

## John and Meryl Parry - July 2015

A FORMER lecturer killed his dementia-suffering wife in an act of desperation, then took his own life after being charged with her murder. John Michael Parry, 81, smothered his wife Meryl, 80, after seeing her being treated like a 'farm animal' by the carers he had hoped would look after her. The pensioner tried to kill himself at the same time, but survived. He then confessed to police and was charged with his wife's murder the next day. Two days before he was due to appear in court, Mr Parry, who once taught philosophy at the University of Manchester, went missing. His body was found in a remote spot near his farmhouse on the edge of the Lake District. An inquest into the couple's deaths yesterday heard how Mr Parry had felt overwhelmed by the struggle of caring for his wife of 58 years and the 'cruelty' of her illness. He had been desperately calling care homes last September to find a bed for Mrs Parry because he was going into hospital for an operation and feared he could no longer look after her. But like many elderly left alone to care for partners with Alzheimer's disease, Mr Parry - whose family live abroad - got no help. When he eventually found a place for his wife, who had suffered from dementia for six years, she was sent home shortly after arriving because staff said they could not control her. Hours later police and ambulance responded to a call from Mr Parry and found his wife's body at the farmhouse. Mr Parry was sitting in the kitchen having tried to take his own life. She had been sent home from the Greenlane Care Home in Brampton, Cumbria, after she escaped from her room. 'He said she'd been returned like a farm animal,' she said.



He told officers: 'I don't regret it.' He revealed that he had spiked his wife's cocoa with sleeping tablets before suffocating her. Mr Parry was charged with murder the following day. He went missing while on bail in December, two days before he was due to appear at Carlisle Crown Court. His body was found in a remote stretch of the River Eden. The inquest at Cumbria Coroner's Court heard how the couple, whose son lives in the US and who lived quiet, isolated lives, had entered into a pact. In a note intended to be left to the local coroner and his brother-in-law in Australia, Mr Parry wrote: 'We have both promised that we would not allow ourselves to go into care with dementia. 'We have had a long life together, and despite what has happened I am pleased that I had the courage to keep our promise.' PC Ruth Coates wept as she told the inquest how Mr Parry had described the desperation that drove him to kill his wife Mrs Parry. Lorraine Rudd-Williams, from Cumbria County Council, said: 'It is a matter of concern that she should be discharged home without the care home knowing the circumstances of the carer. 'I would have expected them either to seek advice from the social services' urgent care team, or consider letting Mrs Parry remain at the home overnight.' The tragedy took a further twist when paramedics told Mr Parry that he could have had his wife admitted to hospital. The grief-stricken academic replied: 'So I need not have done all this?' Only three months before the tragedy, a major search was launched when Mrs Parry went missing from the couple's home in the Eden Valley. Sergeant Claire Sampson of Cumbria Police told how she spoke to a desolate Mr Parry as he dealt with the disappearance. 'He became tearful as I made him a cup of tea. He said it had been a long time since anybody had done this for him,' she said. 'He reminisced about when she was well and a teacher. 'He said how saddened he was by his wife's disease, how it had taken her away and how overwhelmed he felt about the cruelty of the illness that his wife was

suffering." She told the hearing how Mr Parry immediately sprang to his wife's side when rescuers brought her home. 'He sat down and cared for her, checking her for injuries, removing her wet socks and debris from her hair,' she said.

John Parry, 81, had been ringing round desperately to find an emergency care home bed for Meryl, 80, last September and killed her after being told that none was available, an inquest was told. When police and paramedics called at the farmhouse in the Eden Valley, in the Lake District, they found her dead in bed with a plastic bag and a pillow over her face. Mr Parry became increasingly stressed as his wife's dementia got worse, leaving her unable to remember people's names and prone to wandering. He was due to go into Carlisle's Cumberland Infirmary on September 4 for a gall stones operation. After making extensive enquiries about local care homes he booked his wife in for respite care at Brampton's Greenlane House Care home, a recognised provider of care for people with dementia. But just hours after he and a neighbour dropped Mrs Parry off there, she escaped and had to be retrieved by staff. The home's owner, Claire Pratt, decided to take Mrs Parry back to her husband. In a statement, Mr Parry's brother-in-law Huw Owen-Jones recounted a conversation he later had with the pensioner in which he described what happened. Describing his account of events after his wife was left at the Brampton home, Mr Owen-Jones said: "He said he returned home, sat down in the chair and felt an overwhelming sense of relief that he didn't have to worry about what Meryl was doing. "He had been constantly worried that she was getting lost again. "But at 7pm, the care home rang and asked that Michael should go to the home to collect her. He said that he was too exhausted to do that. "Michael then rang seven alternative care facilities but all were either full or there was nobody on duty who could deal with an admission. "He told me that at 9pm, Meryl was bundled through the door and her clothes, which had been neatly folded on her admission, had been stuffed into garbage bags and dumped on the doorstep. "Michael told me that he reached the conclusion that there was no future for either of them. "The care home recommended by his and her doctor, and which advertises in its brochure that it caters for Alzheimer's patients, could not cope with Meryl. "He, Michael, could not cope. He told me: "That was when I did it." In earlier evidence, the Parry's neighbour Fiona Miller, a retired psychiatric nurse, described going with them to drop Meryl off at the Brampton care home. She said: "On the way back, he said: 'What a relief. That was much easier than I expected. Thank you.' He said: 'The guilt will come now, but I'll go in for my bachelor cup of tea.' He looked forlorn. She said Mr Parry clearly did not want to put his wife into a home but he accepted it was necessary. "He'd done a lot of soul searching about it. He wasn't fit and had lost a tremendous amount of weight." Claire Pratt, who is both manager and part-owner of the Greenlane House care home, said Mr Parry first visited on June 27 last year. On August 14 last year, she said, a bed unexpectedly became available and it was earmarked for Mrs Parry. Mrs Pratt said the pensioner was coming on September 1 for "assessment". When assistant coroner Robert Chapman pointed out that paperwork from the home recorded she was coming in for "planned respite," Mrs Pratt said: "I don't remember why I wrote planned respite." Mr Chapman said the evidence clearly suggested there was an agreement Mrs Parry would stay at the home while her husband had hospital treatment on September 4. Mrs Pratt could not recall being told by a local doctor that Mrs Parry wandered. She told how she returned to her care home at 6.15pm on September 1 because Mrs Parry had gone missing and was found walking into Brampton. Mrs Pratt said the care home was not classified as "secure" so she decided Mrs Parry would be better off at home.

Mrs Pratt accepted she should that night have taken advice first from the county council's emergency social worker team. In response to allegations at the inquest that Mrs Parry had not been treated properly, a spokesman for Greenlane Care Home said: 'I'm not bothered what they said. We are not commenting.'

He said how saddened he was by how the disease had taken her away and how overwhelmed he felt about the cruelty of the illness." The inquest was told that on September 1 - the day before his wife died - Mr Parry had arranged for her to go to a north Cumbrian care home. But the same day Mrs Parry wandered out and the home felt unable to cope with her, so returned her immediately "like a farm animal", the hearing was told. The following day - after Mr Parry dialled 999 - police and paramedics arrived at their home to find her dead in bed. A letter to the North Cumbria Coroner was on the kitchen table and officers discovered evidence that Mr Parry had tried unsuccessfully to gas himself. PC Ruth Coates wept during her evidence, explaining she spent two hours with Mr Parry. She said: "He told me he'd taken her to this care home the day before. He said she'd been returned like a farm animal." In January Mrs Parry's murder case was closed after her husband was found dead. He had disappeared in December while on bail before his first appearance at Carlisle Crown Court.

#### Comment

This is a very sad case, clearly the action of the Greenlane Care home precipitated the whole chain of events. Mr. Parry was under considerable stress before Greenlane Care home agreed to take his wife but subsequently they made it intolerable for him, he chose to escape. It is absurd that the care home was not 'secure'....dementia patient wander, that is what they do.