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# MABEL GREENWOOD

*née Bowater*

3 September 1871 — 17 June 1919

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*Mabel Greenwood (née Bowater), 1871–1919*

*AI-enhanced restoration of the original press photograph, c.1919*

*Enhancement by Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Tudor59 · Kidwelly · 2026*

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*Buried at St Mary's Church, Kidwelly · Unmarked grave  
Murder victim — killer never convicted*

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*Researched and written by Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Tudor59 · Kidwelly · April 2026*

<https://tinyurl.com/Mabel-Greenwood-Kidwelly>

# MABEL GREENWOOD

*née Bowater*

3 September 1871 — 17 June 1919

*Rumsey House, Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire*

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*Buried at St Mary's Church, Kidwelly · Grave with uninscribed headstone · Murder victim — killer never convicted*

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Mabel Greenwood (née Bowater), 1871–1919. AI-enhanced restoration of the original press photograph, c.1919. Enhancement by Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Tudor59, Kidwelly, 2026. Source image: press photography, Mabel Greenwood murder trial coverage, Carmarthen Assizes, November 1920.

## At a Glance

**Born:** 3 September 1871, Edmonton, Middlesex

**Died:** 17 June 1919, Rumsey House, Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire

**Cause of death:** Arsenic poisoning (confirmed by post-exhumation forensic examination, 1920)

**Buried:** St Mary's Church, Kidwelly — small headstone, no inscription

**Husband:** Harold Greenwood (1874–17 January 1929), Yorkshire solicitor

**Children:** Four children from the marriage

**Father:** William Vansittart Bowater (1838–1907) of Bury Hall, Edmonton — paper milling magnate

**Inquest verdict:** Murder by arsenical poisoning administered by Harold Greenwood (June 1920)

**Trial outcome:** Harold Greenwood acquitted, Carmarthen Assizes, 9 November 1920

**National Archives:** HO 144/11780/399766 · MEPO 3/265B · ASSI 72/46/7

## **A Life Cut Short in Kidwelly**

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In the graveyard of St Mary's Church, Kidwelly, there lies a grave marked only by a small headstone bearing no name. There is no inscription to give the name of the woman buried there, no dates, no words. The stone stands, but it is silent. The grave has remained without a name for over a hundred years because the person buried in it was a murder victim whose death was never officially resolved, whose killer was acquitted by a jury, and whose story became one of the most famous poisoning cases in Welsh legal history.

Her name was Mabel Greenwood. She was forty-seven years old when she died on 17 June 1919 at Rumsey House, Kidwelly, from what was first certified as heart disease and later found to be arsenic poisoning. Her husband, Harold Greenwood, a Yorkshire solicitor, was tried for her murder at Carmarthen Assizes in 1920. He was acquitted. But the jury added a rider to their verdict, unpublished at the time, stating that they were satisfied a dangerous dose of arsenic had been administered to Mabel they simply could not determine by whom.

More than a century later, no one has been held accountable for Mabel Greenwood's death. She lies in St Mary's churchyard without a stone to mark her existence, her identity erased from the very ground where she was buried. This article tells her story.

## **Mabel Bowater: Background and Character**

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Mabel was born on 3 September 1871 in Edmonton, Middlesex, the daughter of William Vansittart Bowater of Bury Hall, Edmonton, a wealthy businessman who had built up a multinational paper milling company. She grew up in comfortable circumstances and on 2 June 1896 married Harold Greenwood, a solicitor originally from Ingleton in Yorkshire. Together they moved to Wales in 1898, settling in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, where they would live for over two decades and raise four children.

By all accounts, Mabel was a respected and well-loved figure in the town. She was active in the local church St Mary's, where she would eventually be buried and involved in community affairs including the tennis club. She was, in the description of those who knew her, popular, engaged, and kind. Harold, by contrast, attracted a rather different reputation. A male acquaintance described him as not having a single man friend and being fond of stirring up mischief and trouble, though he was noted as exceedingly popular with the opposite sex.

The couple lived on income from Harold's legal work, which was irregular, supplemented by payments Mabel received from her father's estate. They employed domestic staff. Life at Rumsey House was comfortable, if not entirely harmonious.

## **16–17 June 1919: The Death of Mabel Greenwood**

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On 16 June 1919 a warm summer Sunday Mabel Greenwood sat down to lunch at Rumsey House with her family. The meal included a gooseberry pie. Shortly afterwards, Mabel complained of stomach pains. "It always disagrees with me," she said. Harold gave her brandy, which caused her to vomit. Dr Griffiths, the family physician, was summoned and dispensed medication.

By the early hours of 17 June, Mabel Greenwood was dead.

Dr Griffiths certified the cause of death as valvular disease of the heart. Mabel was buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, Kidwelly. A small headstone was placed at her grave, but it was left without inscription no name, no dates, no words.

At this point, the case might have ended there a woman of forty-seven dying suddenly of heart failure, mourned by her community, buried, and gone. But events took a different course.



*Capel Sul (formerly Rumsey House), Bridge Street, Kidwelly. Built 1862 in Italianate style, this was the home of Harold and Mabel Greenwood at the time of her death in June 1919. Purchased by the Independent congregation in 1923 and converted to a chapel 1924–26. Digitally enhanced photograph by Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Tudor59, Kidwelly, 2026.*

## **The Remarriage and the Gossip**

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Within four months of his wife's funeral, Harold Greenwood proposed marriage. He had first approached Dr Griffiths's sister, Mary Adelina Griffiths, aged forty-six — she rejected him. He then turned to his secretary, Gwladys Amelia Jones, born in 1888. She accepted. On 1 October 1919 barely three and a half months after Mabel's death Harold and Gwladys married at St Mary's Church, Kidwelly. The very church where Mabel lay beneath a headstone bearing no name.

Kidwelly was a small, close-knit Welsh town. The speed of the remarriage, the age gap between Harold and his new wife, and the contrast between Mabel's popularity and Harold's reputation combined to set tongues wagging. By October 1919 the gossip had reached a level the police could no longer ignore. When Harold was informed that they proposed to exhume Mabel's body, his response was remarkable: "Just the very thing I am quite agreeable."

On 16 April 1920, at the request of Llanelli Police, Mabel's body was exhumed from St Mary's churchyard. The forensic examination that followed would change everything.

## **The Exhumation and the Inquest**

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The examination of Mabel Greenwood's remains revealed no evidence of valvular heart disease — contradicting Dr Griffiths's original cause of death. What it did reveal was arsenic: between 0.25 and 0.5 grains (16 to 32 milligrams) present in the organs. Arsenic poisoning produces symptoms that include vomiting and severe stomach pain precisely what Mabel had displayed in her final hours.

An inquest was convened at Kidwelly Town Hall. The jury was told Harold had purchased arsenical weedkiller. Dr Griffiths's testimony shifted he had initially said he prescribed morphine, later said opium, a much weaker drug. The maid's evidence had changed several times under police influence. Despite these complications, the inquest jury returned a unanimous verdict: murder by arsenical poisoning administered by Harold Greenwood.

Harold's comment on hearing the verdict was simply "Oh dear." He was arrested on 17 June 1920 exactly one year to the day after his wife's death.

## **The Trial at Carmarthen Assizes, November 1920**

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Harold Greenwood's trial opened at Carmarthen Assizes on 2 November 1920. The defence was led by Edward Marshall Hall, one of the most celebrated barristers of the age. Hall opened by quoting from Shakespeare's Othello, framing the case as the product of local gossip and malice. Harold took the stand, denied any involvement in his wife's death, and withstood lengthy cross-examination.

The prosecution's case began to unravel. It emerged that Mabel's money would not pass to Harold on her death but to their children weakening any financial motive. Dr Griffiths's shifting testimony damaged the medical evidence. The maid's changed story carried reduced weight.

### **Irene's Testimony: The Decisive Moment**

Harold's daughter Irene, aged twenty-two, took the stand as the final defence witness. She stated that she had also drunk from the wine bottle alleged to be the vehicle for the poison and had suffered no ill effects whatsoever. The judge said in summing-up: "If she also drank from the bottle, there is an end of the case." On 9 November 1920, Harold Greenwood was acquitted.

He left Kidwelly, changed his name to Pilkington, and moved to Walford in Herefordshire. He died on 17 January 1929.

## **The Jury's Rider: What Was Left Unsaid**

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The jury added a rider to their verdict, suppressed at the time:

*"We are satisfied... that a dangerous dose of arsenic was administered to Mabel Greenwood... but we are not satisfied that this was the immediate cause of death... (nor) how or by whom the arsenic was administered."*

Harold was free. But nobody was named. The question of who poisoned Mabel Greenwood was left permanently open. George Orwell, in his 1946 essay *The Decline of the English Murder*, referred obliquely to a case from 1919 "which I had better not mention by name, because the accused man was acquitted" most scholars believe this was Greenwood.

## **The Silent Headstone at St Mary's Church**

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Mabel Greenwood has lain beneath a silent, uninscribed headstone at St Mary's Church, Kidwelly for over a hundred years. The stone stands, but it speaks no name. The grave location was identified and confirmed by the Reverend Jim Flanagan, Vicar of St Mary's Church, Kidwelly, who was certain of its credibility as authoritative a source as it is possible to have. This article and the FindAGrave memorial created alongside it are the first steps in restoring her name to the historical record. The mystery of who poisoned her may never be resolved. But her life, her character, and her place in this community deserve to be remembered.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/298728484/mabel-greenwood>



## **The Bowater Family: An Empire Built While Mabel Was Forgotten**

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While Mabel lay beneath her silent headstone in Kidwelly, the family she was born into went on to build one of the great industrial empires of the twentieth century. Her father, William Vansittart Bowater, had founded a paper wholesaling business in the City of London in 1881, supplying newsprint to the Daily Mail and the Daily Chronicle. He died in 1907 twelve years before Mabel and did not live to see the full scale of what his family would create.

Mabel was the seventh of her parents' ten children. Two of her brothers rose to the very highest civic office in the land. Sir Thomas Vansittart Bowater became Lord Mayor of London in 1913–1914, taking office just as the First World War began. His brother Sir Frank Henry Bowater followed him, becoming Lord Mayor in 1938–1939 in office when the Second World War began. Two brothers of the woman in the unmarked grave each presided over London at the opening of a world war. The contrast with their sister's fate could hardly be more complete.

Her nephew Eric Vansittart Bowater, grandson of the founder, joined the family firm in 1921 and transformed it into a global corporation. In 1926 he opened Bowater's first paper mill at Northfleet on the Thames. In 1936 he purchased the mills at Sittingbourne and Kemsley in Kent — at the time the largest paper mill in Europe which doubled the firm's newsprint output to around 500,000 tons per annum. By the mid-1950s Bowater was the largest producer of newsprint in the world, with mills in Britain, Canada, and the United States. The company that Mabel's father started as a one-man paper agency in the City of London had become a multinational empire. Mabel never saw any of it. She died in 1919, the year before her father's business became a limited company, and seven years before her nephew opened the first Bowater mill.

The Kemsley mill in Kent which the Bowater family purchased in 1936 and operated for fifty years stands today as part of one of the largest paper recycling operations in Europe. The family name that Mabel was born with is carried by that industrial legacy. Her own name, by contrast, was left without inscription on a small stone in a Welsh churchyard.

## **What Became of Mabel's Four Children**

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Harold and Mabel had four children. Their eldest, Edith Irene Isabelle Greenwood, was born on 3 April 1898 at Enfield near London. She was twenty-two years old when she took the stand at

Carmarthen Assizes as the final defence witness at her father's trial and stated that she too had drunk from the wine bottle alleged to be the vehicle for the poison without ill effect. Her testimony ended the prosecution case. Whether she was telling the truth is something only she ever knew. She carried that knowledge and that question for the rest of her life.

The second daughter, Mabel Eileen Greenwood, was born on 15 November 1902 in Kidwelly named after her mother. A son, Kenneth Greenwood, was born approximately 1909 and was just ten years old on the day his mother died, present at the lunch table that Sunday afternoon in June 1919. The fourth child's name has not yet surfaced in any source.

None of the four children appear to have gone on to public prominence but that is hardly surprising. Their father was tried for their mother's murder, acquitted but publicly disgraced, changed his name to Pilkington and retreated to a village in Herefordshire. The children grew up under that shadow. After the trial they largely disappeared from the historical record, as families touched by scandal so often did. Research is ongoing. Meanwhile on their mother's side, their Bowater cousins were building an empire. The contrast between the two branches of Mabel's family one celebrated, one erased is one of the most striking aspects of her story.

## Sources and Further Reading

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Grave location: confirmed by the Reverend Jim Flanagan, Vicar of St Mary's Church, Kidwelly, April 2026 · National Archives: HO 144/11780/399766 · MEPO 3/265B · ASSI 72/46/7

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