

An Upsetting Discovery in our Cemetery

Which will prompt us to be more patient with traffic lights!

I recently received this message via Facebook which was a challenge that I could not ignore!

*Hi. I saw a grave in Tewkesbury, It says something like Doreen Dudley and her 9 month old son killed. I'm sure it was in the 60's. Not sure why it would say killed, seems quite dramatic to say those words. But I'm so interested in what happened. I can't find anything about it online. Can you help please. Thank you, **Vicky Heath**.*

She promptly responded to my request for a photograph:



A visit to the *THS* website¹ with a search on cemetery will reveal:

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Forenames</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Burial Date</i>
Dudley	Doreen	[24]*	21-Jul-1965
<i>Burial Ref</i>	<i>Cemetery Section</i>	<i>Grave No.</i>	
9076	F	529	

Sacristan's Notes & Residence

A38 Road – Entrance of Deerhurst EX-10265;
SAME BURIAL REF AS PAUL.

The **Burial Record** omitted the **Date of Birth** of Doreen but from her **age*** we can work it out as **1941**. He also added **NOTES** about the location of their death.

The records also reveal the death of a third person: **Phyllis Dudley**, killed on the same date and at the same place aged **64** [Ref. Number 10264]. They also reveal that she was buried in the next plot **F/530a** – but Vicki could not find a headstone to photograph. We can, therefore, deduce that she was the **mother-in-law of Doreen**,

born in 1901, and grandmother of infant Paul. **Three people were killed in this crash.**

The free online website **FREEBMD** confirms that the deaths of the three were registered in **Cheltenham**² [the district of the crash] but also that the date of registration was in the **December quarter** [Oct-Nov-Dec] 1965 and not in the quarter of the death which should have been September 1965. The delay would have been caused by the need for an **inquest**.

Researching people in the post war era is difficult as the last published census³ was the emergency military census of 1939. Knowing that Phyllis was born in 1901 enables us to ascertain that in 1939 she was living at **63 Church Street, Tewkesbury**, the wife of **James Henry Dudley**, an insurance agent, born in 1906 [and his father **James Hubart Dudley**, a dairyman farmer born in 1866]. Then, they had no children.

The free online website **FREEBMD**⁴ reveals that Phyllis had married at **Newent in 1932** and her maiden name was **Warren**, from *Clifford's Mesne*. Armed with that information we can learn that they had

¹ <https://tewkesburyhistory.org/Burials.asp>

² **7B 393** [Phyllis] & **7B 394** [Doreen and Paul]

³ It is published online by the subscription Family History Website, **Find My Past**

⁴ Ref 6a/513

subsequently three children between 1934 and 1938. The last was **Richard John Dudley**, born above in 1938.

Find My Past also reveals **Probate Records**⁵ of the two adults which took almost two years to be granted on 9 March 1967 for both. The value of their estates was: Phyllis £449 [today worth £8,210.00⁶] and we learn that she was living at **27 Barton Road** and her husband and executor was a "Pump Attendant". **Phyllis died in Cheltenham General Hospital of her injuries the same day, but Doreen died at Deerhurst**, which suggests that she was **killed outright at the accident scene**. It was normal then for your people not to make a will [though, once you have children, it is advisable.] **Doreen**, therefore, was only awarded **letters of administration** for her husband who, we learn, is **Richard J Dudley**, a 'fitter', born above in 1938. She was living at **10 Tudor Place, Priors Park** and the value of her estate was £1,166 [£22,740] (I can only speculate why the younger one's estate was of a high value.)

So, who was **Doreen Dudley**? We can learn by finding the **birth of Paul in December Quarter of 1964**. After 1911, the **maiden name** of the mother is revealed on **FREEBMD**. She was born **Doreen Amphlet** and she married **Richard in June Quarter 1960** in the **Cheltenham District**.⁷ She was the daughter of **Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Amphlett of 31 Margaret Road, Priors Park**.

To find more information about the circumstances of this very sad loss of life, we need to turn to local newspapers, which are on-line if one subscribes to **Find My Past**.

The crash was of course headline news in the **Tewkesbury Register** of **Friday, 16 July 1965**:⁸



It was declared "One of worst crashes on the Gloucester Road in years; 9 other people injured". It was a crash, during a rainstorm of a van, driven by **Mr James Dudley**, 59, (a pump attendant at the water works] who had planned day excursion for fishing with a picnic ; he suffered a broken leg and facial injuries. Also injured was his 4-year-old grand-daughter, who lived in Nuneaton. The van was hit behind by a lorry carrying drums travelling from Tewkesbury towards Cheltenham on today's A38 road. The driver was taken to hospital [in Cheltenham with Mr Dudley and where Mrs. Dudley Snr died] suffering from shock. The injured were tended at nearby Highfield Farm.⁹

⁵ **Probate**: Applying for the legal right to deal with someone's property, money and possessions (their 'estate') when they die is called 'applying for **probate**'. If the person left a will, you'll get a 'grant of **probate**'. If the person did not leave a will, you'll get 'letters of administration'. [Wikipedia]

⁶ For each 1965 I have added in [] the worth today from <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>

⁷ Birth: **7B/486** & Marriage **Cheltenham 7b/520**

⁸ Newspaper: *Tewkesbury Register*, predecessor of today's *Echo*. It can be studied on a machine at the Library,

⁹ In 2020, it is a site for light industry

The accident caused queues of traffic on this busy holiday trunk route from Birmingham to the South West.

The van was propelled so far forward by the impact of the lorry from the rear that it wedged under **no. 170** bus at the junction driving north from Gloucester. The van passengers were extricated by Tewkesbury Fire-Brigade [helped by Cheltenham]. Several passengers on the bus suffered from shock – a dog in the van “*escaped unhurt*”.



Newspaper Photograph of the Family

The Funeral

Again, it is to the newspapers of *Find My Past* we turn

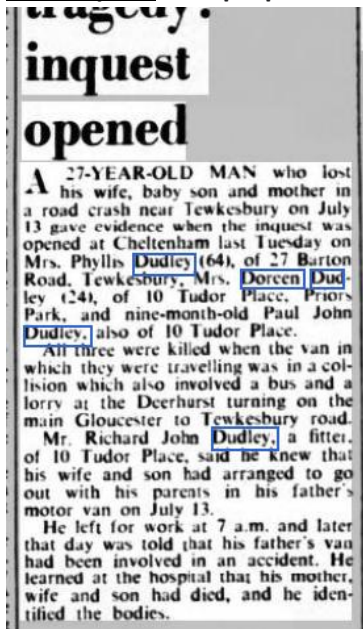
ROAD CRASH VICTIMS' FUNERAL Many mourners at Abbey service

It understandably merited significant coverage of this ceremony at the Abbey in the presence of the Mayor. Objectively speaking historians can learn so much of the exhaustive lists then published by newspapers of mourners - both from the family and local community. From the former, I learned that:

Mrs Phyllis Dudley of 27 Barton Road; daughter of Warren of Cliffords Mesne leaves h 2 sons and a daughter

Mrs Doreen Dudley was daughter of Mr and Mrs R Amplett of 31 Margaret Road; she left a husband as we know.

The Inquest: the purpose of the inquest, held by a legal officer H.M. Coroner, is to find out who the



deceased person was and how, when and where they died and to provide the details needed for their death to be registered. This legal procedure explains why the deaths were registered in a later quarter. This is usually held in public, which means that the press can attend and publish a report. Evidence is given on oath by the police, medical officers in attendance and witnesses.

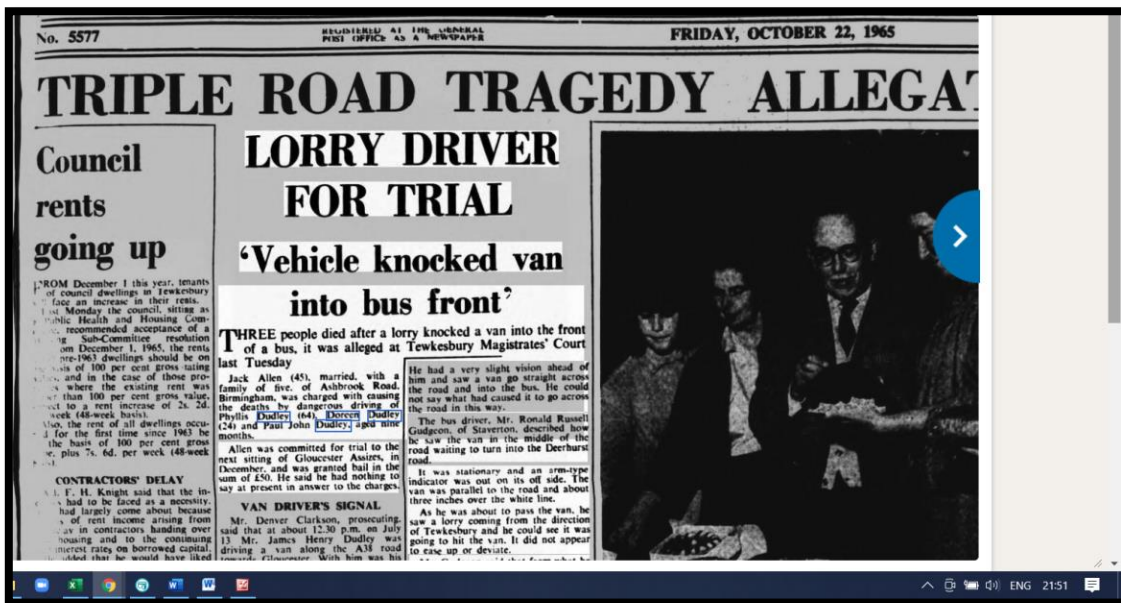
We learned there that Doreen's husband had left for work as a fitter at 7 a.m. in the morning in the knowledge that his father was using his van to take the family on a day's excursion. It was only later in the day that he received the tragic news and attended the hospital where some of the deaths occurred.

As often happened the inquest was adjourned for a verdict at a later date, in this case 6 August 1963, a month later.

We do not have the report of the main inquest but, as a result, the driver of the lorry was blamed for the collision and was summoned to appear at

Tewkesbury Magistrates' Court. However, because he faced the serious allegation that he caused the deaths by '*dangerous driving*', he was sent for *trial by jury* at Gloucester Crown Court, where more serious sentences could be ordered. The initial court report was published three months after the accident on 22 October 1965 and the trial was set for 6 December 1965 – but the driver was released on £50 bail [£975].

We now learn more about the driver who was from Birmingham and when he approached the site of the accident he did not deviate or "ease up". The van was in the centre of the road, waiting to turn right across the Gloucester carriageway, en route for Deerhurst. In those days, cars mainly had no indicator lights but a *semaphore device*, one attached to both sides of the car. The lorry hit the van from behind forcing it forward to be wedged under the oncoming bus



Why did lorry not overtake the van to the left?

The lorry driver pleaded guilty and the judge agreed that he had not been driving recklessly or dangerously but had *“not kept a proper look out”*. He was banned from driving for 5 years and, because he had lost his job, there was a *“low fine”* of £25 [£487].

Conclusion

It would seem that careless driving caused such devastating consequences for this local family. Three were killed and two badly injured, even if we do not know the extent of those injuries. The van driver, grandfather **James Henry Dudley**, had evidently left Tewkesbury and died in 1984 when living at 10 Gilmour Crescent Claines Worcs; he was, however, buried in Tewkesbury Borough Cemetery in Grave G/2575, along with an infant son, **Peter James**, who had died aged 10 months in 1937. The bereaved husband was born in 1938. We do not know the futures of the bereaved husband or those injured.

What a tragic human waste caused by one professional driver, driving *“without due care and attention”*.

The only positive legacy is that, perhaps in the 1980s, these traffic lights were installed which are now controlled intelligently. It is worth being patient.



The same junction for a right turn on a wet day in December 2020 – now with traffic light