

## **TRUE TASMANIAN CRIME STORIES**

(including the Lucille Butterworth Case; Last Man to be Hanged in Tasmania; triple murder at Swansea, triple murder at Grass Tree Hill and many more)



**by**

**Reg. A. Watson**

**“True Tasmanian Crime Stories**

(including the Lucille Butterworth case; Last Man to be Hanged in Tasmania; triple murder at Swansea and many more)

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## Foreword

The 1969 disappearance of an attractive Tasmanian girl, Lucille Butterworth baffled the public. Over the years there have been further investigations into the case, but nothing definite resulting. Then in 2015 it all exploded, when a new Hearing began in September. Once again the public attention was focused. Many, however, of the families involved, the witnesses and those associated in some way have naturally aged, some even have died including members of the police personal involved. People like businessman, Don Hazell, were once again called to give testimony. One the highlights being the appearance of Geoffrey Charles Hunt, whom the police in 2015 voiced no doubt that he murdered Lucille Butterworth way back then. The Lucille Butterworth is our leading chapter followed by the case of Susan Knight, who was murdered by Geoffrey Charles Hunt in 1976. The book then continues with other riveting Tasmanian crime stories that shocked and tormented the public at the time and some, as does the Butterworth case, still.

Crime, particularly murder, though abhorrent to the normal person, also holds its fascination for us. As a consequence, crime stories, crime magazines, crime books, television and movies always sell well.

While these can be fascinating, we may tend to over-look the real fact that such cases did indeed happen and they happened to real people, just like you and me. And that's the tragedy; while we may be very well entertained by these tales, behind the words were the events; sad, unnecessary and brutal. As long as we can keep true crime stories in perspective and our deep seated interest is not overshadowed by an unhealthy desire to enjoy them, then we have every right to learn of what went on before. Past crime is as much a part of history as any other subject. It is unfair to believe that such stories should not be told. During the actual time of the event, the crime was well covered by the media of the day. It is true, of course, that writers of fairly recent crime should take into consideration the remaining family members or those who were involved in some way. I believe I have done so in this instance, by sensitively recounting events surrounding the various cases and the inevitable conclusions.

There will be, naturally, those people who charge, that certain events, statements and assumptions should not have been reported at all. Again this is to be expected, as some of the material contained in this work is controversial and still of a very sensitive nature. However, I do return to what I have already stated, that past crime is as much as a history subject as any war or political event. Therefore, a writer can and should tackle the subject of crime the same as any other subject.

The cases included are a mixture; some are well known and remembered, while others may be forgotten.

There are a couple of exceptions within the collection. One deals with the bizarre case of a woman, dressed as a man and married as a husband who became a murderer. This strange case occurred in Sydney. Clearly not a Tasmanian crime story, but it was a subject that I researched and had published a number of years ago. I thought its addition to this book would be of great interest to readers.

Two other stories are quite different. As a Ripperologist, I have added an intriguing connection between Tasmania and the infamous Jack the Ripper who haunted the slums of London in the 1880s. As the book is about crime within Tasmania, I've taken the opportunity to add it as an interesting anecdote of the State's criminal history.

Why I have chosen the other stories was just a matter of sequence. Firstly, a number of years ago, I wanted a subject for the Australian Police Journal and I chose the story concerning the last hanging in Tasmania. It was chosen because my late mother often related the case to me and the opportunity arose to thoroughly investigate it. A short version of the case which I had written, was indeed published in the Journal (September 1992), then later in *Criminology Australia* (August 1994). Both of these articles were just a summary of the whole case and in my files I had accumulated substantial material on the last hanging. The whole story needed to be recorded for posterity, as a great deal of the material pertaining to it had already been lost at the time when I first began researching back in early 1992. And while researching it and interviewing a major player in the case, a lead was given to me regarding another murder, this time a triple one. This, of course, was the Estcourt affair.

After completing the second case, I considered it was imperative for me to put pen to paper on the murder case with which I had some, though minor, involvement - that being the Lovell murder. While researching this one, it was suggested that it would be worthwhile me perusing the unexplained murder of the Chinese laundryman, Samuel Yick in Launceston. Material on this case was very hard to come by, little of the file remains with the authorities and while it still is unsolved, I do have my suspect, whom I do not fully explore, as the evidence does not warrant it - but there is a suspect, but not enough proof

Then, finally, I wanted a good subject for another work for the Australian Police Journal, so I chose one that was still vivid in my mind, (as it is for many Tasmanians) and that concerns the missing person. Lucille Butterworth. I have, in respect to this one, tackled it purely clinically - The case was reopened in mid 2015 and is discussed in the chapter on Lucille.

Then there is the tragic event where Trooper Henderson was killed in the line of duty, the only Tasmanian policeman to lose his life in such circumstances. There is the Morrison case (published in the APJ) which remains (hopefully forever so) the State's only kidnapping. Also, the story of 'Ghosty' Downes<sup>1</sup> is a chilling one. The unsolved murders of Edgar Geer and Eric Robinson still have their files open.

I have included the story surrounding the sad loss of Trooper John Robertson in 1944. Although this is not a crime case, it is a moving story, which affected his young family. To honour this man and family I thought it would be timely to add in such a book as this, dealing with Tasmanian police matters.

I hope the reader is satisfied with the content. I would like to stress that I have written these stories purely in an historical vein and not with any attempt to solve

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<sup>1</sup> Downes if the correct spelling. In many references it is spelt incorrectly "Downs"

those that have not been solved; if the police have not been able to do so, then who am I to prove otherwise? I am a writer and an historian, not a crime investigator.

Hence our crime stories; to be read with interest and hopefully, to inform the reader in greater detail, of stories that he or she had heard of, but knew little about.

-- Reg. A. Watson