

# WORDLESS WESTGATE

## The murders of Charlotte (Lottie) Adams and Grace (Edith) Cook

*Researched and written by Detective Sergeant John Burchill*

Albert Victor Westgate was a "Remittance Man". He was born in Kent England in 1901 to a very wealthy and prominent English family and at a very young age he became a source of embarrassment to his family, so they shipped him off to Canada and sent him a monthly stipend to ensure that he would not return home and cause further embarrassment to the family.



*Albert Victor  
Westgate*

Albert Westgate landed in Winnipeg and at the age of 16, after lying about his age, he enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force and served with the 1st Canadian Division's 5th Battalion in France during the First World War. At the end of the war, Westgate had an unblemished record and received an Honourable Discharge but he had paid the price for his service with bullet and shrapnel wounds to his head, arms and stomach. Because of the nature of his injuries, Westgate came under the care of doctors from the Department of Soldiers and Civil Reestablishment (D.S.C.R.) after his release and was classified as being "not fit for heavy work."

After his discharge, Westgate returned to Winnipeg, got married in October 1921, took up residence in a rooming house at 353 Kennedy St., and started working for various taxi outfits around the city as either a chauffeur or meter repairman. Although Westgate was a hard worker he hardly, if ever, spoke with his fellow workers. Because of this he became known as "Wordless Westgate".

Early in 1924 Westgate's wife, Jane introduced him to a woman she had once worked with, Charlotte (Lottie) Adams. Lottie was born in Sweden in 1897 and had married a T. Eaton Co. Store detective, James Adams, in 1922. At the time Lottie and her husband lived in St. Vital at 40 Cunnington Av. and she was employed as a waitress at the Picardy Candy Store on Carlton St.

It was at the Candy Store that Westgate and Lottie first met and at that time it seems Westgate became infatuated with Mrs. Lottie Adams. Westgate would hang around the store, buy Lottie little gifts. Eventually, he started calling her at home and started paying local CPR Telegraph boys \$1.00 to deliver messages to Mrs. Adams at home, but advised them to say they had the wrong address if a man answered the door. By late 1927 Westgate started telling his co-workers that he had a new girlfriend and that there would be no one else in his life but her. Westgate's advances became too much for Lottie. They started to argue and he was even advised by her friends to "go and find a nice single girl". Westgate wanted Lottie to leave her husband and go away with him to Minneapolis. Lottie refused and he became enraged. He started following her everywhere she went. If he could not have Lottie to himself, no one would!

On Tuesday, February 14, 1928, Westgate called Lottie at her sister-in-law's house. He asked her to meet him one last time at River Park, just down the street from her house, on Thursday morning. Lottie agreed.

At about 10:30 am on Thursday, February 16th, Westgate attended the A1 Auto Transfer Garage located at 144 Fort St., a place he had once worked, and rented the owner's blue-green 1928 Nash sedan, ML #1233. After picking up the car Westgate drove to a nearby gas station and purchased some anti-freeze before heading out to meet Lottie at River Park.



*1926 Nash Sedan*

At about 11:00 am Westgate picked up Lottie at the end of Cunnington Av., in full view of her neighbours, and took her for a drive through Fort Garry. Westgate again pleaded with Lottie to go away with him, but she refused. It seems Westgate came prepared for that answer. He parked the car along North Drive near Willow St. (now part of Wildwood Golf Course), reached behind the seat and pulled out a .32 calibre Harrington & Richardson revolver and tried to shoot Lottie in the head. Lottie started to fight and the first bullet went through the roof of the car. She continued to fight and in the process bruised her knuckles, elbows, knees and shins. Westgate was a small man, (5'6", 135 lbs), but Lottie proved no match for the revolver and he shot her through the left side of the head, splattering blood onto his clothes and the seat, dash and window of the car. He then stabbed Lottie in the face and dragged her out of the car and into the ditch alongside the road. Westgate had brought along a nice new 2 lb hatchet (when it was found, the hatchet still had the sales sticker on it). Once in the ditch, he chopped Lottie over the head four times with the hatchet and completely macerated her skull, inflicting wounds up to 8" long and 3" wide right to the base of her brain. He then covered the body over with snow and proceeded to drive away, discarding the hatchet, revolver, and all of Lottie's belongings which had fallen off in the car, out of the window and into the ditch.

Westgate was so preoccupied with throwing everything out the window that he drove the car into the ditch as well and got stuck. Between 2:00 pm and 2:15 pm, at least six people stopped and asked him if he needed help. Finally, a tow truck from Taunton's Garage arrived and assisted Westgate out of the ditch. While it seems everyone noticed Westgate's hands were red and that there was something red all over the running boards, it never occurred to them that it might have been blood until Lottie's body was discovered 12 days later.

After getting out of the ditch, Westgate drove the car to the rear of his rooming house, borrowed his landlady's kettle, heated some water and then proceeded to wash the blood off of the car. At about 3:30 pm Westgate returned the car to its owner, Walter Worthington, paid him \$6.00 for its use, and asked that he not mention anything to his wife because she might think he had been out fooling around.

When James Adams returned home from work that night he did not report his wife missing, thinking that she might have gone to her parents for the weekend as she sometimes did. When his wife did not return home on Monday, February 20th Adams notified his long-time friend, Chief of the St. Vital Police Department, Arthur Jourdain, and it became public knowledge that Lottie Adams had gone missing. Not coincidentally Westgate admitted himself into the St. Boniface Hospital that same day after complaining to his doctor at the D.S.C.R. that his stomach wound had hemorrhaged and he had been coughing up blood since the 16th.

Westgate wore the same clothes to the hospital that he had worn on the day of the murder and claimed that the blood on the cuffs of his pants and lapel of the jacket was his own.

When Lottie Adams had not been found by the middle of that week Arthur Jourdain called in assistance from the Winnipeg City Police (W.C.P.) and the Manitoba Provincial Police (M.P.P.) to help in the search and fearing that Lottie might be dead.

It was Tuesday, February 28, 1928, it was unseasonably mild and the snow had been melting for the past few days when William Watkins of 817 Somerset Ave. went out for a walk along North Drive and observed what appeared to be a human hand sticking up out of the snow in the ditch. Watkins summoned police who attended and uncovered the body of Lottie Adams. Later that day Inspector William Smith (M.P.P.), Constable Renton (M.P.P.) and Detective Robert Frayne (W.C.P.) attended to the St. Boniface Hospital and placed Westgate under arrest for the murder of Lottie Adams. It seems Westgate was a suspect from day one when he was seen picking Lottie up at River Park. When questioned by the arresting officers about his whereabouts on the day Lottie went missing Westgate stuck with his story that he had been in bed all day coughing up blood. Westgate's clothes were seized from the hospital staff and he was detained at the Provincial Gaol on Vaughan St. until his trial on November 13, 1928.

While in gaol Westgate contacted his family back in England and advised them of his arrest and the charges against him. In order to save their family name, Westgate's family retained Charles Tupper, the grandson of ex-Canadian Prime Minister Charles Tupper, to represent him in court. The trial lasted four days and on November 16th, 1928, before Justice Dysart, Westgate was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang by the neck on January 23, 1929, at the Provincial Gaol. The National Hangman, John Ellis, was called in from the Maritimes for the execution.

An appeal was launched by Charles Tupper on the grounds that one of the jurors, Edward W. Pickett, was suffering from dementia and had been committed to the Selkirk Mental Asylum from November 2, 1917, to February 22, 1918. As s. 4 of the Jury Act disqualified anyone from serving as a juror who was afflicted with a mental infirmity, the Court of Appeal set aside the Westgate's conviction and ordered a new trial as the jury that had convicted him had been "improperly constituted". The Court of Appeal released its decision on December 20, 1928, and a new trial was set down for March 18th, 1929.

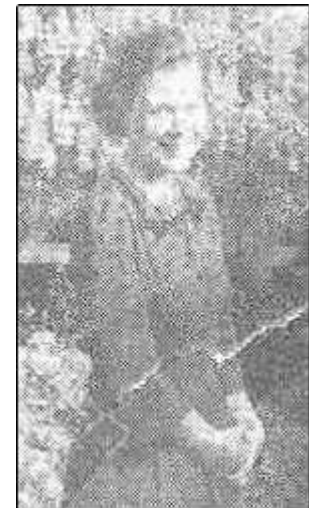
On Friday, March 22, 1929, before Justice Donovan, Westgate was again convicted of murder and sentenced to hang by the neck, this time on June 5, 1929, between the hours of 6:00 and 8:00 am. John Ellis was again called in for the execution but on June 3rd, the Minister of Justice commuted Westgate's sentence to life in prison after receiving a petition circulated by the War Veterans of Manitoba asking for clemency for Westgate.

Westgate was sent to Stony Mountain where he served only 14 years of his life sentence for murder. He was able to get parole on June 3, 1943, with a little help from the War Veterans and because of his good behaviour inside the prison. While in prison he was responsible for all the prison vehicles and often acted as the Warden's personal chauffeur on his trips to and from Winnipeg.

Upon his release, Westgate landed a job with Gillis and Warren of 205 Fort St., where he was employed as a mechanic, and moved into a rooming house at 287 Spence St. in Winnipeg.

Westgate was still married but his wife now lived in Vancouver and the conditions of Westgate's release were that he remain in Winnipeg and report monthly to the Winnipeg City Police Department.

In August 1943 a 16-year-old girl named Grace (Edith) Cook moved into one of the rooms at 287 Spence St. after quarrelling with her mother and father about her lifestyle. Edith liked men in uniform and often dated men from the service. Edith became attracted to Westgate, now 42 years old, primarily because he was nicer to her than her father and because he had been in the army. At the time Edith worked as a waitress at Rae and Jerry's Restaurant in Brathwaite's Store located at 431 Portage Ave., having dropped out of school in the spring. Westgate became infatuated with Edith and told her that she shouldn't go out with other men. Edith didn't listen, so Westgate tried another approach. He bought her presents (like a gold Gruen Tara wristwatch, which he bought on credit,) and he promised her a job in Vancouver at Pioneer Precision Tool Co. as a blue print maker for \$125 a month. He also told her that she could live there with him and his wife. Edith loved the idea and they set a date of December 5th to leave for Vancouver. The problem now was that Westgate could not leave Winnipeg. He had no connections at Pioneer Tool to get Edith a job and he had no money to buy Edith presents, or even to buy her a train ticket to Vancouver.



*Grace Edith Cook*

Westgate tried everything. He went to the National Selective Service and asked if they could arrange his release so that he could go to Vancouver (declined without consent from the Minister of Justice). He went to see the Provincial Secretary for the Canadian Legion about financial assistance to go to Vancouver claiming that his wife was sick. (They unofficially agreed to assist him). He also approached the Bank of Commerce for a loan because his wife was sick (loan declined). Westgate had to be satisfied with a \$25 cash advance from work and a \$50 loan from a fellow employee.

At the end of November Westgate gave Edith the \$50 to buy herself some new shoes before they left for Vancouver. During that same time, Edith moved back home for a few days before she was to leave for Vancouver. Westgate did not think this was a great idea and told her that she should get a room at the Marlborough Hotel for the few days before they left. Edith agreed and Westgate phoned the hotel and made a reservation for Edith Cook from Gimli, Manitoba, for Thursday, December 2, 1943.

Edith arrived at the hotel at about 7:00 pm and was given room #503. Westgate came into the hotel a short time later, attended to room #503, but was not seen to leave that night. Westgate was seen with Edith on Friday night, December 3rd, at the hotel room when they ordered a late-night dinner at 10:30 pm and, again, he was not seen to leave. The next morning Edith went to her parent's house (5-520 Burnell St) and packed her belongings. She then caught a taxi and met Westgate at 12:30 pm for coffee and then they went back to the hotel. There they were both seen together by the front desk clerk, two bellboys and a chambermaid, all at different times. Edith had on a pretty blue dress and the new shoes she had bought. She was going to wear these on her trip to Vancouver and she was showing them off to Westgate in the room. Westgate couldn't take it anymore. It had gone too far. How was he going to tell Edith that he was actually a poor mechanic with no future in Vancouver –

that he had lied? He decided that he couldn't, threw her down on the bed and squeezed her by the throat as hard as he could with both his hands until she was dead.

Being the bright criminal that he was Westgate decided that, since Edith was dead, she didn't need her new shoes and the Gruen watch he had bought her, so he took them with him when he left. He returned the shoes to the shoe store using Edith's original bill of sale and gave a box containing the watch to a waitress to hold for him until Monday. Westgate then made his monthly check-in with Inspector Bishop of the W.C.P. at the Rupert St. station, went for dinner, and then home to bed.

As Edith was supposed to be staying at home until she left for Vancouver. Her mother became worried when she did not return home Saturday night and on Sunday, December 5th, at about 2:55 am she went to the Sargent street rooming house to see if Edith was there. The landlady indicated that she had not been there for several days but that perhaps Mr. Westgate might know where she was since they were friends. Westgate pretended to be sleeping when Mrs. Cook and the landlady came to his room so they decided not to bother him. Mrs. Cook then went to the Rupert St. station and at 3:55 am reported Edith missing. Westgate became so agitated that Mrs. Cook had come to his room looking for Edith that he couldn't sleep and at about 5:00 am he went to a local coffee shop where the waitresses overheard him mumbling over and over, "I shouldn't have done it, I shouldn't have done it". He left the coffee shop shortly thereafter and went back home.

When Edith still had not returned home Mrs. Cook went to the CPR station and waited to see if her daughter showed up to catch the train to Vancouver. By 11:30 am Edith had not shown up so she went back home and asked her husband to come with her and see Mr. Westgate who might know where their daughter was. Westgate was awake when they arrived and stated that their daughter had taken a room at the Marlborough Hotel and that he had seen her there himself on Friday night. He agreed to accompany the Cooks to the Hotel to check on her well-being.

At about 4:30 pm on Sunday, December 5th, the Cooks and Westgate attended to room #503 and knocked on the door. There was no answer at the door but there was a strange smell coming from inside so they summoned a chambermaid to open the door. Once inside they saw Edith laying in bed with the covers right up around her head. Mr. Cook pulled back the covers and when they saw that Edith was dead Westgate volunteered to call the police. Detectives Williamson and Price (W.C.P.) attended. When questioned by the detectives, Westgate indicated that he had last seen Edith on Friday night when they had a late dinner in her room. While Westgate was not arrested, he was held at the Provincial Gaol on a Coroner's Warrant, under the Coroners Act, as a material witness for the Coroners Inquest to help establish the nature of the death. After the Coroners Inquest established that Edith had been strangled to death Westgate was officially arrested and detained until his trial began on Tuesday, May 2, 1944, before Mr. Justice Major. Westgate's family again retained Charles Tupper (now Sir Charles Tupper, K.C.) to act as counsel for Westgate.

The trial of Albert Westgate lasted 6 days and ended on May 8, 1944, with a verdict of guilty. Westgate was sentenced to be hung by the neck at Headingley Gaol on July 24, 1944. An appeal was launched on the grounds that there was no evidence presented at trial upon which a jury could properly convict. However, a unanimous Court of Appeal (5 judges sitting) found that there had been ample evidence upon which the jury could convict, and that the verdict was neither unreasonable nor unsupported by the evidence and that "the evidence as to the

guilt of the accused [was] overwhelming". Westgate's execution was scheduled to be carried out as ordered and at 1:17 am on July 24th John Ellis finally had his chance to pull the lever on Albert Westgate.

Although the Criminal Code provided that condemned criminals were to be buried within the walls of the institution in which they were hung, the War Veterans again came to the aid of Westgate and they were granted permission by the Minister of Justice to bury his body in the Military section of Brookside Cemetery. He was buried on July 25, 1944.

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