

**This file contains pages 5, 10, 16, 37, 61, 72, 77, 122 & 154 from *The Strange Case of Dr John BODKIN ADAMS and the views of those who knew him*, by John Surtees, published by SB Publications, Seaford, (2000).**

**These are the best quality scans I was able to produce. Scroll down to read.**

## John Bodkin Adams

- 1899** Born 21 January.
- 1921** Qualifies in medicine.
- 1922** Comes to Eastbourne as a general practitioner.
- 1926** Awarded MD, and becomes a partner in the practice.
- 1930** Buys *Kent Lodge*, Trinity Trees, for £3 000.
- 1934** Appointed part-time anaesthetist at the Princess Alice Hospital, Eastbourne.
- 1935** Visits Mayo Clinic, USA.
- 1936** Becomes senior partner in the practice. Breaks off engagement to Miss Norah O'Hara. A patient, Mrs Matilda Whitton, leaves him over £7 000, contested by the family, judgement given to Dr Adams.
- 1940** One of the few doctors left in Eastbourne during the war. Works under difficult conditions, and with no private patients.
- 1941** Takes his Diploma in Anaesthetics.
- 1943** Mother dies.
- 1948** Mrs Edith Morrell, 79, has a stroke at her son's home in Cheshire on 25 June. Moves to an Eastbourne nursing home on 5 July. First prescription of morphine by Dr Adams on 9 July.
- 1949** Mrs Morrell moved to her home *Marden Ash* in Meads, Eastbourne, on 30 March. Dr Adams informs solicitor, Mr H Sogno, that Mrs Morrell wishes to alter her will. Nurses' notebooks date from 21 June.
- 1950** On 8 March Dr Adams informs solicitor that Mrs Morrell wants to make a new will. Dr Adams goes on holiday to Scotland on 12 September. On 15 September Mrs Morrell cuts Dr Adams out of her will with a codicil. Codicil torn up 23 October. Mrs Morrell dies 13 November.
- 1955** In November Dr Adams diagnoses cancer of bowel in Mr Jack Hullett. Top surgeon, Sir Arthur Porritt, operates at the Esperance Nursing Home.
- 1956** Mr Hullett dies on 14 March, leaving £500 to Dr Adams. Mrs Hullett very depressed. On 14 July makes out will leaving Rolls-Royce and £100 to Dr Adams. Mrs Hullett dies at her home *Holywell Mount* of barbiturate overdose, 23 July. On 21 August, inquest verdict of suicide. The Police search *Kent Lodge* for dangerous drugs on 24 November. Dr Adams charged with murder of Mrs Morrell on 19 December, and later of Mr and Mrs Hullett.
- 1957** Committal proceedings at Eastbourne Magistrates' Court, 14-23 January, in public. Old Bailey trial starts 18 March. Struck off Medical Register in November.
- 1961** Restored to the Medical Register.
- 1983** 4 July, dies after falling and breaking his hip.

## 2. THE PATIENT'S FRIEND

John Bodkin Adams was born at the turn of a century, 21 January 1899, in Randalstown, County Antrim, which had a population of some 1000 in the 1890s.

Bodkin was his mother's maiden name. He thought the world of her, but he preferred to be known as John Adams. Perhaps this was because 'Bodkin' became so associated with his newspaper image that he came to dislike it. In spite of his wishes, Bodkin was the name that everyone called him at some time or other.

It is said that the family were not rich. His father, Samuel, a JP, and variously described as a watchmaker and jeweller, in the linen trade, and an engineer, was said to be 'popular and a good man'. Samuel, with his wife Ellen, and their two sons moved to Coleraine to be near John's school, the Academical Institution.

His father died when John was 15, and his younger brother, William, died in his teens during the 1918 influenza pandemic. John missed some schooling with fluid on his lung so, understandably, his mother became very close to him. He does not appear to have been a bright student; determined might better express his approach.

It is alleged that Bodkin Adams was tight with money as a medical student; a situation not unknown amongst undergraduates.

He obtained the degrees of Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery and Bachelor of the Art of Obstetrics [Midwifery] in 1921, to become a medical doctor.

After qualification he met Professor Arthur Rendle Short, a surgeon, at a missionary conference in Belfast and was invited to join his staff in Bristol.

In Dr Adams' words, "I came from Belfast to Bristol to work with Rendle Short, an evangelical doctor. My intention was to go back to Belfast to look after my mother and I asked for six months to get my DPH [Diploma in Public Health], and took a job as the Casualty Officer at Bristol Royal Infirmary". These posts had regular hours and were often used to swot for higher exams.

"When I was working for my DPH the pathologist gave me the key to the fire escape door of the laboratory, so that I could go there out of hours and get the experience needed on the plating and culturing of bacteria. Pneumococci were important then because the organism killed lots of people. I know that they had the smallpox virus in the lab, without any of the fuss which came later. When my colleagues went out of an evening I worked at the books and obtained my DPH.

"Rendle Short asked why not try a practice in England, and there was a colleague working with me who was also thinking of practising in England so I was encouraged.

"I saw an advert for a Christian practice assistant in a fashionable South Coast resort, with a view to partnership, and applied. I heard the post was filled, then two weeks later I received a letter asking me to go for an interview. It was my weekend off - Providence again, you see - and so I came to Eastbourne on a blustery day. I was successful at the interview, and joined the Emerson, Gurney, and Rainey practice in College Road."

second, floor had another four, partly used to store his possessions. The electoral roll for 1932 shows that Mrs Adams was ensconced with her son at *Kent Lodge*.

He helped to found the Bisley Rifle Club, became a member of André Simon's Wine and Food Society and attended their dinners. In 1936 he formed a local Camera Club.

About this time Dr Adams was introduced to Lt Colonel Roland V Gwynne of Folkington Manor, Polegate: a man of some peculiarities, but of great wealth and one of the most powerful men in Sussex. He had studied law at Cambridge, was called to the Bar in 1910, and was a member of the Tory Carlton Club in London. He won a *DSO* in the 1914-18 war. A former High Sheriff for Sussex, he was chairman of the Board of Guardians for its last years, Mayor of Eastbourne for two years from 1929, was at times chairman of East Sussex County Council, chairman of Hailsham Rural District Council, and chairman of Hailsham magistrates.

He was renowned for the parties he gave at Folkington, which were fully reported in the county newspapers and high-class magazines. It is alleged they were on such a scale that, although the Colonel was teetotal, every week a lorry from the Star Brewery made a special delivery to the manor to stock up the cellars.

To be in with the Colonel was to be in with the jet set of the county, men of great riches and influence with many contacts.

If Dr Adams was attracted by the high life, he did not forget his patients. He prospered and was popular with both his 'panel' patients and private patients. He never refused to visit and his patients found he always had time to listen.

Mrs Maureen Devlin writes, "My father, Fred Sivers, had polio when an infant and had over forty operations on his legs. He didn't have a lot of time for doctors, but he was treated several times by Dr Bodkin Adams and said that the Doctor was one of the kindest of men.

"He lived in Dennis Road [now Dursley Road] and it was regarded as one of the poorer parts of Eastbourne, but the Doctor was well thought of in the neighbourhood."

The 6 College Road practice opened a branch surgery in 1930 at the neighbouring village of East Dean. This was an extra five-mile drive from the centre of Eastbourne, but Dr Adams was noted for always being willing to attend any call.

Mrs Grace Taylor, of East Dean, says, "In the 1930s my husband, Rupert, went down with double pneumonia. Dr Adams came out to see him, prescribed M&B<sup>3</sup> and said that he was extremely ill and he feared for his life. At 6.30 the next morning he was ringing the doorbell having come out to see his patient. I wouldn't hear a word against him."

Philip Clear says he isn't sure, but thinks that he was delivered by Dr Adams. He does remember going to have a boil behind his knee lanced, "Which he did without anaesthetic and did it hurt, but the family thought he was a good doctor".

He gave Mrs Moyra Malam an anaesthetic, "I can remember him well. He anaesthetised me at our home in Eastbourne when I had my tonsils and adenoids out. One of my memories was that he had chubby hands. It was in 1934, and I had a trained nurse from Great Ormond Street Hospital to look after me."

Local solicitor, John Porter, says that he first heard of Dr Adams from his brother who worked for a life insurance company in London and frequently used his services. "He had a high regard for his ability."

Mr Porter goes on, "A memory which will remain with me was of a telephone call from Dr Adams enquiring as to whether I had seen Mrs X that day and whether she had made provision for him under her will as promised. Obviously, I could not divulge such information and referred him back to the lady in question. Being relatively inexperienced I was horrified and astonished to receive such an approach from a doctor who at the time had an excellent reputation in the town. Subsequently I learned that what Dr Adams was doing was not uncommon among doctors in the town, namely to treat patients privately, but to render them merely nominal bills, on the understanding that the doctor in question would be looked after under the patient's will. As far as I am aware this is not contrary to medical ethics, but it was this sort of activity that gave rise to the suspicion that fell upon Dr Adams and led to his prosecution".

An Eastbourne GP of the time says, "Bodkin was a greedy man, a collector of trinkets, money and cars. I think he had the ability to be a good doctor, but his patients asked to be fussed, they wanted his time, and immediate availability. He had a remarkable ability to talk rubbish which reassured a frightened patient.

"He had a black notebook in which he kept a note of the consultants in every branch of medicine. He sent all his chest cases to Howard Nicholson of UCH, and Bodkin would have the great surgeons from London to operate in the Esperance Nursing Home. A standard remark among the other doctors was that they had to be good surgeons since he would be giving the anaesthetic, when he was awake, that is." And now he could take the patient for a consultant opinion in his Rolls.

Dr Adams was rapidly becoming the talk of Eastbourne. Another doctor confirms, "There was a considerable amount of jealousy in the town. Surgery was kept in the practice, so bringing consultants in from outside the area was disliked.

"His practice was more paternalistic than any of today. Dr Adams would do tests, for example ECGs [heart records], and if abnormal he would often not tell the patient. He would say that he glossed over the fact for the sake of his patient who would only worry. You have to admit that, unlike today, there were no significant drugs or operations to transform most heart diseases.

"A test on a young farmer from Hastings way showed he'd had a pulmonary embolus [a clot on the lung] and I told Bodkin, but he thought it could wait. When I told him he would be up before the coroner, he asked me to treat him."

Michael Clark says, "My wife Laura (née Bergman van Ling) was a nurse in the Princess Alice Hospital theatre, 1951-2, and she was always talking about the patients going blue when Bodkin Adams gave the anaesthetic."

Dr Colin Morley, Old Etonian and later an Eastbourne GP, told a story of Bodkin Adams and his anaesthetics from early 1953. "I was a houseman [junior doctor] at St Mary's Hospital when a little boy was brought into Casualty with a lacerated leg. After I discussed the case with the duty surgeon, Mr Peter Smith, he told me to get on with stitching it up, so I called in the duty anaesthetist who happened to be Dr Adams." Dr Morley recalled that Dr Adams spent most of the

that, when at the pub, he twice overheard the Superintendent use the expression, "I would certainly not like to be in a certain person's shoes, who lives at Eastbourne".

Most evenings the Superintendent, known as 'The Count' at Scotland Yard for his natty suits and cigars, would outline how his investigations were progressing, and the information he leaked to the press was the source of much of the speculation in the newspapers. 'Supt Hannam interviewed a relative of Mrs Matilda Whitton who had died in 1935.' 'Exhumations of the bodies of Julia Bradnum and Clara Miller were under consideration.'



*Superintendent Herbert Hannam  
The Count of Scotland Yard*

Supt Hannam played a grim cat and mouse game with the Doctor, no doubt hoping the latter would crack under the pressure - and the focus of his attention became directed at Mrs Edith Alice Morrell.

Mr Walker, the Chief Constable, on the other hand, gave out that the enquiries were not murder investigations. "Because of the rumours ... in fairness to everyone I felt that an independent investigation should be made." The Eastbourne Police emphasised that to scotch the rumours would entail a long and searching probe.

Dr Adams commented, "I appreciate the Chief Constable's attitude. I am quite satisfied to await the outcome of those enquiries. My conscience is perfectly clear".

The Doctor's equanimity was in contrast to that of Mr Walker, who possibly regretted he had ever called in Scotland Yard, but realised it was too late to reverse the

process. Richard Walker, Chief Constable of Eastbourne 1954-67, said in his old age, "Dr Adams didn't do me any good at all".

Dr Adams indubitably believed that Supt Hannam was in Eastbourne to exonerate him of the imputations stemming from the gossip. Whereas, to quote Lord Devlin, "Hannam was presented with a suspect and his search was for a crime. His job was not to question but to find the proof that would satisfy the law in as many cases as possible". It can be understood why Bodkin Adams was described as 'a trussed chicken waiting to be plucked'.

'Hannam of the Yard' had shot to fame in 1953 with the famous Teddington Towpath Murder case. At 48, he was at the peak of his career. Sartorially elegant, he enjoyed discussions with reporters and lawyers, and he was prepared to use

Borough Librarian 1950-58, "The latter were more numerous than the former, influenced by the media, which more or less condemned him from the start".

Betty Wenham remarks, "Considering that I had a broken ankle set by Mr AH Crook in 1943 when Dr Bodkin Adams gave the anaesthetic, and that he was our family doctor for some years before the trial, I think I may, perhaps, count myself a survivor. There were many scurrilous poems about him going round, including a parody of the Twelve Days of Christmas". It was said that John Wells, who was at Eastbourne College about that time, composed some of the verses.

George Turner, one of the founding members of the YMCA Hartington Hall centre, declared, "I never thought of anything other than the best as regards Dr Adams. I told the *Evening Standard* reporter that I'd known him all down the years and never once had to doubt his integrity".

Nurse Harriott explains, "I had been looking after an elderly patient of his in Greys Road who had died, so I was fearful of the police knocking on my door".

Dr Adams spent Christmas in a cell at Brixton Prison ready to be brought back to Eastbourne for the Magistrates' Court now fixed for 14 January 1957.

His views on Supt Hannam had shifted, "Mr Hannam was determined to get a conviction to become head of the CID. He had hung the Towpath Murderer on a fake confession which everyone knew from Wormwood Scrubs to Brixton.

"They took me away before Christmas and I spent 16 weeks in what was virtually solitary confinement. They hoped to break my spirit, but I knew it would all come out because it was a conflict between God and the Devil, and He wouldn't let me down. During the 16 weeks I received Christmas cards, and presents, and about 500 letters expressing sympathy and I replied to them all. Otherwise, I didn't do much reading or writing, I was on my own with few facilities."

Frank Alford recalls, "Dr Adams was my doctor in Eastbourne from 1945 until he was struck off. I wrote to him when he was in Brixton and received a reply which I still have".

Another transformation was seen when a patient left him £500 while he was in prison – now there was no gossip.

The Doctor later recalled his experience to Percy Hoskins. "When those gates clang ... you lose your individuality and become just another number." Number 7889 was determined to be a model prisoner until his trial. Dr Adams concluded, "I had worked 16 hours a day – and the workings of God are strange – but it was too much and perhaps after eleven years it was time to take it easier".

Is there always someone who benefits from tragedy? The national press corps were keen to get their hands on copies of the death certificates for the 400 widows. Passing one copy round was not good enough, each newspaper had to have its own. The Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths at Eastbourne received a considerable sum in fees for the copies, and it is said that it was the only year the Eastbourne rates benefited from the Registrar's contributions.

Mr Stevenson turned to the death of Mrs Hullett. "There is no doubt that she died of barbitone poisoning, but she died in circumstances which the Crown says amount to murder by Dr Adams, whether or not she herself administered the fatal dose." Counsel pointed out that she was only 50 years of age, and he mentioned the repeated prescriptions of barbiturate by Dr Adams. He added that a bank clerk would tell of being asked by the doctor to expedite the cashing of a cheque for £1000 signed by Mrs. Hullett, and that Dr Harris' would tell of his advice. He also reminded the magistrates of Dr Adams' call to the coroner to request a private post-mortem – "That was something far odder than the other things that had occurred".

The magistrates had previously granted Supt Hannam's application to examine the bank accounts of Dr. Adams, hence Mr Stevenson was able to quote from Dr Adams' bank statement. This showed that the £1000 cheque was paid into an account that contained £12 000, and he drew the conclusion that Dr Adams did not have to expedite clearance because he was short of money. The implication being that it was rushed through because he was afraid of losing the money if she died before it was paid into his account.

Mr Stevenson suggested, "The same pattern repeats itself". Rich patient, heavily drugged, under the influence of the Doctor, died following a final massive drug overdose, after Dr Adams knew he would benefit from the will. In two cases Dr Adams gave a false answer on the cremation certificate, and was only deprived of the opportunity in the case of Mrs Hullett because of the circumstances which led to an inquest. The same desire for money was demonstrated by his request for a rapid clearance of the £1000 cheque.

On reflection, these similarities were not exceptional. Rich patients were two a penny in Eastbourne, and the bequests to Dr Adams were small in relation to the estates. In Mrs Hullett's case the drugs used were not the same as in the other two, and the evidence for undue influence was weak. The proposition had to be that in two cases the final fatal dose was given from fear that they might linger, but in the case of Mrs Hullett the only worry the Doctor might have was that she might die before the cheque was cashed. Such a lack of similarity weakens the arguments for 'system' murders, and could demolish them.

A prominent Eastbournian points out, "There was extra public concern with Mrs Hullett because she wasn't one of Dr Adams' old ladies. What I can't understand is why he expedited the £1000 cheque, he wasn't in need of the money, so does it suggest he knew she was about to take an overdose?"

The prosecution called forty witnesses, but apart from a mild tangle with Supt Hannam, Mr Lawrence reserved his main cross-examination until any later trial. He was convinced that the magistrates would commit for trial whatever he did.

The witnesses included four nurses. Nurse Randall was Mrs Morrell's night nurse from the time she came home to *Marden Ash* in 1949 to her death in 1950, and she also gave the last injections. Nurse Stronach did a few weeks of night duty in June 1950 and day duty in October that year. Sister Mason-Ellis, who was the only married nurse at the time, was the relief nurse. Sister Bartlett, now Mrs Hughes having married since Mrs Morrell's death, came as the day nurse in August



drop out of him. They printed a signed statement from him the next day thanking those who had helped him; 'to Percy Hoskins, for his courageous stand against what must be the biggest witch-hunt in history, to Mr Geoffrey Lawrence, for his devastating cross-examination and masterly speech to the jury, to Mr Edward Clarke (for preparing the defence), and for the backing of the Medical Defence Union'. Over the next week the paper serialised an account of the Doctor's life.

The *Daily Express* paid Dr Adams £10 000. Twenty-six years later, after his death, the money was found in a bank vault, untouched in the original envelope.

*So the Crown's case that strongly addictive drugs were used in massive quantities to kill, confirmed by incriminating statements, with gain the motive, was lost.*

*In the past several judges have expressed the opinion that old evidence is poor evidence and never was this shown to be truer than with the nurses' testimonies.*

*Mr Lawrence's conjuring trick with the nursing report books was one of the most dramatic moments of any trial at the Old Bailey and rocked the prosecution on its heels. His cross-examination, which gave the impression that handing out morphine and heroin was all in a day's (or night's) work, and that no one had any right to expect the nurses to recall anything worthwhile from seven years ago, was a bravura performance, displaying his agile mind and a mastery of his brief.*

*The surfacing of the nurses' notebooks was especially unfortunate for Nurse Stronach, who just happened to be in the box as the first nurse witness. For the day on which she had said that Mrs Morrell was semi-comatose and the Doctor had given a big injection, the notebooks showed the patient sat up in bed and partook of partridge for lunch, and there was no visit from the Doctor.*

*It was reported that the single word 'partridge' had more effect on the jury than all the expert witnesses.*

Ten vital moments, including six incredible twists and turns, saved the Doctor.

1. *The prescriptions on which the Crown relied were shown to be worthless by the nurses' notebooks. The very reports that Dr. Adams had left littering his basement.*

2. *The shame of the nurses who lied in the witness box. In the end the nurses' evidence aided the defence.*

3. *The unlikelihood of any sane doctor murdering a patient who had only a few weeks to live for silver worth £275.*

4. *The motive went when it was revealed that Dr Adams did not benefit from the will.*

5. *The discovery that the last 'big injections' were probably paraldehyde, the safest of all sedatives.*

6. *The production by the defence of the Cheshire hospital nursing notes showed that other doctors started Mrs Morrell on morphine and that she had pain.<sup>4</sup>*

7. *The destruction of the main prosecution medical witness after he denounced as murderers all doctors who prescribed morphine for a stroke patient.*

8. *Mr Lawrence's decision to keep Dr Adams out of the witness box, which stopped him chatting himself to the gallows. At this point in the trial even his earlier incriminating statements were taken with a pinch of salt.*

9. *Dr Harman stating that the patient probably died of her illness rather than the medication, which suggested that alternative professional opinions were valid.*

10. *The Judge, in an exceedingly benign summing up, agreeing that a doctor should relieve suffering even if the measures taken incidentally shorten life.*

Doctor himself said that it was the prattling of the bridge-playing ladies of Meads which started off the rumours.

Supt Hannam encouraged both the gossips and the press to greater heights, partly by his very presence, but also by planting stories of Dr Adams as a mass murderer. It was Hannam's flamboyant ways that aroused the indignation of Percy Hoskins, who considered Hannam to be an unreliable and ambitious man.

Michael Foot said, "The papers would not have run those stories unless there was encouragement by someone in the police".

Lord Devlin proposes that Hannam cultivated the press for his own glorification. True, he was flashy, and looking to go out on a high, but it is to be assumed that the Superintendent's plan was that by hounding the Doctor under the glare of publicity he would crack and either confess or cut and run. Hannam could hardly have miscalculated more comprehensively. Until his arrest Dr Adams was naïve enough to believe that Hannam was in Eastbourne to prove that the rumours were baseless; he was far more convinced of his own innocence than ever the Superintendent could be of his guilt. Dr Adams considered the whole rignmarole was a test set by God, and he was not likely to fail that examination. He was quite convinced that somehow he would be delivered even if the verdict was guilty.

With all the factors for gossip, and so many reasons to keep it going, it is safe to assume that once the Bodkin bandwagon rolled it would pick up momentum.

A barrister says, "The Bodkin Adams case was followed with great interest in the profession, not just because it was a case of *Doctor Murdering Patients for Money*, but because of the personalities involved. The giants of the law were there; Geoffrey Lawrence, the greatest advocate of his time, Patrick Devlin probably the cleverest and ablest judge of the century, and there was also the Attorney-General there by tradition. You don't often get all those together".

Whatever the causes, the gossip was there to be acquired by the resident journalists and fastened on avidly by the national press.

Percy Hoskins, the *Daily Express* reporter said, "People ask me why I made my stand against the publicity. For many reasons: I thought Bodkin was being trussed up by scurrilous reports ready for a monstrous miscarriage of justice. Second, I didn't think he would murder for a few hundred pounds. Thirdly, I didn't trust Hannam, and another factor was that when I talked to his solicitor, Herbert James, he pointed out that it all came down to 'They say' – in other words gossip".

With the exception of the *Daily Express*, the press published highly defamatory material, for which a vindicated Dr Adams later sued them. He also took action against foreign publications sold in the UK, although some escaped. Perhaps the most barefaced example was the American magazine *Newsweek* which came out in the middle of the trial containing photographs of the defendant (400 victims) and the Judge, with text linking Haigh (nine victims) and Christie (seven victims) to the case and mentioning the Hulletts. This led the Judge to enjoin the jury to "avoid such publications and to read only the well-known daily press".

Genuine concern, wagging tongues and jealousy, push-started the slide towards the Old Bailey by forcing the Chief Constable to call in Scotland Yard. Injudicious