THE CROSSING
AT FEN REACH

The boat crossed. Who stayed aboard?





PORTRAIT ILLUSTRATIVE ONLY

FILE 026 · FEN REACH · STATE OF ALDRIDGE
10 MAY 1963

ARCHIVE COPY · REVIEWED 1991

OPENING BRIEF

At about 18:13 on Friday 10 May 1963, two people recovered Clara Venn from the water beside the old wash steps at Fen Reach. Her wrists were restrained behind her with her coat belt. Assistance was called from the repair yard, but she did not survive.

Her elder brother Gareth said he had been aboard the ferry throughout its evening crossing to Westford and return. Toll clerk Edwin Hale had seen him board at Upper Landing. The vessel log placed the ferry on the west bank during part of the relevant interval. Together, those facts appeared to put Gareth away from the wash steps.

The 1991 review reunites the police bundle with the ferry service's retained landing books and crew statements. Read the actual calls, not just the destination of the service. Then distinguish a witness's view of departure from a record of a person's whole journey.

Clara had accepted work away from the family yard. The file includes that choice, her brother's response and a planned return of keys. None supplies guilt by itself. The finding about her death must rest on the shore evidence as well as the journey.

HANDLING. Read pages 1–27. Complete Worksheets A–C on pages 28–30. Use the nine hints on page 31 only if needed. Keep page 32 sealed until Worksheet C is complete. The host keeps pages 33–34 from players until the end. Print single-sided at actual size.

> All people, places and procedures are fictional. No outside ferry, tide, medical or legal knowledge is required. Photographs are illustrative and contain no hidden clues.

PEOPLE, BANKS, TIMES

Clara Venn, 38 — upholstery worker, victim; had accepted independent employment at Westford and was leaving the family's daily yard work.

Gareth Venn, 42 — Clara's elder brother, yard contractor; opposed her departure and claimed continuous travel on the ferry.

Lydia Pike, 56 — ferry master; kept the vessel's movement log and describes a return boarding at Lower Landing.

Edwin Hale, 64 — Upper Landing toll clerk; saw Gareth board and depart, but could not see beyond the mill bend.

Sonia Bell, 30 — market gardener and Clara's friend; saw part of the confrontation at the wash steps and called for help.

Miles Crowe, 49 — boat repairer at Lower Landing; spoke with a passenger who came ashore and later helped recover Clara.

Upper Landing U and Lower Landing L are both on the **east bank**. Westford W is on the **west bank**. The old wash steps and repair yard are beside Lower Landing. Their ordinary shore connections are shown in D02.

> All incident times are **Friday 10 May 1963**. Follow-up statements are **Saturday 11 May**. “About” marks an estimate. Shore clocks were later found within two minutes of each other; no perfect synchronisation is assumed. No conclusion needs an exact walking speed or an unprinted route.

READING A FERRY RECORD

SERVICE ROUTE: the advertised sequence of landing calls. A destination name is not a promise that every passenger travels to the final landing.

VESSEL LOG: actual arrival and departure entries for the boat. It can establish where the vessel called without identifying every person aboard between calls.

LANDING TALLY: an anonymous count of people or loads passing ashore or aboard at a particular call. A count does not supply a name. Use an actual identification before assigning a person to it.

BOARDING OBSERVATION: someone sees a person enter the boat. Unless the witness continues watching, it does not establish that the person stays aboard for the whole route.

THREE QUESTIONS · THREE KINDS OF RECORD

ROUTE	VESSEL	PERSON
Planned landing sequence	Actual calls and times	Boarded / left / remained?
Read the service sheet	Read the movement log	Needs identity evidence

Generic guide · the boat's destination does not establish every passenger's journey.

At Fen Reach a passenger may leave at an intermediate landing on the same bank. The working route and actual calls appear in D03–D05. The landings do not exchange names or move between banks that evening.

> No tide calculation, ticket-punch code, nautical speed calculation or passenger-count elimination is needed. A genuine record can be narrower than the conclusion someone draws from it.

10 May 1963 · old wash steps, east bank

Miles Crowe and Sonia Bell recovered Clara Venn from the water beside the old wash steps at about 18:13. Her wrists were restrained behind her by a fabric belt. The assistance desk recorded the repair-yard telephone call at 18:15. Officer Ada Rowe first attended at 18:31. Clara did not survive.

The medical report records drowning while alive and an approximate interval of 18:00–18:15. It does not identify an exact minute or an assailant. The restraint and witness observations required investigation of a possible assault; the report was not treated as an ordinary fall without question.

Gareth Venn said he had travelled from Upper Landing to Westford and back without leaving the ferry. Edwin Hale confirmed seeing him board at Upper. The initial summary referred to him as “away on the west-bank service”. That phrase must be tested against the service's intermediate calls and the separate passenger accounts.

> No charge or conviction is recorded in the original inquiry. This review asks what the combined surviving evidence supports, not what a route name alone suggests.