

The Sunday Times extracts of May 23 1971

The contradictions of William Ewer-
continued

2] 'Last week the Home Secretary, Mr Reginald Maudling, announced that he was instituting a preliminary inquiry to ascertain whether James Hanratty was the A6 murderer. Hanratty was executed for the murder in April 1962. Our own inquiries over the past month suggest that any effective inquiry must deal with an analysis of the statements of a man who attended every day of the trial but never gave evidence-Mr William Ewer, the brother-in-law of the murdered man.

The task of establishing what part, if any, Mr Ewer played in the pinpointing of James Hanratty is complicated by the variable quality of Mr Ewer's memory.

On some points he is adamant. For example when we first questioned him about the gravest of the 'confessions' by Peter Louis Alphon, he was convincingly dismissive.. Alphon is the man who was picked up and eliminated as a suspect for the murder before Hanratty was charged and who has, over the years several times confessed to the murder.

The most elaborate of Alphon's "confessions" located the trigger mechanism of the crime in Mr Charles 'Dixie' France. In Alphon's confession the point of the operation was not to murder but to 'frighten' Michael Gregsten and Miss Storie, as their affair was causing great distress to Mrs Janet Gregsten, the sister of William Ewer's wife.[1]

It went horribly wrong and after five hours in Mr Gregsten's car, Alphon asserts, he shot Gregsten when he thought he was trying to get the drop on him. With nothing further to lose he then raped Miss Storie, shot her and left her for dead.[she survived but is still crippled.]

Alphon asserted that on the enterprise he impersonated Hanratty [who sometimes stayed at France's house in Swiss Cottage [2] and that France in terror after the event, felt he had to go through with the process of "framing" Hanratty.

In last week's Sunday Times we published an exclusive 15 point statement by Mr Ewer designed, as he put it, 'to put the record straight.'

One of his points was to dismiss as 'complete fantasy' the Alphon confession suggesting that he had any involvement in the events leading up to the murder.

It can be and is accepted that Mr Ewer was not consciously or knowingly involved in it and nor was any other member of the family.

On one issue however, we are clear: Mr Ewer has been highly inconsistent about the events that led to Hanratty's priority as a suspect *after* the murder. In fact in the 15 points in his statement [3].

In fact in the 15 point in his statement to us, we have been able to establish that no fewer than nine are either inaccurate according to other evidence or have been contradicted by Mr Ewer himself on other occasions.

Six of the points cover his version of the alleged sighting of a murder suspect by a member of the murdered man's family.

Mr Ewer's version of a week ago had him seeing a man with staring eyes-'as distinctive as if he had a carbuncle on his face'-in the Finchley Road, a few yards from his umbrella [+ antiques] shop in Swiss Cottage arcade. He thought the man might be the person the police were looking for as the A6 murder suspect, followed him into a photographers shop, lost sight of him, became 'irritated' at the 'dismissive' attitude of the shop assistant and rang the police. End of curious incident. He never found out that the man he spotted was actually Hanratty.

THIS VERSION makes a pale contrast with the reports published by the *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Mail* on the Monday after the trial ended. The gist of the reports had Hanratty first becoming a suspect eight days after the murder as a result of Mrs Gregsten's uncanny intuition.

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She saw this man with 'staring blue eyes' through a window in Mr Ewer's umbrella shop, and became convinced that he was her husband's murderer. Mr Ewer after a diligent sleuthing enterprise, involving visits to a neighbouring cafe, a photographer's, a florist and a dry cleaners established that the man was called Ryan [one of Hanratty's aliases].

He telephoned this intelligence to Scotland Yard at the photographer's shop where the assistant was most helpful.

The source of this detailed information which Mr Ewer described to us last Thursday as 'inventive nonsense' was, according to the journalists none other than Mr Ewer himself. The writers of the Sketch and Mail stories recollected precisely that the 'intuition' aspect was checked with Mrs Gregsten herself and they say the outlines of this remarkable sequence were confirmed by Detective Superintendent Acott who headed the A6 murder inquiry.

Acott has never publicly commented on this or any other aspect of the case.[4] But it is understood that Acott maintains that he was on the trail of the man, who turned out to be Hanratty before the 'intuitive sighting' became known to him personally.

The man serving at the photographers shop that Mr Ewer entered was Mr EDMUND KING. Mr King is now chief technician in the photography department of a London polytechnic college. We talked to him last week, the first time he has been questioned since the incident. He still remembers meeting Mr Ewer.

Mr King's recollection contrasts with Mr Ewer's later statement.

'He was obviously very excited, a bit peculiar' said Mr King *'he was quite insistent and asked to see in the back. I told him he could. I took him in the studio at the back. I'm a reasonably public minded chap.'*

Mr King's remembrance conflicts with Mr Ewer's claim that he was 'dismissive'. His actions were not those that could reasonably have 'irritated' Mr Ewer.

[In my next piece I will look closely at the discrepancies between the four journalists and Mr Ewer which the article elaborates in some depth including the ambiguities in the suicide note of Charles France]