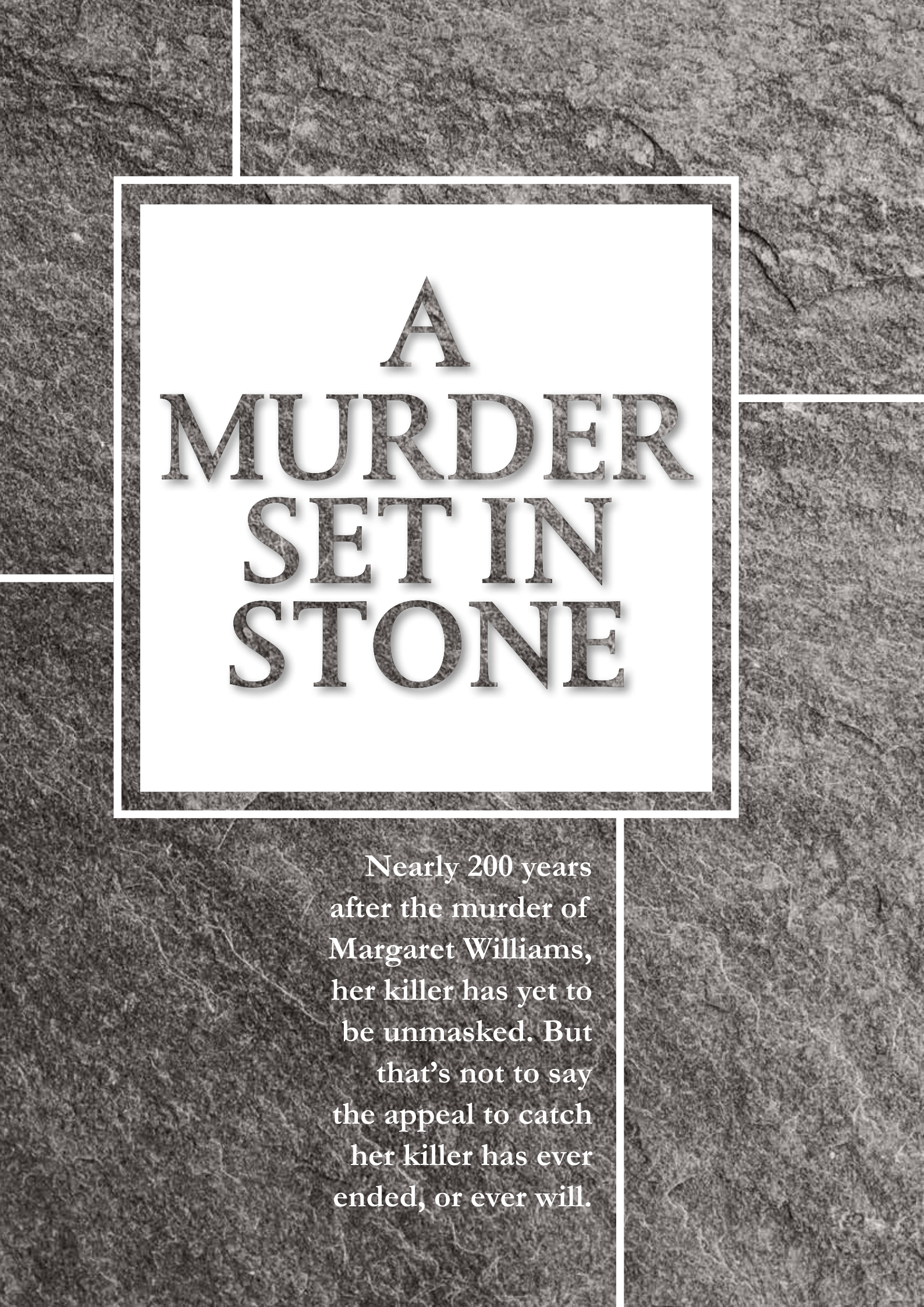




A MURDER SET IN STONE

Nearly 200 years
after the murder of
Margaret Williams,
her killer has yet to
be unmasked. But
that's not to say
the appeal to catch
her killer has ever
ended, or ever will.

For etched into stone above her remains is the detail of how, when and where she died – the only thing that’s missing is at whose hands. It does, though, vow that whoever was responsible would meet “terrible righteous judgement”.

The carving is known as a “murder stone” and is one of only around 100 found in the UK.

They were popular for a while in the early 1900s, often carrying portentous warnings to anyone responsible or thinking of committing similar acts, or a simple moral message such as “Do no murder”.

They often came with biblical references of fierce retribution to the killer, and would frequently be paid for by local communities as a way of expressing their outrage over what had happened.

The memorial to Margaret Williams’ grisly death sits in the graveyard at St Catwg’s Church in Cadoxton near Neath, in South Wales.

A 26-year-old pregnant local woman, her badly-beaten body was found in marshland near the town and, while conspiracy theories abounded as to who was responsible, no-one was ever brought to justice. That didn’t stop the local community expressing its outrage, though, and residents clubbed together to pay for a stone that sits above her remains.

The inscription reads:-

“To record murder.

This stone was erected over the body of Margaret Williams aged 26, a native of Carmarthenshire living in service in this parish who was found dead with marks of violence on her person in a ditch on the marsh below this churchyard on the morning of Sunday the fourteenth of July, 1822.

Although the savage murderer escaped for a season the detection of man yet God hath set his mark upon him either for time or eternity, and the cry of blood will assuredly pursue him to certain and terrible righteous judgement.”

The murder of Miss Williams was a huge story locally and remains part of the town’s folklore. Flowers are regularly laid at the stone even now, while the stone sits at an imposing point on the way into the church, some say as a constant reminder to prick the conscience of the killer or those who might be harbouring him.

Dr Jan Bondeson, a retired senior lecturer at Cardiff University, has researched the stones

and told the BBC that, at the time, “there was a strong instinct to commemorate a tragic murder.”

A reflection of their popularity of the time comes in Charles Dickens’ 1838 novel *Nicholas Nickleby*, where Dickens references the real-life murder stone at Devil’s Punch Bowl at Hindhead in Surrey.

The stone, set in the countryside next to a bridleway which once formed a main road, refers to the Unknown Sailor, a sailor who had arrived in the area but who apparently was not known by anyone, and who was murdered, in 1786, by three men who he had befriended in a nearby pub. The three men were later caught and hanged.

The murder stone was erected by a local mill owner read:-

“ERECTED, In detestation of a barbarous Murder, Committed here on an unknown Sailor, On Sep, 24th 1786, By Edwd. Lonegon, Mich. Casey & Jas. Marshall

"Who were all taken the same day, And hung in Chains near this place, Whoso sheddeth Man's Blood by Man shall his, Blood be shed. Gen Chap 9 Ver 6"

All known murder stones have been found in the countryside or more rural areas – there are no recorded ones in towns or cities - while many are now considered local landmarks and tourist draws. Some have been granted protection as listed structures.

Earlier this year a Grade II-listed stone next to the A684 in Wensleydale, North Yorkshire, was smashed into several pieces when it was hit by a car. The stone commemorated Nicholas Carter, a 56-year-old farmer who was mugged and murdered.

The stone was simply engraved: **“19 May 1826. Do No Murder.”**

Despite initial concerns that it was beyond repair, thanks to the expert work of two local men, a stonemason and the farmer who found the broken stone, it has been restored back to its original state.

