

Cronaca dell'esecuzione di Charles Thomas Wooldridge, 7 luglio 1896, trascritta in: STUART MASON, *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*, Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1914, pagg. 426 - 427, sub 380, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, ninth edition.

### THE EXECUTION AT READING.

On Tuesday morning, July 7, 1896, Charles Thomas Wooldridge, aged 30, trooper in the Royal Horse Guards (Blue), was executed within the precincts of Reading Gaol, for the murder of his wife, Laura Ellen Wooldridge, at the parish of Clewer, Windsor, on the 29th March previously. Wooldridge is said to have cut his wife's throat in a very determined manner, she having excited his jealousy, and (so far as the evidence went) greatly annoyed him. The deliberation shown by Wooldridge was, however, so great that the Home Secretary (Sir Matthew White Ridley, afterwards Viscount Ridley) stated that he could not see his way to comply with the request of several petitions which were forwarded, praying for a respite. A contemporary report states that Wooldridge (who was a native of East Garston, a Berkshire village) "received the ministrations of the Chaplain of the Gaol (the Rev. M. T. Friend\*) in a thoroughly proper spirit, and appeared truly penitent and resigned to his fate."

The executioner (Billington) arrived in Reading on Monday afternoon, and inspected the gallows and made other necessary arrangements, arranging for a "drop" of 6 ft.

"The tenor bell of St. Lawrence's Church began solemnly to toll at 7.45 A.M. on Tuesday, and exactly at eight o'clock the sad procession left the condemned cell for the shed in the exercise yard, which was originally built for the purpose of taking photographs of prisoners, but was adopted as a place of execution some 18 years ago, when two young men named Tidbury were hanged for the murder of Inspector Drewett and a police constable near Hungerford. The fatal apparatus has been used only once since that memorable date, viz., when the wife murderer Carter, of Watchfield, was executed.

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\* The Rev. M. T. Friend, after forty-one years' service, retired in December 1913. See an interview in *The Daily News and Leader*, December 11, 1913.

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"Exactly at 8 o'clock Wooldridge (who had submitted to the preliminary pinioning with marvellous firmness) was conducted from the condemned cell to the gallows, and took his stand under the beam almost as though he was 'on parade.' Billington fastened his feet, adjusted the cap, and drew the bolt, and all was over, the unfortunate man dying without a struggle and without a word.

"The Rev. M. T. Friend, Mr. W. F. Blandy (Under-Sheriff), Mr. O. C. Maurice (Surgeon) and Lieut-Col. H. Isaacson (the Governor of the Gaol) were the only persons present besides the executioner and the warders. Immediately after the drop fell the 'black flag' was hoisted to show that the dread sentence of the law had been duly carried into effect; and as soon as convenient a printed form, bearing the names of the officials present at the execution, was affixed to the prison doors." (*Reading Mercury*, July 10, 1896.)

After the inquest which was subsequently held it is stated that "the body was buried (in quicklime) by the side of Carter, the Watchfield murderer."

The murder was committed at 9 P.M. on Sunday, March 29, 1896, in Arthur Road, between the Great Western Railway Station at Windsor and the village of Clewer. The spot was not far from 21 Alma Terrace where the woman lived. She was 23 years of age and was employed as an assistant in the Eton Post Office where she passed as an unmarried woman under her maiden name of Glendell. Wooldridge was sentenced by Mr. Justice Hawkins at the Berkshire Assizes on June 17 and hanged "three little weeks" later.