



The Case of the Chocolate Cream Killer: The Poisonous Passion of Christiana Edmunds

Kaye Jones

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“The trial which terminated yesterday...revealed one of the strangest and most horrible stories possibly ever told in a court of justice.” (Morning Post).

When the news broke in 1871 of a series of mysterious poisonings in Brighton, shock and horror gripped the Victorian public. Even more disturbing was the revelation that the culprit was not a common criminal but rather a local 'lady of fortune' called Christiana Edmunds.

From March 1871 Christiana had sent out dozens of poisoned chocolates and sweets to Brighton's residents. Her campaign resulted in the death of four-year-old holidaymaker Sidney Barker, and wounded countless others. Her arrest in August 1871 provoked such an emotional response from the local public that her trial was moved from Brighton to London's Old Bailey.

The prosecution anticipated an easy victory. Christiana had not confessed, but witnesses confirmed that she had purchased strychnine and their testimonies placed her at the scene of the crimes. She had a motive too, argued the prosecution; she was a scorned woman. Despite the best efforts of the defence, the jury took only one hour to convict her of the murder of Sidney Barker and the attempted murder of three others. In a last dramatic twist, Christiana was reprieved after being declared insane by the Home Office and lived out her days in Broadmoor.

Alongside Christiana's case, the book will offer a snapshot of life in Brighton, one of Victorian England's busiest and most popular leisure resorts. However, this wholesome holiday destination also had a steamy underworld of sexual licence, which reached even seemingly secure middle-class young women.

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