

MOSTLY GHOSTLY INVESTIGATIONS



THE CASE OF MARY TIMNEY

Mostly Ghostly's [Kathleen Cronie](#) tells the story of Mary Timney; the last woman to be publicly executed in Scotland. She will be remembered in a special 150th anniversary Ghost Walk in Dumfries in April

On the morning of April 29, 1862, a dense fog enveloped Dumfries. The air was still, there was an eerie silence and a sense of impending doom. As early as 4am, people started gathering in the area of Buccleuch Street Prison, awaiting what was to be a most harrowing and historically important event. Even as the numbers increased, there remained a sense of dignity, with no rabble or nonsense. In just a few hours, these people and several thousand more, would witness the last public execution of a woman in Scotland.

The story began in the Glenkens area; Carsphad to be precise. A woman named Ann Hannah was discovered battered to death in her home, with the finger of blame pointed firmly at Mary Timney.

Mary, a young Irish woman and mother of four, had visited Ann one fateful day and it seems an argument broke out. The source of this dispute was an alleged encounter between Ann and Mary's husband. Although Mary admitted quarrelling with Ann, it was too late. Based mainly on circumstantial evidence, Mary was sentenced to hang.

Following her incarceration and in the lead up to her execution, Mary became frail, both in body and mind. She feared the potentially painful and humiliating death which awaited her and cried each day for her four weans.

When April 29 arrived, waif-like Mary was lead into the prison yard and when the condemned soul's eyes met the gibbet, she let out the most haunting, blood-curdling scream. She subsequently cried out to be spared, but her pitiful pleas were to make no difference.

Amid the distress, a messenger suddenly arrived, waving a packet. For one brief moment, the thought of a last-minute reprieve must surely have crossed people's minds. Just seconds later, the prison governor threw the letter away in disgust – it was only a request from a London news agency seeking details of the execution. I don't think any of us can imagine how Mary must have felt at this dramatic and fateful moment.

Following more heart-wrenching appeals, Mary cried out that it was Ann who had struck the first blow before Calcraft, her executioner, commenced his grim business. After replacing her cap with a white hood and adjusting the noose, the bolt was drawn and Mary took the last drop into the darkness of oblivion.

Mercifully, Calcraft confirmed her passing as instant and her lifeless body hung for 30 minutes before she was finally taken down and carried inside the prison. In less than two hours the crowd had dissipated and a sense of subdued normality returned to Dumfries town centre.

■ *Mostly Ghostly Investigations is holding a Dumfries Ghost Walk on Sunday, April 29 – the 150th anniversary of Mary Timney's execution. Interestingly, since our walks began in October 2010, a number of participants have reported unusual activity around the old prison area. These include: a woman's arm being touched; a suffocating tightness in the chest; feelings of uneasiness; a cold hand on another woman's face, and a bright flash of light above another lady's head. If you can't wait til April 29, we will be holding a walk on an equally black date in the town's historical calendar – Friday, April 13, the anniversary of the witch burnings on The Whitesands. Both walks start at 7:30pm from The Midsteeple and tickets are available from the Midsteeple Ticket Office or online at www.ticketweb.co.uk. Call 07791 047835 or 07912 145865 or see www.mostlyghostly.org for more information.*