

The infamous Salisbury Crags Murder



Forty years ago this month, a murder took place in the capital, the circumstances of which not only horrified Edinburgh citizens, but also reverberated throughout Europe.

Twenty-one-year-old Dutchman Ernest Dumoulin and 18 year-old German, Helga Konrad, had eloped to Edinburgh very much against her parents' wishes. The couple moved into lodgings run by Herbert Wood at 9 Torphichen Street, and Dumoulin paid three weeks' rent in advance, allowing him to apply to be married in a Scottish registrar's office.

On Friday 13 October 1972, Mr Wood and his wife witnessed the wedding and joined the couple for drinks and a meal in a Shandwick Place restaurant, where Helga spoke of her new husband's plans to become a financial adviser whilst she would become his secretary. Due to her disagreement with her parents, she had no intention of returning to Germany.

When the newly-weds retired to their room, Mr Wood assumed that they had retired for the night, so he he was surprised to hear them leave a few hours later.

He was even more surprised to be woken in the early hours by a dazed looking Dumoulin who was accompanied by two detectives. Dumoulin was covered in mud and his right arm was bandaged. Strangely, Helga was not with them.

Earlier, a merchant seaman strolling along the foot of Salisbury Crags had discovered the body of a young woman. He contacted the police who attended immediately and were met by an apparently distraught and dishevelled Dumoulin, who told them a heartrending tale of him and Helga going for a walk up

the Craggs to watch the beautiful lights of Edinburgh, but she had slipped and fell.

As there was no evidence at the time to contradict his account, Dumoulin was not arrested, and spent the night in what should have been his honeymoon suite. Mr Wood recalls that he continually played the haunting theme of blockbuster film, 'Love Story', over and over again.

Initially the general public were heartbroken for the young man, but on the Monday, detectives arrived at the guest house and took him in for questioning.

Mr Wood took the opportunity to clean the room, and discovered a letter along with receipts for a £412,368 insurance policy taken out on Helga's life the day before she died in Dumoulin's room. In 1972, that sum was worth the equivalent of £1.1million today. Mr Wood took the paperwork straight to the police.

When the local office of Hambro Life Assurance not only confirmed this, but also revealed that Dumoulin had tried to claim the policy on the very morning after Helga died, Edinburgh City Police knew they had a murder inquiry on their hands

Extensive background enquiries into Dumoulin quickly established he was a failed financial adviser turned conman in Germany, and he had met Helga through a lonely hearts advert he had placed in a newspaper. She was a country girl, from a rich family but old-fashioned, sheltered and, obviously, very lonely. She spent much of her time feeding the animals at her father Helmut's farm.

The advert had been placed on June 24 and three weeks later, Dumoulin had arrived at the farm to ask her father's permission to get married. This permission was not granted, and her father suggested that they wait until Christmas so that he could confirm that he was in a position to support his

daughter.

On 15 September Dumoulin collected Helga in his red Fiat, telling her parents that they would only be 15 minutes. Instead they travelled to Edinburgh and the Konrads would never see their beloved daughter again. Dumoulin had also convinced Helga to draw her life savings of £65 out of the bank

It also transpired that Dumoulin had obtained the car under false pretences in Germany and had sold it for £650. On arriving in Edinburgh, he deposited £250 in the Bank of Nova Scotia in Princes Street and managed to obtain £10,000 credit which allowed him to take out a string of insurance policies in his wife's name.

When he discovered that the insurance company would not pay out due to the circumstances of Helga's death, he asked them to destroy the forms.

During questioning, Dumoulin denied it all, insisting Helga had slipped and fallen from the 100ft cliff, but forensic experts noted there were very few scrapes and bruises on Helga, indicating that she hadn't slipped but had either run and launched herself off the cliff or been pushed, very hard indeed.

Hambro Life Assurance revealed that the insurance policy would have cost Dumoulin £442 a month to maintain, a fortune he didn't have nor would ever be likely to afford.

After everything was taken into account, Dumoulin was arrested and charged with murder. Under Scots law, Dumoulin's trial had to start within 110 days of his incarceration, so the clock was ticking to gather the evidence.

At his trial at Edinburgh High Court in 1973, Dumoulin sensationally claimed that it was Helga who had plotted to con an insurance company by faking his death, and then he insisted

that she had tried to kill him on Salisbury Crags and had fallen when he put his hands up to save himself.

Despite the fact that there were no independent witnesses to what happened that night, the jury were convinced, beyond any reasonable doubt and Dumoulin was found guilty of murdering his wife of only a few hours, and sentenced to life imprisonment. His subsequent admission of guilt while in prison justified the jury's decision.

Dumoulin has served his sentence and is now living in Germany, where he is a minister and apparently his duties include conducting weddings.

The Konrad family later purchased a memorial seat which sits in the shadow of the Crags and has a small metal plate commemorating Helga's short life. It reads: "In loving memory of our daughter Helga Konrad born 16.6.54, died 13.10.72. Buried at Schwerbach, Germany only 300 yards from her parents' home."

Photograph by Bods