

The Murder at Hindhead Chase

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The Murder at Hindhead Chase, Grayshott by Jan & Gordon Gale (2007)

It was December 1915. The Great War had started in the previous August and the British Empire had sent troops to Britain to help in her fight against Germany. One such body of troops was the 9th Canadian Mounted Rifles. The troops were stationed at Bramshott undergoing training before being sent to France, whereas the Commanding Officer, the Assistant Regimental Adjutant and other officers were billeted, with their batmen, at Hindhead Chase, in Crossways Road, Grayshott.

The 22 year old Assistant Regimental Adjutant, Lieut. Codere, was nicknamed 'Fou', or 'Fool,' Codere, because of his erratic behaviour. The C.O. had already decided that, when the regiment was sent to France, he would not be allowed to accompany it. He was the officer temporarily entrusted with the regimental canteen funds which had been handed over by the canteen sergeant, 37 year old Sergeant Ozanne. Although belonging to the 9th Canadians, Ozanne was an Englishman who had moved to Canada and joined the regiment. His parents were still living in Southampton. Once Codere was in possession of the funds he stole some and asked Ozanne to help hide the theft.

Ozanne refused.

Saying that he wished to discuss the matter, Codere invited Ozanne to Hindhead Chase one evening and, following an argument, killed him with a trench stick (a leather-covered rod of lead) in what is now the small Sitting Room,. Following this he dragged the body into the cellar and inflicted a great number of stab wounds. Codere then instructed a batman to help him take the body to one of the stables at the bottom of garden. The batman eventually told the C.O. what had happened. Codere was soon arrested and held at Whitehill Police Station.

In every case of a suspicious or violent death an inquest must be held to determine whether it is the result of foul play. This inquest was started in what is now the Dining Room at the house; continuing at the Village Hall. It was clear that foul play had occurred: Codere's trial followed. The judge gave the jury three options: they could find Codere either 'Guilty', 'Not Guilty' or 'Guilty but Insane'. He was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged but this was later commuted to life imprisonment because of his insanity.

Codere started his imprisonment in England but was later transferred to a prison for the insane in Canada.

On the day of his funeral Ozanne's body was escorted from the Drawing Room of the house by members of his family, his regiment and the regimental band. The parade was halted in Crossways Road to allow the trumpeters to play the Last Post.

He was buried, with full military honours, in the old cemetery in The Mount, Guildford, where his grave can still be seen.

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