Thursday evening . On Thursday he was again delayed : his brother falling ill is mentioned as the reason in some sources , although most claim all his brothers were dead by this time . The next day , Friday , 18 May 1827 , he appeared at the Martens ' cottage during the day , and according to Ann Marten , told Maria that they must leave at once , as he had heard that the local constable had obtained a warrant to prosecute her ( no warrant had been obtained , but it is not known if Corder was lying or was mistaken ) . Maria was worried that she could not leave in broad daylight , but Corder told her she should dress in men 's clothing so as to avert suspicion , and he would carry her things to the barn where she could meet him and change before they continued on to Ipswich .

Shortly after Corder left the house , Maria set out to meet him at the Red Barn , which was situated

on Barnfield Hill , about half a mile from the Martens ' cottage . This was the last time she was seen alive . Corder also disappeared , but later turned up and claimed that Marten was in Ipswich , Great Yarmouth , or some other place nearby , and that he could not yet bring her back as his wife for fear of provoking the anger of his friends and relatives . The pressure on Corder to produce his wife eventually forced him to leave the area . He wrote letters to Marten 's family claiming they were married and living on the Isle of Wight , and gave various excuses for her lack of communication : she was unwell , had hurt her hand , or that the letter must have been lost .

Suspicion continued to grow , and Maria 's stepmother began talking of dreams that Maria had been murdered and buried in the Red Barn . On 19 April 1828 , she persuaded her husband to go to the Red Barn and dig in one of the grain storage bins . He quickly uncovered the remains of his daughter buried in a sack . She was badly decomposed , but still identifiable . An inquest was carried out at the Cock Inn ( which still stands today ) at Polstead , where Maria was formally identified by her sister Ann from some physical characteristics : her hair and some clothing were recognizable and a tooth she was known to be missing was also missing from the jawbone of the corpse . Evidence was uncovered to implicate Corder in the crime : his green handkerchief was discovered around the body 's neck .

= = Capture = =

Corder was easily discovered ; Mr Ayres , the constable in Polstead , was able to obtain his old address from a friend , and with the assistance of James Lea , an officer of the London police force who would later lead the investigation into " Spring @-@ heeled Jack " , he tracked Corder to a ladies ' boarding house , Everley Grove House , in Brentford . Corder was running the boarding house with his new wife , Mary Moore , whom he had met through a newspaper advertisement that he had placed in The Times ( which had received more than 100 replies ) . Flanders says he had placed advertisements in the Morning Herald and The Sunday Times detailing the text of this advertisement . He received more than 40 replies from the Morning Herald and 53 from The Sunday Times that he never picked up . These letters were subsequently published by George Foster in 1828 .

Lea managed to gain entry under the pretext that he wished to board his daughter there , and surprised Corder in the parlour . Thomas Hardy noted the Dorset County Chronicle 's report of his capture :

? in parlour with 4 ladies at breakfast , in dressing gown & had a watch before him by which he was ' minuting ' the boiling of some eggs .

Lea took him to one side and informed him of the charges ; Corder denied all knowledge of both Maria and the crime . A search of the house uncovered a pair of pistols supposedly bought on the day of the murder ; some letters from a Mr Gardener , which may have contained warnings about the discovery of the crime ; and a passport from the French ambassador , evidence which suggested Corder may have been preparing to flee .

= = Trial = =

Corder was taken back to Suffolk where he was tried at Shire Hall , Bury St Edmunds . The trial started on 7 August 1828 , having been put back several days because of the interest the case had generated . The hotels in Bury St Edmunds began to fill up from as early as 21 July and , because of the large numbers that wanted to view the trial , admittance to the court was by ticket only . Despite this the judge and court officials still had to push their way bodily through the crowds that had gathered around the door to gain entry to the court room .

The judge , Chief Baron Alexander , was unhappy with the coverage given to the case by the press " to the manifest detriment of the prisoner at the bar " . The Times , nevertheless , congratulated the public for showing good sense in aligning themselves against Corder .

Corder entered a plea of not guilty . The exact cause of death could not be established . It was thought that a sharp instrument , possibly Corder 's short sword , had been plunged into Marten 's

eye socket , but this wound could also have been caused by her father 's spade when he was exhuming the body . Strangulation could not be ruled out as Corder 's handkerchief had been discovered around her neck , and , to add to the confusion , the wounds to her body suggested she had been shot . The indictment charged Corder with " ? murdering Maria Marten , by feloniously and wilfully shooting her with a pistol through the body , and likewise stabbing her with a dagger . " To avoid any chance of a mistrial , he was indicted on nine charges , including one of forgery .

Ann Marten was called to give evidence of the events of the day of Maria 's disappearance and her later dreams . Thomas Marten then told the court how he had dug up his daughter , and George Marten , Maria 's 10 @-@ year @-@ old brother , revealed that he had seen Corder with a loaded pistol before the alleged murder and later had seen him walking from the barn with a pickaxe . Lea gave evidence concerning Corder 's arrest and the objects found during the search of his house . The prosecution suggested that Corder had never wanted to marry Maria , but that her knowledge of some of his criminal dealings had given her a hold over him , and that his theft previously of the money sent by her child 's father had been a source of tension between them .

Corder then gave his own version of the events . He admitted to being in the barn with Maria , but said he had left after they argued . He claimed that , while he was walking away , he heard a pistol shot and , running back to the barn , found Maria dead with one of his pistols beside her . He pleaded with the jury to give him the benefit of the doubt , but after they retired , it took them only 35 minutes to return with a guilty verdict . Baron Alexander sentenced him to hang and afterwards be dissected :

That you be taken back to the prison from whence you came , and that you be taken from thence , on Monday next , to a place of Execution , and that you there be hanged by the Neck until you are Dead ; and that your body shall afterwards be dissected and anatomized ; and may the Lord God Almighty , of his infinite goodness , have mercy on your soul !

Corder spent the next three days in prison agonising over whether to confess to the crime and make a clean breast of his sins before God . After several meetings with the prison chaplain , entreaties from his wife , and pleas from both his warder and John Orridge , the governor of the prison , he finally confessed . He strongly denied stabbing Maria , claiming instead he had accidentally shot her in the eye after they argued while she was changing out of her disguise .

= = Execution and dissection = =

On 11 August 1828 , Corder was taken to the gallows in Bury St Edmunds , apparently too weak to stand without support . He was hanged shortly before noon in front of a huge crowd ; one newspaper claimed there were 7 @,@ 000 spectators , another as many as 20 @,@ 000 . At the prompting of the prison governor , just before the hood was drawn over his head , he said :

I am guilty ; my sentence is just ; I deserve my fate ; and , may God have mercy on my soul .

After an hour , his body was cut down by John Foxton , the hangman , who , according to his rights , claimed Corder 's trousers and stockings . The body was taken back to the courtroom at Shire Hall , where it was slit open along the abdomen to expose the muscles . The crowds were allowed to file past until six o 'clock when the doors were shut . According to the Norwich and Bury Post , over 5 @,@ 000 people queued to see the body .

The following day , the dissection and post @-@ mortem were carried out in front of an audience of students from Cambridge University and physicians . A battery was attached to Corder 's limbs to demonstrate the contraction of the muscles , the sternum was opened and the internal organs examined . There was some discussion as to whether the cause of death was suffocation ; but , since it was reported that Corder 's chest was seen to rise and fall for several minutes after he had dropped , it was thought probable that pressure on the spinal cord had killed him . Reports circulated around Bury St Edmunds that a " galvanic battery " had been brought from Cambridge , and it is likely that at this point the group experimented with galvanism on the body . Since the skeleton was to be reassembled after the dissection , it was not possible to examine the brain , so instead the surgeons contented themselves with a phrenological examination of the skull .

Corder 's skull was asserted to be profoundly developed in the areas of " secretiveness ,

acquisitiveness , destructiveness , philoprogenitiveness , and imitableness " with little evidence of " benevolence or veneration " . The bust of Corder held by Moyse 's Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds is an original made by Child of Bungay , as a tool for the study of Corder 's phrenology . The skeleton was reassembled , exhibited , and used as a teaching aid in the West Suffolk Hospital .

Several copies of his death mask were made and a replica of one is still held at Moyse 's Hall Museum . Artefacts from the trial , some of which were in Corder 's possession , are also held at the museum . Another replica death mask is kept in the dungeons of Norwich Castle . Corder 's skin was tanned by the surgeon George Creed , and used to bind an account of the murder .

Corder 's skeleton was put on display in the Hunterian Museum in the Royal College of Surgeons of England , where it hung beside that of Jonathan Wild . In 2004 , Corder 's bones were removed from display and cremated .

= = Rumours = =

After the trial , doubts were raised about both the story of the stepmother 's dreams and the fate of Maria and William 's child . The stepmother was only a year older than Maria , and it was suggested that she and Corder had been having an affair , and the two had planned the murder to dispose of Maria so that it could continue without hindrance . Since her dreams had started only a few days after Corder married Moore , it was suggested that jealousy was the motive for revealing the body 's resting place and that the dreams were a simple subterfuge .

Further rumours circulated about the death of Corder and Marten 's child . Both claimed that they had taken their dead child to be buried in Sudbury , but no records of this could be discovered and no trace of the burial site of the child was ever found . In his written confession , Corder admitted that on the day of the murder he and Marten had argued over the possibility of the burial site being discovered .

Donald McCormick wrote *The Red Barn Mystery* ( 1967 ) which brought out a connection between Corder and the forger and poisoner Thomas Griffiths Wainewright when Corder was in London , and that an actress Caroline Palmer , who was appearing frequently in the melodrama based on the case and researching the murder , concluded that Corder may have not killed Maria and that a local gypsy woman might have been the killer . However , McCormick 's research on other police- and crime @-@ related stories has been brought into question and this information has not been generally accepted .

= = Popular interest = =

The case had all the elements to ignite a fervent popular interest : the wicked squire and the poor girl , the iconic murder scene , the supernatural element of the stepmother 's prophetic dreams , the detective work by Ayres and Lea ( who later became the detective Pharos Lee in stage versions of the events ) and Corder 's new life which was the result of a lonely hearts advertisement . As a consequence , the case created its own small industry .

Plays were being performed while Corder was still awaiting trial and , after the execution , an anonymous author published a melodramatic version of the murder ? a precursor of the Newgate novels ? which quickly became a best @-@ seller . Along with the story of Jack Sheppard and other highwaymen , thieves and murderers , the Red Barn Murder was a popular subject for penny gaffs , cheap plays performed for the entertainment of the lower classes in the gin @-@ soaked atmosphere of the back rooms of public houses . After the execution , James Catnach managed to sell over a million broadsides ( sensationalist single sheet newspapers ) . Catnach 's sheets gave details of Corder 's confession and the execution , and included a sentimental ballad supposedly penned by Corder himself , but more likely to have been the work of Catnach or somebody in his employ . It was one of at least five ballads about the crime that appeared directly following the execution .

Owing to the excitement around the trial and the public demand for entertainments based on the

murder , many different versions of the events were set down and distributed , making it hard for modern readers to discern fact from melodramatic embellishment . Good records of the trial exist from the official records , and the best record of the events surrounding the case is generally considered to be that of James Curtis , a journalist who spent time with Corder and two weeks in Polstead interviewing those concerned . Curtis was apparently so connected with the case that , when asked to produce a picture of the accused man , an artist for one of the newspapers drew a likeness of him rather than Corder .

Pieces of the rope which was used to hang Corder sold for a guinea each . Part of Corder 's scalp with an ear still attached was displayed in a shop in Oxford Street . A lock of Maria 's hair sold for two guineas . Polstead became a tourist venue with visitors travelling from as far afield as Ireland ; Curtis estimated that 200 @, @ 000 people visited Polstead in 1828 alone . The Red Barn and the Martens ' cottage excited particular interest . The barn was stripped for souvenirs , down to the planks being removed from the sides , broken up and sold as toothpicks . It was planned to be demolished after the trial , but it was left standing and eventually burnt down in 1842 . Even Maria 's gravestone in the churchyard of St Mary 's , Polstead , was eventually chipped away to nothing by souvenir hunters ; only a sign on the shed now marks the approximate place where it stood , although her name is given to Marten 's Lane in the village . Pottery models and sketches were sold and songs composed , including one quoted in the Vaughan Williams opera *Hugh the Drover* and *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* .

Corder 's skeleton was put on display in a glass case in the West Suffolk Hospital , and apparently rigged with a mechanism that made its arm point to the collection box when approached . Eventually , the skull was replaced by Dr John Kilner , who wanted to add Corder 's skull to his extensive collection of Red Barn memorabilia . After a series of unfortunate events , Kilner became convinced the skull was cursed and handed it on to his friend Hopkins . Further disasters plagued both men and they finally paid for the skull to be given a Christian burial in an attempt to lift the supposed curse .

Interest in the case did not quickly fade . Maria Marten ; or *The Murder in the Red Barn* , which existed in various anonymous versions , was a sensational hit throughout the mid 19th century and may have been the most performed play of this time ; Victorian fairground peepshows were forced to add extra apertures to their viewers when exhibiting their shows of the murder to cope with the demand . The plays of the Victorian era tended to portray Corder as a cold @-@ blooded monster and Maria as the innocent he preyed upon ; her reputation and her children by other fathers were airbrushed out , and Corder was made into an older man . Charles Dickens published an account of the murder in his magazine *All The Year Round* after initially rejecting it because he felt the story to be too well known and the account of the stepmother 's dreams rather far @-@ fetched .

Although diminished , the fascination continued into the 20th century with five film versions , including the 1935 *Maria Marten or Murder in the Red Barn* , starring Tod Slaughter , which was only released in the US after some scenes were cut , and a 1980 BBC drama , *Maria Marten* , with Pippa Guard in the title role . A fictionalised account of the murder was produced in 1953 for the CBS radio series *Crime Classics* . In 1991 , a melodramatic stage version , with some political and folk @-@ tale elements , was written by Christopher Bond .

Original dialogue as scripted , was taken from the Victorian melodrama *The Murder in the Red Barn* and used in the first episode of *The Wireless Theatre Company 's The Legend Of Springheel 'd Jack* , and was performed by Matthew Woodcock and Neil Frost . It was released in late 2013 .

Songs were issued on broadside ballads and subsequently versions were collected by various early folk song collectors including Ralph Vaughan Williams and Cecil Sharp . The Full English archive includes these among the eight versions they record which also includes a broadside ballad from the Kidson collection . The *Voice of the People* volume 3 : *O 'er his grave the grass grew green - Tragic Ballads* has a version from an Oxfordshire singer Freda Palmer recorded in 1972 .

The crime has inspired a number of contemporary musicians . *No Roses* by the Albion Country Band , released in 1971 , included the traditional song " *Murder of Maria Marten* " . More recently , Kathryn Roberts and Sean Lakeman 's " *The Red Barn* " on the 2004 album *2* has referred to the murder . A song " *Maria Marten* " is included on the 2006 folk album *White Swans Black Ravens* by

Daniel Bouwman and Andrew Guy . In December 2011 , the song " Red Barn " was released by Essex folk group The Owl Service . Tom Waits recorded an original song , " Murder in the Red Barn " for his 1992 album Bone Machine . The lyrics make no direct reference to the events of the Red Barn Murder , but critical writings about Waits have tended to assume that the song was , at least , inspired by them .

In 2013 the murder featured in the second episode of the BBC One series A Very British Murder : A National Obsession , presented by Lucy Worsley . An accompanying book was also published .

In 2015 , Peter Maggs published the book Murder in the Red Barn , which suggested that Donald McCormick had manufactured evidence in his 1967 book on the case , and that a number of subsequent authors had repeated his spurious claims . Credible explanations were offered for Ann Marten 's dreams and Corder 's denial that he stabbed Maria .