

## **THE 1953 PENDINE MURDERS**

The Carmarthenshire village of Pendine is remembered for attempts on the world land speed record back in the early 20th century. But in the 1950's the seaside village was in the news again, this time as the scene of a grisly and dramatic double murder.

Shortly before 6:00pm on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 1954 a man in the public gallery at Carmarthen Assize Court put his hands to his throat. It was a signal that Ronald (Ronnie) Lewis Harries was sentenced to death for the murders of John Harries and his wife Phoebe at their farm near Pendine.



*Guildhall Square today – the courtroom was situated on the first floor of the building*

The man was sitting beside a window in view of over 600 people who had been waiting in Guildhall Square since early morning. In a matter of minutes the crowd had swollen to 5,000 bringing Carmarthen town centre to a halt with 100 police officers striving to keep the throng behind trestles and rope used as crowd control barriers

### **CROWD CONTROL DUTY**

In March 1954, NARPO member Mr Wynne Evans of Cardigan was a 26 year old Constable and one of the many Carmarthenshire Constabulary officers on duty outside the court when Harries was sentenced.

The following morning, photographs of the huge crowd appeared in national newspapers and Wynne has kindly supplied NARPO with the original newspaper cuttings. Sadly, the majority of officers shown in the photos are no longer with us:



*This photo appeared on the front page of the Daily Sketch - the officer stood in front of the crowd is PC Wynne Evans No. 17*



*From left to right: PC's Alun James, J Williams (or Jones), Dai Thomas, Wynne Evans and Inspector Nicholas*



*The officer pictured is PC Alun James (brother of Row).*



*PC's Dai 'Farmer' Jones on the left and Glan Davies*

### **THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION**

In October 1953, Mr & Mrs Harries disappeared without trace from their home, Derlwyn Farm, near Pendine. Their twenty-six year old nephew Ronnie Harries claimed to know their whereabouts, telling neighbours and friends they'd gone to London.

However, investigating officers treated the mess the house had been left in, as signs of foul play. Missing posters were issued nationwide, hundreds of square miles were searched and ponds and quarries drained, but to no avail. In fact, according to Wynne Evans the local police came in for criticism by the national newspapers for being unable to solve the mystery. Some neighbours were reluctant to talk freely to the Police as they had sold their stories to the papers

When Ronald Harries became evasive in his answers to police questions, the investigating team led by Superintendent Jack Capstick of Scotland Yard, they were confident that they had their man.



*John Harries and his wife Phoebe.*



*Ronald Lewis Harries*

A search of a kale field revealed the burial place of John and Phoebe Harries, both having been beaten to death with a hammer. Despite evidence that he'd borrowed such a hammer from a neighbour only the day before they vanished, Harries protested his innocence until the end but failed to convince the jury of his innocence.

Wynne Evans recalls that shortly after Ronnie Harries was arrested he was taken initially to St. Clears Police Station. He was so confident that he said to me and the other officers 'Boys you've treated me so good that when this is all over, I will take you out for a slap-up meal at the Ivy Bush in Carmarthen' - for obvious reasons that never materialised!

A guilty verdict was inevitable and Harries was sentenced to hang at Swansea Prison and was executed at Swansea Prison in April 1954.



**Footnote:**

Upon his retirement from Dyfed-Powys Police in 1983 Wynne (left) was an Inspector based at Cardigan. He is now well into his 80's and lives at Gwbert on Sea near Cardigan overlooking the mouth of the Teifi River and Cardigan Bay.

Wynne is a former mayor of Cardigan and a dedicated member of Teifi Boating Club.



Fresh out of training school, Mrs Jean Evans (left) was a young WPC tasked with looking after the families involved during the court proceedings. 'Being a local girl I knew Ronnie Harries personally and was also a school friend of his wife,' she recalls.

Jean added 'I was in court throughout the trial and witnessed him being found guilty of murder and the judge donning his black cap\* sentencing Harries to hang'.

(\*The black cap was worn by a judge when passing a sentence of death).

*Many thanks to Wynne for supplying DPP NARPO with the photographs and providing background information – article compiled by Hugh Colley.*