

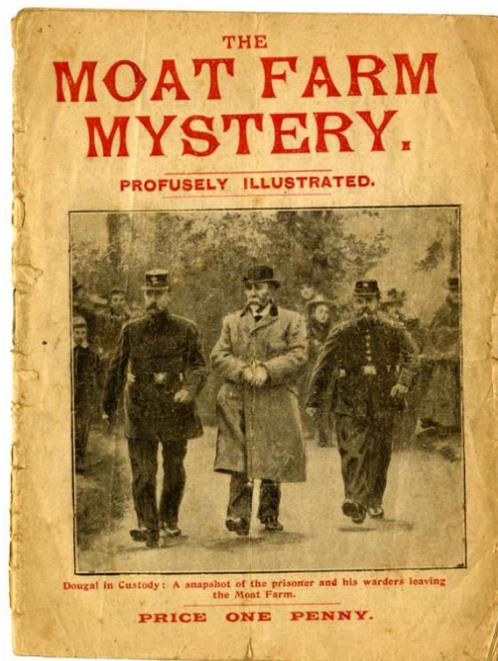
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The Moat Farm Murder – new documents

©Jacqueline Cooper

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Dougal under arrest at Moat Farm, the cover of a booklet published after the trial. ©Clavering Local History Collection.

The donation to Saffron Walden Museum of some hitherto unknown documents, relating to the Clavering Moat Farm murder case, once again revives a story which seems to fascinate people as much today as it did over a century ago when the village, the district and the nation were glued to the unfolding narrative of Samuel Herbert Dougal.

The story of this scheming, philandering killer, and his callous elimination of Camille Holland, in order to get hold of her money, has been retold so endlessly in numerous books and articles, even novels and plays, that one would think there was nothing left to say on the subject. The new documents do, however, shed further light on the making of a murderer, by offering an insight into his life before he came to Moat Farm. The material includes letters, a framed collection of faded photographs and other documents collected by one of the policemen involved,

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Superintendent Daniels, kept by him as souvenirs and donated by one of his descendants (SWM Accession 2009.41).

Born at Bow in 1846, the son of a builder, Dougal joined the army as a young man and remained in the Royal Engineers for 20 years. Stationed in various places, he appears to have left a trail of several failed marriages, affairs and numerous children, both legitimate and illegitimate, continuing after he left the army. The documents deposited in the museum offer snapshots of this extraordinary double life of apparent respectability hiding a life of immorality and criminality.

Soldier

One of the letters is from Thomas Price, who served with Dougal in the Royal Engineers based in Nova Scotia. He took with him the wife he had married in Wales in 1869: 'Mrs Dougal (who was never kindly treated) died at Halifax', wrote Price, 'Dougal came to England with 3 young children on leave to get them put in some home? He returned to Halifax a month later with another young woman whom he stated was his wife. Nothing has been seen or heard of the children? Dougal's moral character was always considered very shaky...'

Publican

Another letter is from the Herts Constabulary, explaining that for six months in 1889, Dougal and a woman thought to be his wife ran *The Royston Crow* pub at Ware in Hertfordshire. But when the pub burned down, Dougal was charged with arson with intent to defraud the insurance company. It could not be proved, however, and he was acquitted.

Chicken farmer

Six years later, as explained in a letter from the Oxfordshire Constabulary, Dougal was on trial again, this time for larceny, but was again acquitted. This charge came about after he accosted a middle-aged woman, Emily Maria Booty, as she was leaving a bank: 'Having represented himself as a widower, he took a house on the borders of Oxon and Bucks, fitted up the place as a Poultry Farm and furnished the house with the lady's money, and after living with the lady for a short time he brought home his real wife age about 26 and two young children'. Miss Booty then pretended to be Mrs Dougal, and Mrs Dougal pretended to be her daughter: 'Things however did not run smooth and having obtained all the money about £100 from the lady, he one morning drove her out of the house, she then sought police protection and Dougal was arrested...' After various complications, the case was dismissed.

The letter adds that, while living at Henley-on-Thames, Dougal advertised his services to look after anyone 'Mentally or otherwise afflicted – a cheerful home is offered to a lady or a gentleman where every care and attention will be given. Terms moderate'. It was a chilling echo of what was to come and reflected 'the character of the man'.

Fraudster

Finally, one of his crimes was proved. In 1897, wrote Thomas Price (see above), Dougal was sentenced at the Old Bailey to a year's imprisonment for forgery. This meant he lost his army pension, which left him even more short of money when he left prison, and therefore in need of funds from another victim. The chosen lady was wealthy spinster Miss Camille Cecile Holland, who agreed to move in with him. They lived temporarily in Saffron Walden, until eventually Dougal was satisfied that he had found the type of remote outpost he had been searching for – Moat Farm, formerly Coldhams, on the borders of Clavering and Rickling parishes. It was paid for with Miss Holland's money and in her name.

Farmer

Everyone knows the fateful events that followed: her murder and burial in a drainage ditch: 'Dougal's training as a sapper would make him an expert with the pick and shovel', advised Thomas Price, 'every foot of ground should be gone over, for I know the man is quite capable of doing desperate deeds'.

One of the faded photographs shows a pony cart, presumably the one pulled by 'Prince', in which Dougal took Miss Holland to Stansted to go shopping on Friday 19 May 1899, just three weeks after their arrival at Moat Farm. When they returned, he shot her at the door of the coach house. He told the servant girl she had gone to stay with relatives, buried the body and planted shrubs on top.

For the next four years Dougal got away with forging Camille Holland's name on cheques, and using the money to live the life of a country squire, while gossip grew. The 1901 Census records him with wife and servant at Moat Farm, by now a familiar figure locally.

Coldhams Farm - Samuel H Dougal - head, Married, age 54, Farmer, employer, born Middlesex, Bow;
Sarah H Dougal - wife, Married, age 30, born Kent, Sheerness;
Emma Burgess - servant, Single, age 15, General Servant Domestic, born Essex, Clavering.

A letter from the police asks two local vicars, among his visitors, 'as to whether they recollect the ditch as filled in ever being disturbed after about June 1899'. A letter about a bill has Dougal complaining: 'I am only

a poor farmer & not a Multi Millionaire'. Yet he had acquired an expensive new toy, an American Locomobile steam car, using it to give rides to his 'girls'. A letter from Det. Inspector A. Marden refers to one of these girls: 'You will doubtless have heard Georgina was one day this week delivered of a daughter. Dougal is I know from a private source highly pleased.' The girl was, one of two (or possibly three) sisters from Clavering, with whom he had an affair. Two illegitimate babies were born in 1903 and baptised at Clavering Congregational Church in 1905. This letter proves that Dougal was the father of at least one of the children. Further information on Dougal's affairs and marriages was provided by Fred Feather of Essex Police Museum:

While in the Royal Engineers, Dougal was married to Lavinia Griffith in Wales. When she died in Nova Scotia in 1886 he married Mary Herberta Boyd and she died the same year in Halifax, Nova Scotia - he had not married his Halifax mistress Miss Steadman. He then married Sarah Henrietta White in Dublin in about 1893-5 and she moved into the Moat Farm after Camille Holland disappeared in 1899 (he was cleared of being a bigamist on the grounds that he did not marry Miss Steadman). But, he was soon to be embarked on the alleged family affair with Mrs Cranwell's family - her daughters Eliza (mother of his son Herbert Dougal 1903-1998), Katy-Honour, Georgina (mistress at the time of the trial) and Millie. There were also the famous mistresses, Miss Steadman in Canada, Emily Booty in Henley, the licensee of the pub in Ware and probably some of his parishioners when he was Steward of the Southend Conservative Club. I used to estimate his children as between 15-20 and wondered what happened to them. Herbert died a couple of weeks before I gave a talk on this crime at Great Sampford, where he lived. Another one, the eldest, was a distinguished soldier in the Boer War.

Murderer

In March 1903 the game was up: Dougal was arrested as he tried to cash a false cheque at the Bank of England: he was arrested and charged with forgery. Local gossip as to what had happened to Miss Holland led the police to start digging up the farm. Word spread quickly and hundreds of onlookers arrived on foot, trap, wagonette, cycle and motor, excited by the story unfolding in the local and national press. Postcards and sweetmeats were on sale, scenes were 'snapshotted', there was a festive atmosphere. Gradually they got bored and stopped coming, as the digging went on for weeks without result, turning the farmyard into a quagmire.

Three of the museum letters are false confessions to the murder: 'If it had not been for cursed money I never should have murdered her,' claimed one man. Another sent a sketch of the fireplace where he said he said he had hidden the body 'cut up & in a large pillow case'. Another mentioned the shop where he bought the revolver.

Finally, a labourer helping the police found poor Miss Holland buried in a drainage ditch and Dougal was charged with her murder. In his pockets police found over £564 in notes and coins, itemised in one of the museum documents. Huge crowds watched, booing and hissing, his various comings and goings from prison to the inquest at a barn on Moat Farm

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and then at Newport, to the committal at Saffron Walden Town Hall and finally to his trial at Chelmsford Assizes. The *Saffron Walden Weekly News* reported on one Sunday when a thousand people descended on the farm and carried away murder souvenirs: ‘...sprigs of ivy, boughs of young trees, bricks, plants, straws, tin cans and bottles and in fact everything they could lay their hands on. Trees which covered her body stripped bare.’ An even larger crowd of 3,000 allegedly visited for the sale of farming stock that followed.

It was also reported in the local press accounts that, while in prison, Dougal complained constantly about the food, and among documents relating to his time in custody is a letter to Supt Daniels requesting, ‘Sir, I shall be very glad if you will send to the Governor for me, some money to enable me to provide myself with food’.

At the Assizes, Dougal was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged at Chelmsford on 14 July 1903: in the second before the drop, he finally confessed. The policemen were congratulated for their persistence. The grave of poor Miss Holland can still be found in the Radwinter Road Cemetery at Saffron Walden, while Moat Farm has been renamed and become a private dwelling. But I sometimes walk up there – and think how very different it is from the bleak outpost pictured in tales of a century ago. Today the old house still surrounded by its moat is a place of great beauty and peace, and all those long-ago horrors are unimaginable. This nasty story about a revolting person long ago really ought to be forgotten after all this time, but then new documents appear and



The former Moat Farm today. ©Jacqueline Cooper.

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