

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mr Alan Massey Visits Shipman

Background

- 12.1 During and after the police investigation, members of the Brooke Practice noticed that the numbers of cremation Forms C which they were asked to sign by Shipman reduced markedly. In the three months from April to June, they signed only two Forms C whereas, by contrast, they had been asked to complete 15 such forms during the previous three months. Neither of the deaths in respect of which they were asked to sign Forms C aroused any suspicion in their minds and, indeed, following investigation of those two deaths by the Inquiry, both were found to be natural. In addition to those two deaths, there were four further deaths during the three months from the beginning of April to the end of June 1998, all of which were followed by burials. Three of those deaths – those of Mrs Winifred Mellor, Mrs Joan Melia and Mrs Kathleen Grundy – were the subject of convictions at the criminal trial.
- 12.2 Dr Reynolds believed that the reduction in the number of cremations had occurred because Shipman had learned of the police investigation. After Shipman's conviction, there was some speculation in the newspapers about the possibility that Shipman had been 'tipped off' about the first police investigation. Some suspicion fell upon the GMP. However, once the Inquiry began its investigations, another possibility arose, namely that Shipman had been (intentionally or unintentionally) alerted to the danger of discovery by a visit from Mr Alan Massey, the funeral director.
- 12.3 Before the Inquiry started, it had been widely reported that, because of his concerns at the number of deaths of Shipman's patients which had occurred and the circumstances of those deaths, Mr Massey (who was not himself a patient of Shipman) had visited Shipman by appointment at his surgery in order to seek an explanation. That visit was said to have taken place towards the end of 1997. When Mr Massey provided a statement to the Inquiry, he said that he could not recall when he had his meeting with Shipman. A search of the Market Street Surgery appointments sheets for 1997 and the early part of 1998 revealed no record of an appointment for Mr Massey. However, an appointment was found for noon on 2nd April 1998. This was during the first police investigation. In due course, Mr Massey accepted that that must have been the date of his visit.
- 12.4 It is clear beyond doubt that, when he visited, Mr Massey said something to Shipman about the deaths of his patients. Mr Massey has vehemently denied the suggestion that he went to give Shipman a 'tip off' about the police investigation. He asserted that, at the time he saw Shipman, he was unaware that a police investigation was in progress.
- 12.5 The Inquiry has sought to discover what Mr Massey knew at the time of his visit, why he went and what he said to Shipman. Before considering the evidence on those topics, it is necessary to say something about the Massey family.

The Massey Family

- 12.6 The firm of Frank Massey and Son, Funeral Directors, of Hyde (described in this Report as 'Masseys') was started in 1903 by Mr Alan Massey's grandfather and great-uncle. It

passed to Mr Massey's father, who in turn passed it to him. Mr Massey has worked in the business since the age of 15. In recent years, he has taken a less prominent role and day-to-day control of the business has been exercised by his daughter, Mrs Bambroffe. Mrs Bambroffe's husband, David, has also worked in the business for about ten years. The business is successful and the family is justly proud of it. Both business and family enjoy a high reputation in the Hyde area.

- 12.7 For many years before Shipman's arrest, the Massey family had held Shipman in high regard. The family might not have been aware of the fact, but it has clearly emerged in evidence before the Inquiry that Shipman also had a high regard for them. If the family of a deceased patient did not have in mind a particular funeral director, Shipman would suggest that Masseys should be instructed. The firm dealt with the deaths of many of Shipman's patients and it was inevitable that there would be quite frequent professional contact between Shipman and the Massey family. This association did not extend to friendship or any sort of social contact. When the family's general practitioner had retired in 1994, Mrs Bambroffe, her husband and mother transferred to Shipman's list. Mrs Bambroffe said that they did so as he seemed so caring and was such a nice person. During the years that followed, they were entirely satisfied with the care that he gave them.

The Origin of the Concerns about Shipman

- 12.8 It was Mr Bambroffe who first began to notice odd features about the deaths of Shipman's patients. He began to recognise a 'Shipman death', even before he knew that Shipman was the deceased's doctor. He noticed that the deceased were often sitting up dressed in their day clothes and showed no sign of having been ill. He and his wife discussed these concerns and they began to notice other strange features; they realised that Shipman often seemed to be present at or about the time of the death. In due course, Mr and Mrs Bambroffe mentioned these matters to Mr and Mrs Massey. Mr Massey did not share their anxiety. He had every confidence in Shipman.
- 12.9 As I have mentioned earlier, the time came when Mrs Bambroffe mentioned her concerns to Dr Booth of the Brooke Practice, on 23rd February 1998. Dr Booth discussed those concerns with some of her partners, including Dr MacGillivray. Not long afterwards, Dr MacGillivray visited Masseys' premises and took the opportunity to raise the subject with Mr Massey. The gist of what he said was that there was no need to worry about the deaths of Shipman's patients. Shipman had a large list of elderly patients; he liked to keep his elderly patients at home rather than admit them to hospital and he visited them much more frequently than other doctors. These factors would account for the large number of deaths and Shipman's presence at or about the time of death. In his Inquiry statement made in January 2002, Mr Massey claimed that he had not felt reassured by Dr MacGillivray's words and therefore decided to visit Shipman. I am sure he is wrong about his reaction to Dr MacGillivray and about the timing of his decision to visit Shipman. I am sure that, at the time, Mr Massey was not worried about Shipman and merely passed on the reassurance to his daughter and son-in-law. He did not visit Shipman at that point.

Mr Massey's State of Mind in March 1998

- 12.10 Mr Massey claimed that, in March 1998, he too began to have concerns about the deaths of Shipman's patients. He said that his concerns were aroused by the death of

Mrs Margaret Waldron, who died on 6th March. She was a friend of the Massey family. [My finding in respect of Mrs Waldron's death is set out in Volume Six of my First Report. I found that Shipman killed her.] Mr Massey explained why he had been suspicious about the circumstances of her death. However, his recollections bear little relation to the true circumstances of the death and what he recalled did not appear to me to form a basis for reasonable suspicion. I accept without hesitation that Mr Massey was shocked and distressed to learn of Mrs Waldron's death but I do not accept that he harboured any concerns that her death might not have been natural or might be in any way associated with Shipman. The first time he mentioned any such concern was when he gave oral evidence to the Inquiry. He had failed to mention it in his written statements. Mr and Mrs Bambroffe had no recollection of him expressing any such concern. Mrs Bambroffe said that there was no discussion about this death in particular. She recalled that the death was quite sudden although Mrs Waldron had 'been to see the doctor beforehand'. In my judgement, Mr Massey did not share the concerns of his daughter and son-in-law in March 1998. In rejecting Mr Massey's evidence on this point, I do not wish to suggest that he has attempted to deceive or mislead the Inquiry. I think that now, with the benefit of hindsight, he finds it hard to believe that he did not share the concerns of his daughter and son-in-law. He has persuaded himself that he did.

- 12.11 That is how things stood on 13th March 1998, when Mr and Mrs Massey went away on holiday for two weeks. They were away until 28th March. It was during this period that Dr Reynolds and the other Brooke Practice doctors decided to report their concerns about Shipman to the Coroner and the police investigation began.

Mr Massey Decides to Visit Shipman

- 12.12 I have already referred to the various contacts made between Mrs Bambroffe and Dr Reynolds and Dr Booth. The evidence about those contacts is not entirely clear. What is clear, however, is that Dr Reynolds spoke to Mrs Bambroffe at 2.41pm on Tuesday, 24th March, at a time when Dr Reynolds had already made her report to the Coroner and was awaiting a visit from DI Smith. In evidence, Mrs Bambroffe said that Dr Reynolds told her either that she was about to make a report to the Coroner or that she had already done so. Bearing in mind the timing of this conversation, I am satisfied that Dr Reynolds said that she had made a report to the Coroner. I think it likely that she also said that the police had become involved. Even if she did not, this does not matter, as Mrs Bambroffe said that she realised that, if the Coroner had been informed, the police also might well be involved.
- 12.13 Mrs Bambroffe said that, when her father returned from holiday on 28th March, she told him of the developments in the Shipman matter. I think she would have told him by Monday, 30th March, at the latest. Mr Massey accepted that his daughter would have told him what she knew. Within a very short time, Mr Massey had decided to visit Shipman. Mr Massey asserted that, at that time, he did not know that the police or the Coroner were involved. He, together with Mrs Bambroffe, also insisted that he would not have decided to speak to Shipman if he had known that an investigation was under way. I noticed that Mrs Bambroffe was most uncomfortable when giving this part of her evidence and think it likely that she was not sure that what she was saying was true and accurate. Mr Massey said that his daughter and son-in-law were opposed to him visiting Shipman; they told him

to 'leave it alone'. He could not offer a sensible reason for this opposition but said that he thought his daughter was being 'a bit protective' of him. Mr and Mrs Bambroffe agreed that they were opposed to the proposed visit. They were unable to explain why. They said that it was not because of any concern about the effect on their business if it were to become known that they had made unfounded allegations against Shipman.

- 12.14 In my view, Mr Massey was aware of the report to the Coroner and probably realised that the police would also be involved. In my judgement, Mr Massey decided to see Shipman because he thought that things had 'gone too far'. Now that the truth is known about Shipman, Mr Massey cannot believe that he went to see Shipman at such an inappropriate time. His daughter and son-in-law, motivated by the respect and affection in which they hold Mr Massey, have allowed themselves to be persuaded that Mr Massey could not have known of the Coroner's involvement at the time he went to visit Shipman. I think that, when Mrs Bambroffe gave evidence, she still remained in a state of conflict and uncertainty about this issue.
- 12.15 What was Mr Massey's purpose in making this visit? In his Inquiry statement made in January 2002, Mr Massey said that he wanted to see Shipman in order to satisfy himself that Masseys were not involved in **'anything untoward'**. In his Inquiry statement of April 2002, he said that he went because he had become concerned about the number and circumstances of the deaths about which his daughter was telling him. I have already said that I do not accept that Mr Massey shared the concerns of the younger generation before he went away. There is no evidence that anything occurred on his return that might have caused him to take a different view. When giving oral evidence, Mr Massey said that, when he returned from holiday, he was concerned about the number of deaths among Shipman's patients and the similar circumstances in which they were happening and decided that something had to be done. He felt that there was something 'not quite right'. Mr and Mrs Bambroffe both said that they understood that Mr Massey's motive was to ask Shipman for an explanation for the large numbers of patient deaths in his practice. I regret to say that I find none of these explanations at all convincing.
- 12.16 As I have said, Mr Massey did visit Shipman on 2nd April. He said that he was very nervous about going; he was shaking and sweating while in the waiting room. I can well understand that. Whatever his motive for going and whatever he planned to say, he might well dread the interview. He has given differing accounts of exactly what he said. In his Inquiry statement of January 2002, he said that he had told Shipman that he **'had one or two concerns about the number of deaths Masseys seem to be getting'** from him. In his Inquiry statement of February 2002, he said that he told Shipman that **'people had been talking about the high rate of deaths among his patients'**. In his statement made in April 2002, he claimed that he said **'something like "We've got concerns about the number of deaths of your patients"'**. In oral evidence, he said that, when he sat down, he told Shipman that 'they' (impliedly meaning Masseys) were concerned that they were getting a lot of deaths of elderly ladies fully clothed who were sitting up or had been out shopping. Later in his evidence, when asked about the reference in one of his statements to **'people had been talking about the high rate of deaths'**, he explained that he had used the word **'people'** to distance his own family from the concerns. Mr Massey denied

that he had said anything to Shipman about a report to the Coroner or an investigation by anyone in authority.

- 12.17 Mr Massey has consistently reported that Shipman's response was to say that the deaths of his patients were all properly recorded in his book, which Mr Massey took (no doubt correctly) to be his book of MCCDs. In oral evidence, Mr Massey added that Shipman said that the book was available for anybody to see. In his Inquiry statement of January 2002, he said that Shipman had said that the book was **'open for inspection by any of the authorities that wanted to see it'**. In his April 2002 statement, he said that the book was open for inspection by **'anybody concerned'**. Mr Massey said that Shipman took down the book from a shelf or cabinet and showed Mr Massey various names and causes of death. He was very relaxed and confident and friendly. He and Mr Massey went on to exchange pleasantries. Shipman did not seem at all worried or even concerned to know that he was being talked about. Mr Massey said that he felt reassured and that he had been given an explanation. When pressed, he agreed that he had not received an explanation for anything. He had just been reassured by Shipman's confident manner.
- 12.18 When he returned home, Mr Massey assured his family that there was nothing to worry about. Shipman had been very nice and quite relaxed. I think Mr Massey was convinced that the concerns and suspicions were misconceived.

Conclusion

- 12.19 My conclusion is that Mr Massey at no time shared the concerns of the doctors from the Brooke Practice and the younger generation within his family. I am sure he thought they were wrong about Shipman. In my view, he decided to see Shipman because he thought that to make a report to the Coroner had been to take things too far. He thought Shipman ought to know what was being said about him. I think he gave Shipman to understand that people were talking about the number of deaths among his patients. I do not think he told him that there had been a report to the Coroner.
- 12.20 I am sure that Mr Massey made it plain to Shipman that he did not share the suspicions that were being voiced by others. I think he was also anxious to avoid giving the impression that the concerns had arisen within his own family. Mr Massey says that Shipman did not ask him the identity of the people who were 'talking'. I accept entirely Mr Massey's account of Shipman's reaction. Shipman was an accomplished liar and dissembler and it was entirely typical of him that he should give the impression that he was not in the least worried about any rumour or gossip.
- 12.21 In rejecting some of the evidence of the Massey family, I do not wish it to be thought that I regard them as dishonest. I do not, for one moment, think they are. Looking at these events with the benefit of hindsight, I think that they have found it impossible to remember and to accept that Mr Massey believed that the people who suspected Shipman were making a mistake. I think they have persuaded themselves that Mr Massey shared the concerns of the younger generation. I think they have talked about these matters at great length on many occasions and have convinced themselves that Mr Massey wanted to seek an explanation from Shipman for the large number of deaths. They cannot remember

why the family was in disagreement because, on the accounts they now give, there is no explanation for the rift. They have persuaded themselves that Mr Massey cannot have known of the involvement of the Coroner because they now see that it was wrong (or at least unwise) for Mr Massey to visit Shipman at that stage, while the Coroner was involved. As they regard themselves as decent, law-abiding citizens, which they are, they cannot believe that one of them once supported the man who is now known to be a mass murderer. Mr Massey need not feel embarrassed that he once supported Shipman. So did many others. Mr Massey had received reassurance from Dr MacGillivray. In the event, the trust of both of them in Shipman was misplaced.

- 12.22 I am satisfied that Mr Massey did alert Shipman to the fact that he was under some suspicion, possibly even some investigation. I think the consequence was that Shipman stopped killing for a time. It is likely that Shipman deduced that, if the Masseys knew of people who were 'talking', it might well be that the source of the concern was the doctors from the Brooke Practice. I think that is why, when he resumed killing on 11th May, he chose a victim who would not be cremated. Mrs Winifred Mellor had made it known that she had a strong preference for burial. There is no evidence that he discovered the preferences for burial of his other two victims; indeed, Mrs Woodruff, Mrs Grundy's daughter, is adamant that Shipman could not have known what method of disposal would be chosen for Mrs Grundy, as it was Mrs Woodruff herself who chose burial. When Shipman forged Mrs Grundy's will, he specified that it was her wish to be cremated.
- 12.23 In my judgement, Mr Massey's action in speaking to Shipman did not lead to any loss of life. If anything, he may have saved lives. Shipman had been killing at the rate of one patient a week during the three months before Mr Massey's visit. If he had continued at that rate, more patients would have died than in fact did so. On the other hand, had the rate of killing continued unabated, it may be that Shipman would have been detected and stopped sooner than he was.
- 12.24 I am sure that Mr Massey acted with good intentions when he went to see Shipman. He is a thoroughly decent man. His mistake was that, like countless others in Hyde, he trusted, admired and respected Shipman and could not believe that the suspicions harboured by his daughter and the Brooke Practice doctors could have any foundation. I think he has found it very hard, indeed impossible, to accept that this was once his state of mind.