

**BIRMINGHAM POST December 12<sup>th</sup> 1888**  
**EXECUTION AT WORCESTER**

Yesterday morning, Samuel Crowther, an old man seventy one years of age, was executed in the Worcester Prison, for the murder of John Willis. The murdered man, who was sixty five years of age, resided at Church Terrace, Dodderhill, Droitwich. Deceased, who was a market gardener, had been in the habit of rising early in summer months for the purpose of collecting the pears which fell in his garden during the night. On the morning of the last day of July he rose at a quarter to four, telling his wife he was going down to see after the pears. He partially dressed himself, and went down into his garden. Two or three minutes subsequently his wife heard him calling for her to go downstairs, and he exclaimed, "Old Sam Crowther has killed me". She hastened down, and found her husband leaning against the wall of the house, near to the back door. He held his right hand to his chest. He was unable to speak, and she assisted him to a chair in the kitchen. She then observed that he was bleeding at the chest. She fetched in a neighbour (Mrs Fowkes) and Mr Fowkes went for medical aid, but before Dr Cuthbertson arrived Willis had expired, without uttering another word. Police-sergeant Harrison was speedily at the scene of the tragedy, and soon afterwards he went to Crowther's house, which he found locked up. He effected an entrance, and found Crowther in bed. Crowther expressed surprise at the officer's visit. Police-sergeant Harrison found some boots and trousers wet indicating that they had just been worn. He also found a knife similar to what Crowther used in his trade as a shoemaker, and upon that knife were stains, which were found to be blood. When taken into custody Crowther denied committing the murder. Upon his finger there were blood smears, but he said they were jam marks. At the trial a series of witnesses were called who deposed to seeing Crowther shortly before the murder in the vicinity of Willis's house, and shortly afterwards he was seen wending his way through Dodderhill churchyard and towards his home. Upon his trousers, waistcoat and shirt bloodstains were found. The supposition was that the deceased man found Crowther in his garden appropriating the fruit, and that directly Willis appeared Crowther stabbed him several times in the breast, one of the wounds penetrating the heart. Independently of the murdered man's last words, the circumstantial evidence against Crowther was very strong. At the trial prisoner's counsel endeavoured to get the crime reduced to that of manslaughter, but failed. Crowther had lived at Droitwich for many years, where he worked as a shoemaker. It is said that when a young man he served for some time in the Birmingham Police Force and subsequently was a watchman in some Liverpool docks, where his hip was injured, which rendered him a cripple. He then returned to Droitwich, where he had a fair business, and employed two or three workmen. He married late in life, his last son being still a youth. Of late years, his business declined, owing to the introduction of machinery, and he has since earned a very precarious living. His eldest son is a boatman, and when his wife died five years back his two youngest children went to the workhouse, where they are now. For some years past Crowther has enjoyed an unenviable notoriety for his garden pilfering proclivities, and he has been convicted some half dozen times for garden robbing. Since his condemnation he has been very indifferent to his fate, and although visited by several relatives he always avoided all reference to the crime. A petition was presented to the Home Secretary praying for a reprieve, but it was unavailing. Yesterday morning, when the prison bell began to toll at quarter to eight, there was a dense fog, and the air was intensely cold and raw, notwithstanding which some 300 people assembled outside the prison to witness the unfurling of the black flag. The reporters were admitted at that hour, and were immediately conducted to the wheelhouse, where Berry was making a final inspection of the gallows. On this occasion Berry brought with him an assistant, he deeming this expedient as Crowther was a cripple. About five minutes to eight Berry entered the condemned cell, and the procession directly afterwards wended its way from the prison across the large yard to the wheelhouse, the prisoner being supported by the executioner and his assistant. As the procession crossed the yard the Chaplain recited the usual passage from the burial service. The condemned man was speedily placed in position beneath the fatal beam. He looked up at the rope, and then dropped his chin upon his breast. When Berry had adjusted the cap Crowther in a whining tone said, "Take the cap off, take the cap off". Berry however continued his preparations, with the assistance of a warder standing on each side of the condemned man. In less than a minute from the time of reaching the drop Berry drew the lever, and death appeared to be instantaneous. After hanging an hour the body was taken down, and at the inquest the usual verdict was returned. The chaplain of the prison states that Crowther confessed his crime and that he died penitent. A few minutes before Berry was introduced to the condemned cell Crowther asked for a drink of beer, but as this was not easily procurable brandy was fetched, and he drank it. Owing to the condemned man having a remarkably thin neck Berry gave him a drop of 3ft 6in only. He was 11<sup>st</sup> 4lb in weight. One of the jurymen who tried Crowther has written to Mr Holyoake, the culprit's solicitor, stating that the jury were in favour of a recommendation to mercy, on the ground of absence of motive and old age, but that the foreman was so overcome with emotion that the recommendation slipped his memory. It is said that Crowther was very anxious to be supplied with leather wherewith he could make himself a pair of new shoes in which to be hanged. The murdered man, Willis, had been very kind to Crowther, frequently giving him food and work. This is the second execution that has taken place in the Worcester Prison this year, Thomas Wyre having been executed on July 16 for the murder of his child, aged four years at Wolverley. Berry, the executioner, proceeded to Kidderminster by the ten o'clock train from Worcester after discharging his duty at the gaol and the fact of his presence in the town drew a number of persons to the houses he visited. We are informed that he delivered an address at an inn he called at. He stated that he had been brought up to the carpet and blanket trade and referring to his "official" duties, he said some of them might think him a very low sort of man to follow the occupation he did. He thought it better, however, that he should perform the duty well than for someone else to do it badly. Berry went north by the train from Kidderminster, and a number of persons thronged round the compartment he was in until the train moved away.