

The John Marley Tragedy

August 1966

At the Guildhall in London in March 1967 Gladys Marley accepted the first ever **Gold Medal for Bravery** awarded by the Association of Chief Police Officers. It was given posthumously for her son, 21 year old **John Mitchell Marley**, who had been fatally stabbed on 3 August 1966 after chasing a shoplifter in Manchester.

John- or Johnny as he was generally known- was from Park Avenue, Washington, and was working as a laboratory analyst for a contractor building the Mancunian Way, an inner city motorway, later opened by Prime Minister Harold Wilson. He had recently returned to his Manchester digs after a two week holiday back with his mother in Washington. He, and a work colleague, Thomas Stephens, gave chase to two shoplifters fleeing from a tobacconist in Oxford Road, Manchester after the owner had set off an alarm. John raced through adjoining streets after 33 year old itinerant and serial thief, **Michael Grimes**, who stabbed him when confronted. Though John was taken quite quickly to the Manchester Infirmary he was dead on arrival.



Shop raid woman prays for stab victim's family

'I WOULD ALMOST RATHER THAT MAN STABBED ME...'

BY A STAFF REPORTER
WHITE-HAIRED Miss Teresa McElugh, the Manchester shopkeeper attacked by the raider who later murdered a pursuer, today said a prayer for the 19-year-old man who was stabbed to death.

Still trembling with shock, Mrs. McElugh had just returned from morning Mass.

In her corner tobacconist's shop in Oxford Road, Chorlton-on-Medley, she said: "I would almost rather the man had stabbed me."

She added: "It seems terrible someone should die trying to help me."

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Detectives build up stab dossier

Continued from Page 1

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I never thought at that time that the man's presence away was anything more than someone who had tried to steal cigarettes.

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"I thought if we could find him in the crowd, I could see him and phone the police. But he turned his head and I lost him."

"That was the last we saw of him."

An hour later the police told her a man had been seen about 10.30, near the corner of the street where the man was seen to turn.

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This robbery and murder hit the national headlines. It was the first time the popular press used the phrase 'Have A Go Hero' when reporting on the case, just weeks after the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, used it in a speech. Within days the chairman of the Washington Urban District Council, Councillor Richard McGlen, launched a **memorial fund**. After a number of money raising events, including a variety show at Gateshead Town Hall headlined by singing stars Teddy Johnson and Pearl

Carr, it reached £1,900 when it was closed in the following spring.

Johnny was born in 1945 and adopted by Gladys nee Jameson, and George Edward Marley. They had married in 1928, in the same quarter that she gave birth to a son, Turner Marley, who sadly died a few months later. In 1929 her daughter, Mary Jane Marley, was born. Tragically George was killed by a rock fall at Washington pit in 1952, and Gladys never remarried.

Johnny went to the Washington Grammar School in 1957, eventually becoming a prefect. By all accounts he was very popular. The press reported large crowds at his funeral and burial at Holy Trinity Church in Washington Village two weeks after his death.



NEIGHBOURS and children stand in Park Avenue, Washington, as the body of John Marley is carried to the hearse this afternoon.

CROWDS LINE STREETS FOR HERO'S FUNERAL

A CROWD of 500 waited at Holy Trinity Church, Washington, this afternoon for the funeral of John Marley, the town's "have-a-go hero," who died after a stabbing incident in Manchester two weeks ago.

Have-a-go man's killer is jailed for life

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
DUBLIN-BORN Michael Grimes, aged 33, the killer of "have-a-go" hero John Marley, aged 21, was jailed for life at Manchester Crown Court.

Grimes was arrested in a Liverpool pub in the week after the murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment in November 1966. His accomplice, 20 year old **William Lyons**, was sent to a Borstal.

It was decided to use most of the memorial fund to build a community hall for old people in the Oval as an addition to what was already planned. Additional funding came from Washington

Development Corporation, Washington Urban District Council, Durham County Council and The King George VI Foundation Fund, with a further £200 from the fund to be given to Washington School for an annual prize.

The concept of 'have a go' was critically examined by journalists and others, especially over the lack of compensation for anyone who suffered when they intervened. Granada TV made a documentary on the crime, '*Epitaph for a Young Man*', that should have been transmitted on 14 April 1967, but, at the request of Gladys, it was pulled a few days before transmission, However it is now on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mqa2tH1aDyY> BBC2's Man Alive referred to the John Marley case in a programme titled '*Have A Go?*' in January 1968.

In May 1967 Johnny's action were further recognised when he

5730	SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 23RD MAY 1967
	William Derek HANDLEY, Maintenance Foreman, Widnes. For attempting to rescue a man from drowning in a heavy sea.
	Stewart Maxwell JONES, Detective Sergeant, South Australia Police Force. For disarming a mentally deranged man.
	Maurice George LUNNON, Driver, Norfolk Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association, Norwich. For services when a fire occurred in a Territorial Army Centre.
	Noel Arthur McLACHLAN, Constable, New South Wales Police Force. George STOTT, Constable, New South Wales Police Force. For services when a man armed with a shotgun threatened to shoot his neighbour.
	John Mitchell MARLEY (deceased), Materials Technician, Washington, County Durham. For attempting to detain an armed robber.
Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct:	
Derek Clive BRAUMONT, Constable, Ipswich County Borough Police. For rescuing a man from drowning.	
John Edwin BUCKLAND, Constable, West Sussex Constabulary. (Chichester.) For arresting a youth armed with a loaded shotgun.	
David BUSH, Prison Officer, H.M. Prison, Maidstone.	

received the **Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct**.

There was a delay in constructing the hall when the parties fell out over who would managed the centre. This was overcome and it was built in the following year. It was called the **John Marley Memorial Room**, until it was replaced by the Millennium Centre in 2000.

Johnny's mother, Gladys died in 1993, and his sister, Mary Jane Kenyon, in 2010. It was a tragic episode that had a significant impact on Washington and the whole country at the time, but the memory of it has long faded. There is no plaque or reference in the Millennium Centre today (2023). Hopefully this article will correct that.



The Marley Family Grave in Washington Cemetery



Washington History Society would like to hear from anyone who knew John and his family, or remember the case and its aftermath.

(A personal note: I knew that part of Manchester very well in the late 1950s and 1960s because my father's cousin and her husband ran a sweet shop off Oxford Road, so as children we always enjoyed visiting them!).

Ged Parker