

**Manchester Evening News Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February 1902.**

**NORTHENDEN MURDER.  
INQUEST TODAY.  
STARTLING EVIDENCE BY THE SURGEON.  
HOW COTTRILL WAS KILLED.**

Mr. C. F. Newton, County Coroner, held an inquest at the Church Inn, Northenden, on the bodies of John Gibson Dyson, of Bradley Gate, Northenden, and Frederick Cottrill. It will be recollected that on Friday morning Cottrill, who had been a butler in the service of Mr. Dyson, shot his former master in bed, and then, after a murderous attack upon the police, at whom he fired a number of shots from his revolvers, committed suicide. The inquest excited a considerable amount of interest in the village. A number of people assembled outside the inn, and remained in its vicinity as long as the proceedings lasted, notwithstanding that rain was descending.

**VIEWING THE BODIES.**

The jury met at Bradley Gate, and there viewed the body of Mr. Dyson. They then adjourned to the Church Inn, and having been sworn in, were taken to see the body of the man Cottrill. The proceedings were watched on behalf of the police by Mr. Leah, Deputy Chief Constable of the County, and Superintendent Oldham, and on behalf of the relatives of Mr. Dyson by Mr. Grace, solicitor, of Manchester. Mr. Gibson Dyson and Mr. W. Dyson, brothers of the deceased gentleman, were also in attendance. Shortly after ten o'clock the first witness was called. The Coroner at the outset of the proceedings mentioned that he had received a letter from the rector. He asked whether the gentleman was present who had brought it. A gentleman stepped forward and said he had brought the letter. The Coroner informed him that the rector might rest content about the matter mentioned in the letter. There will be no difficulty at all.

**REMARKS BY THE CORONER.**

The Coroner, in opening the proceedings, said he must ask the jury before commencing the evidence in the case to dismiss from their minds all that they may have heard or read with reference to the terrible tragedies which had taken place at Northenden. The evidence so far as the police had been able to obtain it would be laid before them, and they would be asked to return a verdict solely upon the evidence which was given there to-day, and not upon anything they might have heard or read. Any observations he might have to make in reference to the death of Mr. Dyson he would postpone until the jury had arrived at their verdict—except to say that in his case they would have very little difficulty, after hearing the evidence which would be laid before them, in arriving at their verdict. The only thing he must ask them to direct their special attention to would be that of motive.

### THE CASE OF COTTRILL.

Then in the case of Cottrill he had not had any report from Dr. Humphries until this morning. He would be able to guide them with regard to the cause of death of Cottrill. Until he received that report it was his intention to direct the jury to be very careful in arriving at the cause of death, because the evidence pointed to one cause.

### SUGGESTED FATAL RESULT OF THE POLICEMEN'S SHOTS.

He thought, however, when the doctor gave evidence he would direct their attention especially to another cause. It struck him at the time when he read the evidence that it was very probable that Cottrill was shot by one of the two policemen who were shooting at him. They both had guns and were shooting at the same time, and it would be very difficult under any circumstance for a policeman who was facing a revolver, and who fired in return, to say at what portion of the body of his assailant he aimed at. If anyone had directed a pistol at his head, he (the Coroner) would not have shot at his legs—that was certain. A Juror: Hear, hear. Proceeding, the Coroner said he thought the jury would be able to arrive at a conclusion which was not his first conclusion that the man shot himself. Mr. W. Leah, Deputy Chief Constable of Cheshire, said the police courted the fullest investigation.

### MRS. COOMBES' EVIDENCE.

Mrs Coombes, wife of James Coombes, butler in the employ of Mr. Dyson, said the deceased gentleman was 33 years of age, and was a solicitor practising in Manchester. Witness and her husband lived at Bradley Gate, in the house. On Friday morning, about 25 minutes past eight witness was cleaning the drawing-room. She heard a noise, and looking to ascertain the cause she saw a strange man passing up the stairs. She at once called her husband's attention to it, and he suggested it might be the village plumber. Witness and her husband followed the man up the stairs, and when they got to the first landing witness heard two shots. They sounded as if they were in Mr. Dyson's room. Cottrill at that moment came from the room and pointed a revolver at witness and her husband, having first closed the door after him.

The Coroner: One or two revolvers?

Witness: I saw one. What did he say?

He said, "Go back, or I will shoot you both."

I said, "let me have my little boy." Where was your little boy?

He was coming along the landing, near to Cottrill.

What did he say? He said " I won't hurt' your boy, but you go down."

And you both went down? Yes.

And he followed?

No, he stood on the stairs.

### RAISING THE ALARM.

Witness, continuing, said that she and her husband raised an alarm, and called the coachman and gardener. The gardener, Thomas Hewitt, came into the house, and Cottrill was then still standing on the top stairs. Witness went partly up the staircase, and Cottrill allowed her little boy to pass. Hewitt went with her up to the first landing. Cottrill stood aside to allow witness's little boy to go to her. She heard Cot trill open Mr. Dyson's bedroom door and go in again. Immediately afterwards she heard two more shots in the bedroom. She never saw Cottrill alive again. She took her little boy to the coachman's, and when she returned Cottrill was being picked up off the roadway. Mr. Grace: I think it was only a matter of seconds between your first seeing Cottrill and hearing the shots?

Witness: That is so.

A Juror: May I ask if the witness had ever seen Cottrill before?

Witness: Yes; I saw him shortly before Christmas at the top of the lane. He asked my little boy whether he lived at Bradley Gate, and whether Mr. Dyson was in.

The Coroner: You did not bear him say that; your little boy told you?

Yes, that is so. But you saw him yourself?

Yes, shortly before Christmas. I cannot say the exact time.

### A GARDENERS ACCOUNT OF THE AFFAIR.

Thomas Hewitt said he was a gardener employed at Bradley Gate, and resided at Rose End Cottage, Northenden. At 8 20 on Friday morning he was in the greenhouse at Bradley Gate. He heard two shots fired and then two more immediately afterwards. They seemed to come from Mr. Dyson's bedroom. He heard the second pair of shots just as he was leaving the greenhouse. He entered the house by the back door and went upstairs to the first landing. He was there confronted by Cottrill, who had a revolver in each hand, and who was standing at the top of the stairs. Cottrill exclaimed "Stand back, you or I'll shoot you," at the same time pointing the revolvers at him. Witness retreated one step, and then Mr. and Mrs Coomb's ran in and up the stairs. Mrs Coombs asked for her child. Cottrill said she could have the child, but she must go. He then allowed the child to go to her. Witness and Mr. and Mrs Coombs then went downstairs, and he went out at the back door. Witness ran round to the front of the house, and saw Cottrill leave the house by the front door. He walked to the front gate. Witness and Alfred Price, another gardener who was employed at the place, left the premises by another gate. Catching sight of them Cottrill said "Are you there again," and shot at them

twice. He then walked up the road in the direction of Northenden Station for a distance of 25 or 30 yards.

#### THE ARRIVAL OF THE POLICE.

At this juncture Sergeant Foster appeared on the scene, and then Cottrill turned back and entered by the front gate. Foster approached Cottrill, and when he was about six yards away the latter, taking a revolver from his pocket, pulled the trigger twice, but the weapon did not go off. The revolver was pointed at the officer, and just before he aimed it said "Are you come for a bit, you ---" Cottrill then took another from his pocket it was one of a smaller size—and Foster backed towards the gateway.

#### THE SHOT GUNS SENT FOR.

Foster ordered witness and Coombs to fetch any guns that might be in the house. They got two, and one of them was handed to Foster, witness holding the other until the arrival of Police Constable Lawson, some five or ten minutes later, when he handed it to that officer. In the meantime Cottrill had again gone in the direction of the Station for a distance of thirty yards from the house. Afterwards Cottrill went to the big gate at the front of the road, loading the two revolvers as he walked along. He held one in each hand as he approached the gate. When got to the gate Sergeant Foster and Constable Lawson stepped into the road, each holding a loaded gun. They called on Cottrill to stand and hold up his hands, and they ran towards him. He made no reply, but discharged three shots at the officers before they shot back again. He shot both revolvers but missed the officers. He ran backwards, shooting from both revolvers as he ran. Sergeant Foster and Constable Lawson each discharged a shot at Cottrill but did not hit him, and he then turned round and ran. Facing the officers once more he shot at them again, and they shot at him in return.

#### COTTRILL SHOOTS HIMSELF

Witness added that at this point Cottrill turned round, put up his right hand, and shot him-self. He fell down, and the police at once went to him, witness following. Cottrill was then alive, but dying.

A Juror: Did the police only fire one shot?

They fired two shots each.

And the first missed him altogether? Yes.

How far were they off when they shot the second time?

About twelve yards, as near as I can say.

### COTTRILL NOT AIMED AT.

Mr. Leah: At the time the man Cottrill took the second revolver from his pocket had he fired at the police? No, sir; there was only Sergeant Foster on the the scene then.

The first revolver had missed fire, and he took out a second revolver? Yes. ,

Did he present it to the Sergeant? Yes. He presented it to the sergeant, and he backed with his hands up. He did not fire.

About how far was he from the sergeant?

About six yards when the sergeant stepped from the gate way and said "Hands up "did he say "or we fire". Did he caution him in anyway? He said "Hands up" that is all I heard.

Well then, after what you have told the Coroner, Cottrill shot three times before the police fired? Yes. How far was Cottrill away from the police? I don't think he was above eight or nine yards away. At a distance of eight or nine yards he fired three times? Yes. And then you say he moved away backwards, firing both revolvers all the time? Yes. Were the Sergeant on the side of the roadway and the Constable on the other? Yes. And then you say the police fired, but did not hit Cottrill? That is so. Do you know they aimed at Cottrill or whether they fired high? I am sure they did not shoot at Cottrill at the time. Do you know or could you tell from the way the guns were levelled whether the barrels were pointed upwards or straight at the man? I can honestly say he was not shot at. You can honestly say that neither gun was aimed at Cottrill? Yes. , After the second shot at the police you say Cottrill turned round, raised his right hand, and shot himself? Yes. Are you quite sure he shot himself with the right hand? He seemed to have both hands up and revolver in each, but I think he shot himself with the right hand. Are you of opinion that the deceased fired the revolver at himself after the second shot from police? I can honestly say he did. Did you see P.C. Lawson's coat damaged by a revolver shot? No. By the Coroner: Witness said he was twelve yards away when Cottrill put the revolver to his face both revolvers were very close to his face. By Mr. Leah: At the moment the police fired the second time was Cottrill upright or was he stooping down? He stooped down, and I thought he got hit in stooping down. Do you think the police pointed the guns at him a second time that he stooped to avoid the shots? Yes,

### PRAISE FOR POLICE.

Witness: I should like to say a few words in praise of the Sergeant. The Coroner: We should all like to do that, and I think we had better di it all at once afterwards. Witness: If it had not been Fosters presence of mind in asking for the guns there would have been a few people killed.

Alfred J. Price, who was also employed at Bradley Gate, was the next witness. In the main he corroborated the details given by the last witness, and added a few more. It was 8 50 according to witness, when he saw Coombs and his wife come out of the house. They had their little boy with them. After this Cottrill made his appearance. The Witness generally corroborated the last witness's account of Cottrill's movements from that time up to the

arrival of Sergeant Foster. The latter was only five or six yards from Cottrill when the murderer fired twice but the weapon missed fired. Had it not done so Foster would certainly have been shot dead?

Proceeding, the witness Price said when the officers had got the guns Cottrill came towards them and fired. Then the officers each fired a shot, but without effect. After this Cottrill fired at the officers five or six times in succession, first at one and then at the other. They called upon him to throw up his hands and he replied by several shots. They then discharged a shot each at Cottrill, and that aimed by Police Constable Lawson took effect. Cottrill thereupon reeled. In doing so his right hand went to his mouth, but he could not say whether he fired at himself or not. Did you hear any report when his hand went to his mouth? I cannot swear to it.

### A SCORE OF LIVES ENDANGERED

Mr. Leah: How many people's lives were endangered by Cottrill's reckless firing? I should be within mark if I said a score were within range of his fire. Are you of opinion that the only way of preventing further danger was by the police disabling Cottrill? Most certainly. The Coroner: I think the jury will have to decide that question. Mr. Leah: I only asked the witness for his opinion. The Coroner: He can only give evidence; the jury must form the opinion, not the witness. He said these people were in danger, and it is quite evident that the lives of the officers were in danger from the fact that they were continually being shot at. I think that is sufficiently clear? Mr. Leah: Who fired the first shot fired by the police? Witness: I think it was the Sergeant. But whichever fired first, it was Lawson's shot which took effect? Yes. You do not know whether you heard a report of not after Lawson's shot took effect? You do not know whether Cottrill fired? No; in the confusion of the moment I could not swear to it. By Mr. Leah: Witness thought from the position of the guns the first shots aimed by the police were aimed at Cottrill's legs. Foster and Lawson did their best to effect the arrest without further bloodshed. In order to do so Foster walked deliberately up to the man, who was armed with a revolver.

### SERGEANT FOSTER'S EVIDENCE

Sergeant Albert Foster was next called from information he received from the Coachman Alfred Barrett, about 8 30 on Friday morning he went to Bradley Gate. Walking down the road he saw Cottrill come out of the front gate of the house. Cottrill stepped on to the footpath, and when witness was seven or eight yards away he turned his face towards witness and pointed are revolver straight at him saying, " Have you come for some, you---? The revolver clicked twice, but misfired .Witness put his hand up, and said to Cottrill "What's Up" The man put the revolver into his pocket and produced a smaller weapon from his pocket; also pointing that at witness, who stepped back as he did so Cottrill said " I'll show you." Witness stepped back he did not hear any report. Cottrill walked to the corner of the road, and witness called for guns to be brought from the house, and in the meantime Cottrill examined the revolvers and reloaded one or both of them. The guns were brought out, and

one was handed to witness and another to Constable Lawson who had appeared by that time. Cottrill advanced from the corner towards them, and when he got ten or twelve yards away, witness and Lawson stepped into the the road, having first loaded the guns. Witness called to Cottrill, "Stop hands up, or we shall fire". Cottrill, however, who held a revolver in each hand began to fire at them from both. When he had discharged three or four shots at witness and Lawson shot over him. He turned and ran a little distance road, followed by witness and Lawson. He then turned and faced them again and fired at them several times. Witness fired again and Cottrill stooped as if to dodge the shot. He then wheeled round and put a revolver to his head, Witness could not say if Lawson fired at him before he did so. He could not say either whether Cottrill discharged the revolver at himself. All he knew was that he fell down holding the revolvers as he fell. His mouth was full of blood and he did not live above two minutes afterwards. He made no statement before he died.

At this stage the three revolvers which were found upon the deceased were produced, and were examined by the jury. All three are first-class weapons and the first of a large type which is generally supposed to be used by cowboys, the second though somewhat smaller but also almost as formidable, and the third is of the type (Unreadable). The third revolver was in Cottrill's pocket he held the other two in his hands. The Sergeant said he found 69 cartridges inn Cottrill's pockets.

#### IN MR. DYSON'S BEDROOM

Proceeding, Sergeant Foster said he afterwards went into Mr. Dyson's bedroom. He found Mr. Dyson in bed, and there was a wound at the back of the head. He did not stop to examine him as the Doctor was in the bedroom. Mr Dyson was uncovered to the waist. His brains were protruding from the wound at the back of the head. Witness produced four spent cartridges, which were handed to him by a nurse who had found them in the bedroom. A fifth was picked up on the bedroom floor.

By Mr. Leah: When he first saw Cottrill attempted to fire at him. The revolver clicked, but did not go off. What was your object in firing at him? To frighten him and see whether it would make him give in. When Lawson fired first he fired high as I did. Why did you fire at him a second time? Because he was facing us again and was still firing at us. Were you of the opinion that if Cottrill was not disabled he would have done further mischief? Yes. Had you any other means of disabling him than by aiming at his legs? No. There were a score of people about, and some of their lives were in danger

#### SENSATIONAL SHOOTING.

Dr. Edward Angus Humphreys, of Northenden, police surgeon, said he was called to the scene of the tragedy about twenty minutes to nine on Friday morning last. He went there, and the first incident which attracted his attention was a bullet passing his ears he entered by the back way. He went into Mr Dyson's bedroom after passing James Coombes, who was putting a fowling piece (a light gun that fires small shot, used in hunting game birds) together at the time. Coombes handed the gun to witness, who took it into Mr. Dyson's bedroom. He satisfied himself that Mr. Dyson was dead and threw up the window. Firing was going on

pretty briskly at the time on the part of Cottrill as he advanced towards Lawson. Witness called to Lawson to “drop him” as he fully expected Lawson to be killed every minute. It was hammerless gun which Lawson held, and witness did not think the officer understood the mechanism, the catch being on. There was no mistake about it, said witness emphatically, that irrespective of sentiment he should have himself shot to kill. When he shouted to Lawson he was under the impression that the officer was afraid to fire. The Coroner: Did you notice that Lawson’s gun would not go off? Yes in the first instance, but by some reason or other he found the catch I was under the impression that Hewitt went up and did something to the gun whilst it was in his hands. How far were Cottrill and Lawson apart just then? About six or seven paces. And Cottrill was still firing? Yes, fully five or six shots occurred whilst they were at that distance. I don’t think the first shot of Lawson’s touched him at all. Witness shouted to Lawson “Let him have the other barrel” and he did so. Cottrill crouched before Lawson’s second shot, and when he received it he seemed “to cringe and wither up and drop” He had a fiendish look on his face. Witness never saw a revolver go into Cottrill’s mouth.

#### THE MURDERER ALMOST LYNCHED.

Proceeding, the witness said he went to Cottrill, who was bleeding profusely and almost at his last gasp. Seeing he could do nothing for him, witness told some people to put on a lorry and take him away. If Cottrill had only been disabled he would have been lynched. As it was, it took the police all their time to get the people from him. One person in fact did get hold of something with the object of attacking him, and had to be restrained.

#### Mr. DYSON’S WOUNDS.

Proceeding, the Doctor said that he had examined Mr. Dyson’s body and found that one shot entered by the left side of the head. This was no doubt the fatal wound. A second wound went through the mouth and cut the lip. The third and fourth shots were fired at Mr. Dyson’s back and went through the lungs. Witness could not account for the fifth bullet.

#### RIDDLED WITH SHOT

Describing the appearance of Cottrill after death, Dr. Humphreys said he examined the dead body after it had been removed to the Church Inn. He found no bullet wound either in the roof or the back of the mouth. One of his teeth had been struck by a bullet and the front part of his head was literally riddled with shot, due to his having stooped down. Several pellets had passed through his throat. On the right front side there was another wound, as from shot which had entered the lung. Any one of the wounds would have been sufficient to cause death. The Coroner: Suppose he had shot himself, would you not have found something to show it. Yes, you would not only have found the entrance of the bullet but here would have been singeing.

### TESTIMONEY OF THE POLICE.

So you are clear that there was no shot at a very short distance? Yes. I may say that if he had not been shot we should probably have all been shot in cold blood. I can only add to what has been said before as to the gallantry and bravery of both the police officers at the risk of their lives. Had it not been for their conduct in getting the guns we should all have been shot, because the man came fully prepared, and there would have been nothing to stop him. Mr. Grace: Mr. Dyson died in his sleep? Witness Yes. And died an absolutely painless death? There would be the throes of death, but he was on his back when the first shot was fired. By Mr. Leah: The police were not only justified in firing, but it was absolutely necessary that they should do so. A shot in the legs would not have answered the purpose. If they had not shot him dead they would have been shot. The enquiry at this stage was adjourned until 2 30pm.

### AN OLD THREAT

When the inquiry resumed after luncheon. Police Sergeant Bladen, stationed at Wincham, said he was present at Stockport Police Court on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900, when a charge was brought by Cottrill against a man named Thomas Carlisle for unlawfully wounding. The case was tried and dismissed. Mr. Dyson gave evidence on the occasion, and after the case was closed Cottrill threatened Mr. Dyson. Cottrill was in Mr. Dyson's service before the trial, but he was subsequently discharged. Bladen added that Cottrill left Mr. Dyson's house on the day of the trial. At the request of Mr. Dyson witness saw Cottrill off the premises at Bradley Gate. Cottrill asked Mr. Dyson on that occasion to see that the silver was all right, and that he was very sorry for Cottrill, who thereupon remarked to him "I shall probably see an end of you" Witness: then saw him off the premises.

### CONSTABLE LAWSON GIVES EVIDENCE.

Constable Lawson was then called, and the Coroner told him it was his duty to caution him as his evidence would be taken down in writing, and if a jury came to the conclusion that he had feloniously killed Cottrill such evidence might be given in evidence against him on his trial. He therefore asked the Constable if he was still willing to give evidence. Lawson replied that he was. Giving evidence Lawson said that he got to Bradley Gate at 8.50 on Friday morning. He saw Sergeant Foster in the yard with several other people. He then went to the yard gate leading into the road, and saw Cottrill at the end of the road, a distance of about 25 yards away. He was standing, and appeared to be loading a revolver. A gun was handed to witness, and Foster had another gun in his hand. Cottrill in the meantime was walking down the road towards them on the footpath with a revolver in his hand. When Cottrill got within about ten yards they both stepped into the road. As soon as saw them Cottrill started firing. Witness levelled the gun at him and shouted "Stop hands up or I will shoot" Cottrill took no notice, but kept coming towards them and firing shots. Witness pulled at the gun, but it would not go off. Someone then came behind witness and did something to the gun, which was a safety. Before this witness had pulled the trigger without result. He then fired "wide" at Cottrill, who however took no notice, but went on and continued to fire as he went. Witness and Foster

followed. Then Cottrill stopped and faced them with a revolver aiming at each of them. At the same time he approached them. It appeared as though he had made up his mind to “come for it” Witness shouted “Hands up” Again he took no notice, and witness aimed at his legs, just above the knee, with the intention of disabling him. Cottrill appeared to stoop to dodge the shot. After witness had shot Cottrill rose he appeared to reel around and his hands went up towards his face. As Cottrill’s back was to the witness could not tell what he was doing, Cottrill then fell backwards. Witness did not think Cottrill fired at himself after he received the charge of gunshot. One bullet fired by Cottrill passed through his jacket and another passed his right ear.

#### COTTRILLS LANDLADY GIVES EVIDENCE.

The next witness was Annie Abraham, widow, living in Welbeck Street, Hulme. She stated that Cottrill and his wife came to lodge at her house last June. They went away to Southport but Cottrill returned about two weeks later alone. He told her he had lost his wife and that he had buried her at Southport. He owed witness four months lodgings, and latterly had been selling and pawning things for food. Witness gave him a week’s notice last Wednesday. On Friday morning he went out between five and six o’clock. She had not heard him say anything about Mr. Dyson.

#### THE SUMMING UP.

The Coroner in summing up said the case was the most painful one he had met with since he was appointed to his office. Mr. Dyson was a perfect gentleman Cottrill was in low water; could not pay his lodgings and was evidently brooded over his dismissal. In this frame of mind he went to Northenden and committed the murder. The Coroner added that he had never heard of a more dastardly or wicked act. Cottrill had enough ammunition in his possession half the people of Northenden Police Constable Lawson was justified in bringing him down and he was protected by the law. If the jury thought Cottrill by Lawson Cottrill’s state of mind need not trouble them.

#### THE VERDICT

In the case of Mr. Dyson, the jury found a verdict of wilful murder against Cottrill. In the case of Cottrill, they found that he was killed by gunshot wounds in the head, throat and chest, with the gunshot wounds being caused by Sergeant Foster and Police Constable Lawson whilst in the execution of their duty, and in defence of themselves and other persons. The Coroner said this was a verdict of justifiable homicide, which carried no penalty. The jury expressed their deep sympathy with the family of Mr. Dyson, and their admiration of the courage of Sergeant Lawson and Police Constable Lawson. They asked the Deputy Chief Constable of Cheshire to bring their conduct under the notice of the authorities.