

## Huntingdon, Bedford and Peterborough Gazette, 11 March 1837

The inhabitants of Ely have been thrown into a considerable state of excitement, occasioned by the following barbarous and inhuman murder. —On Thursday se’nnight, at about 12 o’clock at noon, as a labourer named Veal was emptying a privy at Newnham, in Ely, to his horror and astonishment he turned up the bloody head of a new-born infant, severed at the neck. Mr. Bacon, the constable, was sent for, and as some women had in the mean time washed it with soap-suds, he took it in a pocket handkerchief to the magistrates, who were then sitting; and from whom he received orders to use his utmost efforts to discover the remainder of the body, and the perpetrator of the deed. He accordingly gave Veal instructions to search diligently for the body, and in about an hour afterwards, it was found, wrapped up in an old rag, and close beside it was the knife with which the horrid act was perpetrated.—The inquest was immediately held on the body at the Shire-hall, before H. R. Evans, jun. coroner, and a girl of the name of Elizabeth Sellis, just turned of sixteen years of age, whom Mr. Bacon had apprehended on suspicion, was examined; but she stoutly denied all knowledge of the transaction. After sitting four hours, the inquest was adjourned until 12 o’clock on the following day, at which time medical men would be in attendance; the girl was placed under the care of the constable. At the appointed time the jury again met. From evidence adduced from Dr. Stevens, and the Messrs. Muriel, surgeons, not a shadow of a doubt could be entertained but that she had been recently delivered. After a patient investigation of eight hours, without anything being elicited to prove her guilt, she was asked by one of the jury whether she wished to consult with any gentleman, in the presence of the coroner, in private? She answered that she had no objection to tell Mr. John Muriel and the coroner the whole truth in a private room. They retired for the purpose—(Mr. Evans, the coroner, first cautioning her that what she uttered would be taken down, and be used against her)—when she confessed, “That she delivered herself, without the knowledge of any other person—that the child, a boy, was born alive—that she cut the head off with a knife—that she afterwards fetched a piece of old rag to wrap round the body, and threw them both down the privy, and the knife with them.”—Verdict—*Wilful Murder*.—She was committed to Cambridge Castle on the coroner’s warrant, to take her trial at the next assizes, which will commence on the 17th inst.

**Essex and Herts Mercury, 4 April 1837**

**CAMBRIDGE.**

**\*\*CHARGE OF INFANTICIDE.**—**\*\***Elizabeth Sellis was indicted for the wilful murder of her illegitimate child by cutting off its head.—The prisoner is a mild-looking girl of 16, the daughter of a labouring man living at Ely. Towards the close of the last year she was observed by her neighbours to be pregnant, but about the middle of February the outward signs of that state disappeared, and, although she looked ill, she no longer appeared to be *enceinte*. In the early part of that month her father gave up the occupation of the house in which he had long resided, and went to live in another part of the city. He was succeeded by one Veall who, before he took possession, set about emptying the privy. Almost as soon as he had begun this work his shovel struck upon what he thought was “a football,” but it proved to be the head of an infant. Searching farther he found the body wrapped in a piece of an old gown. These he immediately took to the coroner, who summoned a jury to investigate the matter. Suspicion fell on the prisoner, who was taken into custody. It appeared by the evidence of a Mrs. Jackson, who lived opposite the house in which the father of the prisoner had lately resided, that soon after he quitted it she saw the prisoner enter the house. The prisoner borrowed a broom of a neighbour, and pretended to sweep about the front of the house for a few minutes, when she went into the house, and shut the door, the shutters being also closed. Mrs. Jackson saw her go from the back-door to the privy already mentioned two or three times, and altogether she remained in the house an hour and a-half. Whilst the coroner’s jury were inquiring into these matters the prisoner requested permission to speak to the medical witness in the adjoining room, and he and the coroner went thither with her. She then made a voluntary confession respecting the death of the child. The particulars of this confession are not fit for publication.—Mr. Justice Coltman, in summing up the evidence, left to the jury three questions—first, whether the child was born alive; next, whether it was alive at the time its head was cut off; and, lastly, whether the prisoner had done the act. With respect to the first question, his lordship said that in order to justify a conviction for murder, they must be satisfied that the entire child was actually in the world in a living state. If it be wholly born, and was alive at

the time of the act, it was not essential that it should have breathed, but they must be convinced of its being wholly born into the world in a living state. If they were so convinced, still if they thought the child died before the head was cut off, they ought not to convict the prisoner. If they were not satisfied on these points, they might find her guilty merely of concealing the birth of the child.—The jury almost immediately found the prisoner Not Guilty of murder, but Guilty of concealing the birth.—The learned Judge sentenced her to be imprisoned for two years.