

21/03/1899

Robert Ballantyne, a justice of the peace, and a storekeeper in Gatton, deposed that he was informed of the murders on the 27th December, after Gilbert returned from the scene. He at once drove out.

M'Neill and Mrs. Murphy were near the bodies, while a crowd of people stood three or four chains away.

He walked over to Mrs. Murphy, who was near the bodies of Ellen and Michael, and said, "This is a sad business." She clasped her hands and said, "Oh, Mr. Ballantyne, who could have murdered my innocent children?" He replied, "I am here to try to find that out, and I hope to find out before night." Mrs. Murphy said, "What good will that do me? It will not bring them back."

He next asked M'Neill, "Are you the man that found the bodies?" He said, "Yes." He asked him if he objected to coming to one side for a minute, and he replied. "No." The two then drew back from Mrs. Murphy for about ten yards.

He asked him if he knew he was a magistrate, and he said, "Yes, Mr. Ballantyne." At that time he had never before seen M'Neill, and did not know him at all. Witness explained how he found the bodies.

He said, "I left Murphy's to go to see what was detaining the Murphy's."

In driving along the Tenthill-road I observed the dog-cart tracks leading into the paddock, one of the wheels being wobbly. I went into the paddock, looking for a house, thinking the Murphy's had stopped there all night.

I could find no house. I returned to the rails and followed the tracks of the dog-cart, which I knew to be my own by the wheels, till I came to the bodies.

I did not go close up to the bodies, but returned through the rails into Gatton to give information." He asked M'Neill if he knew whether any of the girls had any sweethearts, and he said, "No."

That was all that transpired between them at that time.

There were no members of the Police Force present then.

He understood from Gilbert that Thomas Wilson and William Devitt were in charge of the bodies. These two were keeping the people back when he got there.

He did not ask M'Neill to show the tracks where he went into the paddock. He then took a walk round to see if he could see anything, and noticed a piece of timber that he thought was used in the committal of the murder. It was lying among some rotten timber close to the heads of Michael and Ellen. It was picked up afterwards by Andrew Smith.

In observing further he noticed the tracks of a horse leading from the place where the heads of Michael and Norah lay towards the rails. These tracks he followed for three or four chains.

By this time Sergeant Arrell arrived, after sending away his telegrams. He ordered the people off the ground; but they refused to go. He repeated the order, but they would not move. They were very stubborn, especially one class of the community.

Inspector Urquhart: What was the stubborn class, Mr. Ballantyne? -The Germans.

They could understand? -Yes, they could. I pointed out to them they might be defeating the ends of justice, but they would not go. Continuing, he said the tracks he followed were those of a small unshod pony hoof. He believed he pointed them out to Sergeant Arrell; but there were all sorts of tracks by that time-horses, buggies, and German waggons.

There were many foot tracks there; but there was one leading from the western side of the dog-cart to Norah's body.

It was a small footmark, more like the foot of a woman than a man.

It was a peculiarly-shaped boot, being narrow-toed, but there was no heel mark.

It looked as if some one was carrying a heavy weight, and had leaned forward.

He was very careful, and made a good examination of the ground, especially on the western side, towards the fence.

He saw no appearance of a struggle.

He could find no stains on the dog-cart, which surprised him.

He looked at the horse, and was under the impression that it was shot while it was standing still.

He was inclined to think the animal was tied up to a sapling.

He observed M'Neill's movements closely, and saw nothing worthy of remark, nor did he hear him speak again till he came to Gatton.

In walking along the tracks in the paddock he saw tracks of a shod horse coming out. These he supposed had been made by the police officer's horse. He dealt in boots and shoes, but the track of that he saw gave him no indication of the make.

His remark to Mrs. Murphy with regard to the discovery of the murderers was for the purpose of comforting her, and not because he really thought he would find out before night-time.

Inspector Urquhart: You seem to have observed very closely there. Did you see anything at all, beyond the marks that would afford a clue? -No. If there had been an expert there, I would have been prepared to go out and point them out before they were stamped out.

Continuing, he said if he saw a track by the same pony he would detect a resemblance.

In consequence of this evidence the Murphy's' pony was brought in last night, and early this morning he made an inspection of the hoof-prints to compare them with those he saw at the scene of the murder, but it is understood that nothing satisfactorily definite was the outcome.

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