



# MURDER at Foxe's Folly

## PART I

By Shelley Magellan

The judge then put on his black-cap and addressed the prisoner:

“The sentence of this court upon you Lowry is, that you be taken hence to a place whence you came from there to a place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck until your body is dead, and may God have mercy on your soul.”

A slight cheer was heard in the Court House after the sentence was passed from some who were utterly unimpressed by Lowry's awful situation.

A few of you have most probably heard the story of Lowry, a black slave who lived and worked on the Island in 1853 and who was charged and found guilty of the murder of a young Saint woman named, Elizabeth Ann Booms – better known as Betsy. For those of you who haven't, continue reading about this true-life riveting tale.

Lowry was the slave of Mr and Mrs Ebenezer Hastings, who lived at Sane Valley and who was very fond of Betsy, who was also employed by the Hastings' as a housemaid. No matter how hard Lowry tried to gain Betsy's affection, he was repeatedly rejected. Charles Augustus, a local farmer to whom Betsy was engaged lived at Levelwood and was the only man who Betsy had tender feelings for and this knowledge proved unbearable for Lowry. His feelings soon grew to

### His obsession turned into hatred

obsession and hatred and he verbally threatened the life of Betsy and Augustus in front of others. Lowry also abused Betsy physically by attempting to force himself on her, this was later revealed at the trial by Betsy's mother – Mrs Frances Williams – who Betsy confided in.

On Saturday evening 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1953, Lowry saw



What remains of the kitchen!

Betsy walking out towards the fence and quickly followed in hope of being alone with her but when he saw that she was meeting Charles

Augustus, Lowry became enraged. He returned to the Kitchen (which was a detached

building from about 30 yards from the house) and waited for Betsy to come back.

Lowry, still very much enraged began questioning and yelling at Betsy; he began bringing Charles Augustus into the argument. Betsy interrupted and reminded him that she did not have to explain herself to the likes of him and sneered at him and called him a nigger. Betsy knew that Lowry was burning with anger so she quickly left. Lowry, now on the verge of despair, sat patiently and once again waited for Betsy to return.

It was after six when she slowly walked through the kitchen door, which shut swiftly behind her and was bolted by Lowry;

then he struck her forcefully over the head with a blunt instrument. Betsy instantly fell to the ground unconscious.

Although experiencing agonizing pain, she was remarkably still alive.

Though dazed and confused Betsy suddenly felt it extremely difficult to breathe.

Lowry had tightened his grip around her neck; slowly he felt her growing weaker and weaker. Finally after a brief struggle, Betsy's limp and lifeless body lay in his powerful arms.

He took some rope and tied her hands and feet and trussed her up and then dragged her bruised battered body into his room and as he closed the door behind him, he tried to shut out the last 10 minutes of his life.

Realising the time, which was going on to 7 o'clock Lowry made tea for his master and made his way up to the dwelling house.

Upon his arrival Mr Hastings knew that something was wrong, because it was Betsy's job to bring the tea. When Mr Hastings enquired of Betsy's whereabouts, Lowry forcefully replied that he had seen her heading towards Foxes Folly with Charles Augustus.

Mr Hastings requested that Lowry go and fetch Betsy and bring her back, but he refused to go, Lowry returned to his room off the kitchen.

### Her lifeless body lay in his powerful arms

It was now 8 o'clock and Mr Hastings was still concerned about Betsy and Lowry's reluctance to go and find her. As he made his way to the kitchen, he looked towards Foxe's Folly in hope of spotting Betsy.

Going into the kitchen he noticed the door to Lowry's room was closed and locked; Mr Hastings knocked several times ordering Lowry to open the door.

Lowry knew that he could not allow Mr Hastings to enter the room – in which Betsy's corpse was lying.

He told his master that he was naked and indecent and persisted that Mr Hastings return to the house. Mr Hastings, well aware of Lowry's uncontrollable temper decided to return to the house.

When all was dark and still, Lowry carried the body down the side of the hill to the gut, he dug and placed her in a hole 3 feet long and covered her with about four inches of earth and stones.

### He dug a hole and placed her body inside

At 10 o'clock that same evening, just when Mr

Hastings was going to retire to bed, Lowry knocked at the front door and inquired if Betsy had returned (this, no doubt, was done with the double purpose of avoiding suspicion, and of satisfying himself that all was quiet.)



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## PART I

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The next day, (Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1853) Mr Hastings sent Lowry to Jamestown to fetch Betsy's mother, Mrs Frances Williams. After being told the circumstances, she immediately blamed Lowry for her daughter's disappearance, saying: "If I were on my oath I should say you had concealed my child away from me."

Mrs Williams was very familiar with Lowry's indecent intentions for her daughter, for many a time Betsy had confided in her mother about Lowry's crude behaviour towards her.

Lowry earnestly denied having done anything to Betsy and appealed to her to accompany him to Sane Valley.



# MURDER at Foxe's Folly

## PART II

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Last week Mr Hastings took Lowry to Jamestown and reported his suspicions as to Lowry's involvement in the disappearance of Betty Boom to the magistrates. Lowry was immediately placed in Police custody at the Gaol. This week we conclude this grisly tale with the search for the body, the subsequent events and trial.

Police and local volunteers then undertook an extensive manhunt for Betsy.

The searching of Lowry's room was short but swift and a lot of incriminating items were found, such as a pickaxe, a spade, some rope, and a bludgeon.

All of the recovered items directed Police to believing that Lowry was hiding something.

Tuesday morning (25<sup>th</sup> January 1853), PC Thomas Randle accompanied by Sergeant Hayes and Policeman Sim along with five others began investigating the surrounding valleys.

After searching for three hours PC Randle came to a spot in the gut where the mint had been greatly cut and withered, he began to move it about and rolled over a large stone, he started to poke about with a stick and a great amount of buzzing flies came up from the earth. PC Randle quickly removed several other stones and there before him lay a most horrific site.

The body was found exactly how Lowry had disposed of it, the plaited hair of Betsy hung over her right shoulder, her hands crossed over her breast and tied with a rope around her neck; which was attached to her wrists and legs. The legs were bent up and the clothes were covered in blood.

The body was then transported to the Civil Hospital in Jamestown where it was identified by Mrs Frances Williams, as her daughter Betsy.

Mr C M Powell, performed a post mortem and noted the various brutal injuries inflicted on Betsy's body.

It was his opinion that the vicious wound to the head was evidently caused by a large heavy object for example a bludgeon – the one found in Lowry's room.

All the evidence pointed to Lowry as the killer; he was charged with Betsy's murder and the case went to trial.

### The manhunt for the body began

### Before them lay a most horrific site

At the trial Lowry represented himself the best he could. It was also observed by those in the Sessions House that Lowry was limping – this was the result of self-infliction, while in Police custody

Lowry endeavoured to take his own life by cutting his Achilles tendon in the hope of causing lockjaw.

Witnesses such as John Hern, Richard Young, and Charles Williams, were aware of Lowry's intents and threats towards Betsy, they related all heard threats that he had made to Betsy to the court.

Emotional testimonies from Betsy's mother and Charles Augustus proved detrimental to the outcome of Lowry's fate.

However a very vital witness took the stand. Sub-gaoler, James Clayton testified that Lowry had confessed his murderous

deed to him while in gaol.

Reverend Richard Kempthorne told the court that Lowry had also communicated to

him circumstances connected with the crime.

When the trial was nearing an end, the judge asked Lowry if he had anything

to say, Lowry replied that Betsy should not have enraged him.

The Judge accumulated the evidence and the Jury retired.

The Jury returned with a verdict of Guilty. The Judge then put on his black-cap and sentenced Lowry

to death.

On leaving the sessions house for the Gaol across the Grand Parade, though surrounded by Constables, Lowry managed to escape out of their hands, running as fast as he could he was tripped by a soldier and secured.

That night after supper, the gaolers removed the plate and spoon and Lowry's clothes (this was done to prevent Lowry from harming himself again), only a tin pot was left in the room containing water.

However through the night and while handcuffed, Lowry had managed to break the handle off the pot and swallowed it in order to choke himself.

He resisted all attempts by doctors to remove it and so it remained in his throat. It was feared that he would be dead in a few hours, but though suffering a great deal of pain he survived the night.

An entire month later on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1853, Tuesday morning at 7:30am, Reverend Estcourt accompanied Lowry onto the scaffold. While the hangman adjusted the noose around Lowry's neck and fastened his legs and fixing the rope around the beam

above, the Reverend informed the crowd that Lowry had been baptised that previous night and he had fully acknowledged the justice of his sentence and now wished to die at peace with all men.

On lookers watched as the white cap was drawn over Lowry's head. During the reading of prayers, drawings of bolts were heard and Lowry's body plunged into eternity.

His struggles were few and short though they seemed severe.

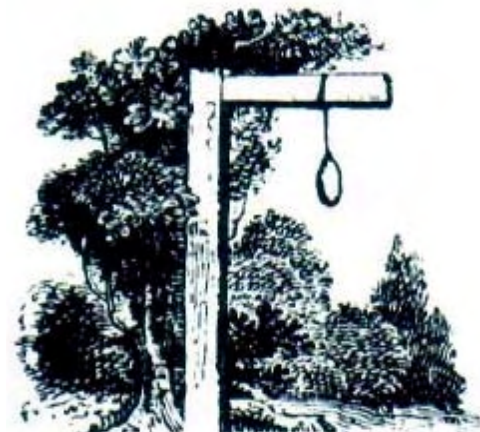
Lowry was now dead; he had paid the ultimate price for the ultimate crime. As spectators walked away from his swinging body, these words were uttered "heaven grant that St Helena may long be spared such a horrid sight again".

Interestingly *The St Helena Chronicle* of 29<sup>th</sup> January 1853 concluded its Police Report dealing with the following:

"A woman named Dolly George having disappeared in mysterious circumstances some two or three years back,

is now supposed to have been murdered in a similar manner. Her daughter had been also in Mr Hastings service, and had left in consequence of Lowry's threats to her. The mother used to take her daughter's clothes to Mr Hastings.

On the day when last seen she was at Two Gun Saddle. It is said the police intended to make a further strict search, in the hope of being able to discover the body of the unfortunate woman."



### The hangman adjusted the noose