

Case study: harold shipman



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shipman began practicing as a doctor in 1974, at the Abraham Ormerod Medical Practice in Todmorden. He was there until 1975 when his partners discovered that he had been obtaining drugs dishonestly for his own use. In 1976 he pleaded guilty to three offences of obtaining pethidine by deception, three offences of unlawful possession of pethidine and two further offences of forging a prescription he was sentenced in Halifax Magistrates court to pay a fine and compensation. In August 1992, he began working as a solo practitioner at a surgery in Hyde he continued to work as a single-handed practitioner until his arrest in September 1998.

In July 1998 the Greater Manchester Police began an inquiry into Kathleen Grundy's death, a patient of Dr Shipman, the inquiry was rapidly widened to include the deaths of Shipman's other patients. On Monday, 31st January 2000 the jury at Preston Crown Court convicted Harold Shipman of 15 murders and of forging a will.

Case Study

Mrs Kathleen Grundy was a widow and lived by herself she was in remarkably good health for her age. She undertook work for many Charitable organisations and had a healthy social life. She spent the evening before her death with a friend and was in normal health when she went home. Mrs Grundy died on 24th June 1998 at the age of 81. Shipman forged a certificate and passed off her death being due to old age. Later scientific analysis of her body tissues in August 1998 showed that she had died of morphine poisoning.

In the few days before her death, Shipman had persuaded Mrs Grundy to take part in a research project into the ageing process, allegedly to be conducted by Manchester University. It emerged later that this was a hoax so he could obtain a sample of her signature, which he used in an attempt to forge a will. This also created an excuse to visit her at home. She visited him on 23rd June, to have her ears syringed and told her that he needed a blood sample for the research project which must be taken early in the morning. He arranged to visit her at about 8. 30am the next morning.

The following day she was due to attend Werneth House but she did not arrive. Friends and colleagues there became concerned as this was out of character for Mrs Grundy and two of them, Mr John Green and Mr Ronald Pickford, went to her house at about midday. They found her lying on the sofa fully dressed. Her body was cold and it was established she was dead. The door to the house was unlocked. They summoned Shipman to the house. Following a perfunctory examination of the body, he said ‘ cardiac arrest’, following the test he had a brief discussion with someone in the coroner’s office and it was agreed that a certificate which stated the cause of death to be ‘ old age’ would be acceptable. There was no record kept of the conversation with the coroner’s office.

When Shipman had left the house Mr Green informed the police, as he was unable to contact Mrs Grundy’s daughter Mrs Angela Woodruff. The officers concerned spoke to Shipman later and he informed them he had called on Mrs Grundy earlier that day because she had been unwell. He did not mention the fact that he had called to take a blood sample. Shipman also told them he had spoken with the coroner’s office and was going to issue a

certificate stating that Mrs Grundy had died of natural causes. The police officers took a quick look at the body and on seeing nothing suspicious took no further action.

The day after the death Shipman spoke to Mrs Woodruff. He told her that he had seen Mrs Grundy on the day before her death just for 'a routine thing'. He was vague and mentioned she had chest pains possibly due to indigestion. Shipman said that he had arranged to collect a blood sample the next morning, when he arrived she was not yet dressed. He then said that some old people complain of feeling unwell a few days before they die and then just die. He inferred that this had happened to Mrs Grundy. He handed Mrs Woodruff the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and said that he had certified the death as being due to old age.

Mrs Woodruff's suspicions were not aroused until she was contacted by the Hamilton Ward legal firm handling her mother's will. Her own law practice in Warwick had usually dealt with her mother's legal affairs. The original will had been lodged with the firm in 1986. Hamilton Ward received a new will the same day that Mrs Grundy died. The new will was badly typed. Mrs Woodruff told the Shipman trial in October: "My mother was a meticulously tidy person. The thought of her signing a document which is so badly typed didn't make any sense. The signature looked strange, it looked too big. The concept of mum signing a document leaving everything to her doctor was unbelievable." [1]

The police arranged for the exhumation of Mrs Grundy's body. The exhumation was vital because forensic evidence was needed to verify the

case of death. Dr Rutherford an expert witness pathologist was instructed to conduct the post-mortem examination. The post-mortem was crucial as it would establish time and cause of death, one would also know if Shipman's version of events are true. The results of the post-mortem examination found no natural explanation for Mrs Grundy's death therefore not supporting Shipman's account. Also questions that were left unanswered for example why had this happened to someone who had been in good health, had been answered. Scientific analysis of the body tissues revealed levels of morphine consistent with the administration of a fatal dose.

Dr John Grenville also provided a report and said that there were a number of false entries in the medical records which had been created after the death to give credibility to Shipman's stories. Firstly that Mrs Grundy was under the weather when he saw her on 23rd June and secondly that Mrs Grundy had been abusing drugs and might have administered the morphine herself. This evidence was very valuable as it proved medical records had been doctored in order to cover Shipman's back.

Forensic evidence proved that Shipman forged Mrs Grundy's will this was one of the main reasons as to why suspicions were aroused in the first place. Shipman wanted to obtain the whole of Mrs Grundy's estate, leaving nothing to her daughter and grandchildren. He drafted the will using his own old-fashioned Brother portable typewriter. When the police came to Shipman's premises and took possession of the typewriter the will was immediately linked to him. This was important as tests would be able to show that if the will had been produced from Shipman's type writer the paper could be matched as well as the ink and tracks that had been used, this evidence

would be enough to prove that it had come from that specific printer.

Although this evidence was valuable shipman could still argue that someone else had used his type writer. Overall the final product looked painstakingly unprofessional and suspicion would be aroused immediately.

Expert hand writing evidence proved them to be forgeries. Shipman forged Mrs Grundy's signature and dated the will 9th June 1998. On that day he staged a 'signing and witnessing' event in his consulting room and must have prepared a document for Mrs Grundy to sign which purported to provide for her consent to take part in some medical research supposedly to be conducted by Manchester University. This document required that Mrs Grundy's signature should be witnessed by two others, who also had to sign and provide their names, addresses and occupations. While Mrs Grundy was at Shipman's surgery on 9th June, Shipman appears to have obtained her signature on this document and then called two patients from his waiting room into the consulting room where they completed and signed the witnesses' part of the document. Shipman must have used this document to copy the three signatures as well as he could. The document would have been valuable to shipman as he had no other means of looking at Mrs Grundy's signature.

Forensic evidence showed the Shipman had forged the signature as it did not match the style of Mrs Grundy's writing and it was blatantly obvious that it was a copy due the fact that Shipman had to break off as he kept looking at the original signature to copy it, it was also noted that the signature Shipman forged was allot bigger than how Mrs Grundy would normally sign.

There were clear conclusions drawn from the Forensic evidence as the post-mortem that Mrs Grundy's death was a clear case of morphine poisoning. Even without this evidence there were a number of questions that did not add up for instance this was a sudden death of an elderly person in good health. There was no explanation for her death. Mrs Grundy's door was unlocked this was also unusual for her as her neighbours mentioned the fact that she was a security conscious person, Shipman implied that Mr's Grundy left the door unlocked after letting him out this vital piece of evidence was a major blow to shipman's case as he had been unable to leave the security system in the condition relatives and friends would have expected it to be.

Even though Shipman had altered Mrs Grundy's medical records to show she was unwell just before her death and that he suspected she had been abusing drugs her medical records still showed she had been in good health and had no potentially fatal conditions that would harm her. Also the cause of death being ' old age', left unanswered question and was quite an inappropriate case of death for a person who had been in such good health.

On the 31st January 2000, after six days of deliberation the jury found Shipman guilty of killing 15 patients by lethal injections of diamorphine, and forging the will of Kathleen Grundy. He was sentenced to 15 consecutive life sentences and it was recommended that he never be released. Shipman also received four years imprisonment for forging the will. Two years after his conviction, Home Secretary David Blunkett confirmed the judge's recommendation that Shipman never be released.

Shipman was officially struck off by the General Medical Council in February 2002 he consistently denied his guilt, disputing the scientific evidence against him. He never made any statements about his actions. His defence tried, but failed, to have the count of murder of Mrs Grundy, where a clear motive was alleged.

Shipman subsequently committed suicide at Wakefield Prison by hanging himself from the window bars of his cell using bed sheets. He was found in his cell at 6: 20 am on 13 January 2004, on the eve of his 58th birthday, and was officially pronounced dead at 8: 10 am.

Bibliography

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[1]Mrs Woodruffs evidence in court