



## The murder of Eileen Cullen in Old Catton in 1951

Following the account of the murder of Nellie Howard in 1908, we continue the pattern of professed love and inexplicable death, moving through improving times and two world wars, the police taking on board forensic evidence from cross contamination by fibres, hairs, and body fluids, identification by fingerprints and matching blood groups, progressing through crime scene photography and steadily improving communications and transport. We arrive at 1951, recalling what became known as the 'Oak Lane murder'.

By 1951 progress had come from other agencies. Post-mortems were conducted in hospitals by qualified pathologists, inquests no longer rivalled committal proceedings and the press had lost the freedom to trample around a 'ghastly spectacle'. Eileen Cullen's murder came upon a more professional, disciplined and respected police force backed by experts, though in 1951 the Norwich City Police were not used to murders because for many years they had not had one. In February of that year they got one, temporarily.

At 8.50 pm on Saturday, 3 February 1951, Station Sergeant Harold Byland answered the telephone in Bethel Street Police Station (a purpose-built police station opened in 1938, replacing the Guildhall) and, with the air of a long serving policeman inured to the wiles, ignorance and hysteria of his public, listened to a young male voice admitting murder. Sergeant Byland was not impressed. Saturday nights produced revellers prone to mischief, plus the usual ration of misguided observers, hoaxers and the odd decoy call. Calling 'murder', much practised by Victorians in assaults and arguments, did not necessarily mean murder; even half a century or more later it might be a clarion call of alarm or excited misperception. His jaundiced view may also have been influenced by the belief that Norwich did not have murders - nobody could remember the last one; they were history, now occurring outside the city. The Sergeant made a joking aside to colleagues in the Station Office that he had a 'right one' on the line.

The 'right one' was, however, either sincere or a good actor, and he was unusually forthcoming. He gave his position, the roundabout at Catton Grove Road by Woodcock Road, and named his victim, Irene Coleman - although the Sergeant's hearing of the surname was later to be questioned. When asked by the Sergeant he gave his name and address: Dennis Moore of Woodcock Road. These readily supplied details could of course have been false, and indeed Irene Coleman, or any other Irene, had not been murdered, but Dennis Moore really was on the line and he had committed murder.

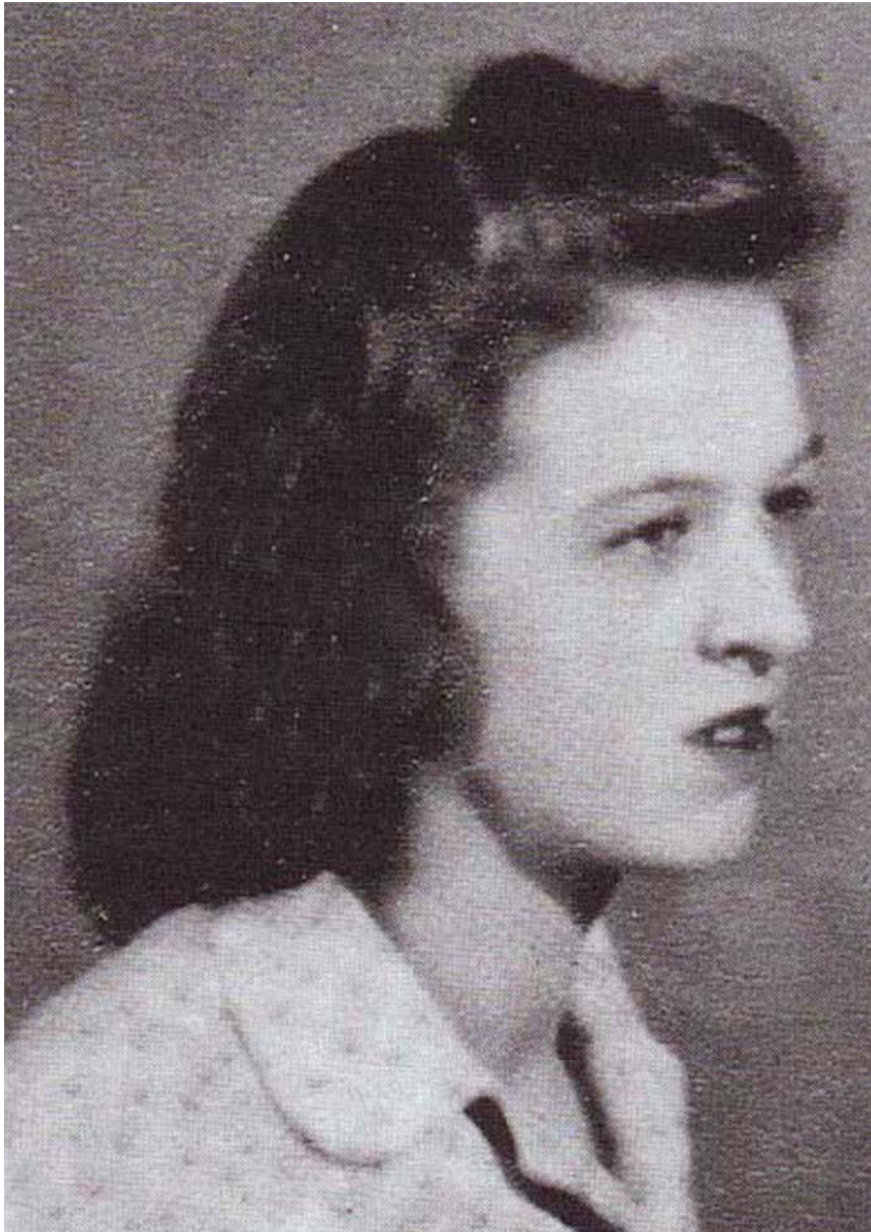
Sergeant Byland told Moore to stay by the telephone box and sent Detective Constable John McLennan and aide-to-CID Constable Herbert Lines to the given position. Moore waited as instructed and in his words, 'a Black Maria came with two civilians I think were detectives'. Watching the approaching police van he contemplated the events of a day that had promised happiness and delivered tragedy; he had killed the girl he was due to marry in two weeks' time.

Eileen Cullen, twenty-one years of age, and Dennis Moore, twenty--three years of age, had met in June 1950 in Great Yarmouth where the youth of Norwich often enjoyed the pleasures of the sea front, which included eyeing the opposite sex. Eileen had cycled to the seaside resort with her sister Evelyn; Moore had similarly arrived in a group of young men. Eileen and Dennis met, were mutually attracted, and cycled back to Norwich together.



Eileen lived at Buxton Road, a little over a mile from Woodcock Road, and was the eldest of three sisters living with her father, an asphalter, and blind mother. She and her next eldest sister, Evelyn, to whom she was very close, worked at Segger's shoe factory in Botolph Street. Eileen was an attractive young woman with an engaging personality, uncomplicated and happy with life, and clearly attracted to the good looking and presentable young man she had met at Great Yarmouth. She quickly introduced him to her family and he was welcomed at Buxton Road, visiting Eileen there every day. Their relationship blossomed. Dennis Moore was kindly and attentive to Eileen, polite and respectful to her family, and liked by the Cullen family. There was no reason not to like him.

Such was the obvious affection of the young couple for each other Eileen might reasonably have been expecting love to turn into marriage, still the socially required form in those days, a prospect that became reality when she discovered she was pregnant.



*Figure 1. Eileen Cullen (Evelyn Cousins).*



Moore apologised to her father and said he would marry Eileen as soon as possible. They became engaged on 20 November, her twenty-first birthday, and the wedding date was set for 17 February. Arrangements were made for them to live with Eileen's aunt at nearby Bakers Road and the couple began to accumulate various items for their new home, storing them at Buxton Road and paying jointly for articles they purchased.

Through to Christmas and beyond the engaged couple planned their new life together without any hint of the disaster to come. Even on the fateful day, 3 February, there appeared nothing out of the ordinary; the very opposite for it was the day Eileen went into the city to choose her wedding dress.

The couple met at seven-thirty that Saturday morning at Eileen's home and later had dinner there, following which they went shopping in the city accompanied by Eileen's sister Evelyn as an aid to selecting a wedding dress. In the city Eileen found she had insufficient money and Moore went to Norwich Market to borrow some from his father who kept a fruit and vegetable stall. At ten minutes past four he returned to the stall, at that time in the charge of his brother Gerald and brother-in-law, Victor Sewell, and handed Sewell a ten shilling note saying it was the return of a loan from his father. Moore stood on the footboards at the side of the stall as he returned the money, a position that would later be of some importance.

At half-past five that afternoon Moore and his bride-to-be had tea with the Cullen family at Buxton Road and left at half-past six to visit the doctor supervising Eileen's pregnancy. They were happy and attentive to each other, leaving the house with customary farewells and promises to soon return. Moore told Evelyn they would bring her some chips. Evelyn never got her chips and never saw her sister again.

Doctor Champion saw Eileen and her fiancé together at his surgery in Magdalen Road between 7 and 7.30 pm. They discussed the arrangements for Eileen's forthcoming confinement and the couple left after ten minutes. The doctor later said that both were 'perfectly normal'.

Like so many murder cases what happened next lay within the knowledge of one person. The dead cannot speak, cannot rebut or qualify the version proffered by a person who murders without witnesses. And Eileen died in darkness in a brick shelter situated in a meadow fifty yards from a little used lane called Oak Lane. The shelter had been used as a cattle shed and before that a store for the Home Guard. It was twelve feet eight inches long and eight feet eight inches wide, approached over damp winter grass, unprepossessing outside and cold and uninviting inside. The police measured the distance from the doctor's surgery at 1.3 miles. Without doubt Eileen went there willingly, one of a courting couple seeking privacy and shelter.

Between 7.50 and 8.10pm Moore entered The Park House public house at Catton Grove Road, a few minutes walk from the Oak Lane shelter. A customer and the landlady noted that he was not wearing an overcoat and was generally untidy. He bought ten Kensitas cigarettes and left.

At a time after eight o'clock Moore appeared at his home in Woodcock Road, no more than ten minutes walk from The Park House, and asked his mother for a pencil. She asked where Eileen was and he replied, 'She's outside.' He then said, 'Cheerio all, I'll see you when I get home.' He left and, if the evidence is correct, he took a bread knife from the kitchen. His thinking at the time he briefly visited his home remains an enigma. Eileen was already dead. Yet he returned to her body at the Oak Lane shelter, with the bread knife.



He stayed with his dead fiancée in the shelter, possibly only a few minutes, maybe as long as twenty minutes, before leaving to telephone the police, resigned to surrendering. Now he stood at a roundabout contemplating his actions, and the approaching police vehicle.

The police van stopped and Detective Constable McLennan asked, 'Are you Dennis Moore?'. Moore replied, 'Yes, I have strangled my girl Eileen Cullen. I'll show you where she is.' After being placed in the van he directed the officers to Oak Lane and, pointing to the shelter, said, 'She's in there.'

Walking towards the shelter between the two detectives Moore began to cry and suddenly broke away, running towards the shelter. They caught him at the entrance, holding him back.

A police torch showed that Moore had told the truth. Eileen Cullen lay on her back with a woollen scarf wrapped round her head and over her face. Her head was against a wall, her feet pointing to the entrance. She was wearing an overcoat and a mackintosh lay over her body. Again Moore broke away, throwing himself upon the dead woman crying, 'I love you. I love you.' Again he was pulled back.

Detective Constable McLennan leant by the body and found it was warm. He removed the woollen scarf from the head and found a silk scarf knotted tightly round the neck. He undid the scarf but realised that life was extinct and stepped back to leave the body as near found as possible. Cut marks were visible on the right side of Eileen's neck. Constable Lines went for assistance and Constable McLennan arrested Moore.

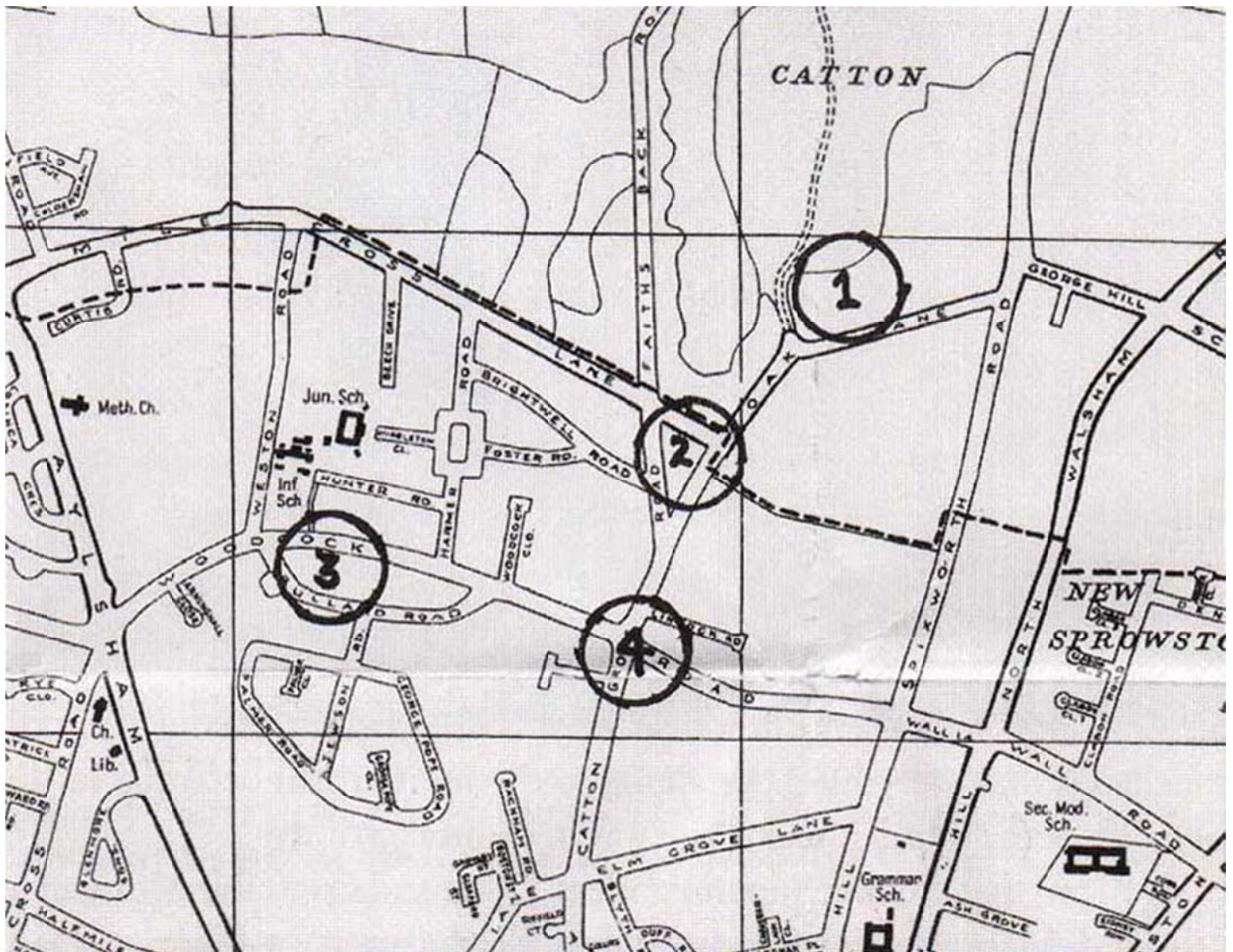
Moore said, 'I strangled her with my hands until blood came out of her mouth and I knotted the scarf around her neck, wrapped my scarf around her face, covered her with my coat. I went to the pub and got some cigarettes and then rang the police. I knew it was no good running away.'

A circling police torch revealed other points of interest. A bread knife lay close to Eileen's head, her handbag rested on her lower stomach as if laid there, and at the side of her right knee was a shopping card heavily pencilled in lipstick 'I love her. Goodbye all.' Later, a search of her handbag would reveal an envelope addressed: 'To Eileen, my pretty. From Brian.'

Sergeant Byland soon learned that murder really had been committed and he accordingly alerted all who should respond, and probably some who need not. Superintendent Tester and Inspector Wright of the city force went to the scene, also the Police Surgeon Doctor Lincoln Hurn. Norwich had ended a long run without a murder - or had it? Discussion in Bethel Street Police Station and in a field on a cold February evening quickly concluded that everything pertaining to the murder had occurred in the city, except the murder. Oak Lane was in county territory.

At 10 pm that evening Superintendent Tester and Constable McLennan delivered Moore to the County Police Headquarters at Thorpe Road, handing him over to Detective Sergeant Colin Sidell.

The Superintendent explained that the prisoner had given himself up after strangling his girlfriend at Old Catton and Moore said, 'Yes, that's right.'



**Figure 2. A murderer's progress. (1) Scene of the murder, (2) The Park House public house, (3) The murderer's home, (4) The place where he called and met the police.**

**Reproduced from 1951 Ordnance Survey map with kind permission of the Ordnance Survey.**

Detective Superintendent Sydney Kybird of the county force was called out and he went with Sergeant Sidell to Oak Lane to add to the growing number who had peered into the brick shelter. He was now the officer in charge of the case. Murder scenes in the middle twentieth century were more tightly controlled and more comprehensively investigated than those of previous years, but a greater procession of officialdom to and from the body came from experts in forensic evidence, fingerprint retrieval and photography, with assistants, plus the Police Surgeon and a pathologist examining the body in situ before conducting his post-mortem in a mortuary. In this case policemen from two forces trudged across a field to where Eileen Cullen lay. But no longer would the press and public obtain a viewing.

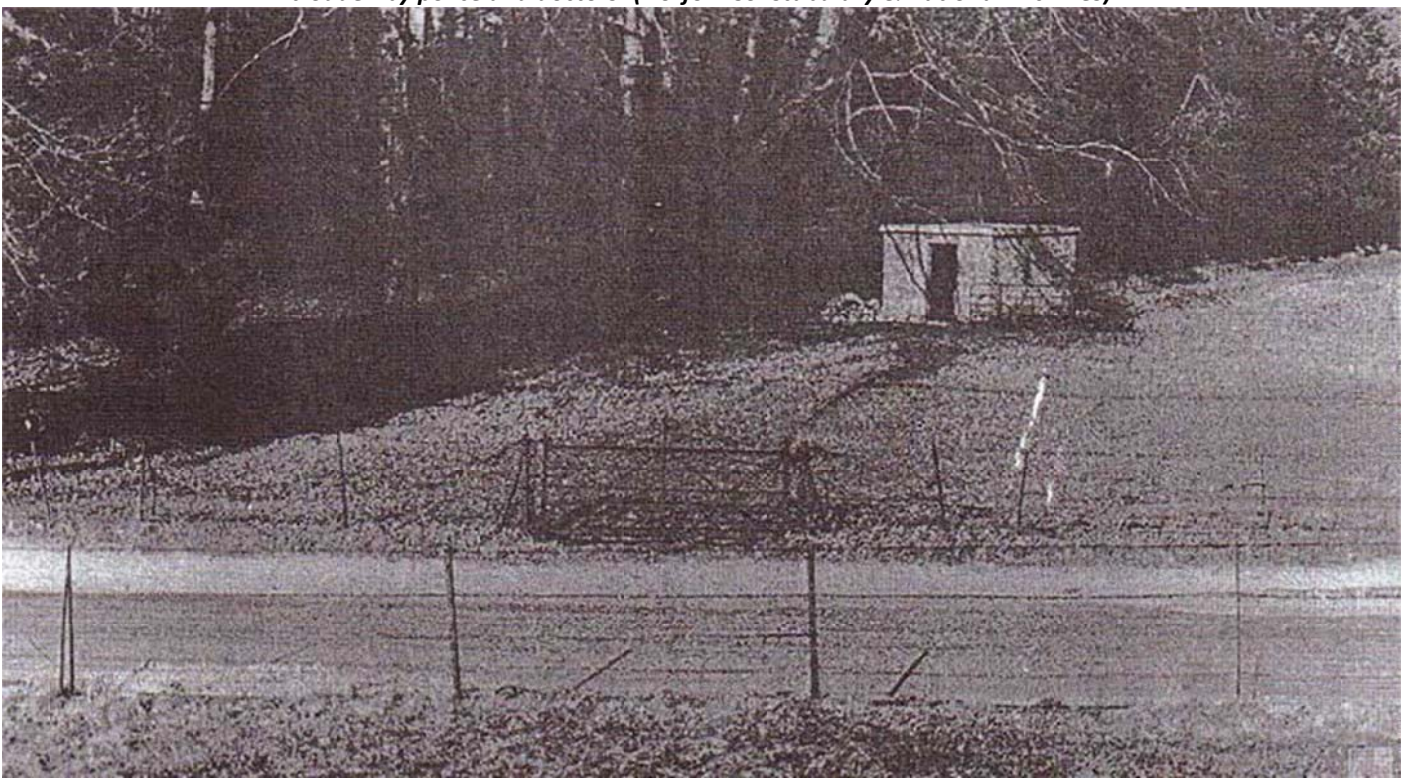
Doctor Hurn examined the body at 10.20 pm and certified death, opining that it had occurred one or two hours previously. At eleven-thirty Superintendent Kybird, Sergeant Sidell and Detective Constable Kimpton viewed the body, the latter a 'scenes of crime' officer trained in forensic and fingerprint retrieval and photography. He would later attend the post-mortem with the investigating officers and photograph all relevant marks and injuries.



The body was guarded overnight and visited by pathologist Doctor David Fulton from Nottingham at eleven-thirty the next morning. Normal practice would see the body removed under supervision of the pathologist, assisted by the scenes of crime officer and police officer designated to be the 'exhibits officer'.



**Figures 3. and 4. These police photographs were taken the following morning when Eileen Cullen still lay in the brick shelter. Figure 3. shows her last walk, coming from the distance and turning left into the field, and Figure 4. shows the path well-trodden by police and doctors. (Norfolk Constabulary & National Archives)**





Doctor Fulton conducted his post-mortem at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and reported, as expected, that death had been due to asphyxia caused by a ligature tied tightly around the neck. He also reported other injuries: extensive bruising round the right eye, a large bruise at the back of the head, 'a number of superficial transverse cuts in the skin of the neck' and a 'superficial abrasion under the left ear'. He found a pregnancy of approximately four months.

Doctor Fulton was of the opinion the bread knife could have caused the marks on Eileen's neck. He did not give an opinion as to the cause of the other injuries.

A freely confessing murderer does not mean a truthful one. Confusion, shock or simply an attempt to dilute the consequences of the killing may result in a distorted explanation or simply no explanation at all for given circumstances. Dennis Moore made two statements under caution, the one in answer to the charge of murder saying that he understood the charge, finishing 'I'm sorry I've done this and hope I've not caused too much worry on either of our parents,' the other a more lengthy and detailed document that went into how he met Eileen, intended to marry her and killed her.

Moore's main statement described the events of 3 February leading up to the visit to Doctor Champion's surgery following which they walked to Oak Lane quarrelling as they went. They went into the brick shelter and kissed and cuddled and he wanted sex and she didn't, he said. The next part of his statement requires exactness.

*I put my arms round her and squeezed her to me tightly, the next thing I realised she had fallen to the floor and her mouth was all bleeding. I then realised I had hold of her throat and I just couldn't leave go. After that I took her scarf, put two knots in it and tied it round her neck very tight. I then took my own scarf off and wrapped it round her mouth, I also took my rain mack off and laid over her and walked up to The Park House to get some cigarettes, then to the telephone kiosk and dialled 999 from the box at the bottom of Woodcock Road.*

The attentive reader will have noticed the intervening visit to his home is not mentioned. Later in the statement, obviously prompted by earlier police questioning, he goes back to the shelter in a renewed account of what happened.

*Tonight was the first time I have ever been in that shed. When I realised what I had done I sat in the porchway of the shed and took her lipstick out of her handbag and I wrote with her lipstick "I LOVE HER- GOODBYE". I felt like running away but I thought twice and came for the police, because I thought it would be better for me. I never carry a knife about with me, but the knife lying on the table looks like my mother's bread knife, I don't remember taking it to the shed. We had got over our tiff when this happened. I can't remember putting my hands round her throat, all I know is I had them tightly round her throat when she fell to the floor. I couldn't leave go. I loved her too much, I wouldn't have hurt her, not for anything in the world.*

Some of these words are familiar to other cases of death from professed love. His statement finished:

*That's all except my tie there. I don't remember taking it off. I have been wearing it all day.*



So the tie (found at the scene) and the bread knife remained enigmas, ancillary to Eileen's death from her own silk scarf. Whether he had used or planned to use the tie is not known but the bread knife had without doubt been used, albeit without conviction. The key to Moore's state of mind would be where the bread knife came from and when.

The envelope from 'Brian' proved to be a red herring. Evelyn had a similar one. The author was a twelve-year-old boy living in Buxton Road and admiring the sisters from afar.

Procedural progress in the twentieth century saw the inquest and formal committal to trial implemented without the duplicity of previous legal administrations, though inquests still favoured public houses. Eileen Cullen's inquest began in The Woodman at Catton. She was laid to rest on 10 February at Earlham Cemetery attended by a large crowd of mourners. Segger's shoe factory shut down to allow all the staff to attend the funeral of this popular young woman.



**Figure 5. The note written in lipstick, found near the body. (Norfolk Constabulary & National Archives)**



**Figure 6. The envelope found in Eileen's handbag - a red herring. (Norfolk Constabulary & National Archives)**

At the remand hearing at the Shirehall Moore appeared in a crumpled pullover, without collar or tie, and hailed his father in the Court. He answered the charge with 'Correct' though whether that meant he approved of the wording or was guilty of its allegation is not known. For sure he would not plead 'Guilty' at his trial. His life was at stake. Capital punishment still remained the punishment for murder.

Thursday, 31 May 1951 and he appeared before Mr Justice Parker, represented by Mr Alpe. John Flowers KC, prosecuted for the Crown. A plea of 'Not Guilty' was entered and the defence case emerged as an acceptance of the killing (difficult to argue otherwise) but performed whilst 'labouring under a defect of reasoning'. Simply put, the defence said Moore did not know what he doing because of temporary insanity and therefore his responsibility was diminished - a defence that within a few years would be formalised by statute and is consequently more familiar today. The prosecution said otherwise: that he knew exactly what he was doing and had the malice aforethought necessary for murder. (Wilful was no longer bandied around quite so freely - all murders are wilful by definition.)



The prosecution sought to prove that the bread knife, identified as coming from Moore's home, had on the day of the murder come from his father's fruit and vegetable stall on Norwich Market, appropriated by Moore when he returned the ten shillings. Whilst the Moore family agreed that a bread knife from the family home sometimes found itself on the stall for the purpose of cleaning leeks, and there was some discrepancy between them whether it had been there on 3 February, evidence at the trial placed it in the kitchen at Woodcock Road at about 7.30 pm. This argument was crucial for if Moore had taken it from the stall he must have had some determination long before he killed Eileen. Eventually, the prosecution accepted that the knife had not been taken from the stall by Moore, Mr Flowers saying he had only made that suggestion in accordance with the depositions. The defence had scored a victory concerning the bread knife but it was a brief success.

Sergeant Byland in the witness box admitted that he might have misheard the name of the victim given by Moore in his telephone call. Mr Flowers suggested that the name given had been 'Irene Hambling', not Irene Coleman. In any event there was agreement that it had not been Eileen Cullen.

The neutral observer wondering about Irene Hambling was soon enlightened. The prosecution called her as a witness and her evidence came as a bombshell. She had been Dennis Moore's girlfriend from April 1949 to April 1950 and they had parted company after she had found she was pregnant and her father had become extremely angry. It got worse. She and Moore had quarrelled on a towpath and he had tried to strangle her, she said. She now lived in London.

The defence might have said that Moore using an ex-girlfriend's name when reporting the murder truly showed an aberration of the mind, but the prosecution were intent on showing psychopathic tendencies and they called a witness to reveal that Moore had engaged in a wrestling match during his National Service at Colchester and had tried to strangle his opponent.

Mr Flowers in summing up to the jury for the prosecution said he had no intention of misleading them over the bread knife but Moore's advances to Eileen had been repellent and he had formed an 'overpowering rage'. He said, 'In this imperfect world many people had killed the person they loved in passion' and such an act was 'miles and miles away from insanity'. Mr Alpe in his defence speech to the jury said that if the bread knife had been taken from the market stall it meant premeditation of 'this dreadful and horrible act' but that had not been the case, now agreed by the prosecution. He referred to the knotted scarf used to kill Eileen and said that related to a murder Moore had seen at the cinema. He rhetorically asked 'Was this the act of a man's sound mind towards the woman he loved?'

The judge summed up without obviously taking sides (defending lawyers would seize on any bias for consideration by the Appeal Court) and the jury retired. They returned after fifty minutes and found the prisoner 'Guilty'. The judge said he 'entirely agreed with the verdict' and without much preamble sentenced Moore to death.

Moore's defence of temporary insanity was taken to the Appeal Court in company with the appeal of Alfred Reynolds, aged twenty-five years, of Dereham, also convicted of strangling his girlfriend. Both appeals were dismissed within ten minutes, Lord Goddard observing that there was no reason for the Appeal Court 'interfering in any shape or form'.



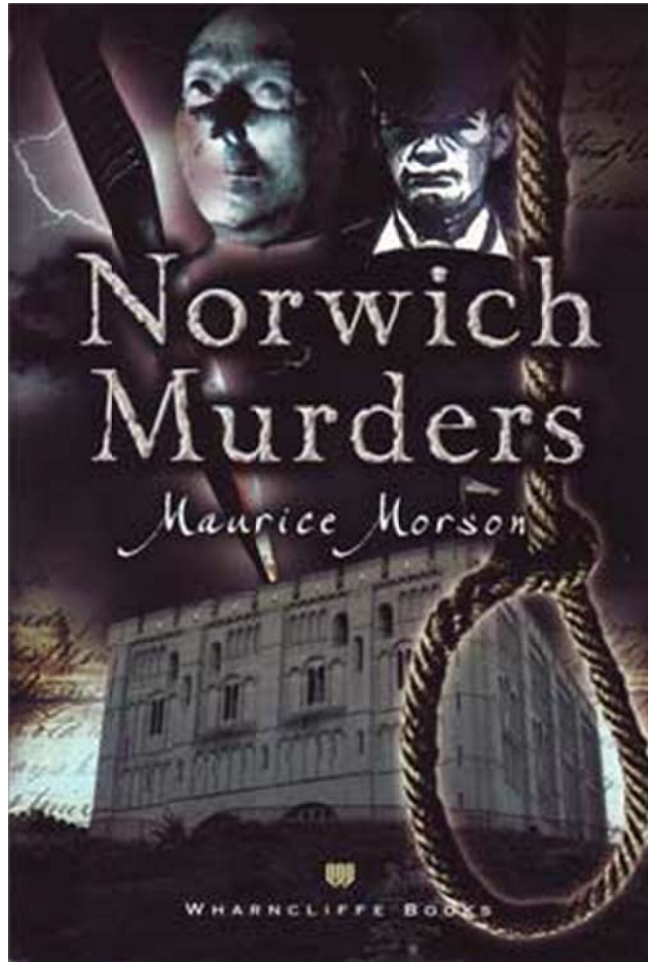
A vigorously conducted petition, at one point insensitively taken to Segger's shoe factory, failed to impress the Home Secretary. There was no reprieve and at 8 am on Thursday, 19 July 1951 Dennis Moore and Alfred Reynolds were simultaneously hanged at Norwich Prison. The prison bell tolled its melancholy message across Mousehold Heath and was heard in Buxton Road.

Moore and Reynolds were the last to suffer the ultimate punishment in Norwich and they died in times of growing opposition to the death penalty. As far back as 1854 there had been a public meeting opposing executions. Nearly one hundred years later, in 1948, the House of Commons voted to abolish the death penalty for a five year trial period, only to be thwarted by the House of Lords; and the Abolition Bill of 1956 also floundered in the House of Lords. The 1957 Homicide Act brought in categories of murder to receive the death penalty and through its provisions Moore and Reynolds would have lived and, as presumed sane men, eventually been released; and probably be with us today. They found a place in history and the inquest verdict on these two men was recorded in Norwich for the last time: 'hanging pursuant to the execution of the law.'

The last judicial hanging in Great Britain took place in 1964 and the death penalty for murder was finally abolished in 1965. The sanctity of life had been preserved, though there could of course be no reprieve for Eileen Cullen, or Nellie Howard.



Finally, a note of our sincere thanks and acknowledgement.



The account of the murder of Eileen Cullen was reproduced from the book, *Norwich Murders*, by Maurice Morson. We are extremely grateful to Mr Morson and to the book's publishers [PEN & SWORD BOOKS LTD](http://www.penandswordbooks.com) for allowing us to publish this article.

Maurice Morson was Detective Chief Superintendant and Head of Norfolk CID. Since retiring from the police force, he has used his long experience as a detective to reinvestigate exceptional criminal cases from the past.

*Norwich Murders* is an in-depth account of murders that have gripped the public imagination over two centuries. They include notorious murders that have left milestones in criminal history which can now be reinvestigated using modern research techniques. Readers of this book will act as a new judge and jury, reflecting on long-gone police practices and applying up-to-date thinking to old cases.

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