ANNALS OF CRIME

DID THE U.K.'S MOST INFAMOUS FAMILY MASSACRE END IN A WRONGFUL CONVICTION?

For decades, questions have circled the Whitehouse Farm murders. The British justice system has made it extraordinarily difficult to get definitive answers.

By Heidi Blake

July 29, 2024

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The Whitehouse Farm case was an unusual one, because from the outset there were only two plausible killers. Photo Illustration by Joan Wong; Source photographs by Steve Back / ANL / Shutterstock and Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy

Listen • 108 minutes

Whitehouse Farm stood in open fields, facing the bleak Essex salt marshes, its columned portico lit by the moon. It was a midsummer night, nearing 4 A.M., when a patrol car sped toward the property. Three police officers got out at the end of the driveway, and a silver car pulled up behind. The driver, Jeremy Bamber, was the twenty-four-year-old scion of a local farming dynasty; his parents, Nevill and June, occupied the Whitehouse. Bamber had phoned the police half an hour earlier to report a panicked call from his father. His sister, Sheila, had "gone berserk," he said. Her six-year-old twin sons were asleep upstairs, and she had a gun.

Two of the officers told Bamber to follow them. The Whitehouse lay around a bend, concealed by tall trees, and they crept through the darkness until its rear wall came into view. Lights were shining in three windows: the kitchen, a bathroom, and the bedroom where Sheila's twins were sleeping. But the only sound from within was the faint whining of a dog. They cut across a field to the front, where light filtered through the curtains of the master bedroom. Seeing a shadow looming at the window, the men ducked behind a hedge and braced for shots. When none came, they raced back toward the patrol car, the officers radioing for reinforcements.

At the car, Bamber made a confession. The previous night, before heading home from work on the farm, he had taken his father's .22 Anschutz rifle out to shoot rabbits—and he had left the weapon in the kitchen, its magazine still loaded. "Oh, God," he said. "I hope she hasn't done anything silly."

Bamber urged the officers to go to his relatives' aid—"They are all the family I've got," he said—but they refused to enter without backup. It was almost 5 A.M. when a van finally thundered up the lane, carrying a squad of armed officers. Bamber accompanied them to a staging area, a cattle barn facing the back of the house. For two and a half hours, as the sun rose over the fields, officers remained in place, calling through a bullhorn for Sheila to surrender. The only answer was the dog's continual yapping.

At about seven-thirty, a raid team was finally authorized to enter. Inching toward the house, a forward officer reported seeing a woman on the kitchen floor, but it took time to get a better view. The back door was locked, requiring several blows with a sledgehammer to open. When the officers spilled inside, they encountered a gruesome scene. Nevill Bamber lay slumped over an upturned chair by the kitchen hearth, blue pajama pants around his knees, his face resting inside a coal scuttle. Brain tissue spilled from gunshot wounds to his head, and blood had pooled on the floor. He had been shot in the shoulder and the arm, and he appeared to have been battered in a struggle; shattered crockery and shards of a light fixture were scattered on the floor.

The woman whom the officer thought he had spotted was nowhere to be seen. The raid team proceeded quietly, communicating in hand signals and whispers. After hearing movement from above, they used an extending mirror to survey the upstairs landing. As they tilted the glass toward the master bedroom, they saw a woman collapsed in the doorway, her nightgown soaked in blood.

It was Bamber's mother, June. A bullet had been fired between her eyes, and six more through her head, neck, chest, and limbs. The officers found the dog, a Shih Tzu named Crispy, cowering under the bed. Then, across the room, they saw Sheila. She was on her back, in a turquoise nightgown and jewelry. Her father's rifle lay atop her body, her fingers by the trigger, its barrel pointing at a fatal gunshot wound through her chin. Beside her, a bloodstained Bible lay open to Psalms 51-55. The line "Save me from blood guiltiness" was underscored with a streak of red.

In the twins' room, officers found the boys in bed. Daniel was curled on his side with his thumb in his mouth; Nicholas lay on his back, the covers pulled up to his chin. Five bullets had been fired through the back of Daniel's head. Nicholas had been shot three times in the face. The officers paused, stricken. Then they radioed in the news.

"My kid could paint that."

Cartoon by Juan Astasio

Outside, an officer approached the patrol car where Bamber had been told to wait and tapped on the window. "I'm really sorry, Jeremy," he said. "We've found everybody dead." Bamber closed his eyes and began to cry. Another officer climbed in beside him.

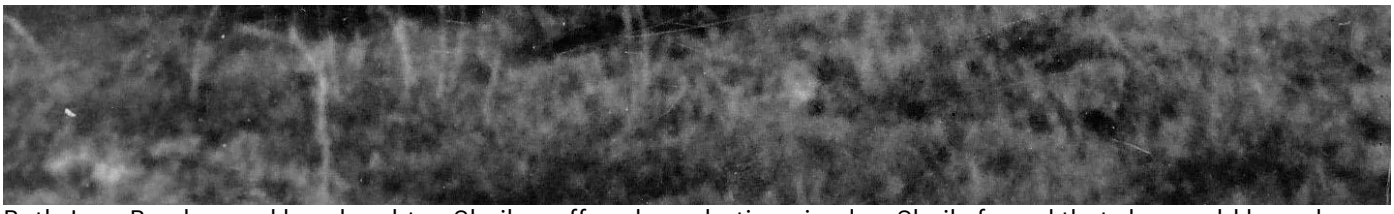
"You said everything would be all right," Bamber said.

"I know," the officer said. "We like to think things will work out."

Seemingly unable to process the news, Bamber begged to speak to his father. When he was reminded that Nevill was dead, he broke down again. "Sheila ought to be in a nuthouse for what she's done," he muttered. Shortly afterward, he was seen retching in a field.

Detective Chief Inspector Taff Jones, a bluff, ruddy-faced Welshman, was ordered to lead the police inquiry. He examined the windows and doors, determining that the house had been locked from the inside. The police surgeon and the coroner's officer examined the bodies and confirmed that Sheila appeared to have slaughtered her family before turning the gun on herself. As more detectives arrived, Jones told them that they were dealing with a clear-cut murder-suicide—a horrific crime, but one with a simple solution.

News of the shooting, which took place on August 7, 1985, tore through the sleepy rural community of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, where the Bambers were regarded as local gentry. The next day, the massacre filled the front pages of the national newspapers. Sheila had been a successful model—known to the press as Bambi—and the papers printed her portrait under such headlines as "FARMHOUSE OF DEATH." In Britain, where gun ownership is tightly controlled, mass shootings are rare, and the public's shock was heightened by the Bambers' social status. Nevill, a former fighter pilot with silver hair and periwinkle eyes, was a staunch Conservative and a longtime magistrate; June was a devout Christian who arranged church flowers and regularly stepped out in her tweed skirt to bring food to the poor. The Bambers' murder instantly became one of the most infamous crimes in the country's history.



Both June Bamber and her daughter, Sheila, suffered psychotic episodes. Sheila feared that she would harm her twin sons, but also feared leaving them with June. Photograph from Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy

The story gained new salience when reporters discovered that Jeremy and Sheila had been adopted: his biological father was a senior Buckingham Palace official who had conceived him during an affair, while her mother was the teen-age daughter of a chaplain who participated in the Queen's coronation. The Whitehouse itself—a Georgian manor set in the landscape that featured in Susan Hill's famous ghost story "The Woman in Black"—acquired a kind of ghoulish celebrity. The occupant before the Bambers turned out to have drowned himself in a water tank. His father had also died by suicide, drinking poison in his room.

The Bambers had kept their personal affairs private, but as police began making inquiries a troubling picture emerged. June had been racked by mental illness since soon after their wedding, apparently brought on by grief at their inability to conceive. She had been hospitalized with depression, psychosis, and paranoia, undergoing multiple courses of electroshock therapy. Her psychiatrist told police that her illness had caused a "distortion of her already strong religious beliefs," so that she saw "everything in terms of good and evil"—a pathology that, he said, had done terrible harm to her daughter.

Sheila had complained that, from her earliest years, her mother had treated her coldly. In her teens, June called her "the Devil's child" and ascribed her youthful behavior—flirting with boys, sunbathing naked—to satanic impulses. By seventeen, Sheila had left for London, launching her modelling career and falling in love with an artist named Colin Caffell. The couple moved in together, but the relationship was turbulent. "Violence was just below the surface," Caffell later wrote. "There were even times we could have killed each other." When Sheila

became pregnant, June insisted that they get married—but, soon after the ceremony, the baby was stillborn. Another pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, and Sheila, who saw the losses as divine punishment, came to believe that she exuded an "evil aura." After she finally gave birth to Nicholas and Daniel, Caffell left her for another woman.

Alone with the twins in her London flat, Sheila unravelled. Besieged by hallucinations and paranoia, she contacted social services and said that she feared she might harm the babies. When the twins were four, her family arranged for her to be treated at St. Andrew's Hospital, the exclusive facility where her mother had undergone electroshock. June's psychiatrist, Dr. Hugh Ferguson, saw clear symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. "Sheila had bizarre delusions," he later told police. "She thought her sons would seduce her and saw evil in both of them"—particularly Nicholas, who she feared was "a woman hater" and "a potential murderer." Her gravest concern was that she might be capable of killing the boys. Yet Ferguson considered this unlikely. He prescribed an antipsychotic and discharged her.

On her own, Sheila began skipping her drugs and self-medicating with cannabis and cocaine. She said she was hearing voices and being chased by the Devil. Five months before the killings, she was home with the twins in London when she flew into a frenzy, beating the walls with her fists and accusing people who approached of trying to kill her. "I was extremely scared for everyone's safety," a friend who was present told the police, noting that Sheila "was behaving like a person possessed." She claimed to hear the voice of God.

Nevill arranged for his daughter to be readmitted to St. Andrew's, where Ferguson noted that she had "relapsed into an acute psychotic state" and that she believed those around her were conspiring in "an attempt by the Devil to take away her godliness." He discharged her a few weeks later with a prescription for a new

antipsychotic—to be administered intravenously each month, so that she couldn't skip a dose.

By then, Sheila's modelling career had crumbled, and she had picked up cleaning jobs, where supervisors complained that she turned up dishevelled and dirty and stared blankly into space. Her condition seemed to worsen during visits to the Whitehouse. On one occasion, left alone with her thirteen-year-old cousin, Sheila offered the girl drugs, talked about suicide, and described herself as a "white witch." She told her father's secretary that "all people are bad" and that some "deserve to be killed." Yet, a month before the murders, when she received the last injection of her antipsychotic, Sheila persuaded the doctor to give her a half dose.

The day after the shootings, detectives assembled in the dining room of the Whitehouse to discuss their findings. The officers concluded that all the evidence suggested Sheila had suffered a breakdown and had murdered the family before shooting herself. The pathologist who had conducted the autopsies confirmed that he had not found "anything to contradict the suicide theory." He said that, though Sheila had sustained two gunshot wounds, one to her neck and the other under her chin, the first of these would not have been immediately fatal, and the second was consistent with suicide.

With the matter settled, officers were instructed to clean up the scene. They hurled bloody mattresses, bedding, and carpets from the upstairs windows, telling farmworkers to burn them. The bodies were released for cremation. To all intents and purposes, the case was closed.

The morning after the killings, Jeremy Bamber was at his cottage, talking to police, when his cousin Ann Eaton appeared at the door, having learned of the tragedy from a neighbor. Ann, an angular, inquisitive woman of thirty-five, came in and perched on the sofa, holding Bamber's hand as he continued his statement. Listening to him describe how he had left the murder weapon in the kitchen, she began to watch more intently. As she recalled later, "I became puzzled,

more puzzled, then suspicious of Jeremy and then bloody suspicious of Jeremy." She rifled in her pocket for a scrap of paper and furtively began taking notes.

Ann's family had long been wary of Bamber. He was a delicate-featured young man who described himself as "a bit velvet" and flouted the conventions of country life, keeping bohemian company and sometimes wearing makeup. Ann's father, Robert Boutflour—an upright man with a helmet of white hair, who was married to June's sister—was particularly disdainful. "He scorned the Young Farmers Club, to which most farmers' sons belonged," Robert wrote in his diary. "Those remarks that he did make to any of his relatives, were designed to give displeasure." He considered his nephew a degenerate with a "constant craving for money."

Bamber had been a lacklustre student at Gresham's—one of the country's most prestigious boarding schools—and had infuriated teachers by brewing beer and sneaking out to watch punk bands. Robert liked to note that Bamber's classmates had called him "the Bastard"; he wrote in his diary that, after the other students learned of his adoption, "he never made another friend." Back home after leaving school, Bamber had grown cannabis behind the cattle shed and scandalized the family by carrying on an affair with a married mother of three. Though he helped his father on the farm, he could be unreliable, taking off to go travelling, and flirting with careers as a scuba diver and a cocktail waiter. Nevill had hoped that his son would eventually take over Whitehouse Farm, but Robert disapproved. "Why don't you throw the bugger out?" he urged.

Though the Bambers and the Boutflours weren't on especially intimate terms, their farming and business affairs were intertwined. Among their most valuable shared assets was the nearby Osea Road vacation park, on the River Blackwater. That spring, there had been a break-in at the park's office, in which almost a thousand pounds was stolen, and the relatives considered Bamber the prime suspect. Now they began to wonder whether he had murdered his family to seize

control of his parents' estate. Their alarm intensified when Bamber returned from a visit to an accountant and announced that, owing to inheritance taxes, he would have to begin selling off assets. "I felt on duty, wide awake, and trying to catch everything Jeremy said," Ann wrote about that day.

Listening to Bamber talk to the police, Ann was outraged by his stark account of his mother's mental illness; she felt that he was "screwing Aunt June into the ground." Then Bamber's girlfriend arrived at the cottage and told officers that, on the night of the murders, he had called to say, "There's something wrong at home," before he headed to the Whitehouse. Ann was shocked. Why had he delayed hurrying to his family's aid to make such a call?

At Ann's farmhouse, the family conferred about the crime. Robert thought it obvious that "Jeremy had shot the family and tried to put the blame on Sheila." He considered his niece "a featherbrained girl" who would have been incapable of firing a rifle accurately. Ann agreed. She noted that Sheila was so uncoördinated that she sometimes missed the cup when pouring tea, and wondered how she could have overpowered her father—a tall, fit man of sixty-one who she felt sure would have "gone after Sheila like a lion-tamer." They all thought it bizarre that the rifle's silencer, which was usually attached, was not on the gun when it was retrieved from Sheila's body. Reasoning that the silencer would have made the rifle too long for Sheila to reach the trigger and shoot herself, they concluded that Bamber must have unscrewed it and concealed it after committing the murder. "It was a frightening moment," Ann wrote. "We all became extremely worried that Jeremy might realise we suspected him and come after us."

In the morning, Bamber's cousins went to the local police station and asked to see Taff Jones, the head of the investigation. In his office, they insisted that Sheila "couldn't possibly have methodically killed everybody" and explained their suspicions. Jones was impatient; in his view, the case was closed. He rose to his

feet and thundered, "I can't put up with all this nonsense!" before marching the family out. "He was like a RAVING RED BULL," Ann noted later.

They made their way back to Bamber's cottage, where they found him crying. Ann held him as he sobbed, taking the opportunity to examine his bare arms for marks of a struggle, though she saw none. Eventually, a doctor arrived and wrote a prescription for Valium. Still, Bamber said he couldn't bear to go back to the Whitehouse; he was haunted by his family's faces. Ann volunteered to be the official key-holder to the crime scene.

The following morning, she stood in the Whitehouse kitchen and said, "Give us a clue, Uncle Nevill." Then she noticed a pair of bloodstained underpants soaking in a bucket—Sheila had been menstruating. She took them to the sink, and as she stood there she studied the window, wondering if Bamber could have escaped through it and locked it from the outside.

Later that day, Ann's father and brother joined her to search the property for evidence and valuables, agreeing to take them away "for safekeeping." Ann gathered jewelry, while her father checked Nevill's clothes for cash, and her brother, David Boutflour, hunted for firearms, retrieving five guns. Only toward the end of their search did they find the missing silencer. Peering into a cupboard under the stairs, David spotted it protruding from a cardboard box containing a few hundred rounds of ammunition. They put it in Ann's car, along with the guns and the jewelry, and took it back to her house for closer inspection. Later, Robert told the police that their officers had overlooked a crucial clue. The silencer appeared to be daubed with blood.

On the day of the Bambers' funeral, mourners lined the narrow streets of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, and camera crews surrounded the village's small stone church. Delivering the eulogies, the vicar praised Nevill and June as "valued leaders" of the parish, and asked "God's mercy for Sheila, sadly and tragically deranged."

As the congregants emerged into a burst of flashbulbs, Bamber cried out, and his legs seemed to buckle. He was filmed shaking with sobs, supported by his girlfriend as he struggled toward the hearses. His relatives watched bitterly. They had unsuccessfully urged police to bug the funeral cars, hoping to catch Bamber in a confession. Now, as the procession pulled away, he seemed to give them a knowing smile. "Little bugger," Ann's husband, Peter, said. "He thinks he's got away with it."

"I hired you to work full time and here I find you at home at night asleep in your bed."

Cartoon by Brendan Loper

By then, the relatives had found an ally on the police force: Detective Sergeant Stan Jones (no relation to Taff). Jones was a grizzled murder cop, an instinctive investigator who spoke fast and tended to wear his tie askew. Ann had taken him aside at Bamber's cottage to intimate that she was "strongly suspicious" of her cousin, and he had privately agreed. When the family discovered the silencer, Jones was delighted. "I was looking for something to go and arrest Bamber for," he said. Examining the device at the Eatons' house, he noted what appeared to be blood on its end, as well as a spot of red pigment that the family believed was paint scraped from the Whitehouse kitchen hearth as Nevill struggled to wrest the gun away from his killer. The silencer was sent off for testing, and Jones arranged for a paint sample to be taken from the hearth.

Four days before the funeral, Ann had invited Bamber to the Whitehouse, to observe his reaction to the crime scene. Robert, who came along, wrote in his diary that Bamber arrived in a "terrible state," trembling and pale, obviously heavily dosed with Valium, and "hardly able to walk or talk." Ann thought it odd that he showed no desire to know the details of how his family had died. "He looked absolutely petrified and never asked any questions," she recalled.

After being shown around the house, though, Bamber settled in his father's kitchen chair and noted that valuable items appeared to be missing. He angrily instructed Ann not to take anything else. Later that week, she returned to find him with an appraiser from Sotheby's, examining an ancestral portrait, a collection of silverware, and a Meissen china clock. Her father reported soon afterward that he had spotted Bamber filling the trunk of his car with "family treasures."

After the funeral, Bamber was largely absent from Tolleshunt D'Arcy. To the family's disgust, he and his girlfriend left the reception and went to a local Caribbean restaurant, where they spent the evening drinking champagne and cocktails with friends, before heading off on a windsurfing vacation. They returned

briefly for the twins' burial in London, then sailed to Amsterdam to buy marijuana.

With Bamber gone, Ann and Robert let themselves into the Whitehouse and discovered that it was indeed possible to climb out the kitchen window before pulling it closed from the outside. Ann also sneaked into Bamber's back yard hunting for evidence; she had learned that June had bought a bicycle shortly before her death, and she suspected that Bamber had used it as a getaway vehicle. She found the bike propped against Bamber's wall, and Robert spent hours traversing the fields between Bamber's cottage and the Whitehouse, plotting out a viable route. Then he sat up all night constructing an elaborate theory of the crime, which he outlined in his diary.

Robert imagined his nephew cycling through the moonlit fields and creeping into the Whitehouse, where he armed himself with his father's rifle. During a struggle with Nevill in the kitchen, the silencer collided with the hearth. As he killed his parents and nephews, Bamber sprayed their bodies with bullets to "make it look like the work of a maniac." Then he roused his sleeping sister, saying, "Wake up Sheila, Mummy wants you to say prayers with her," before guiding her into the master bedroom, where June lay dead. Robert imagined him saying, "Lie down here darling, put the bible on your chest," then shooting Sheila and escaping through the window. "I am convinced that Jeremy has sold his soul to the Devil," Robert wrote.

As the family conducted its private investigations, they urged Stan Jones to pursue their theory of the case. "I had so much pressure being heaped on me," Jones later wrote. "The family knew I believed them." Though the official view of the crime had not changed, several officers now shared his skepticism. Among them was Mick Barlow, a junior detective with a prominent brown mustache, who had noted

at the funeral that Bamber appeared to be wearing dark makeup "to give others the impression he was looking drawn and emotional."

Barlow began meeting with the relatives, sharing information about the case and absorbing their theories. He went to the Whitehouse to conduct experiments on the kitchen window, and visited Bamber's cottage, where he, too, found June's bicycle. When Taff Jones, the lead detective, learned of Barlow's unauthorized sleuthing, he ordered him to stop. "He gave me a proper dressing down," Barlow (who couldn't be reached for comment) wrote later. "He wanted no more of it."

After Robert appealed to the chief constable of the Essex Police, a high-ranking officer was assigned to review all the evidence. When the results came back, though, they confirmed that everything pointed to Sheila. "It was clear to us the investigation was stagnant and going nowhere," Robert wrote. Then, the following day, a fresh development transformed the case. Exactly a month after the shootings, Bamber's girlfriend came forward to accuse him of plotting his family's murders.

Julie Mugford, a twenty-one-year-old student teacher with gap teeth and dark curls, had met Bamber while waiting tables at a pizza parlor called Sloppy Joe's. Bamber was moonlighting as a bartender there, and he dazzled her. But she told investigators that the relationship had been tempestuous and increasingly clouded by his hatred of his family.

Mugford was interviewed by Stan Jones, who had taken her into protective custody. She told him that Bamber had been planning the killings for more than a year. "He said he would like to commit the perfect murder," she said, adding, "All Jeremy wanted was money." Bamber had told her that he would arrange the scene to frame his sister, then slip out through the kitchen window and escape by

bicycle. “I got very upset and cried and insisted that he did not mention it again,” Mugford said.

Before the murders, she said, Bamber had called and said, “The crime will have to be tonight or never.” She had been smoking marijuana and had simply told him “not to be so stupid.” When he called again after 3 A.M. and told her something was wrong at the farm, she was feeling “dozy,” and didn’t appreciate what he meant until after she returned to bed. Then, she said, “I knew that Jerry had murdered his family.” She told the police that Bamber revealed the details in the ensuing days. He had tried to toughen himself up by strangling rats with his bare hands, but had eventually realized that he couldn’t do it—so he had decided to hire a hit man, a local plumber. Bamber had paid him two thousand pounds and told him to call from the Whitehouse once the crime was complete.

Taff Jones was attending a dinner dance at his golf club when he was summoned to the station. “This had better be fucking good,” he declared. When he was told that Mugford had implicated Bamber, “Taff’s face went from red to white in a split second,” an officer told me. Bamber was immediately named the prime suspect.

Taff Jones travelled to London, where Bamber was staying at Sheila’s former apartment. Early the next morning, he pounded on the door and Bamber opened it drowsily. “I am arresting you on suspicion of murdering your mother, father, sister, and her two children,” Jones said. Bamber stared at him. “I don’t believe what I am hearing,” he said. “It must be something else you want me for—not murder.”

Back at the station, Bamber insisted that Mugford had invented the story after he broke off their relationship. “If she could put me behind bars then nobody else could have me,” he said. (Mugford did not respond to requests for comment.) In his cell that night, he asked an officer to pass Mugford a solicitous note:

“Thinking about you. Sorry for splitting up. I love you!!” He signed it with his pet name, Stinko.

As the interrogations continued, Bamber insisted that he loved his parents. He acknowledged that his relationship with his mother had been both “rough and smooth,” and that they had clashed over her religious views, but he said that they had recently found “much more common ground.” Asked if he disliked Sheila, he replied, “I loved my sister but could not understand in the last few years her mental illness.” When Taff Jones suggested that he had sometimes seemed to be surprisingly cheerful since the murders, Bamber ascribed it to “manic depression.”

Privately, the detective still doubted Bamber’s guilt. “I think we are barking up the wrong tree,” he told a colleague. Before long, Stan Jones was brought in to take a more aggressive approach. Bamber mostly remained calm under questioning, but he lost his temper when told that more than twenty bullets had been fired into his family members’ bodies. “You’re a hard bastard,” he said. Stan Jones told the stenographer, “I would like you to note that the accused is continually staring at me.”

Though Bamber steadfastly denied any involvement in the crime, he made two important admissions. First, when asked if there was a way to get into the Whitehouse when it was locked, he revealed that he had known since childhood how to jimmy the windows. Second, he admitted to carrying out the theft at the Osea Road vacation park. “I knew I would be the No. 1 suspect but that they couldn’t prove it,” he said.

The police couldn’t prove his guilt in the murder case, either: Mugford’s testimony was crucial, but she was an imperfect witness. She had confessed to helping Bamber perform the Osea Road burglary—and to conducting a string of check frauds with one of her housemates. Then the plumber whom she had accused of

being a hit man turned out to have an irrefutable alibi. After holding Bamber for five days, the police were forced to concede that they had nothing concrete connecting him to the killings. He was charged with burglary and released on bail. When he left the station, in a friend's white Jaguar, plainclothes detectives tailed him. He went out for the night, first to a wine bar and then to an upscale strip club called Stringfellows, before returning to Sheila's apartment at dawn.

As Bamber tried to go on with his life, the suspicions about him spread. Four days after he was released, the *Sun* caused a sensation by reporting that he had been "trying to cash in on the horror" of his family's deaths by selling "topless and full-frontal nude" pictures of his sister. Bamber, the article said, had offered the images "for a substantial sum," promising that they "show everything right down to the last detail." The next day, Bamber left the country with a friend, bound for Saint-Tropez.

By then, Taff Jones had been sidelined, and the inquiry had a new leader: Detective Superintendent Mike Ainsley, a narrow-eyed, jowly man with a reputation for investigative vigor. Ainsley requested Boutflour's notes on the case and became even more convinced of Bamber's guilt. Officers on the scene the night of the murders suggested that they had found Bamber's behavior strange. Instead of calling 999, the U.K.'s emergency line, he had taken the time to look up the number for the local police station. When they passed his car on the way to the Whitehouse, he seemed to be driving suspiciously slowly. Some said that he appeared oddly calm during the siege, or that his displays of weeping and retching felt false. The officer who escorted Bamber home said that he "showed little signs of any emotion." As soon as they reached his cottage, he made himself a cup of coffee and a bacon sandwich.

"I talk to myself because I listen."

Cartoon by Maggie Larson

New forensic testing also raised doubts about Sheila's guilt. Swabs taken from her hands found unusually little lead for someone who had repeatedly loaded and fired a rifle, and her feet were surprisingly clean. The paint sample taken from the hearth at the Whitehouse matched the red paint on the silencer that the relatives had discovered—and scratches matching its surface were found on the underside of the mantel.

DNA testing was not yet widely used, but scientists retrieved a flake of dried blood from the silencer's internal baffles and made a decisive discovery: the blood type matched Sheila's. An expert concluded that the blood was back spatter from the wounds to Sheila's throat, and tests confirmed that she would have been unable to reach the trigger of the rifle to shoot herself with the silencer attached. The police were now ready to assert that Sheila had been murdered.

Ainsley sent a report to the director of public prosecutions, describing Bamber as a "calculated killer" who had murdered his family for the "vast wealth" he stood to gain. Returning from Saint-Tropez in late September, Bamber was arrested in the customs hall at Dover. The following day, he was arraigned on five murder charges and held without bail. As he was driven away to Norwich Prison, he spotted a group of friends and threw them a smile. The resulting press photograph of the accused killer grinning in the back of a police van became one of the most notorious images of the crime.

Bamber's attorney, a distinguished Queen's Counsel named Geoffrey Rivlin, had serious concerns about his client's case. The blood in the silencer presented a grave difficulty. Bamber suggested that his relatives had planted it, but Rivlin dismissed this as too "far-fetched" to present in court.

As the trial approached, a preternatural calm seemed to descend on Bamber. "Why should they convict an innocent man of such a terrible charge?" he wrote to a friend. He appeared in court wearing a double-breasted blue suit, a fresh white shirt, and a striped tie. Presented with five murder charges, he pleaded "not guilty" to each.

The prosecution argued that he was a "skilled, cold, calculating killer," and witnesses said that he despised Nevill and June. Robert Boutflour recalled Bamber saying, "I could easily kill my parents." Nevill's secretary, Barbara Wilson, described how Bamber had asked her to clean out his father's office after the murders, instructing her in an "arrogant and nasty" tone to dispose of everything. Several people who knew Sheila attested to her inexperience with guns. Her psychiatrist, Dr. Ferguson, acknowledged her previous breakdowns and her troubled relationship with June—but said that he could not envisage her harming her father or her sons.

Mugford, wearing a prim floral blouse and a pencil skirt, spent more than five hours in the witness box, trembling and sobbing as she described Bamber's plot. Asked why she had concealed his crime for so long, she said, "I was scared—just scared—what Jeremy might do."

"How were you able to cope with remaining in his company, going out to dinner with him, sleeping with him?" Rivlin asked.

"This was the only reason I went to the police," she said. "Not because I felt he was slipping away from me, but because I could not cope with such a hideous thing."

When Bamber took the stand, his testimony was so quiet that the judge frequently had to tell him to speak up. He insisted that he loved his parents and had never talked of harming them, suggesting that witnesses' recollections had been skewed by the allegations against him. "It's a psychological thing, isn't it?" he said. Asked why his own uncle might have lied about him, he replied, "I can only surmise reasons, and I think it is very dangerous to do so." Bamber lost his composure only once under cross-examination, when asked why he had left a gun lying around in a house where two children slept. "I was being lackadaisical," he said in a whisper. "I didn't know what was going to happen."

After seventeen days, the prosecution and the defense had rested their cases, and Judge Maurice Drake, in accordance with British legal custom, summed up the evidence for the jury. Peering down from the bench in an elaborate white wig, he acknowledged that Sheila was "quite clearly a disturbed woman" but said there was "certainly no evidence" that she was in a psychotic state on the night of the murders. She was slender, making it "very unlikely indeed that she fought and overcame that tough farmer father," and her hands and feet were so clean as to make it "inconceivable" that she had committed the killings. The paint on the silencer proved that it had been on the gun during the struggle in the kitchen, he

went on, and experts said that the blood inside it was "overwhelmingly likely" to be Sheila's.

Following several hours of deliberations, the jury announced that it had reached a verdict, with a majority of 10–2. The courtroom was silent, except for the sobs of two jurors. As the foreman read out five guilty counts, Bamber sank into his chair, his features constricted in horror. The judge ordered him to stand. "Your conduct in planning and carrying out the killing of five members of your family was evil, almost beyond belief," he said. Bamber was sentenced to life in prison.

Outside the court, Robert Boutflour gave a triumphant speech. He described Sheila as a "fun-loving girl" and thanked Ainsley for his "painstaking and diligent" work on the case. For decades, until his death, he would refer to his nephew by his prisoner number. "We cried with absolute RELIEF," Ann Eaton later wrote.

The police were mocked in the press for having been fooled by Bamber. The *News of the World* printed a cartoon of a corpse being hauled from a river, its feet sheathed in cement and an axe in its mouth, while a detective declared, "It's an open and shut case—suicide." The chief constable held a lunch at police headquarters to offer the family a formal apology.

Bamber was incarcerated alongside many of the country's most prolific rapists and murderers at Wormwood Scrubs, a Victorian prison whose own warden had described it as a "penal dustbin." The poet Ken Smith, who taught writing classes there, recalled Bamber as a slender, boyish figure, who talked constantly about his determination to clear his name. "What struck me was the strength of his conviction, and the strength it must have taken to maintain it day by day," Smith wrote in a book about his time at the prison. "He would have to be a very good actor, or a very clever psychopath, or a very innocent man." Yet, as time went on, Bamber seemed to fade. "He grew greyer, yellower, more withdrawn, turning into

the colour of old newspapers," Smith wrote. "Prison was beginning to drown him in its silence."

Twenty-three years later, Sarah Hanover was at loose ends. She was thirty-seven and living alone in a remote Midlands hamlet; a long-term relationship had ended, and her business, a small art gallery, had gone bust. Searching for something to occupy her mind, she picked up a book about the Whitehouse Farm killings and found herself engrossed. Bamber was one of Britain's most reviled murderers—a "resident monster of the public imagination," in Ken Smith's words—but as Hanover read about the evidence that had secured his conviction she began to question his guilt.

The prosecution's assertion that Sheila couldn't have dominated her father physically seemed to overlook the fact that Nevill had evidently been shot four times upstairs before he was finally killed in the kitchen. "You could easily overpower a man that had been shot and was bleeding," Hanover told me. She also puzzled over Mugford's role. "If my boyfriend had access to guns and he told me he was going to murder his family, I would have gone to the police," she said. She became increasingly preoccupied with the case. Eventually, at a friend's urging, she wrote to Bamber.

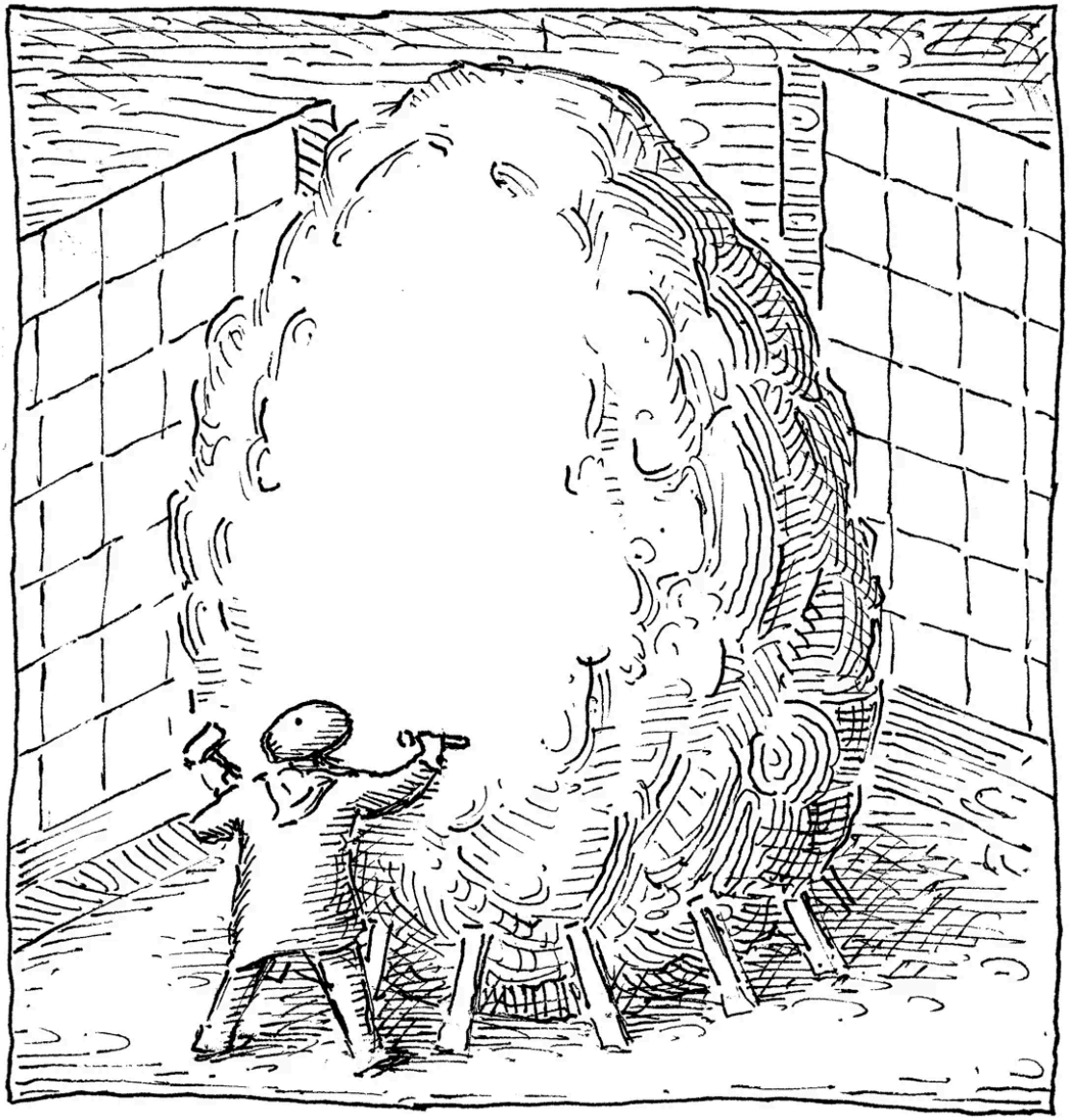
After Jeremy Bamber was convicted, he became what one writer called a "resident monster of the public imagination." Photograph from ANL / Shutterstock

By then, Bamber had been through two failed appeals and had made multiple unsuccessful applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which examines potential miscarriages of justice. He had complained repeatedly about police malfeasance, but those claims were dismissed after inquiries by the City of London Police and Scotland Yard. Yet he wrote to Hanover that he remained determined to prove his innocence.

They began corresponding, and after a few months he invited her to visit him at Full Sutton, the prison in the North of England where he was being held under maximum security. When she saw him in the visiting hall, she was taken aback. He was tall and burly—nothing like the waifish figure she remembered from the

front pages—and his dark hair was graying. She told me that she found him warm and easy to talk to, though she saw "a depth and a sadness" in his eyes.

After the visit, Hanover and Bamber spoke almost every day on the phone, sometimes for hours. She learned that he had undergone multiple psychiatric assessments in prison, which had determined that he was not a psychopath. His most recent assessment, from 2009, also placed him within the "low-normal" range for "impression management," meaning that he was not especially skilled at influencing the way others perceived him. "It is hard to sustain the view that Jeremy Bamber is so expert in deceptive self-presentation as to maintain this front over a variety of different assessors, different assessment instruments, and different times," the psychiatrist had concluded.



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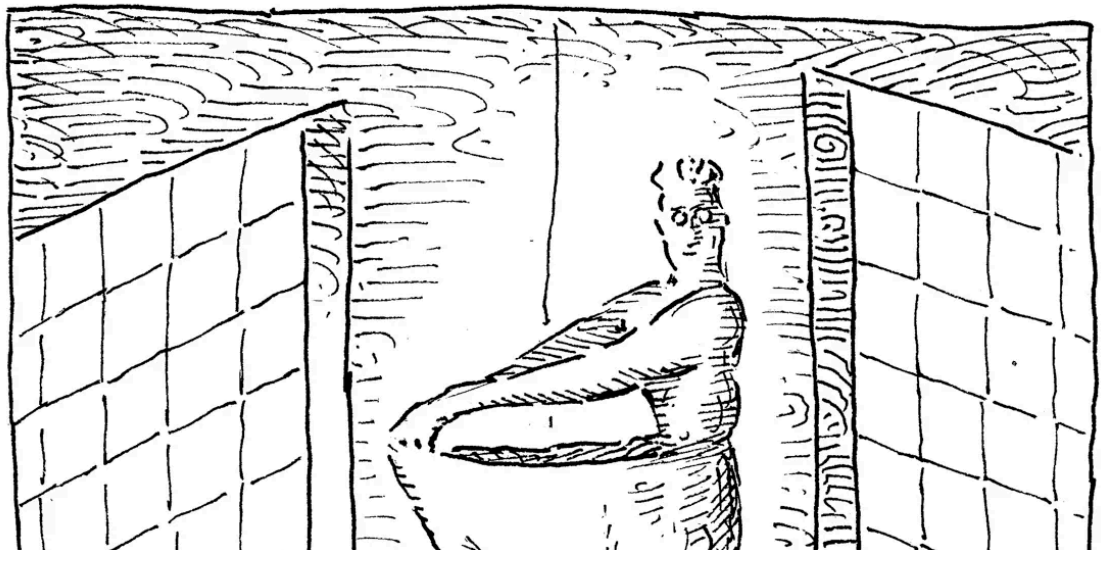


Cartoon by John O'Brien

Open cartoon gallery

In time, Hanover had come to believe Bamber. "You know from his nature that he didn't do it," she told me. "I would trust him with my life." She decided to help him reëxamine his case. He sent her copies of thousands of records that he kept in his cell, and, after contacting attorneys who had represented him over the years, she drove up and down the country collecting documents. Then she took them all back to her thatched cottage and started to read.

Hanover was surprised to discover that many of the people who had been instrumental in securing the verdict against Bamber were enriched by his conviction. Since murderers are forbidden to inherit money from their victims, June and Nevill's fortune had passed to his aunt, his uncle, and his cousins.

The rural dynasty that Bamber had been adopted into occupied a series of impressive properties. June and Nevill inhabited the Whitehouse. June's elderly mother, Mabel Speakman, was living out her last days in a white-fronted mansion called Vaulty Manor. She also owned the farm where her older daughter, Pamela, lived with Robert Boutflour.

Ann and her husband, Peter, were in a more precarious position at the time of the murders. They had significant debts, and were hoping to profit from Little Renters, a modest fifty-acre farm that Nevill had bought at their request. Ann had dreamed of living at Vaulty—a prospect that seemed to be drawing nearer as Speakman grew increasingly frail. But, a few weeks before the shootings, Bamber had told her that his family intended to buy Vaulty for themselves, using money gained by selling Little Renters. She was so furious that she tore down all the wallpaper in her bathroom. "What Jeremy had told me was a threat," she said to police.

After the murders, the jeopardy only heightened. With June dead, Bamber stood to inherit half of his grandmother's estate. Robert Boutflour was so alarmed that he arranged for Speakman, on her deathbed, to cut Bamber out of her will. Still, Bamber remained June and Nevill's heir—meaning that he could sell Little Renters whenever he chose. (Ann and Peter Eaton mostly declined to answer questions for this story, but the family has strongly denied that their suspicions of Bamber were influenced by financial considerations.)

The jury was largely unaware of these family tensions, even though they had played out while the Eatons and the Boutflours were securing much of the crucial evidence in the case. Not only had they found the silencer; Robert Boutflour had given the police a dossier outlining a vision of the murders that Detective Superintendent Ainsley appears to have followed closely. Some of Robert's theories were strikingly eccentric; upon hearing that Bamber had gone windsurfing after the funeral, he became convinced that he had worn a wetsuit during the killings, then washed away the "blood splashings" in the sea. According

to Mugford, Bamber had actually borrowed a friend's wetsuit for the trip. Still, Ainsley told prosecutors that he suspected Bamber had worn the suit that night. He also clung to the theory that Bamber had escaped through the kitchen window and locked it behind him, even after inspections proved that it was impossible to close one of the two latches from the outside.

Hanover was interested to learn that, as Julie Mugford recounted what Bamber had told her about the crime, some of her testimony bore notable similarities to the family's version. Mugford had stated that the Bible was placed on Sheila's chest—something a police officer had told Ann, even though it had actually been beside her body. She also identified the kitchen window as an escape route and the bicycle as the getaway vehicle. (The family has denied discussing their theories with Mugford.) Other claims were plainly incorrect: that Nevill had been shot seven times, rather than eight—a detail erroneously reported in several newspapers—and that June had been shot in her sleep, when she had died in the bedroom doorway.

Bamber admitted to Hanover that he had treated Mugford badly. He had been unfaithful, and the relationship had grown more tumultuous after his family's deaths. Mugford had become jealous when a gay friend came to visit Bamber, complaining to a friend of hers that the two were "always cuddling together." After overhearing Bamber making a date with another woman, she became so enraged that she slapped him and smashed a mirror, before he shoved her onto a bed. When Bamber eventually told Mugford that he no longer loved her, she tried to smother him with a pillow. "If you were dead you would always be with me," she said. Only after he finally broke off the relationship for good had she gone to Stan Jones to accuse him of murder. Even Judge Drake, who strongly encouraged the members of the jury to return a guilty verdict, warned them to approach Mugford's testimony with "a great degree of caution," noting the "possible motive she might have to tell lies."

Attesting to Mugford's credibility, the prosecution had said during the trial that she had not sold her story to the tabloids. But, immediately after the verdict, she sold an interview to the *News of the World* for twenty-five thousand pounds. The resulting article, which ran under the headline "I TRIED TO SMOTHER THE SLEEPING BAMBI BEAST," gave details of the couple's sex life, and included a semi-nude photo shoot. After Bamber pointed out in his second appeal that she had sold the story, Mugford insisted that her testimony had not been motivated by the hope of profit. She did, however, allow that the fee could be considered "blood money." She added, "All I can say is that I bought a flat."

Another detail from the appeal intrigued Hanover. Prosecutors had opted not to pursue Mugford for her check frauds, after her bank agreed not to press charges. When the bank manager was questioned about it, he indicated that Stan Jones had accompanied Mugford when she came in to ask for leniency.

Cartoon by Roz Chast

Open cartoon gallery

The police denied influencing the bank's decision, and Jones strongly disputed going there with her. "You wouldn't have dreamed of it because that would come out later on and spoil our case," he said. But that wasn't the only question around the detective's role. Colin Caffell, Sheila's ex-husband, complained shortly before the trial about Jones's handling of a statement that he'd submitted. In the original handwritten version, Caffell recalled Bamber offering sympathy because "I'd had a rough deal all along, in respect of Sheila's illness." Yet, when the statement was typed, the pronoun was changed to suggest that Bamber felt *he'd* been mistreated. Caffell wrote to the police that the error altered "the whole inflection of the sentence," but that Jones had told him it didn't matter. "Whatever you do don't say

anything about it in the witness box," he said, according to Caffell. "It'll cause all sorts of trouble."

The trial judge had cited Dr. Ferguson's testimony—that he did not consider Sheila likely to harm her father or children—as key evidence. As Hanover dug into the psychiatrist's background, she learned that this was not the only time he was involved in a case of mass shooting. Ferguson had assessed a teacher, Paul Paget-Lewis, who had begun stalking one of his pupils, and concluded that he was not mentally ill and should be allowed to keep his job. After Paget-Lewis threw a brick through the boy's window and slashed his father's car tires, Ferguson recommended that he be transferred to teach elsewhere. The teacher subsequently shot four people, killing the boy's father and the son of the school's deputy headmaster. When he was arrested, he asked the police, "Why didn't you stop me before I did it? I gave all the warning signs." (Ferguson did not respond to questions about his assessments of Sheila and Paget-Lewis.)

Still, the blood in the silencer seemed to render everything else irrelevant. The biggest breakthrough for Bamber's case came in 2001, after the first DNA tests were run on the device and failed to find Sheila's profile. Scientists did find DNA from at least two other people, whom they could not identify, because the blood evidence in the case had been mysteriously destroyed a few years earlier. Nonetheless, the absence of Sheila's DNA was enough for the Criminal Cases Review Commission to refer Bamber's case for a fresh appeal. If Sheila's blood was not in the silencer, the commission stated, the remaining evidence would not be "sufficiently secure so as to maintain the safety of a conviction."

The following year, the Court of Appeal dismissed the DNA evidence—along with fifteen other grounds for appeal. The judges decreed that Sheila's blood could have been degraded by the "passage of time," and that the other profiles could belong to scientists, jurors, or others who had handled the silencer.

Hanover was outraged. James Clery, a leading DNA expert, told me that the ruling was contradictory. "Blood is a rich source of DNA," he said. The idea that the "considerable quantity" that scientists had reported finding inside the silencer had disappeared and been replaced by residue from people who simply touched the device was "not a reasonable proposition." Michael Turner, the barrister who represented Bamber, told me that the judges were "never going to allow this appeal," regardless of the strength of the evidence. "There are certain cases that get into the British psyche and the judicial psyche, when they decide someone is guilty," he told me. "The Court of Appeal can be a dreadfully closed-minded place."

Bamber was devastated by the news, but a little hope remained. Turner had discovered as he prepared for the appeal that the police had millions of pages of evidence, only a tenth of which had been disclosed before the trial. Since Bamber's conviction, the rules around disclosing evidence had become far more favorable to defendants; a team from Scotland Yard was tasked with reviewing the previously unseen files and turning over anything that would now be considered relevant.

After Hanover took charge of the new material, her kitchen filled with towers of boxes. Realizing that the task was too vast to tackle alone, she recruited volunteers —some from the Internet, where true-crime enthusiasts exchanged views about the case, and others from among the hundreds of pen pals Bamber had accrued over the years. They combed through documents, hiring forensics experts to help examine evidence, and in 2021 filed a new application to the C.C.R.C., outlining multiple grounds on which Bamber's case should be referred for a fresh appeal. Then they waited.

"It is better that some innocent men remain in jail than that the integrity of the English judicial system be impugned," Lord Denning, the most celebrated English judge of the twentieth century, said in 1988, two years after

Bamber's conviction. Denning was discussing the Birmingham Six, a group of Irishmen who were convicted of bombing two pubs and then spent more than a decade protesting their innocence. The Court of Appeal had dismissed their case, and Denning himself had thrown out allegations of police corruption, describing the suggestion as "such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say that it cannot be right." After activists and journalists took up the issue, Denning complained that it would have been better if the men had all been hanged. "They'd have been forgotten and the whole community would be satisfied," he said.

The Birmingham Six were finally freed in 1991, after it emerged that police had indeed fabricated evidence. Their case was one of several in the eighties and nineties that eroded faith in the British justice system. Enough convicts were found to have been framed by corrupt officers that they came to be known by shorthand: the Tottenham Three, the Bridgewater Four, the Maguire Seven.

Two judges caught up in these scandals were involved in Bamber's case, too. Maurice Drake, the judge in his trial, also presided over the Bridgewater case, in which he was accused of misdirecting the jury with a biased summing-up. Bamber's lawyers argued during his first appeal that Drake had done the same thing to their client. "The jury was not led gently by the hand," Rivlin said. "They were pushed hard from behind." (A detective from the Essex Police confirmed this impression to me, recalling that the jury foreman had told an officer that "it was only the judge's summing-up" that led to Bamber's conviction.) Bamber's appeal was dismissed by Lord Lane—the judge who, two years before, had thrown out the appeal of the Birmingham Six.

Judges on the British Court of Appeal have extraordinary power. They routinely refuse to overturn convictions unless fresh evidence has come to light—often locking out cases in which juries may simply have returned the wrong verdict, or in which the defense has overlooked important evidence. The sole way their rulings can be overturned is by the Supreme Court, which will hear cases only on

points of law that affect the general public interest—making it impossible to challenge even glaringly perverse decisions if they turn on the facts of an individual case.

As a public outcry grew over wrongful convictions, a royal commission recommended forming an autonomous body to investigate them. The Criminal Cases Review Commission started operating in 1997. The C.C.R.C. was designed as an independent check on the Court of Appeal, yet from the beginning the government curtailed its remit. Though the commission was intended to call for new hearings if there were *any* "reasons for supposing that a miscarriage of justice might have occurred," it was empowered to refer cases only if there was a "real possibility" that the Court of Appeal would overturn them—forcing its case workers to think like judges rather than like investigators. Its effectiveness has been further diminished by the Conservative government's program of austerity. After 2010, the C.C.R.C. lost more than a third of its funding. Yet its commissioners—who now mostly work one day a week, from home—have seen their caseloads double.

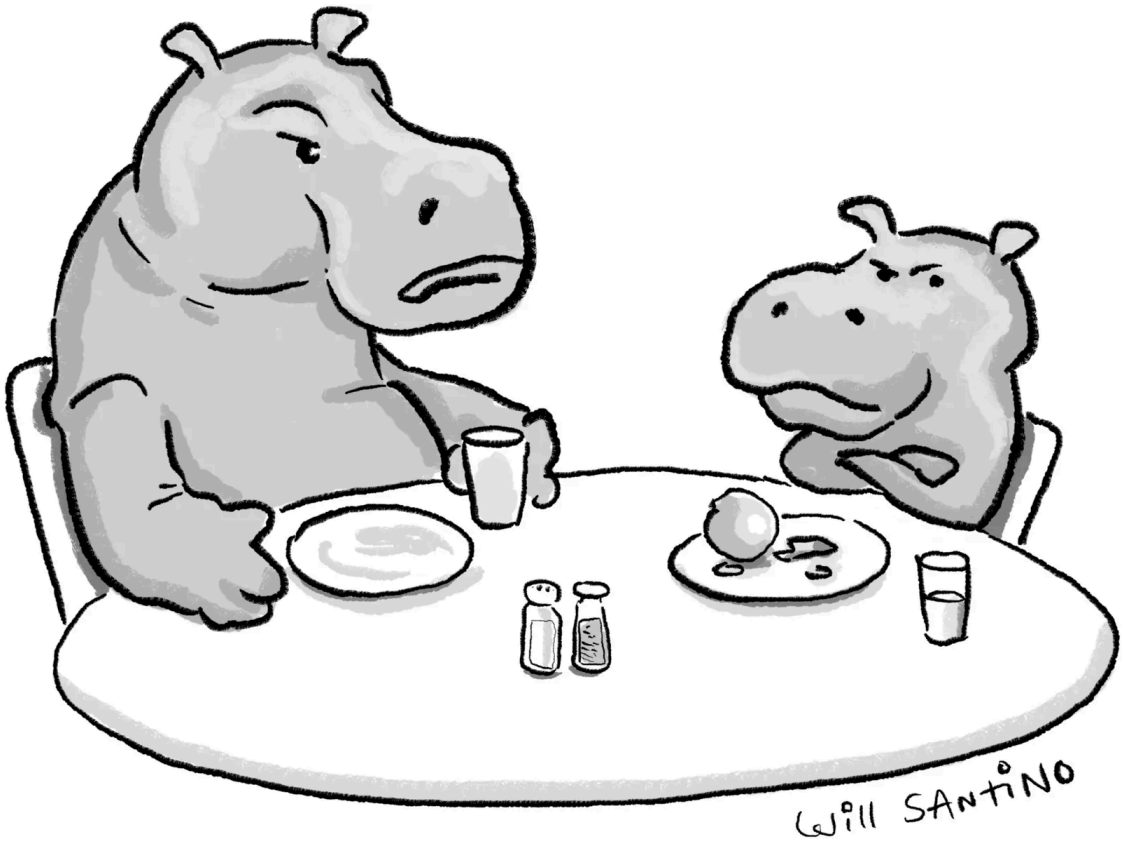
In 2021, a cross-party inquiry issued a damning report, concluding that the C.C.R.C. was "too deferential to the Court of Appeal." Wrongful convictions in the U.K. have repeatedly been traced to failures by police or prosecutors to hand evidence over to the defense, but the C.C.R.C. made few inquiries into undisclosed material—and its work was routinely hampered by officers' destruction of forensic evidence.

Two years later, it emerged that the C.C.R.C. had repeatedly overlooked exculpatory evidence in the case of Andrew Malkinson, a former security guard who served seventeen years for rape. Malkinson was convicted after the victim picked him out of a police lineup, though his appearance did not match her description of the attacker and there was no DNA evidence linking him to the

crime. Malkinson was exonerated in 2023, after his lawyers commissioned DNA tests. It turned out that police and prosecutors had known for at least fourteen years that another man's DNA was found on the victim's clothing. Outside the court, Malkinson said that he had been "kidnapped by the state."

The C.C.R.C. had made similar errors in the case of a postman named Victor Nealon, whose rape conviction was overturned only after his lawyers discovered another man's DNA on the victim's clothes. It had also rejected scores of applications related to the Post Office Horizon scandal, in which hundreds of postmasters were wrongly convicted of fraud based on faulty software.

Michael Naughton, a scholar of sociology and law at the University of Bristol, told me that the C.C.R.C. had come to serve the opposite of its intended purpose—it was effectively insuring "that miscarriages of justice don't come to public attention, because they diminish confidence and trust in the criminal-justice system." In 2004, Naughton began launching innocence projects at universities across the U.K., emulating a movement that has exonerated hundreds of convicts in the United States. The network closed down after eleven years, having overturned just one conviction. "People tend to say terrible things about America, but they have this real commitment to innocent people not being convicted," Naughton said. "We don't have that focus on innocence in this country."



"Finish your food, son—there are hippos out there who are hungry hungry."

Cartoon by Will Santino

Dennis Eady, a criminology scholar at Cardiff University, runs one of Britain's remaining innocence projects. When I called him, last October, he said that Jeremy Bamber's case was an "obvious miscarriage of justice" and a singular illustration of the intransigence of the British system. If Bamber were guilty, he said, it was inconceivable that "more disclosure, more anomalies, more and more suggestions of innocence" would still be coming out almost forty years later. "The C.C.R.C. must know that this is an unsafe conviction, to put it mildly," he went on. "But they simply do not want to refer it. They've dug so far in the hole—and that's what worries me—that there might be a continuation of the coverup. Because revealing this now is going to be a catastrophe for the criminal-justice system."

I wrote to Bamber the next month, and he agreed to talk by phone. "I've been awake in jail a billion seconds," he told me, in our first conversation. Bamber is now sixty-three, and he has been imprisoned for almost forty years. His voice was raspy, from a bad case of pleurisy, his hair had turned white, and he had lost a lot of weight. When I asked him to share the documents from his case—hundreds of thousands of files—he readily agreed. "I didn't murder my family," he said. "I promise you."

Bamber and I spoke every day as I sifted through the records. There were some questions that the documents couldn't answer, about his behavior on the night of the crime and afterward—the perplexing acts and omissions that had allowed the prosecution to present him as a cold-blooded villain. When I asked why he hadn't dialled 999 to report his father's distress call, he exhaled wearily. "People don't understand that Dad, Mum, and I had been looking after Sheila since she was about eighteen, managing her schizophrenic episodes," he said. "So, when Dad rang, it didn't shock me that Sheila had flipped." It was obvious that this episode was a bad one—"She had never grabbed a gun before," he said—but it was unclear exactly how serious it was, and after the line went dead he couldn't get through to his father to find out what sort of help he needed. Calling the local station had seemed more measured than involving the emergency services.

"I should have driven over there straightaway," he told me. "And, you know, I suffer terrible, terrible, terrible feelings of if-only." He explained that he hadn't raced to the farm because he was nervous about arriving before the police. But he wondered if he was also subconsciously resentful of his sister: "It's the inevitability of mental illness that it's quite emotionally tiring for those around—to keep that level of concern and love."

At the scene, he had tried to maintain his composure, though he had "no one holding my hand." When he heard that his family was dead, his first thought was to blame the armed police who raided the property. "I just thought, Oh, my God, they've gone in and shot everybody," he said. "I couldn't imagine Sheila killing her children in a million years." Buried among the files, I found an officer's handwritten notes confirming that Bamber had voiced this suspicion at the scene. "I put that comment down to him being distraught," the officer wrote. Though some observers reported that Bamber was oddly unemotional, plenty of others recalled that he had seemed genuinely grief-stricken.

One of the most damaging accusations against Bamber was that, after the killings, he had rushed to see his accountant and to sell off his parents' belongings. In fact, he had visited Nevill's accountant, Basil Cock, who told police that he'd requested the meeting to discuss "immediate business relating to the farm," and had also arranged the valuation of the house's contents. Bamber said he started removing items only once he realized his relatives were taking things. "It felt like they were pecking my mum's eyes out," he said.

Julie Mugford had testified that Bamber seemed shockingly carefree in the weeks after the tragedy—but other witnesses had told police a different story. "He looked shattered. His eyes were popping out of his head," one friend said. Another observed that he looked "pale and drawn like he'd been through Hell." The manager of the restaurant where Bamber drank champagne after his parents' funeral told police that he had been "very quiet, subdued, and seemed to be under heavy strain," and had come out at his friends' insistence.

Bamber said that it pained him when people questioned his grief: "Everyone thinks I'm a psychopath and don't have any emotion, but it's just not true." Still, he acknowledged that he sometimes held himself apart from his feelings. "I was brought up where I wasn't allowed to cry," he told me. After the murders, he had

also been taking significant quantities of Valium, though he considered it a "cop-out" to use that to explain his behavior. "I'm sure I'm to blame for some of the strange stuff that went on," he said. "Trying to feel a bit more loved, trying to figure out that life was worth living."

Bamber said that he'd been drinking and taking Valium when he discussed selling Sheila's nude pictures to the *Sun*. "You can see the outrage, of course," he told me. "It was just stupid." A reporter had asked whether any such photographs existed and then offered to pay for them, Bamber said, and he had briefly entertained the prospect. "I was easily manipulated," he added. "But I also justify in my own head, I must have been feeling really angry at Sheila—having just killed everyone, killed herself, and ruined my life."

Bamber broke down frequently when he talked about his parents. He told me that he often relives childhood memories to ease the loneliness of prison—learning to swim in the river with June, raiding Nevill's pockets for lemon sherbets and riding beside him in the family's old Morris Oxford. "I'm trying to find the feeling of love that I had at certain times," he said, and began to cry. "That emotion when Mum wraps you in her arms."

For decades, Bamber has lived in cells stacked with hundreds of binders of carefully ordered evidence. Sometimes he stays up at night, poring over files. "I'm trying to cling on to threads, I suppose," he said. His case has been taken on by the lawyer who successfully overturned Victor Nealon's conviction—a combative advocate named Mark Newby. But since his latest C.C.R.C. application was filed, in 2021, the commission has reviewed only three of the nine grounds. At that pace, it could be six more years before the review is finished. He would be nearing seventy. "Time is ticking away, and he is very aware of that," Hanover told me. At times, Bamber's faith that he would eventually prove his innocence seemed to falter, but he urged me to keep digging. "Maybe you'll find something we've missed," he said.

The Whitehouse Farm murders were an unusual case, because from the outset there were only two plausible killers. If Sheila was murdered, rather than dying by suicide, then Bamber's call to the police, reporting that she was menacing the family, made him the obvious suspect. "Jeremy crucified himself," his cousin Anthony Pargeter told me.

The case against Bamber was founded less on evidence that he committed the killings than on an argument that he framed his sister. At the trial, the prosecution evoked a grisly tableau: a bloody Bible propped against Sheila's arm to create the impression that she had killed the family in a religious frenzy; a struggle in the kitchen that she was too weak to win; a bloodied silencer removed from the murder weapon and hidden by her killer.

At Bamber's last appeal, he produced several records indicating that officers may have interfered with the crime scene, including by knocking over furniture in the kitchen—but the Court of Appeal emphatically rejected this suggestion. One of the justices said, with an air of finality, that for an "officer to disturb the scene is a moral sin." But evidence has since emerged that the scene may have been disturbed in other ways. The crime-scene photographs show Sheila lying with her head at an awkward angle against a bedside table, the Bible open against her right shoulder. Its unnatural position accorded with the prosecution's argument that Bamber had placed it there, and the Court of Appeal noted in 2002 that the smudged bloodstains on its pages indicated that it had been shut and then "reopened by someone to lie beside the body." Yet, according to records discovered more recently, members of the firearms squad queried the veracity of the photographs. After viewing the images, one officer noted that Sheila's body was "not in same position as when I saw it" and that the Bible had been found not against her shoulder but at her waist. A second officer recalled that he and a colleague had raised similar concerns with Detective Superintendent Ainsley, but had been "reassured" that nothing was moved. "I'm happy to accept this fact now although in the back of my mind still a shadow of doubt," the officer wrote.

In the U.K., where mass shootings are rare, the murders caused a national sensation. During the victims' funeral, mourners crowded the sleepy rural community of Tolleshunt D'Arcy.

Photograph from PA Images / Alamy

Detective Inspector Ron Cook, the lead crime-scene officer, died several years ago. But when I spoke to his deputy, Detective Sergeant Neil Davidson, he made a startling revelation. During the examination of the bodies, Cook had "lifted the Bible up and had a look at it," he said. "It was one of those 'Oh, shit' moments." Davidson recalled that Cook had stood "fumbling" with the Bible, before asking which page it had been on, and had then put it back by Sheila's body before the pictures were taken to "re-create what we just screwed up." This kind of incident had earned Cook a nickname on the force. "We called him Bumbling Ron," Davidson said. "Chaos reigned wherever he trod."

Cook oversaw the cleanup of the crime scene, and Davidson helped dispose of bloody carpets and bedding. After Bamber was declared the prime suspect, "The shit hit the fan, big time," Davidson said. " 'What can we salvage? Who can we blame?' " Cook spent weeks "chasing about, red in the face," trying to find scraps of evidence, Davidson told me. "He was trying to dig himself out of the hole. The whole forensic thing was really a shambles, because nothing was preserved." Watching the chaos unfold had left him conflicted about the case. He told me, "I would not be surprised if, one day, someone comes along and says, Here's definitive proof that he didn't do it."

The linchpin of the case against Bamber was forensic evidence gathered from the silencer. Yet, even leaving aside the mystery of why a calculating killer would meticulously stage the scene and then stash the bloodied proof of his guilt under the stairs, there were questions about its provenance. Before Bamber's relatives reported finding the device, Cook and several other officers had looked inside the cupboard, and none of them had seen it. David Boutflour told police that he had spotted the blood and the red paint immediately, but Ann Eaton testified that the family had noticed the "jam-like" blob on the end of the device only later, as they examined it around her kitchen table.

There were other irregularities in the time line of the silencer's discovery. Buried in Ann's notes from the weeks after the murders, I found a list of questions apparently written before she met with police on the ninth of August. The first read, "Look at silencer. Blood?" Yet, in the relatives' account, they did not retrieve the silencer from the cupboard until August 10th. Shortly beforehand, the family had summoned Barbara Wilson, the farm secretary, to the house, and she told me she suspected that the discovery had been staged for her benefit. "I would say that they'd already found it, but they wanted someone to prove that they'd found it," she said. (Ann declined to comment on the circumstances in which the silencer was found, but David insisted that "never was there a 're-staging.' ")

After taking the silencer to Ann's farmhouse, the relatives stashed it at the bottom of a wardrobe, and two days passed before they relinquished it to the police. Stan Jones drove over to collect it, securing it in a paper-towel tube before stopping to share a bottle of whiskey with Peter Eaton. He then threw it into the back of his car and drove to the station. "Mr Eaton was not impressed by this display of drink driving and never thought when the drink was offered that DS Jones would consume such a large amount," officers from the City of London Police later noted.

At the station, Jones failed to enter the silencer into a property log, instead locking it in his desk drawer. The next morning, he handed it to Cook. Both officers noticed a gray hair caught in the muzzle end of the silencer—but by the time Cook took it to the forensics lab this bit of evidence had been lost. Nonetheless, the hair was described to the jury as an indication that the silencer had been used to strike Nevill on the head.

Scientists conducted initial tests to establish that the blood was human, and examined the small red pigment stain on its end under a microscope. Then Cook took the silencer back to the station. For the next seventeen days, he did not keep records of its whereabouts. During this time, he tested for fingerprints, but claimed not to have found a single discernible print—despite the many ungloved hands that had handled the silencer since its discovery.

Meanwhile, Cook had secretly returned to the Whitehouse along with Stan Jones and Ann to take a paint sample from the hearth. Officers from the City of London Police later asked Ann if the detectives had used the silencer to scratch the paintwork. "The answer is NO," she replied. "If such a thing had happened then I would have been absolutely dumbfounded." She did, however, remember Jones telling her that she had "not seen anything." (Jones claimed that he had simply been trying to keep the visit secret from Bamber and denied that any officer scratched the mantel with the silencer.) Afterward, the officers returned to the Eatons' house and drank another bottle of whiskey with Peter.

Later, the silencer was returned to the forensics lab, and scientists noticed a piece of tape covered with paint flakes stuck to the barrel. They were told that Cook had placed it there to protect the silencer during his fingerprint tests. Nine layers of paint were then removed from the silencer's knurled end, containing not only red but also blue, green, white, and gray flakes, all of which matched those recovered from the hearth. Yet the records of the earlier laboratory examination make no mention of any flakes of multicolored paint.

Despite the chaotic handling of the silencer, and the risk of contamination in the weeks between its discovery and the forensic tests, the results that came back from the lab played a central role in the trial. If the paint on the silencer was important to the prosecution's case, the analysis of the blood was critical. As the jurors deliberated, they wrote a note to the judge asking him to clarify whether the blood was a "perfect match" for Sheila. The judge assured them that it did not match anyone else. They returned their guilty verdict twenty-one minutes later.

As I delved through the case files, though, I was astonished to see that there had been another match. Days before the trial, scientists had belatedly tested samples from the relatives and discovered that Robert Boutflour had the same blood type as Sheila. Though Robert denied touching the silencer in the days before the family gave it to the police, he was never cross-examined directly about whether his blood could be in the device.

The police had also harbored private concerns about the value of the blood as evidence. After Ainsley learned that Ann Eaton had found Sheila's bloodied underpants in the Whitehouse kitchen, he had warned her that the defense could accuse her of using them to contaminate the silencer. Ann fiercely denied doing this, and though Bamber's lawyers did not ask her about it during the trial, the prosecutor prompted her to mention that she had quickly disposed of the

underwear. Yet Ann's notes from the days after the crime suggest that she had thrown the underwear into a trash bag that she later took home.

Ann declined to answer my questions about whether she had kept the underwear, but, when the City of London officers visited her six years after the murders, she told them that she had saved a trash bag from the scene. She and her family had by then moved into the Whitehouse, where she had other evidence gathered during her private investigations—apparently including Sheila's bloodstained nightgown. She said that her cousin's "dress" was upstairs in her laundry basket, still unwashed.

From the outset, there were plenty of clues that Sheila might have been responsible for the killings: the locked house, the fact that she was holding the murder weapon, her psychiatric history. All of these were explained away by prosecutors, and again by Judge Drake in his summing-up. Yet, as I examined the case files and interviewed witnesses and police officers, the evidence pointing to Sheila grew.

When police arrived at the Whitehouse, there were indications that Sheila might still be alive inside. First, as Bamber and two officers approached, a shadow seemed to move in the master-bedroom window. One of the officers testified in the trial that he had quickly realized the shadow was simply "a trick of the light"—but the leader of the firearms squad, Doug Adams, told me that the officer had presented it at the time as a "genuine" sighting. Then, as Adams's team approached the property, an officer reported seeing a woman's body through the kitchen window. The officer later said that it was actually Nevill, whom he had mistaken for a woman—even though he was unclothed from waist to knees. Bamber's lawyers have posited that Sheila was in the kitchen beside her father's body when the team members approached and began battering down the door, but

then fled. When officers reported finding her dead, more than thirty minutes later, two of them noted "blood leaking from both corners of her mouth."

During the trial, the judge told the jury that there was "no evidence at all" that Sheila "was used to loading and firing guns." Yet she had been on a three-day shooting trip with David Boutflour, during which she had fired a gun, and had attended at least one shooting party with Peter Eaton.

Philip Boyce, a firearms expert who has produced reports for Bamber's lawyers, told me he had no doubt that Sheila could have fired the murder weapon. The .22 Anschutz uses low-velocity ammunition, reducing its recoil, and its long barrel makes it hard to miss when firing at close quarters. "If you're close enough to anybody with a rifle of that length, you're not even really aiming it, you're just pointing it," he said. A ballistics expert for the prosecution stated privately before the trial that the .22's subsonic ammunition is quiet enough that it would have been possible to sleep through the shots, even without a silencer attached.

On the night of the murders, police created two separate logs noting that Sheila was wielding a rifle. At 3:36 A.M., an officer took down Bamber's report that his father had called to say, "Your sister has gone crazy & has the gun." Another log, created by a dispatcher and given a time stamp ten minutes earlier, seemed to relate a message from Nevill himself: that his daughter had "got hold of one of my guns." The police have maintained that both logs refer to Bamber's call, and that the discrepancy in timing was simply an error. Bamber's team recently commissioned a review by a document-forensics expert, who concluded that, while an error was possible, the mismatch was "more simply explained if there had been two telephone calls."

Another hint came from Mugford. She testified that Bamber had told her late on the evening of the killings that it was "tonight or never," and had called back in the early hours to report that something was wrong at the farm. Reading through

her diary, I found another account. Bamber, she wrote, had told her, "Sheila has gone mad," adding, "His father didn't know what to do."

Such discoveries were striking, but they weren't enough. Even brand-new evidence is likely to be dismissed by the Court of Appeal if it bears the slightest trace of ambiguity. Bamber needed to find a fresh fact that changed the logic of the case.

Scouring thousands of pages of memorandums from the Scotland Yard review in 2002, Hanover's team thought they might have found it. After Bamber reported his father's distress call, the phone in the Whitehouse kitchen was left off the hook, and an operator at the phone company was charged with listening in to the open line. She reported indistinct noises—a dog barking and a "slight moving sound"—before transferring the line to the police station. The police said that they took over monitoring the line at 6:09 A.M. But the Scotland Yard records appeared to indicate that something different happened at that time: a "999 call made from White House Farm," which suggested that someone had picked up the phone and dialed while Bamber was outside with the police.

Detectives assigned to investigate the call produced a short statement in the name of an Essex Police officer named Nicholas Milbank. The statement made no mention of anyone calling 999. Instead, it said that Milbank had been asked to monitor the open line into the Whitehouse, and had heard nothing until officers entered. Unusually, the statement had not been signed; Milbank's name had been typed on the signature line.

I found Milbank, still working for the Essex Police, and he said that a call had come in at 6:09. "From what I can remember, someone phoned 999," from "inside the farmhouse," he told me. The caller had not spoken to him, but he recalled hearing what might have been muffled speech—perhaps a "voice or a radio"—and noises that could have been "a door opening and closing, or a chair being moved."

I asked if this suggested that someone had been alive in the house. "Well, obviously," Milbank replied. When I mentioned the statement issued in his name, he was taken aback. He had given no such statement, he told me, and no one inquiring into the crime had ever contacted him. "No one's spoken to me about it since the nineteen-eighties," he said. "Other than you."

Scotland Yard declined to comment, and when I called Mark Oliver, the detective who oversaw the inquiry into the call, he cut me off angrily. "I really wouldn't waste any of your time on that case," he said. "Bamber will continue to make spurious allegations until the day he dies." Then he hung up the phone.

Dennis Eady, the criminology scholar, argues that wrongful convictions often result from what he calls "Agatha Christie syndrome." The agents of the justice system—police, prosecutors, and juries—tend to fixate on "the evil perpetrator of the perfect murder," even when the truth is more mundane. "If a tragedy occurred because somebody with a mental illness had a hallucination, you can't blame anybody," he told me. "But, if you can create this figure of evil, that's a better story."

For many observers of the Whitehouse murders, it was easier to accept that a greedy man had killed his parents for their fortune than that a devoted young mother could have slaughtered her sons. Yet, as soon as Bamber met police at the scene, he had offered a possible explanation for his sister's frenzy. Before leaving the farm the previous night, he said, he had heard his parents urging Sheila to consider placing Nicholas and Daniel in foster care.

Prosecutors dismissed Bamber's account as a cynical fabrication. But Barbara Wilson, the Whitehouse Farm secretary, told me that Nevill and June did indeed have a fostering plan for the boys—it was "one of the things they were talking about." They wanted to assume custody and then send them to boarding school.

This prospect would surely have been alarming for Sheila, who had told Dr. Ferguson that her relationship with her mother had trapped her "in a coven of evil." Any suggestion of removing the children "would threaten whatever precarious balances she had," Ferguson told police. "She would resist it in any way she knew."

"When I left Union Station this morning at 9:38 A.M. travelling ninety m.p.h. toward another train leaving New York at 9:15 A.M. going eighty-five m.p.h., I never expected to fall in love in Philadelphia."

Cartoon by Amy Kurzweil

Sheila was already at risk of losing her sons. They had moved in with their father, Colin Caffell, during her last stint in the psychiatric hospital, and a teacher at their school had expressed "serious concern for their progress and welfare" if they

returned to their mother's care. When Sheila got home, she desperately wanted to live with them again, but Caffell refused.

Among the documents disclosed after the trial was a letter that Caffell had written Nevill, seeking his help in retaining custody. Bamber's lawyers raised this during his 2002 appeal, and Ferguson declared its contents highly significant. Though there is no evidence that Sheila saw the letter, the idea that Nevill might have supported Caffell's efforts could have had a "catastrophic effect" on Sheila, Ferguson said. "She may have projected onto her father a concept of evil."

The trial judge had told the jury that there was "no evidence of any sort" that Sheila was relapsing into a psychotic state at the time of the murders. Yet multiple witnesses said that she seemed agitated in the preceding weeks—dirty, unkempt, and unable to focus, all of which are common early signs of psychosis. "Bambs was beginning to display those familiar long periods of becoming distant and vague again," Caffell wrote, using Sheila's nickname, in a memoir called "In Search of the Rainbow's End." Wilson told me of a disturbing encounter with Sheila in the kitchen during her final visit to the farm. "All men are evil and there's a blackness," she had said. A workman who had seen her on the day of the murders told police that she was "walking stiffly, like a zombie from a horror film."

Experts for the defense had suggested at the trial that a woman with Sheila's psychiatric disturbances might have murdered her children out of a belief that they would be together in Heaven. In such "altruistic killings," they said, it was not uncommon for the murderer to go through a process of "ritual washing," which might explain the cleanliness of Sheila's body. That notion was dismissed as "fanciful," though it was not possible to test it, because the police had failed to swab the showers and sinks for traces of blood or gunshot residue. In the files, I noticed another possible explanation for the spotlessness of Sheila's feet: a pair of blue socks that were found on the floor beside her body, spattered with her mother's blood.

There were also questions over whether Sheila could have left a suicide note. When Stan Jones was questioned before Bamber's appeal in 2002, he offered an intriguing explanation for the initial assumptions about the crime. "You've got a note saying, 'I've killed myself.' So it was treated as four murders and a suicide," he said. The detective, who has since died, was not asked further about the matter, and the possibility of a suicide note was never raised during the trial. But among the documents disclosed subsequently were two undated letters signed "Bambs." "Oh Mummy don't you think I have feelings also in this floating space I am in," one read. "As soon as the dirt is dug up and the public no then my Darling Mummy will my Babys and me go to our rest."

The letters—pages of chaotic scrawl—had been marked "illegible" by police, though it is possible to make out many of their words. Bamber was baffled when he read them. "Sheila had beautiful writing," he said—but who else would have signed her name? A graphologist engaged to compare the writing with examples of Sheila's neat cursive found both similarities and differences. Multiple studies have shown that handwriting can change dramatically during moments of psychic disturbance—particularly in those suffering from schizophrenia.

Sheila knew that her children were frightened of their grandmother. June had upset them on a previous visit by flying into a frenzy as she chanted about God, and she frequently forced them to kneel and pray against their will. Weeks before the murders, Daniel had produced a series of frightening drawings of the Whitehouse. One depicted a figure brandishing guns beneath a decapitated head pouring blood from its neck; another showed June with jagged teeth and narrowed eyes, red spurts gushing from her head. When the police searched the room where the twins slept at the farm, they found the words "I HATE THIS PLACE" scratched into the wardrobe door.

Caffell recalled that, as he packed Nicholas and Daniel into his VW camper, collected Sheila, and drove them out to the farm to see her parents for the last time, he felt a "nagging fear" about leaving them. Sheila was vacant throughout the

journey. When Caffell dropped them off, the boys clung to him as if in fright. “On some level,” he later wrote, “they knew they were going to die.”

For a time, the publicity around the killings made Whitehouse Farm a macabre destination. Tabloid reporters and true-crime enthusiasts nosed around the yard where the police had gathered to call out to Sheila. But the property remained a working farm, with hundreds of acres planted in borage and rapeseed. The crops needed care, or they’d rot in the fields. The Osea Road vacation park needed to be freshened up for the summer tourist season. The Bamber estate was too valuable to neglect.

After Jeremy Bamber’s conviction, the family fortune was the subject of an intense dispute, with the Boutflours staking a claim and Nevill’s niece and nephew Jacqueline Wood and Anthony Pargeter arguing that Nevill’s half should go to them. Before it was settled, Peter Eaton took charge of Whitehouse Farm. Soon afterward, the farm secretary, Barbara Wilson, told the police that he’d been embezzling money, goods, and machinery. (The family has dismissed the allegations as “baseless.”)

Wilson’s claims presented a conundrum for police. Bamber was preparing to lodge his first appeal, and the Eatons had been crucial witnesses against him. Senior officers discussed concerns about “the publicity it will create,” and decided that “the enquiry should be delayed.” They waited until Bamber’s appeal was rejected, more than a year later, to take any action. Detectives then visited Basil Cock, the accountant, who was acting as the executor of the Bamber estate, and asked if he wanted them to pursue the case. He did not. Though officers noted that Cock seemed to enjoy “a close working relationship with Mr. Eaton,” they shut down the case without any further inquiries.

The abortive investigation was overseen by Ralph Barrington, the head of the Criminal Investigation Department at the Essex Police. Barrington later went to work for the C.C.R.C. as its investigations adviser, remaining in the post as the commission deliberated on several submissions from Bamber that ultimately failed. Barrington retired in 2011, but his role in the stalled inquiry into the Eatons was only recently uncovered by Bamber's team. "Essex Police not only failed to expose the discredit caused to key witnesses, they also neglected their duty to investigate serious fraud," Bamber's lawyers argued to the C.C.R.C. (Barrington and the Essex Police declined to comment on the fraud investigation, though the police pointed out that every authority that has reviewed the murder case concluded that Bamber was guilty, and added that they would continue to "assist the C.C.R.C. as required.")

In the end, the Boutflours inherited a large portion of the family estate, along with many of the "treasures" from the Whitehouse. Among them was June's diamond-and-sapphire engagement ring. Bamber had insisted that it be cremated with his mother, but it had been removed from her finger during her autopsy without his knowledge. When I mentioned this to him, he broke down. "Mum would have been absolutely, absolutely devastated," he said. "She'd never taken her engagement ring off, or her wedding ring. She must have said a thousand times to me in her life that she was so honored to wear Dad's ring."

When Ann decided to move her family into the Whitehouse, many of her relatives were aghast. Anthony Pargeter told me, "I think she wanted to prove something—'I'm in a famous house, you know.' " Both he and David Boutflour said that the Eatons' children suffered from nightmares. Colin Caffell had once visited the place with Ann, and found that it was still heavy with "the smell of death." But Ann professed contentment. "I feel Auntie June & Uncle Nevill are here as well and are happy that we are here," she wrote. When Scotland Yard officers visited before the appeal in 2002, the house appeared largely unchanged

from the crime-scene photographs. Searching for fresh evidence, they removed a section of carpet padding that was still soaked with blood.

On a cloudy day in April, I drove up the bumpy lane to the Whitehouse, passing barns and rows of tractors before its rear wall appeared. As I stopped on the gravel driveway, a stooped figure with hollow cheeks and tufts of gray hair approached. It was Peter Eaton. A few weeks earlier, I had written to Ann urging her to talk to me about the new evidence in Bamber's case, but Peter told me that she didn't want to see me. "It was her auntie that was murdered here, wasn't it?" he said, gesturing back at the house. Then he eyed me shrewdly. "Do not be fooled by Jeremy Bamber," he said. "You can't make any more of a story than, that bastard killed those poor children just for money."

A Land Rover crunched to a halt on the gravel, and Ann Eaton climbed out in a cloud of floral perfume. She looked younger than her seventy-four years, with vivid green eyes and chestnut-tinted hair. She hurried through the back door and reëmerged with a piece of paper. "I'm not going to speak to you, I'm just going to give you this," she said. It was a typed statement. "Jeremy Bamber has caused so much grief and pain to this family that we find it almost impossible to deal with and rarely speak about it," it said. "He continues to try and cause pain to the family from the safety of his cell." Ann told me that she was planning an afternoon swim in the river, then disappeared into the Whitehouse.

I drove back through the flat Essex countryside, passing the gleaming façade of Vaulty Manor, which the family now runs as an upscale wedding venue, and the entry to the Osea Road park, which the Eatons have transformed into one of Essex's premier vacation attractions. Eventually, I reached a sturdy, gabled farmhouse, set back from a winding lane, where boxes of shotgun ammunition were piled against the windows. Ann's brother, David Boutflour, was going in through a side gate, and he ushered me to a garden with pretty views of the

surrounding fields. When I brought up Bamber's case, he waved his hands dismissively. "Jeremy still keeps coming up with his fancy ideas of how he's innocent and God knows what else," he said. "We haven't got any doubts about exactly who did it." Yet his mood darkened when I mentioned Ann. "She's a very ambitious lady," he said. The family had been bitterly divided by competition over the estate, and David felt shortchanged. "She's catching all the balls, and I'm not," he said. "I have no love for my sister at all."

Sheila's psychiatrist told police that the prospect of losing her children could "threaten whatever precarious balances she had." Photograph by Chris Barham / ANL / Shutterstock

It had been David who found the silencer that secured Bamber's conviction, and there were two questions that I wanted to ask about it. The first was about a record, buried in newly discovered material, that appeared to indicate that forensic tests before the trial revealed *another* blood sample inside the silencer. The blood type listed did not match either Sheila or Robert Boutflour—but it did match David. He greeted this news with uproarious laughter. "I'm ready to go," he said, throwing up his hands. "I'm ready to own up to it all." Curious about the unidentified DNA samples from inside the device, I asked if he might have cut himself while trying to unscrew the end of the silencer to examine its baffles during the family's kitchen-table inspection. He shrugged, and his wife, Karen, who had been hovering nearby, interrupted anxiously.

"That never ever came up," she said. "It was never asked."

"I did screw it," he said. "I tried to turn it quite hard."

"I don't think you cut it," she insisted.

"But the skin tissue could have been there, couldn't it?" he said. "I could have had a bit of DNA on it."

My second question related to another silencer—one from his personal collection, which happened to be identical to the one recovered at the farm. Bamber's team has repeatedly raised suspicions that the police seized two silencers, suggesting that the jury was misled with evidence conflated from separate devices. The police and the prosecution have always denied those suggestions—despite records that appear to show silencers with two different reference numbers passing through the forensics lab. David said during the trial that the police had not seized his silencer, but now he told me that they had in fact taken it away, for "months and months."

In 2018, Bamber commissioned Philip Boyce, the firearms expert, to examine freshly discovered records—including examination notes apparently indicating that two silencers were inspected at the same time in different departments of the lab. In a peer-reviewed report, Boyce concluded that "at least two separate sound moderators had been examined."

Bamber's lawyers wrote to the prosecutors seeking documents that could elucidate the matter, but the request was declined. "We do not accept at this stage that two separate silencers were examined," the prosecutors wrote. Bamber sought a judicial review, and the High Court ultimately determined that the C.C.R.C. should reëxamine his case. Many questions remain about how many silencers were examined, when they were discovered, and whether they were adequately shielded from contamination. Yet the commission informed Bamber this March that it had no intention of seeking any fresh disclosure from the lab—or of allowing Boyce to examine the hidden material.

Bamber was desolate. "I just burst into tears and thought, What on earth am I doing?" he told me. "I'm never going to win if they just won't look at it." He spoke of his fear of dying in prison. "I hope I get out, and maybe I can have a little life outside," he told me. "But sometimes I don't think that I ever will. They'll just find ways to obstruct." He fell silent for a moment. When he spoke again, his voice was more resolute. "That doesn't change my innocence," he said. "Just because you kept me in jail for forty years, it doesn't make me guilty." ♦

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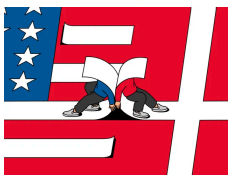

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