

An Adelaide Gaol Execution

Percival William Budd

Executed 24 April 1919

The disappearance of 24 year old Harold Sidney [Snowy] Jacques during 1918 was dubbed the Motor Car Tragedy. Jacques was last seen alive in Crystal Brook on 25 November 1918. His battered body was discovered two weeks later buried in a private yard in Pirie West.

Percival William Budd who was boarding at the house in Pirie West was questioned by police as to how he came to be in possession of Jacques car. His explanation was he that met Jacques in Adelaide and discussed hiring the vehicle and driver to take him to Port Pirie and Port Augusta.

Jacques had offered to sell the Talbot before they set off from Adelaide for £300. An amount of £240 was paid in cash and the balance to be paid off at £2 per month.

As Jacques was visiting Crystal Brook he invited Budd to join him and test-drive the car during the journey. Another man, a friend of Jacques, also joined them on the trip. By the time they arrived in Crystal Brook Budd was satisfied with the Talbot, handed over the money and left Jacques with the third man before continuing on to Port Pirie alone.

Police were not happy with Budd's explanation of how he came to be in possession of the car. Although he produced a receipt for the purchase with Jacques name written across it the receipt could have been written by anyone.

When detectives examined the vehicle they found clotted blood on the floor and on the front springs. Detectives found more blood stains on the coat and trousers of the clothing he wore during the trip from Adelaide.

There was a depression in the soil floor of the garage where the car was housed. The soil was soft and showed signs of recent disturbance. When police removed the dirt they found the battered body of Jacques and the murder weapon, a bludgeon, in the hole.

Budd was then charged with the murder of Jacques.

Budd, a 25 year old sheetmetal worker at the Port Pirie BHAS works, was held on a Coroner's warrant for the murder of Jacques.

Great interest was shown in the case. Crowds thronged Ellen Street for the Coroner's inquest but only a small number of people were able to gain admittance into Port Pirie courthouse for the hearing. The Coroner concluded that in his opinion the injuries to Jacques were caused by the man in the dock, Percival William Budd. Budd was then committed for trial at the next criminal sitting at the Gladstone Court.

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The trial commenced at Gladstone on Tuesday 25 March 1919. Twelve local farmers were sworn in as the jury. The Chief Justice Sir George Murray took his seat on the bench and after the charges were read Budd was asked how he pleaded. He had his arms folded in front of him and replied in a bold voice "Not guilty!".

Several witnesses testified that Budd alone had accompanied Jacques on the journey from Adelaide. The owner of the Pirie West property told the court Budd had asked for permission to dig an inspection pit in the garden so he could work on a car. Budd had then built a garage over it. However, when the car arrived, he filled in the inspection pit because 'the side caved in'.

Police gave evidence that the bludgeon was made from metal piping which was common at Budd's place of work and fashioned by someone accustomed to soldering and iron work.

Budd remained composed during the trial. His defence counsel offered little in the way of defence. When Budd took to the witness box he told the court 'there was nobody more surprised than I was when it was discovered that Jacques' body was in the hole I had dug'. He went on to say that "although I am charged with a most serious crime I swear to you I am not guilty of it". However, the evidence against Budd was overwhelming and the jury found him guilty. He stood in silence as he was sentenced to death and ordered to be removed to Adelaide Gaol for his execution.

On the morning of the hanging, 24 April 1919, Rev Dr Seymour spent some time administering spiritual guidance to Budd. At 8.00am, as Budd calmly walked the few steps from his cell to the gallows in the New Building, Dr Seymour was overcome with emotion and collapsed. The incident did not interfere with proceedings and Budd disappeared from view. Dr Seymour was taken to the office and revived but soon collapsed again. A formal inquest was held at 9am into Budd's death and followed by his burial between the inner and outer walls on the northern side of the gaol.

Footnote:

There was further tragedy in this story.

Two weeks after the death of her husband, Mrs Jacques gave birth to a baby son, Sidney. He later became a cab driver and in 1959 he was murdered by a gunman while driving his cab at Elizabeth.

The killer, P Kiker, was initially sentenced to death but this was later commuted to life imprisonment.

He served 12 years before being released."

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