

= Murder of Celine Figard =

Celine Figard (1976 ? 19 December 1995) was a French woman who went missing and was murdered during a visit to the United Kingdom in December 1995 , after accepting a lift from a lorry driver at the Chieveley services on the M4 in Chieveley , Berkshire . Following an appeal for information on her whereabouts and police enquiries , her body was discovered on 29 December , ten days after her disappearance , at a lay @-@ by on the A449 in Hawford , Worcestershire . A post @-@ mortem examination determined she had been strangled and bludgeoned to death .

The case received extensive news coverage in the UK around the Christmas and New Year period , amid fears that it could be linked to a series of killings around the English Midlands which police called the work of a " Midlands Ripper " . The murder investigation included the UK 's first national DNA screening programme in the hunt for a murder suspect , covering over 5 @,@ 000 people .

Stuart William Morgan , a 36 @-@ year @-@ old lorry driver from Poole , Dorset was arrested in February 1996 after a colleague recognised his image from a photofit . Morgan was later charged with Figard 's murder , and convicted in October . Detectives concluded that after raping , strangling and bludgeoning her , he carried her body in his vehicle for ten days over the Christmas period before dumping it . Morgan was given a life sentence , with a recommendation to serve at least twenty years . An appeal in February 1998 was rejected by the Court of Appeal , and in 2009 the High Court turned down his application for a review of the length of his sentence . He became eligible for parole in February 2016 , but has continued to maintain his innocence .

Figard was buried in the French village of Scey @-@ sur @-@ Saône @-@ et @-@ Saint @-@ Albin , Haute @-@ Saône , at a service attended by her family , friends and politicians in January 1996 . In the UK she is remembered in a memorial garden established at a church in the Worcestershire village of Ombersley , close to where her body was discovered .

= = Background and disappearance = =

Figard was born in 1976 to Martine and Bernard Figard . She had two brothers , Stephane and Nicolas , and a sister , Karine . At the time of her death she was studying accountancy at the Lycée le Grand Chênois in Montbéliard . She developed a fondness for the UK following a 1990 visit and traveled there repeatedly .

Figard spent the summer of 1995 working at a hotel in Fordingbridge , Hampshire , where her cousin Jean @-@ Marc was head waiter , using the opportunity to improve her English . She returned to the UK in December to spend another two weeks with Jean @-@ Marc . After leaving on 18 December , she travelled with a family friend employed by a local haulage firm to the French coast , as arranged by her parents , and crossed the channel the following day . She arrived in Ashford , Kent . She had intended to travel to Fordingbridge by train , but her escort found another French lorry driver who was willing to take her to Chieveley Services near Newbury , Berkshire . He then helped her to find another trucker for the final leg after she tried to phone her cousin to ask him to pick her up , but misdialed . She was last seen alive at Chieveley Services at Junction 13 of the M4 at around 5 pm entering a white Mercedes lorry .

Police appealed for information about her disappearance , and issued a photofit of the lorry driver , but he was not identified . By 25 December investigators were working on the theory that he had abducted her . The following day , investigators were working on the assumption she had been murdered . Figard 's father travelled to the UK to help detectives in their search for her and to appeal to the public for information as to her whereabouts .

= = Discovery of body and autopsy = =

On the morning of Friday 29 December , the naked body of a young woman was found dumped at a lay @-@ by on the A449 near the Worcestershire village of Hawford by a motorist who had stopped to change a windscreen wiper . Police sought to establish her identity , but were sure it was not Louise Smith , an 18 @-@ year @-@ old clerical assistant who had vanished early on

Christmas Day after attending a nightclub at Yate , Gloucestershire . Smith 's body was discovered in February 1996 in Chipping Sodbury , South Gloucestershire .

The body was positively identified as that of Figard the following day . The post mortem determined she had been strangled and bludgeoned with a heavy implement , but did not establish which was fatal . The autopsy revealed " no obvious signs " of sexual assault . However , it determined that sexual intercourse had taken place shortly before her death . Detectives believed it had occurred against her will .

Police said that the body had been there for about twenty @-@ four hours and were working on the theory that she had been held captive before being killed . Detective Chief Superintendent Roger Hoddinott of Hampshire Police said at the time of discovery Figard had been dead for at least four to five days , but did not announce a time of death .

= = Investigation = =

The investigation was led by Detective Chief Superintendent John McCammont of West Mercia Police , and involved more than 100 detectives from three police forces . Officers examined similar unsolved murders amid concerns that they could all be the work of the same individual . Of particular interest were the recent murders of Tracey Turner and Samo Paull , both of whom were found strangled near motorways . McCammont ruled out a link at a press conference on 4 January : " I would stress that at this stage there is no firm evidence whatsoever to link Celine 's murder with any other investigations . " He appealed for information concerning a bottle of Pascal Chretien champagne , a gift to Figard before coming to England : " This particular type of champagne is not exported to anywhere in the world outside France and is not sold in this country . It is a 1993 vintage and only 60 @,@ 000 bottles have been produced . "

On 12 January , investigators announced that they would perform DNA testing on the drivers of all vehicles similar to the Mercedes . This was the first time the method was used nationally to identify a murder suspect . Detectives traced more than 1 @,@ 000 vehicles and tested 5 @,@ 000 drivers . On 19 February , West Mercia Police confirmed that a man had been arrested and was helping them with their inquiries . The following day , authorities announced that the suspect was English and had been arrested in Poole , Dorset in a joint operation between West Mercia and Dorset Police . He was subsequently identified as Stuart Morgan , a 36 @-@ year @-@ old , self @-@ employed lorry driver , who on 21 February was remanded following an appearance at Redditch magistrates .

= = Stuart Morgan = =

Stuart William Morgan is an English lorry driver and former heating engineer from Poole . The son of John and Julianne Morgan , one of five siblings , he was raised in Tunbridge Wells , Kent , where his father was employed as a council foreman and his mother ? a refugee from the former East Germany ? worked as a school cleaner . Morgan left school with three CSEs , and in 1974 served a custodial sentence in borstal following a conviction for burglary . After attending Croydon Polytechnic to train as a plumber and heating engineer , he established a plumbing business in the Tunbridge Wells area . He moved to Dorset following the failure of that business in 1983 and worked as a heating engineer for Bournemouth Borough Council . He became a lorry driver in 1991 .

Morgan met his first wife in Kent in the early 1980s . They married in 1982 , but he left her when she became pregnant with twins . He met the woman who would become his second wife after moving to Dorset . She also became pregnant , giving birth to a son . They did not marry until 1994 , after living together for several years . Morgan had a reputation as a womaniser , seducing customers while working as an engineer . He continued this activity after becoming a lorry driver . Following Morgan 's conviction , brother Ray Morgan said , " He has had so many affairs over the years I have lost count . " He also had a violent temper . One friend , Dave Moemken , described him as being " on a short fuse " .

He was driving from Leeds to Southampton Docks when he picked up Figard on 19 December 1995 . Detectives concluded that after raping and killing her , Morgan left her body in the bottom bunk of

his cab for up to ten days while he continued to drive the lorry , driving and sleeping in it for at least some of that time . Apparently Morgan left the body in the vehicle after parking it opposite his house to spend Christmas with his family . Police believe he dumped the body on 29 December .

He was arrested after another trucker recognised him from a photofit . Morgan initially denied meeting her . After he was picked out at an identity parade , he claimed he and Figard had engaged in consensual sex .

= = Trial = =

The trial began at Worcester Crown Court on 2 October 1996 , before Mr Justice Latham and a jury . Morgan 's trial counsel was Nigel Jones QC , and the case was prosecuted by David Farrer QC . Morgan denied the charge .

The prosecution account was that Morgan raped and killed Figard on the afternoon or evening of 19 December 1995 , then kept her body in his cab for ten days . Farrer told the court that she had been strangled and battered around the head with a heavy object , and injuries to her face were " consistent with kicking and stamping " . There was also evidence to suggest her hands had been taped together , and that sexual intercourse had taken place , with the prosecution of the opinion she had been " intimidated " into having sex .

Evidence was presented by the prosecution to suggest that Morgan continued to use the vehicle while Figard lay dead in the cab , and that the lorry was parked outside his house over the Christmas period . Farrer said Morgan bought a spade , axe and hacksaw with the intention of dismembering the body , but changed his mind , instead making an overnight delivery run to dispose of her remains . After removing a fuse from his lorry 's tachograph to conceal the journey , he drove to Worcestershire . Discrepancies were subsequently found in his travel records for 29 December 1995 because he forgot to replace the fuse following the trip . DNA tests on spots of blood found in the cab matched Figard , while a blood @-@ soaked mattress was found in Morgan 's garage . Several items belonging to Figard , including photographs and a toilet bag , were recovered from his house . Some of her clothing was found close to a warehouse he had visited the night the body was dumped . Morgan gave two bottles of Pascal Chretien that Figard had brought to England as Christmas presents to two garage attendants who worked at a Shell station opposite his house .

Morgan admitted giving Figard a lift on the afternoon of 19 December 1995 . He claimed that the pair had consensual sex after chatting and flirting , developing a rapport and halting at a lay @-@ by where he made her a cup of tea and asked her for what he described as a Christmas kiss . He said afterwards he drove her to Southampton , where they exchanged contact details before he left her , and that she was " smiling and happy " . He did not come forward after police appealed for details of the driver who had given her a lift because he did not want his wife to learn of his infidelity . He claimed her photographs and other belongings were in his possession because she had left them in his truck , and the mattress had become stained with blood because a man had lain on it after gashing his leg while the vehicle was on loan to another driver in 1994 .

On 16 October a jury took three and a half hours to convict Morgan of Figard 's murder , and he was sentenced to life imprisonment with a recommendation that the Home Secretary should decide his parole eligibility . Passing sentence , Mr Justice Latham said , " What you did to Celine has caused revulsion in the minds of all right @-@ thinking people . You are a dangerous man and I will so report to the Home Secretary . " Latham subsequently set a minimum term of twenty years , which was later endorsed by the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales , Lord Bingham , and on 4 November 1998 the Home Secretary informed Morgan of the length of the sentence he must serve .

= = Appeals = =

Morgan appealed his conviction on the grounds that it was unfair due to the level of publicity the case had received . His application was rejected by the Court of Appeal of England and Wales on 5 February 1998 after the three sitting judges ruled there were insufficient grounds to justify an appeal

In January 2009 Morgan appealed again under paragraph 3 of Schedule 22 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 to the High Court of England and Wales requesting a review of the minimum term recommendation . This too was rejected , in July of that year , with the presiding judge , Mr Justice Openshaw recommending , " The sentence is ? and remains ? a sentence of imprisonment for life . The defendant may not even be considered for release until he has served at least 20 years (less the time served before sentence) . That is not to say that he will then be released ; indeed he will be detained unless and until the Parole Board is satisfied that he no longer presents a risk to the public . Even if the Parole Board decides then or at some time in the future to authorise his release , he will be upon licence which will extend for the rest of his life . "

In January 2016 Morgan appealed against the Ministry of Justice after it decided not to downgrade his prisoner status from that of a Category A prisoner , as well as challenging the Parole Board for refusing to allow him an oral hearing . A hearing at the High Court on 26 January was told that under the terms of his sentence , Morgan would be eligible for parole from February , but had continued to maintain his innocence throughout his time in prison , claiming to be in a " Catch 22 " situation where he could not qualify for release without admitting his guilt . Rejecting Morgan 's case , Justice William Davis suggested that Morgan had not " addressed his offending behaviour " and was " in effect in the same position as in December 1995 , when he murdered his victim " .

= = Aftermath and memorials = =

Figard 's body was flown home to France on 17 January 1996 , where her funeral was held on 20 January . She was buried in Scey @-@ sur @-@ Saône @-@ et @-@ Saint @-@ Albin . The Mail on Sunday reported that the ceremony was attended by 3 @,@ 000 mourners , including family , friends and French politicians .

A memorial garden dedicated to Figard was planted at St Andrew 's Church in the village of Ombersley , Worcestershire , close to where her body was found , and opened at a ceremony in June 1997 . Local residents raised more than £ 1 @,@ 000 to help with its construction . The garden also remembers other victims of violent crime , including Joanna Parrish and Caroline Dickinson , two English students who were murdered while in France . On 29 December 2000 , the fifth anniversary of the date Figard 's body was recovered , the local newspaper , the Worcester News reported that an annual service of remembrance was held for her at the church during the autumn , attended by her parents . Flowers were also regularly placed at the lay @-@ by at Hawford where she was found , and the location named Le Jardin de Céline (Celine 's Garden) in her memory .