



Most foul: A catalogue of crime was uncovered by Geoff Holder. Perth jail, top, where many miscreants were held. Left, Mr Holder's book

not proven – much to the annoyance of the judge who was unhappy at being denied the opportunity to hang her.

'But he had her on the theft, and she was sentenced to Transportation for Life, a harsh punishment even by the standards of the day. Miss Boag was soon on her way to Tasmania and Lizzie's murder remains officially unsolved.'

However, by 1825, when lawyer Clark came to their attention, the police were getting a handle on this murder business.

Clark was a capable litigator and a well known figure in Perth. But the bachelor had a weakness for illiterate servant girls. One such lass was Christian Cameron, an innocent from Highland Perthshire who became pregnant.

The solicitor was alarmed that his reputation would be compromised. Miss Cameron had the baby girl but realised she could not keep the child. She was, however, confident the infant could grow up in comfort with her father.

'A relative took the baby to the solicitor's rooms and told Clark the child was his responsibility. 'Something in his demeanour worried her,' says Mr Holder. 'She

hung about, watching his apartments.' Clark emerged, but he did not have the child. Miss Cameron's guardian alerted the police who paid a visit.

But there was no sign of the infant and Clark insisted he had taken her to a nurse. 'The nurse could not be found,' Mr Holder adds.

A second search of Clark's apartments proved equally fruitless. However, one determined officer was not satisfied. He remembered Clark had an armoire desk in the living room. Accompanied by a locksmith, the resourceful officer returned for a third time and demanded the doors be opened – to reveal the child's body.

Clark was arrested. 'But, at his trial, the medical evidence conflicted,' says Mr Holder. 'It was not clear if he was a killer, or if the child had died of neglect or natural causes. He was nonetheless convicted, but a plea for clemency was tendered, which, rather surprisingly, was signed by the members of the jury.'

A sentence of death was commuted to Transportation for Life and he was taken to the Thames, where prisoners were confined in

wooden hulks before being put on ships. 'Conditions were appalling, rife with disease,' says Mr Holder. 'Clark succumbed to infection. Poetic justice, I suppose.'

Justice was also served by the hangman after the Blackford Landlady Murder of 1848. There was no dubiety over who bludgeoned Janet 'old Jennie' Anderson. It was John Kellocher. 'He was

'He lifted up a hatchet and whacked her'

as cold an individual as you could meet,' says Mr Holder. 'He went to her home and used a previous relationship to lull the old lady into a false sense of security.'

The psychopath was 27, and four years earlier he had lodged with Jennie while working as a navvy on the local railway.

When he turned up one Sunday morning she was delighted. Mr

Holder adds: 'He had murder on his mind, picking a time when the house would be empty. He was hardly in the door when he lifted a hatchet and whacked her.'

Kellocher slipped away but he was not the shiniest button in the sewing box.

'It was classic. No money one day, flush the next', says Mr Holder. 'He was not in the least contrite. It was only when he was condemned that he launched a tirade of abuse. Dancing the hempen measure silenced his complaints.'

It was not long before local police officers were investigating yet another bloody affair – the Blairingone Bread Cart Murder – in December 1865.

'This was sinister,' says Mr Holder. 'It began when the cart, which operated in that area of Kinross-shire, appeared out of the winter fog. The horse was plodding along but the driver was missing.'

'Residents emerged to buy bread or pay bills and spotted blood on the cart. They tracked its route back to Vicar's bridge, where Miller was found with a massive wound to his face.'

The baker was conscious. He asked after his horse and then

expired. Locals had a suspect in mind and police traced a violent miscreant by the name of Joseph Bell.

Another worthy, Robert Wright, also pointed the finger, claiming Bell had asked him to participate in the robbery. Mr Holder says: 'Bell was convicted and in the weeks before he was hanged he sobered up, to reveal himself as a man of some intellect.'

'He went to his death claiming he had been framed.'

When a minister invited him to confess, he said: 'I am as innocent as an unborn child.'

Mr Holder believes Bell was probably not innocent but he has reservations about the guilt of George Chalmers – the Toll Booth Assassin. In December, 1869, Johnny Miller was toll-keeper at Braco. 'Toll booths were good targets because they always had money,' says Mr Holder.

Miller's assailant rushed in and beat him with a crowbar.

Police later discovered a 'raggedy collection of clothes' at the scene, which the killer had apparently left behind, and witnesses spoke of earlier seeing a tramp wearing similar clothes.

A nationwide search culminated in Dundee where an eagle-eyed police officer spotted Chalmers. It was established that he had been released from Dunblane jail just before the murder and police tracked the Aberdeenshire-born simpleton from there to Braco.

For some reason, Chalmers sometimes used the alias of Andrew Brown. He claimed he was living under that name in an Edinburgh hostel on the night of the murder.

The jury ignored the alibi and he, too, would go to the gallows, protesting his innocence. 'I will die like a man but I am innocent,' he told the hangman.

'Chalmers was the first man in Scotland to be hanged in private after public executions were done away with,' says Mr Holder. 'I can't help wondering if they got it wrong, in his case.'

But if it was a miscarriage of justice, it was one of the few, says Mr Holder. 'Most of them were mad or bad and got what they deserved. I'm just happy that, these days, Perthshire appears to be a much quieter place.'

● *Geoff Holder's lecture – Hanged By The Neck Until You Be Dead – takes place at 7pm on March 24 in the AK Bell Library, Perth.*

Admission is free to Friends of Perth and Kinross Archive, £5 for non-members, on the door.

Perthshire Murders is published by Amberley at £12.99.