

EXTRACT FROM *FOUL DEEDS* BY DEE GORDON

... headlines reported the 'shocking discovery' of 'A Woman found in a pond with her head nearly half cut off'. She had been discovered around 5pm on Saturday 20 May [1893], her body lying face down in the water. A labourer, Alfred Hazell, made the discovery, and had been 'horrified' when he approached the body and turned it over to find that her throat was 'cut from ear to ear', with the head 'half-severed' from the trunk.

The villagers of Rochford appear to have been in a 'ferment of excitement' for the next few days before the inquest, trying to decide whether this was wilful murder or a case of a dramatic, and drastic, suicide. As a broken umbrella had been found nearby, and there were injuries to the back of her fingers, not to mention the severity of the deadly wound, murder seemed the most popular bet – though advocates of suicide pointed out that a manic determination to commit suicide would make the brook the ideal choice, in that if the throat-slitting failed, drowning would make death 'doubly sure'!