

# THE MURDER OF PC GEORGE CLARK, 1846

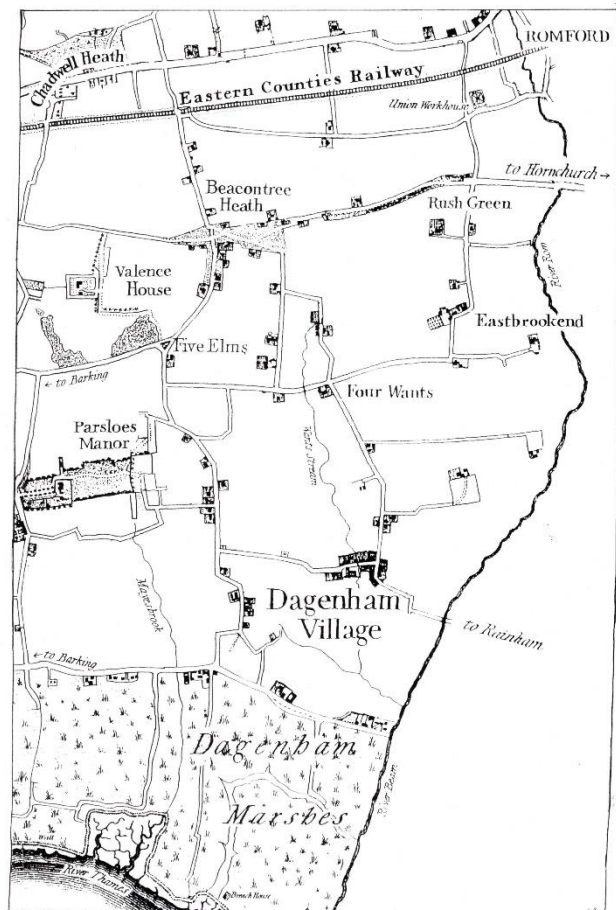
## Part 3 of 4: The murder investigation

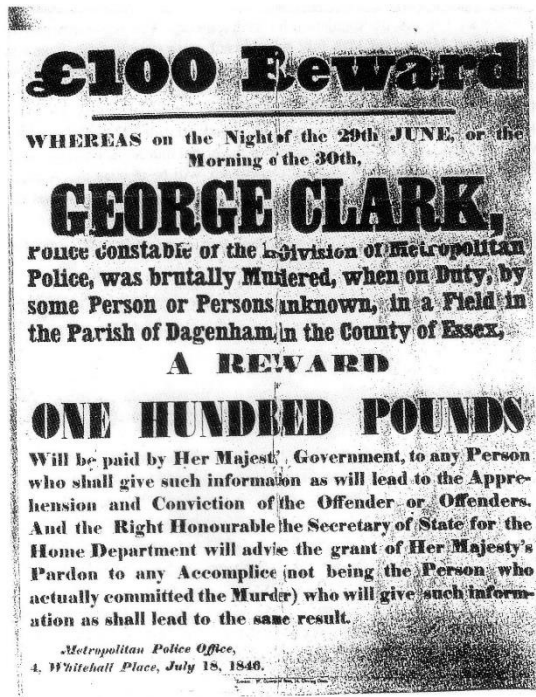
The Metropolitan Police Detective Department had been founded four years previously, in 1842. It consisted of two inspectors and six sergeants. Investigating this shocking murder of George Clark, one of their own, naturally became their top priority. Two of the detective sergeants, Jonathan Whicher and Edward Kendell, attended the opening of the inquest on 4 July. They spent the rest of the day touring Dagenham and Romford, paying particular attention to pubs and beer shops.

Initially, it was assumed that Clark had been the victim of mistaken identity. PC Abia Butfoy, Clark's predecessor on the Eastbrookend beat, told the inquest he'd been threatened by William Walker, a beer seller and marine stores dealer from Romford. Sergeant Parsons then said he thought **he** might be the intended target, in revenge for arresting James Young, another Romford man, a few weeks before. However, the detectives could not find sufficient evidence against the suspects.

The *Times* newspaper reported that some local people "hint very strongly the probability of the real murderers being smugglers infesting Barking and the surrounding villages, Dagenham only lying two miles from the desolate Essex bank of the Thames, and being well adapted for smuggling transactions". The detectives also followed up this theory, but with no result.

Map of Dagenham Village and surrounding areas in the 1840s, including Eastbrookend to the north of the village and the marshes and River Thames to the south. (Drawn by Lee Sheldon using elements from Chapman & Andre's 1777 map of Essex plus details from early Ordnance Survey maps)



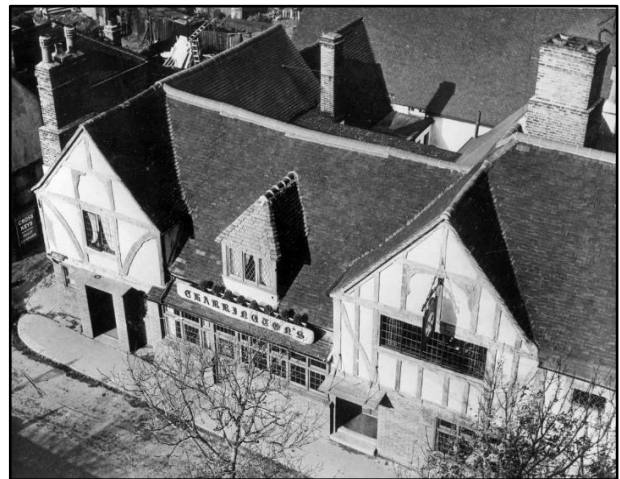


Poster offering a reward of £100 for information leading to the conviction of the murderers. This was a huge sum of money, around five years' wages for a farm worker (LBBB Archives at Valence House)

### Suspicion now falls on the police

On 18 July a sensational report appeared in the *Bedford Mercury*. Apparently a chain of evidence was now leading to a new suspect. This person was none other than a member of the police!

The inquest had reopened on Tuesday 14 July at the Cross Keys public house in Dagenham Village. The coroner announced that a woman in the neighbourhood who hadn't yet been summoned to give evidence might have important information. He and two jurors then set off in a chaise to fetch her. She turned out to be Mrs Elizabeth Page of Thorntons Farm.



Right: Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century view of the Cross Keys (LBBB Archives at Valence House)

At the previous hearing, Sergeant Parsons had said he rode from beat to beat throughout the night of 29 June, and had met Clark for the last time shortly after 1am near the Four Wantz. Mrs Page, however, now undermined his version of events.

After describing the discovery of Clark's body, she said that after constables Kimpton and Stevens brought the borrowed farm cart back, she gave them supper. She alleged that as they chatted, Kimpton told her that Parsons hadn't been well on the night of the murder and had ordered him, Kimpton, to take the horse and do his duty instead.

But Kimpton and Stevens denied this conversation ever took place, and supported Parsons's claim that he was on duty all night. The dispute dragged on into the third inquest hearing, on 23 July. At one point Parsons lost his temper, sprang up and accused them of branding **him** the murderer!

Three weeks later, PC Abia Butfoy dropped a bombshell. He went to Scotland Yard, insisted upon seeing the Commissioners (Sir Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne) and confessed that the Dagenham policemen had been lying all along – Parsons *hadn't* been on duty the night of the murder and had forced the others to back up his story.

Parsons, Kimpton, Hickton, Stevens and Farnes were all suspended from duty and put under house arrest. On 14 September the inquest finally concluded, with a verdict of “Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown”.

Parsons, Kimpton and Hickton were charged with perjury and conspiracy, but went on the run. A £50 reward was offered for information leading to their recapture.

Eventually they were traced and put on trial. Kimpton and Hickton were found guilty and sentenced to transportation. In the event they were never actually sent to Australia, and were freed after two years.

Parsons, on the other hand, was never convicted, as the judge threw out the case against him. He decided to emigrate to Canada with the Hudson's Bay Company and resume his former occupation as a miller.

£50 reward poster for Parsons and Hickton  
(LBB Archives at Valence House)

**£50 Reward.**

WHEREAS

**William Parsons,**  
a Police Serjeant, and  
**Isaac Hickton,**  
a Police Constable,

lately in the *K Division* of the Metropolitan Police, stand charged with Conspiracy and Perjury at the Inquest held at Dagenham, in the County of Essex, upon the body of **GEORGE CLARK**, a Police Constable, who was Murdered on the 29th June, 1846.

*Her Majesty's Government*

will give the above REWARD, to any Person who shall give such Information as will lead to the Apprehension of these Men, or a proportion of it for the Apprehension of either of them.

**Description of Parsons,**  
Aged 30 Years, Height 5 feet 7½ inches, Fresh Complexion, small Grey Eyes, Sandy Hair and Whiskers, much freckled, walks upright, and is well proportioned, by Trade a Miller, Born in Saint Peter's, Norwich.

**Description of Hickton,**  
Aged 33 Years, Height 5 feet 9½ inches, Fair Complexion, Grey Eyes, light Brown Hair, small Sandy Whiskers, round Shouldered, draws his Mouth on one side when talking, especially when excited, by Trade a Carrier, and was employed at a Tanner's at Hales Green, near Birmingham, about 3 Months since, Born in Saint Warbur, Derby.

Information to be given at the Police Office, Great Scotland Yard, to the Police Station, *K Division*, Arbour-square, Stepney, or any of the Police Stations.

Metropolitan Police Office,  
4, Whitehall Place.

## New evidence comes to light 12 years later

By 1858, twelve years after the killing of Clark, no-one had yet been charged with the crime. Then on 24 June of that year Jonathan Whicher, the most celebrated detective of his day, strode into one of farmer Samuel Seabrook's fields in Dagenham. He approached George Blewitt, an elderly farm labourer, and announced he was under arrest for the murder of George Clark. Whicher had worked on the original investigation, and had now risen to the rank of Inspector.

Photograph of Inspector Jonathan Whicher (Wikipedia)



This sensational turn of events was prompted by new evidence from a Mrs Mary Ann Smith. In 1846 she'd been the wife of a farm worker named William Page and lived in a cottage on Clark's beat. She claimed that on the evening of 29 June she had pleaded with Clark to persuade her husband, who was violent towards her, to mend his ways. Clark had accordingly stopped Page and given him a lecture about his immortal soul, but this only had the effect of enraging him.

When Page came home he told his wife that he and three other men, George Blewitt, George Chalk and Ned Wood, planned to stage a robbery that night, and if Clark interfered they would "stab the b\*\*\* down to the ground".

Mrs Smith alleged that just after midnight the four men, taking her as lookout, entered the barn at Eastbrookend Old Hall belonging to farmer Thomas Waters Brittain. They intended to steal sacks of corn and take them to neighbouring farmer Ralph Page, who would be waiting in his barn at Thorntons Farm.



Eastbrookend Old Hall (now demolished), showing the barn where Clark allegedly encountered the corn stealers (LBBB Archives at Valence House)

When the men had entered the barn, Mary Ann spotted Clark approaching. She turned towards the door and called out "Bill, here is a policeman!" Page came out and asked Clark "Who told you to watch us?" Clark retorted "It is my duty, my man".

Page attacked Clark with a weighted stick, and Clark drew his cutlass. Clark was getting the upper hand, so Page called to the others for help. Mary Ann attempted to pull her husband away, but he ordered her to make herself scarce "or else I will serve you as we mean to serve him". The other three came out and joined the attack. They brought farm implements to use as weapons, including a pitchfork.

Mary Ann fled the scene. When her husband returned home he told her that they had murdered Clark. Page's first thought was to burn his clothes, which were covered in blood. A few days later he burnt the handle of a pitchfork, telling her "it is the fork that done the deed".



Most of the suspects named by Mrs Smith were dead by 1858. Ned Wood had hanged himself, William Page had been crushed beneath the wheels of his own cart, and Ralph Page was suspected of committing suicide by taking an overdose of laudanum. George Chalk, only 16 at the time of the murder, had emigrated to Australia. The only one still in the area was George Blewitt, who had been Mr Brittain's horse-keeper at the time and had keys to the barn.

The Grand Jury heard the evidence against him at the Essex Assizes, but the case was thrown out because the evidence was not corroborated. Blewitt's defence suggested that Mrs Smith was of unsound mind. She claimed to have seen the ghost of her husband, as well as the Devil, and even the apparition of a fire engine in her bedroom. She was elderly, deaf, poorly educated and presented as an object of ridicule. Blewitt was now a free man. Nobody else was ever arrested for the murder of George Clark, and to this day it remains unsolved.

The memorial on Clark's grave in Dagenham parish churchyard has been restored several times over the years. It is pictured here on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his murder, in 1996



**See also:**

- Part 1: Introducing the George Clark case
- Part 2: Brutal and shocking killing
- Part 4: George Clark remembered

*Text by Linda Rhodes, Lee Sheldon and Kathryn Abnett, July 2022*