MURDER AT ILLAWONG

STEPHANIE BAILEY

Sunday 22 February 1920 was your typical, summer's day in Sydney: temperatures were in the mid-20s, the skies were mostly sunny with just a sprinkling of light rainfall, and friends and families were going about their weekend business. By 8am, brothers Fred and Harry Grimshaw, and their brother-in-law Edwin Catley were already up and busy. The previous day, the three men had travelled down from their homes in Marrickville in Sydney's Inner West to the rugged peninsula that stretches out between the Georges and Woronora Rivers – the area we now call Illawong. In 1920, there was only a scattering of dwelling houses in the area, but the men had one of the few weekend camps on the peninsula and it was here that they'd set up their temporary accommodation.

Harry and Edwin were both returned First World War soldiers who had recently arrived safely back in Australia after serving overseas with the Australian Imperial Force.[1] It's reasonable to assume that on this sunny weekend in February, the men would have been looking forward to enjoying some relaxing time together now that they were a world away from the stress and horrors that the war had inflicted on so many individuals and families. They were in for a rude shock. When they'd first arrived at their camp, Fred, Harry and Edwin had noticed a strange smell in the area, but it wasn't so pungent as to cause particular attention. By the following morning however, as they were starting out to cut saplings, the odour was much worse, and so the men decided to have a look around to see if they could discover what was causing the stench. They moved through the thick bushland for a while, until finally, at just after 9am, they came upon a gruesome scene. Lying in the scrub, not far from Fowler Road, was the badly decomposed – and partly eaten away – body of a woman. A veil was drawn across her face which, when pulled aside, revealed unrecognisable features. The woman's scalp was almost gone, leaving a halo of dark brown hair lying adrift in the crown of a straw hat that was decorated with pretty, pink leaves and white muslin. The men could see too that she had died violently: a gaping gunshot wound marked her left temple.

The woman was lying on her back with her head inclined to the right. She wore a white muslin dress, and a holland dustcoat trimmed with white material and blue stripes. Her right arm was by her side. Her left hand – its bones exposed – was extended sideways, palm down. She wore a three-stone ruby ring on what remained of one of her fingers, and on the back of her left hand rested her left shoe. The other shoe was still on her right foot, and underneath it lay a copy of *The Sun* newspaper dated ten dates earlier: 12 February 1920. The date she met her fate?

Fred, Harry and Edwin could see no obvious sign of a struggle, but with closer inspection found dried and well-caked blood at her feet. There was also blood on the front of her dress, but this was covered by the dustcoat which had been buttoned up to hide the dark stains. And there was no weapon to be found. Clearly, someone else had been here. It was time to call in the police.

Sergeant Tracey from Hurstville Police Station was the first officer on the scene. On examining the body, he immediately concluded that it was a case of murder and contacted Inspector Milne of Marrickville police district (which the Sutherland area was then part of). Superintendent Bannan, Detective-Sergeant Edwards and Detective-Constable Arnold were assigned to the inquiry.

The policemen were driven from the city to Como, where they procured a boat and crossed the Woronora River to inspect the grisly scene at the reserve at Thompsons Bay. After they examined the body, the detectives visited the occupants of the few dwelling houses nearby, as well as those staying at the weekend camps, but were unable to obtain any information as to who this woman was or how and why she had been killed. They also interviewed several riverboat proprietors, but all they were told was that no-one answering the description of the dead woman had been known to cross over from Como recently. Despite these setbacks, the police did find one valuable clue to solving the mystery of the woman's identity. In the right-hand pocket of her dustcoat was a silver chain purse, and inside it they found silk gloves and a monogrammed handkerchief which appeared to be inscribed with the initials 'M.W.W.'[2]

Tragically, the case of the woman at Illawong was not the only violent incident that the police were dealing with at the time, leading Inspector-General, Mr Mitchell, to state: 'I doubt whether in the whole history of the police department there has been such a weekend of crime as this weekend.'[3] On Thursday 19 February, two men had been shot dead at Molong. Then on the Friday, a man and woman were both shot and killed after disembarking from a tram at Bronte Beach. Another shooting occurred that evening on Campbell Street in Ultimo when returned soldier (and Military Medallist) Peter Geary and his wife Grace were shot by a young woman who resided in their house. Grace was lucky to survive, but Peter was fatally wounded.[4] On Saturday a Russian seaman was arrested after attacking and stabbing with a jack knife at least five men outside the Burwood Hotel.[5] Then at 11 o'clock that night, former champion boxer, Bob Turner, was shot three times in the chest near his home in Ultimo following an argument with another man. Bob survived, but when asked by police for the name or description of his assailant, he remained silent. (Later that year, in August, Bob's brother, Sidney, was killed when he too shot in Ultimo).[6] And on Sunday 22 February 1920, the Grimshaw brothers and Edwin Catley made their shocking discovery in the thick bushland near the Woronora River. News of the tragedy was broadcast the following day.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported:

> There can be little doubt now that the woman found dead in Woronora Reserve, near Sutherland, was murdered... One bullet of a large calibre was found in the skull. The bullet had entered the left temple and had practically gone through to the right side of the head.
>
> The conclusive fact, that practically proved that the tragedy took place on the exact spot where the body was discovered, is that a small tree close to the feet of the body shows clear blood stains. This, in the opinion of the detectives, goes to show that she must have been standing alongside the tree, probably leaning against it, when she was shot. The alternative theory of suicide was discounted by the fact that an exhaustive search failed to locate a revolver or gun with which the dead woman could have shot herself.

> The locality in which the tragedy took place, though a favourite spot for picnickers, is covered by wild thick scrub that is difficult to penetrate. The denseness of the undergrowth would militate considerably against the travelling of any sound such as a revolver shot. Other persons could have been in close proximity to the scene of the tragedy and not have heard the report or known anything of the occurrence. The murderer would have had no difficulty in getting away from the scene of his crime unobserved. Everything was in his favour.[7]

The newspapers also keenly circulated the description supplied by the police of the unidentified woman in the hope that someone out there might come forward with information. As well as details of her clothing and the monogrammed handkerchief, the woman was described as being about 28 years old, 5ft 6in in height, of slight build, with brown hair, and a plate of nine teeth in the upper jaw.[8] It didn't take long for the description to ring a bell with one reader.

Martha Maud Worrell
[*Evening News,* 8 March 1920, p.1]

Mrs Catherine Featon was asleep at her home at 242 Pyrmont Bridge Road, Forest Lodge, when she was woken by her lodger, Mrs Sarah McInerney, urging her to read the article in the newspaper about the murdered woman. Both agreed that they recognised the clothing described – the hat, dustcoat and three-stone ring – as belonging to another of Mrs Featon's lodgers, one that neither woman had seen since 12 February. At the morgue, their suspicions were confirmed. The police also realised that they had made a mistake about the monogrammed handkerchief: they'd read it upside down. The initials weren't M.W.W., but M.M.W. The mystery woman was Martha Maud Worrell. Later that day – 24 February 1920 – the police arrested and charged her husband, Probationary Constable Leslie Clive Worrell with feloniously and maliciously murdering his wife, Martha – the woman he had married just two months earlier.[9] So, who were these young newlyweds? And how did things go so horribly wrong, so quickly?

Martha Maud Worrell (nee Lennon) was born in 1895, the sixth of twelve children to Charles and Agnes Lennon of Albro Farm, near Manilla, a small town in regional New South Wales (about 45km northwest of Tamworth). Martha probably met her future husband, Leslie Worrell, in 1916 when he was working as a labourer with the railways at Manilla. Leslie was originally from Baradine Creek (north of Coonamble); he had lived and worked as a grazier on the family property, 'Melrose'. Leslie, born in 1894, was the eldest child of Lewis and Charlotte Worrell; the Worrells were a well-known and respected family in the district. In September 1915, Leslie's 21st birthday celebrations were reported as being 'One of the most successful and enjoyable functions ever witnessed on the 'Creek'.'[10]

Group portrait of the 9th Australian Infantry Brigade School. France, 24 October 1918. Sergeant Leslie Worrell (2906), 35th Battalion, far right, second row.
[Australian War Memorial E03663. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C396255]

A year later, on 19 September 1916, he enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at Armidale. Leslie's service record describes him as 6ft tall, 13 stone, with grey eyes, a fair complexion and fair hair. Curiously, his age on enlistment is given as 21 years and 8 months, when he had, in fact, just turned 22.[11] On 25 November, Leslie set sail for overseas war service leaving Martha, who he was said to be 'keeping company with' far behind.

In August 1917, Leslie proceeded to the Western Front where he was 'taken on strength' with the 35th Infantry Battalion. He'd arrived too late for the Battle of Messines, but on 12 October he was with the 35th Battalion as they took part in the infamous battle around Passchendaele. The conditions were truly horrendous, as described on the Australian War Memorial website:

> Heavy rain ... deluged the battlefield, and thick mud tugged at the advancing troops and fouled their weapons. The battle was a disaster for the 35th; 508 men crossed the start line but only 90 remained unwounded at the end.[12]

Somehow, Leslie survived the slaughter. On 25 October, he was promoted to Temporary Corporal, and then Corporal just two weeks later – on both occasions to replace men who were amongst the wounded. Later, in July 1918, he was again promoted – to Sergeant. Although Leslie escaped the trenches uninjured, he did not make it through the war unscathed. In early 1918 he was admitted to hospital suffering with venereal disease (gonorrhoea), and in November – right at the war's end – he was reported 'dangerously ill' with bronchopneumonia and had to spend several months convalescing in hospital in England.[13] And we can only imagine how the horrors of war must have damaged him both mentally and emotionally.

Throughout their long years apart, Leslie and Martha corresponded regularly. According to Charles Lennon (Martha's father), Leslie had even invited his daughter to come down to Sydney and meet him when he finally returned from the war in August 1919 aboard the *Konigin Luise.*[14] What Charles did not know – nor Martha either in all likelihood – is that someone else was travelling to Australia on the troopship with Leslie*:* Leslie his new – and first – wife, Alice.

Leslie Worrell married 24-year-old Alice Louise Notton at the Parish Church in Basingstoke, Southampton on 19 February 1919.[15] The couple presumably met while Leslie was recovering at the 4th Canadian General Hospital in Basingstoke in late-1918. When the newlyweds departed England in June, they were by no means the only married couple aboard the *Konigin Luise*. In fact, as Sapper Benjamin Alfred Cohen of the 5th Australian Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company noted in his shipboard diary, there were quite a few Australian soldiers onboard who were bringing their English brides home to Australia.*[16]* If Charles Lennon was correct, and Martha had journeyed from Manilla to Sydney to meet the ship when it arrived, we can only imagine just how relaxing a voyage this might have been for Leslie if he'd known that his pre-war sweetheart would be waiting for him as he disembarked with his new wife. The fact is, we don't know whether any reunion occurred at this stage, or indeed if Martha and Alice ever crossed paths. Whatever the case, Leslie was soon back at his parents' property in Baradine Creek where Lewis and Charlotte Worrell enthusiastically welcomed their son and new daughter-in-law into their home.[17] But the happy homecoming was to be short-lived.

On 2 October 1919 the *Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative* newspaper reported:

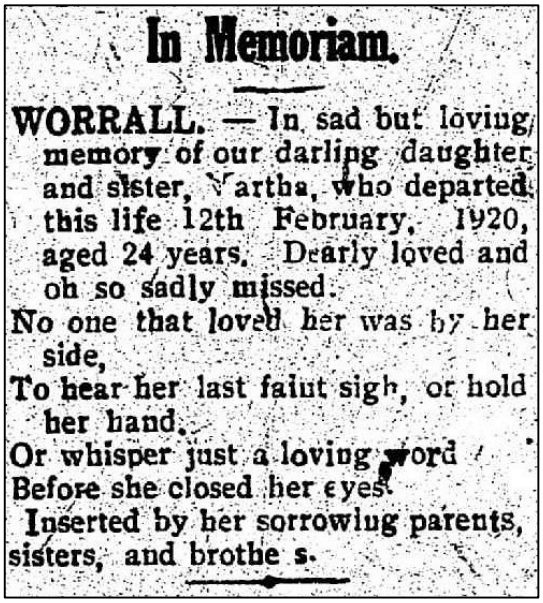
> A death, the circumstances of which were particularly sad, took place at Bugaldie on Tuesday, September 16. Mrs Leslie Worrell, who had accompanied her husband, Sergeant Leslie Worrell, on his return to Australia, and had only been in her new Australian home, at Baradine Creek, just a month, when she became ill with appendicitis, and despite every medical assistance – both Dr Failes and Dr Docker being in attendance – she collapsed while being removed to the Coonabarabran Hospital and passed away at 'The Cedars' Bugaldi after lingering a couple of days... Deep sympathy is felt throughout the district with Sergeant Worrell in his very sad bereavement.[18]

Leslie had survived atrocious battlefield conditions on the Western Front, nearly succumbed to pneumonia, and then married and buried his young English bride in short succession, so it's impossible to comprehend what he was thinking or feeling. Nevertheless, what his did next seems odd. Very odd.

By mid-November 1919, Leslie was back in Sydney and had joined the police as a probationary constable.[19] The following month he travelled up to Manilla, married Martha on Boxing Day at the Holy Trinity Church of England – on the marriage certificate he claims to be a 'bachelor' – then returned to Sydney with his new, second wife and set up home at Mrs Featon's lodgings in Forest Grove. Less than two months later, Martha was dead, and Leslie arrested for her murder.

Following his arrest, Leslie Worrell was taken to the morgue to view what remained of Martha's body. When Inspector James Milne asked him, in the presence of the City Coroner, 'Can you identify that as the body of your wife?', Leslie replied, 'I can identify it by the clothing.' He also confirmed that the earrings found entangled in his wife's hair were indeed Martha's, as well as the ring on one of her

fingers and other pieces of jewellery. When he was shown the bullet that had fallen from Martha's skull when her body was turned over, he simply said: 'Yes.' But when asked if he knew how his wife had come to be found lying dead in the scrubby reserve across the river from Como, he answered, 'I have no idea.' Leslie claimed that neither he nor Martha had any acquaintances in the area, and that they had never even been to Como. 'I do not know where Woronora or Como is,' he said, 'and I don't think my wife has ever been there either.' Soon after, Inspector Milne was called away to take a telephone call. When he returned a few minutes later, Leslie changed his story: he told the inspector that he had been a member of a picnic party at Como sometime before Christmas. 'Well, you do know where Como is,' said Milne. Worrell replied that he did.[20]



In Memoriam.

WORRALL. — In sad but loving memory of our darling daughter and sister, Martha, who departed this life 12th February, 1920, aged 24 years. Dearly loved and oh so sadly missed.

No one that loved her was by her side,
To hear her last faint sigh, or hold her hand.
Or whisper just a loving word
Before she closed her eyes.

Inserted by her sorrowing parents, sisters, and brothers.

Family notice inserted on the first anniversary of Martha's death.
[*Manilla Express*, 15 February 1921, p.2. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article192966525]

On 25 February 1920, Martha's shattered parents, Charles and Agnes Lennon arrived in Sydney from Manilla. Charles was queried as to whether he'd known that Worrell had been married before, to which he replied: 'No. The first I knew of it was when I read it in the paper.'[21] Two days later, Charles and Agnes laid their daughter to rest at Rookwood Cemetery; the only mourners at the funeral being Martha's bereaved parents and her brother-in-law, Guern Sutherland.

When the case of Martha Maud Worrell's brutal death was heard at the Coroner's Court in March, it caused a sensation. Throughout the proceedings, large crowds would gather outside the court long before the sessions were due to begin. When the doors were eventually thrown open, a swarm of excited attendees – the bulk of whom were women – surged inside, all keen to secure a seat in the public portion of the courthouse and witness first-hand the coronial inquiry into the young ex-police constable arraigned with murdering his newlywed wife. Mr JW Abigail was charged with looking after Worrell's interests during the proceedings, while Mr Kidston appeared for the Crown.[22]

Leslie Worrell did not speak at the Coroner's Court, but a statement made and signed by him on 24 February was read out as evidence. In it, Worrell stated that around 2pm on 12 February he had left his wife at their home in Forest Lodge, gone to his workplace at Regent Street Police Station, and had dropped off a bag containing a revolver and other items. He returned home and then took Martha to the cinema in Haymarket.[23] When Inspector Milne asked Worrell, 'Can you tell me the name of any picture that was screened at the Haymarket Theatre on February 12?', Leslie answered, 'No.'[24] Mrs Featon, the landlady, did later confirm that on 12 February Martha, in happy spirits had told her, 'My boy has a day off, and he is going to take me out. I don't know where he is going to take me, but it's the pictures, I suppose.'[25] Mrs Featon never saw Martha again.

Worrell stated that on returning to Forest Lodge late in the afternoon, his wife packed a suitcase full of luggage – leaving nothing but a few doyleys and table-centres – and left. His statement continued:

> About 5:30 on February 12 I saw my wife, Martha Maude Worrell off on the Newcastle train. She said she was going to her sister's place. I don't know the address from memory, but I have some letters at my house where I can get it. She has not communicated with me in any way since I saw her off on the train.
>
> We lived happily together, and the day she went away we parted on the best of terms. My wife told me she was going to stay a week at Newcastle, and then she was going to her home at Manilla. On leaving me in the train I said to her, 'Martha, you will write to me and let me know how you get on,' to which she replied, 'All right, Les.' After seeing my wife off, I came back to 4 George Street West, and saw a man named George Roberts, a dancing master; had a couple of dances; came on duty at No. 2 [police station] at 8pm in plain clothes and did not return to my home until I came off duty.[26]

Around 10am on 13 February, Leslie told Mrs Featon: 'Mrs Worrell went home [to the country] last night. There was a letter at No. 2 station. Her mother is not very well... She will be away about three weeks.'[27] Later that day, Worrell paid Mrs Featon the rent he owed and moved out to a boarding house at 132 Abercrombie Street. In their evidence, both Mrs Featon and Mrs Sarah McInerney (another lodger) agreed that Leslie and Martha appeared to be on good terms and never seemed to quarrel. But Mrs McInerney did say that she thought 'Mrs Worrell was of a jealous disposition, simple and emotional.'

Leslie Worrell's police statement concluded with this extraordinary claim:

> I now remember that my wife threatened to commit suicide by taking poison. She was in a certain condition and was very bad tempered. When in a temper she always spoke of doing away with herself.[28]

One of the first witnesses at the Coroner's Court was Dr Stratford Sheldon, the Government Medical Officer. He stated that he had made an internal post-mortem examination of the body; it had suffered considerable decomposition.

> On the left side of the head, in the temporal region, there was a round hole and underneath this a hole in the skull immediately in front of the top of the ear. The brain had entirely disappeared, and only dried tissues remained inside the skull. Behind the right ear there was another hole. The posterior portion of the right temporal bone was also out of position. This had been fractured to an almost perpendicular position, loosening the ear until it fell out.[29]

'In my opinion,' continued Dr Sheldon, 'a hole of that nature would be caused by a bullet, and the injury was sufficient to cause death.' Although Sheldon could not confirm the position from which the bullet was fired, he did say that the shot could have come from a police revolver. When Mr Abigail queried whether the wound could have been self-inflicted, Sheldon replied: 'Yes, it could,' but added, 'There was nothing to indicate to me from what distance it [the gun] was fired.'[30]

Evidence was also provided by Inspector James Fraser. At 6am on 24 February, when Probationary Constable Worrell was coming off duty at No. 2 Regent Street Police Station, Fraser had made an examination of the revolver in Leslie's possession and discovered that it was not loaded with police-issue ammunition. Instead, Fraser found five Adams cartridges in the weapon. 'This ammunition does not fit your revolver,' he told Worrell, 'The shield will not close down.' He then took Leslie to an

adjoining room and asked him how he came to have Adams ammunition in his revolver. Worrell said that he'd lost five of his service ammunition and had bought the Adams cartridges as replacements at a Mick Simmons store. 'I only bought five,' he insisted.[31] But Adams ammunition was only sold in packets of 12 and boxes of 50. Worrell's service ammunition was subsequently found in his lunch bag at Regent Street Police Station. None was missing. At the Coroner Court, a gunmaker with 25-years' experience, Robert Alleyne Corkran, stated that he had examined the revolver and bullet found in Martha's skull, and determined that the bullet could have been fired from the revolver.[32] Frustratingly, at no point do any of the newspapers covering the proceedings identify the type of revolver, or indeed what sort of police-issue ammunition it should have contained. If it had been a .45 Colt or a Smith & Wesson fitted with low-powered .450 Adams bullets, Leslie would have been in possession with the ideal weapon for a kill shot on a human at close range.[33]

As the witnesses continued to give evidence at the Coroner's Court, Leslie Worrell's story – that he knew nothing about the circumstances of Martha's tragic death and that he'd last seen his wife at the train station before she departed for Newcastle – started to unravel. Firstly, Agnes Lennon (Martha's mother) made it clear that she had not been unwell and had certainly never written to her daughter to say that she was. Furthermore, neither she, nor Minnite Sutherland of Newcastle (Martha's sister), had received any correspondence at all from Martha to indicate that they might be expect a visit from her. As far as they were concerned, the Worrells were a happily married young couple. Despite Martha only learning about Leslie's first marriage to Alice after 'the acquaintance between them was renewed', Mrs Lennon believed that 't did not affect her affection for Worrell.' But when pressed by Mr Abigail as to whether her daughter was jealous of the first wife, Mrs Lennon admitted, 'Yes.'[34]

Jens Christian Simmonsen was a boat proprietor at Como. Jens said that early in the afternoon on 12 February, as he walked under the subway at Como, he passed a man and woman standing and looking towards his boat shed. Once inside his shed, Jens watched the couple for a while, and eventually they approached. The woman waited outside, but the man came into the shed and hired a boat – the 'new dinghy'. The man asked Jens the best place to go, so he suggested Woronora. The man replied, 'I will go there.' Soon after, Jens watched the couple rowing away on the river.[35]

A few hours later, at 4:30pm, Jens saw a boat approaching midstream with only one person in it. He didn't take too much notice, but when he went out to take tea, he found a boat tied to a lamppost some distance from his shed. It was the 'new dinghy' that he'd hired to the couple earlier that the afternoon. [36] On 27 February, at Central Police Station, several probationary constables wearing plain clothes – including Leslie Worrell – were lined up. Jens Simmonsen had no trouble picking Leslie out from the line-up as the man he'd hired the boat to a fortnight earlier at Como. 'This is only a ---- farce!' exclaimed Worrell.[37] At the Coroner's Court, additional witnesses remembered seeing Leslie and Martha (in her holland dustcoat with blue stripes) on the train to Como on 12 February. But perhaps the most shocking evidence heard at the proceedings – and that which offered the most damning insight into Leslie Worrell's disturbed state of mind – was provided his former police colleagues.

Constable Horton Ward said that around 6pm on 26 January, he had been having his meal in the supper room of No. 2 Police Station. Worrell was sitting opposite him.

Ward: ‘Is that a wedding ring you are wearing?’

Worrell: ‘Yes, that belonged to my first wife.’

Ward: ‘Have you been married twice?’

Worrell: ‘Yes.’

Ward: ‘You ought to get a Victoria Cross.’

Worrell: ‘Yes. Perhaps a man ought. My first wife I brought out from England; she was one of the best little women in the world. It’s the one I have now that nearly drives me mad. Before I am done with her, I will shoot her and myself too.’

Ward: ‘Don’t talk like that, boy. What’s wrong with the woman?’

Worrell: ‘When I go out, she wants to know what I’ve been doing; she’s always crying.’

Ward: ‘You’ll get over that all right.’

Worrell: ‘You may think so, but I don’t. Life to me is Hell upon Earth.’[38]

It was then Constable Sheringham’s turn. He said that between 1 and 20 February he and Leslie worked together on the overnight shift (8pm to 4am). At around 1am on 12 February (the day of the shooting) the two men were sitting in a doorway in Hay Street in the city. During their conversation, Leslie commented that he thought ‘the Old Country girls are much better than the natives.’ He told Sheringham how his first wife, Alice, had died of appendicitis. ‘I had two doctors attending to her, but they could not save her,’ he said. ‘I wish this wife was as good a woman as my first wife... I sometimes think of getting rid of her.’ Sheringham tried to cheer the conversation, but it quickly fell to silence. After a little while Leslie continued: ‘You know, this war has made some men callous; they don’t care what they do. Some of the soldiers shot their wives in France and were never found out.’[39] Before the day was out, Martha Maud Worrell was dead: shot once in the head. The coroner returned a verdict of murder against Leslie Clive Worrell and committed him for trial.


WORONORA TRAGEDY

Ex-probationary Police Constable Leslie Worrell entering the Coroner's Court this morning to attend the adjourned inquest regarding the death of his wife, with whose murder Worrell stands charged.

Ex Probationary Constable Leslie Worrelll arriving at court [*The Sun*, 17 March 1920, p.1]

The trial at Central Criminal Court commenced on Monday 24 May, three month and two days after the decomposed body of Martha Maud Worrell was found lying in the scrub at Thompsons Bay, Illawong. Again, crowds gathered early in the hope of gaining a seat in the courthouse or just catching a glimpse of Leslie Clive Worrell. The criminal trial was held before Mr Justice Wade. Mr J.W. Abigail again appeared for the defendant, and Mr Coyle, instructed by Mr John Gonsavles, conducted the case for the Crown. Leslie Worrell pleaded ‘not guilty.’ Nine jurors were challenged by the defence team, and just two for the Crown. The result being that the jury was almost entirely composed of men under the age of 40. In his opening address, Mr Coyle stated:

> He took her deliberately to Como, and just as deliberately shot her dead, and put in the evening dancing... It is a case of the most brutal, cold-blooded, and callous murder of an innocent woman.[40]

In many ways, the evidence presented at the criminal trial was identical to that heard at the Coroner's Court. Additional information was, however, provided by George Henry Roberts, proprietor of the dance academy in George Street. Roberts said that on the evening of 12 February, Worrell had come to see him and agreed to help with some of the dancing pupils. After dancing the night away, Leslie said to Roberts: 'If anyone asks about me, say I was here this afternoon.' He then asked Roberts if he could borrow a small sum of money with the excuse that: 'My wife has cleared out and has taken all my money with her.'[41]

The case for the Crown closed on 25 May following the testimony of around 30 witnesses. After being granted a quarter of an hour's consultation, Mr Abigail (acting for the defence) said: 'I will tender the accused, your Honour.' Leslie Worrell had decided to take the stand. Incredibly too, although he still claimed his innocence, Leslie completely changed his story. Under oath, he said:

> 'I loved my wife very much... She was always under the impression that I was talking to and visiting other women. I treated her with consideration, but she was very quick-tempered, impulsive and emotional. I did all I could to make her whole life happy.
>
> 'I came off night duty [on 12 February] and went home. At about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, my wife and I left, went to the railway station, and caught the 2:35 train for Como. I met Roberts on the way. I was carrying an umbrella and a bag which contained my police handcuffs, revolver, a thermos flask of tea, cups and biscuits. We hired a boat at Como, and, after rowing for about ten minutes, alighted at the Woronora reserve. I took the bag, and walking into the bush, we sat down to have tea and biscuits. There was a conversation about my first marriage. My wife said she was jealous and told me I did not act as a man to her by marrying another woman. She did not think I ought to have done it.
>
> We had finished our biscuits and tea when my wife became highly excited. I tried to pacify her, but she commenced to weep. She got the revolver out of the bag and threatened to shoot herself. At the time I was standing a few yards away, and she was sitting down, but suddenly jumped up and pulled back the cocking piece of the weapon. She again threatened to shoot herself, saying, 'You will pay for this, Les; I have suffered enough for you.' I replied, 'Don't talk like that.
>
> I went to take the revolver, but she whipped it from her right hand to the left and then shot herself.
>
> I rushed and picked her up in my arms, and did not know what to do. Seeing that she was gone, I kissed her, straightened the body out, and, picking up the bag, left the scene. I went away with the intention of reporting the affair, but, when rowing back, became afraid that if I did so, I should be wrongfully blamed, as I am now. I admit having said certain things, but they were all lies. I told them because I was afraid. I never shot her.'[42]

Worrell also stated that although he was not wounded in the war, he had suffered from shellshock, and that his nerves were still shattered. Mr Coyle, the prosecutor was unmoved.

Coyle: ‘I am to take it then, that this is the first time since your wife was killed that you have told the truth?

Worrell: ‘It is.’

Coyle: ‘Have you ever told anybody that your wife committed suicide?

Worrell: ‘No.’

Coyle: ‘You loved your wife?’

Worrell: ‘Yes, very much.’

Coyle: ‘Yet you knew that her body was lying uncovered in the bush, rotting in the sun?’

Worrell: ‘Yes.’

Coyle: ‘And you went to Roberts dancing academy soon after the fatality’

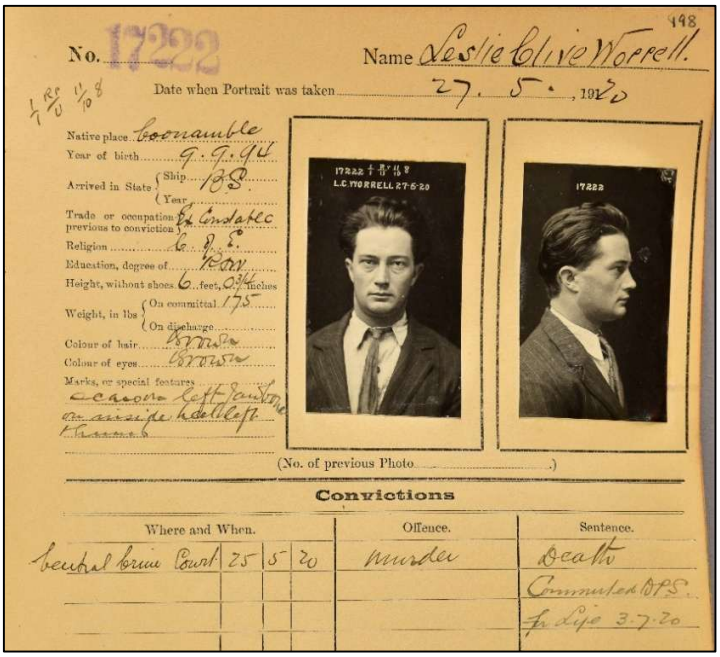
Worrell: ‘Yes; my mind was so confused I didn’t know what I was doing.’[43]

The jury retired a little before 5pm on Tuesday 25 May 1920 to consider all the evidence.

There were only two people who could have committed the shooting. During the trial, Martha had been described – by others, as well as Leslie – as being ‘emotional, quick tempered and jealous’, but was she impulsive enough to grab her husband’s revolver in a rage and shoot herself dead? If not her, then this left Leslie Worrell. Had he coldly calculated to substitute his police ammunition with Adams bullets thus arming himself with the perfect weapon to kill someone at close range? What’s more, because these Adams bullets could have been purchased by anyone, was his plan to distance himself from any bloody trail that might have led investigators back to him? Had Leslie deliberately taken his wife, Martha, to the secluded reserve across the Woronora River from Como and shot and killed her in cold blood? If so, then why did he not return his service ammunition to the police revolver, instead keeping the incriminating Adams bullets in its chambers? And why did he choose to take his wife to Como by public transport, then hire a boat from a local proprietor – both actions, of course, resulting in eyewitnesses that could readily place both him and Martha in the area? Was it premeditated murder? Or was Leslie Worrell a deeply disturbed, sleep-deprived man, suffering the ongoing traumas wrought by war? Was he a man who (in his own words) was ‘so confused he didn’t know what I was doing’?

In the end it took the jury just 40 minutes to come to a decision. At 5:25pm, the Court was reassembled, Worrell returned, and after a few more tense minutes, His Honour finally came to the bench. The jury was asked the question: ‘Do you find Leslie Clive Worrell guilty or not guilty?’ ‘Guilty,’ replied the foreman. Worrell received the decision quietly, and when asked if he had anything to say before sentence was passed, answered in a husky voice, ‘No, your Honour.’[44] Mr Justice Wade summed up: ‘I must say that the evidence is almost irresistible... I will not add to your feelings by any lengthy remarks. My solemn duty is to pass sentence of death as the law provides.’[45] Leslie was led away through a trapdoor at the back of the dock...

...but he did not go to the gallows and hang.



On 15 June, at a meeting of the Executive Council, Leslie's death sentence was commuted to one of penal servitude for life; he was sent to Goulburn Gaol to serve his time.[46] While there, he took up music and, in the intervening years, reportedly became a virtuoso on piano, clarinet, organ and violin.[47] In June 1940, after twenty years in prison, Leslie applied for release, claiming that, if successful, he hoped to become a lay preacher.[48] His application was refused.

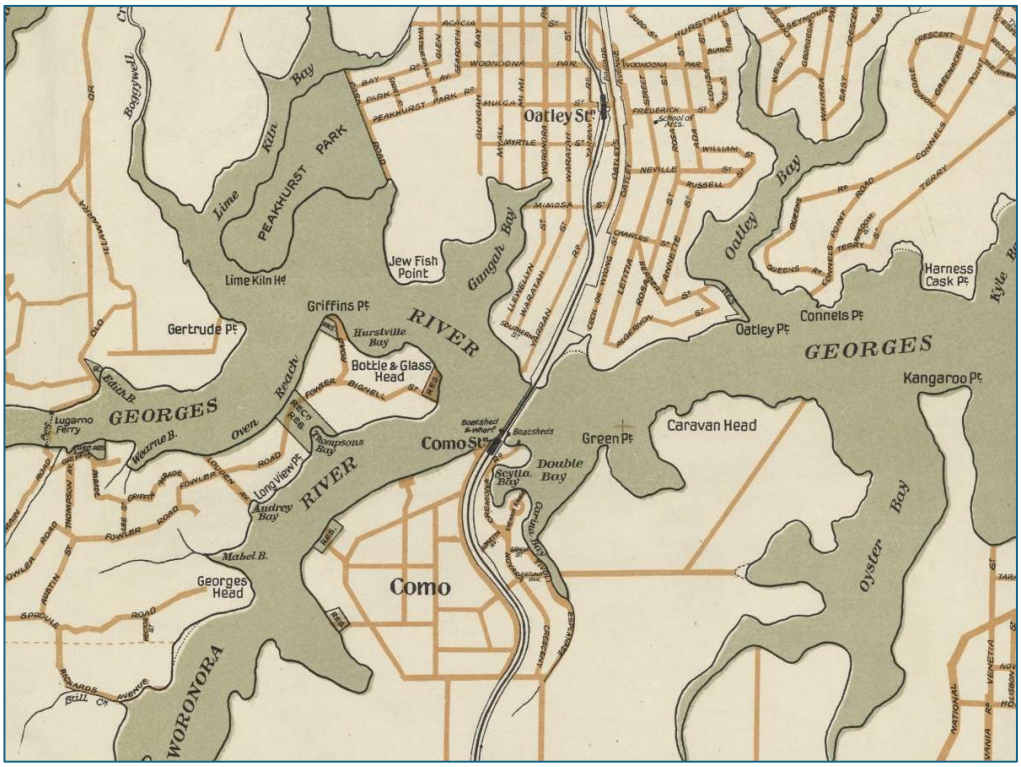
Leslie Clive Worrell, mugshot, 27 May 1920
[NSW State Archives, INX-84-42202]

It's unclear exactly when Leslie Worrell finally gained his freedom, but he was certainly out of Goulburn Gaol and living in Queensland by 1948. On 23 October of that year, and now going by the name of Leslie Clifford Elwyn, he married his third bride, an Englishwoman named Hannah Streader (nee Wright), at the Methodist Church in Ingham (not far from Hinchinbrook Island).[49]

Why did Leslie adopt the names 'Clifford' and 'Elwyn' his new middle and surname? The answer is found by examining historic records from 1907. Back then, Leslie was just 13 and still living at the family farm at Baradine Creek. On 27 December – two days after Christmas – his nine-month-old brother died of an 'enlargement of the heart and bronchitis'. His name was Clifford Elwyn Worrell.[50] Fifty years later, in August 1957, Leslie made his new name official when he changed it by deed poll to Leslie Clifford Elwyn[51] in remembrance of his long-dead baby brother.

Throughout the 1950s, Leslie worked as a labourer, sometimes on farms; he and Hannah moving occasionally around the area north of Townsville.[52] Eventually, the Elwyns made their way south to Brisbane and Leslie found work as a cleaner.[53] On New Years Day 1958, Hannah Elwyn died of thrombosis of the superior mesenteric vein and congestive cardiac failure. She was 58.[54] Incredibly, within the year, Leslie married again – for the fourth time. His new bride (another Englishwoman) was Rosa Jane Broadhurst (nee Roffs). On 14 August 1965, at the age of 71, Rosa died too. The cause of death was acute cerebral degeneration and an acute pyloric ulcer.[55]

Leslie Clive Worrell/Clifford Elywn survived the First World War trenches on the Western Front, months in hospital with influenza, decades in Goulburn Gaol, and 'outlived' four wives. On 22 August 1966, at Nazareth House in Wynnum – an aged-care home near Brisbane with spectacular views of Moreton Bay – he died of coronary artery disease at the age of 71. Leslie was cremated three days later at Mount Thompson Crematorium. The occupation on his death certificate is given as a 'gardener.' Also listed on the certificate are the names of Leslie's three English wives: Alice, Hannah and Rosa Jane.[56] There is no mention of his second – murdered – wife, Martha Maud Worrell (nee Lennon), who was, in many ways, another tragic casualty of the First World War.



Area map showing Thompsons Bay where Martha Maud Worrell's body was found, on the reserve between the Georges and Woronora Rivers, opposite Como rail bridge.
[https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74Vv7LkODp.Xg]

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[54] Hannah Elwyn death certificate. Ref no. 23713.
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[56] Leslie Clifford Elwyn death certificate. Ref no. 83357.