

## **‘A’: Life, murder**

“.....A strong theme to emerge was a great sense of inevitability concerning the offence. Visibly shaken by this at interview, A acknowledged that, in his words, “the result was the aim”. This is not to say that each step was carefully and consciously planned. Alongside the “inevitability” he spoke of a sense of “uncontrollability”. The following aspects seem important in understanding this. Again, all words in quotation marks are his own.

In his concern to be “adult”, “capable” and “unflappable” he evolved a false “outer shell”. He had earlier described this as a “suit of armour” and compared it to a “space capsule” on which the qualities he wished to present to others were “painted”. This appears to have its origins at least in part in his relative isolation as a child and the inward- looking tendencies that accompanied this. One expression of this was his “martinet” behaviour as head boy at the age of 11. It took on recognisable form as he strove to cope with the intense yet destructive family situation: he seems to have felt the need to develop a thick- skinned personality to cope with what he portrayed as his father’s aggressive instability and to take his mother’s side. Later on it served his ambition and was compounded by intolerance of others. It could, however, lead to feelings of detachment in situations with other people and to emotional coldness (as with his girlfriend).

It was stifling. He felt “totally enclosed and sealed off from the outer world” but still felt he had to “keep the world in general at bay” and to carry on in the face of uncertainty about himself. He felt that in effect he was “living on the previous years’ programming”. It was also necessary to keep his emotions in check and to distance himself from his father’s personality. At times he felt it necessary to go beyond this shell and precipitate situations where he could experience some measure of spontaneity. Possibly the incidents of violent irresponsibility in his childhood (hitting a girl with a piece of ice, shooting at a passing lorry with an air rifle) served this function.

The “inevitability” of the offence (and an accompanying feeling of “impending change”) seems related to this tendency. He described feeling that he had come to a “watershed” in his life. He had come to the end of his probationary period at work and was uncertain how to develop his career next, his parents were getting divorced and he decided to finish with his girlfriend. In order to escape from the staleness of his false outer self and to meet future events in a more satisfactory way it seems he needed to challenge himself and experience a sense of immediacy and involvement.

There was some irritation harboured against the victim: he alleges that she was a gossip and had mistreated his dog. He was also aware of her money (though he presented this as a source of resentment rather than a target) and knew the layout of her house. In addition he described as significant the feelings he derived from darkness, quietness and being alone. Going into the countryside at night had long been a way of “clearing the cobwebs” out of his mind. Also regarded as noteworthy was the proximity of the house in which he had lived between the ages of 11 and 18.

When he left the victim's house the night before the offence, after unsuccessfully trying to break in, he still felt that "something had to be achieved". He reports that the next day he tried to avoid thinking about this, feeling that doing so would have weakened his resolve. As he approached and entered the house on the night of the offence there was "an absurd degree of coolness". In the dark in the victim's house and when he encountered her, he reported feeling "vibrancy", "inner vitality" and a heightened sense of himself and her as separate entities; he felt they were both "embarking on a journey". Then his feeling became one of nausea and of being in a "whirlpool". The episode had become out of control and catastrophic, but that was an end consistent with what had been set in motion. The unfamiliarity of the experience contributed to his difficulty in assimilating it (understanding, describing and coming to terms with it) until recently. Afterwards he regained his characteristic composure.

A described that when he was charged he felt a sense of "relief" and as if "part of him had died" though this was accompanied by a feeling of unease and uncertainty as to precisely why he had committed the offence. He distanced himself once more, but within days this strategy began to break down: "I change. In a sense I am more free than I have been for a long time. But the sense of shame is peculiar. I feel dreadful for what I have done. There is a feeling that I have terribly twisted something." Possibly what died in him, and in so doing gave a sense of relief, was the false front, the "shell" that he presented to others. He now had to acknowledge discreditable aspects of himself, and as a result now claims to be more tolerant of others....."