

HOW I EXPOSED THE REAL-LIFE MIDSOMER MURDERER

Having become suspicious of her aunt's relationship with a much younger man, Ann-Marie Blake alerted detectives. Ahead of a new BBC drama, *The Sixth Commandment*, she speaks for the first time about the shocking killing in an English village... and reveals why she believes justice was not done

ANN-MARIE Blake describes her torment as "like having a knife thrust through her heart". In her first-ever interview, six years after the untimely death of her aunt – a death she believes was caused by convicted murderer Ben Field – she is still haunted by how her bubbly, independent relative had been reduced to a frail shell of herself by the time she died in May 2017.

"It is the worst thing," says Ann-Marie, 44. "Every time another story goes out or I see someone that looks like Ben, that knife gets twisted in a little deeper.

"And it will always be like that. I will always have a piece of my heart that will never come back."

Ann-Marie was a pivotal figure in the sensational trial that gripped the nation in 2019. She was the first to alert Thames Valley Police to the actions of Field, the son of a Baptist minister.

The 28-year-old church warden – clever, charming and impeccably mannered – stood accused of murdering distinguished 69-year-old teacher and writer Peter Farquhar in 2015, and of the attempted murder of Ann-Marie's aunt, Ann Moore-Martin, 83, who was a retired headmistress.

The victims were close neighbours, living three doors apart in the

EXCLUSIVE By Vicki Power

chocolate-box Buckingham village of Maids Moreton.

They were both single, childless, deeply religious and, crucially, financially independent.

In a case dubbed the "real Midsomer Murder", after the bucolic popular TV series, it was alleged Field had targeted Farquhar and later Moore-Martin for financial gain, entering into relationships with them, then gaslighting (undermining their perceptions of reality) and poisoning them after persuading them to hand over money and change their wills in his favour.

Though Field denied murder, but admitted charges of fraud and burglary, he was finally convicted of Farquhar's murder in 2019 after the deceased's body had been exhumed in the search for damning evidence of poisoning.

Field is currently serving a life sentence with a minimum term of 36 years.

Although the prosecution alleged a witness had seen Field giving Ms Moore-Martin white powder, Field denied this and was acquitted of charges relating to her death. Yet Ann-Marie contests this emphatically.

"I believe he caused the death of my aunt," she says.

"Whether or not the jury

thought so is a whole other discussion. It baffles me that they came to the conclusion they did.

"In my mind, Ben Field is without doubt the reason why my aunt isn't here anymore."

Ann-Marie is speaking out now because the murder case will return to the public gaze on Monday, when BBC One airs a powerful new four-part drama, *The Sixth Commandment*.

Starring Timothy Spall as Peter Farquhar, Anne Reid as Ms Moore-Martin, *The Split*'s Annabel Scholey as Ann-Marie and Irish actor Éanna Hardwicke as Ben Field, it dramatises the story, bringing the full horror of Field's actions to light.

Until now Ann-Marie has refused all invitations to be interviewed, not only because it is a painful personal story, but chiefly because her aunt made her promise the story would not be made public. Ann-Marie has also chosen not to be photographed for this article.

"I've had to accept that, as much as my aunt wanted me to promise her that this wouldn't be out there, it was out of my hands as soon as it became a murder trial," she adds. "I do find it hard that I couldn't protect her. I loved every bone in her body."

Ann-Marie supported the making of this series and spoke at length to screenwriter Sarah Phelps because "the story being out there isn't perhaps as much of a bad



MANIPULATIVE: Field in a selfie with messages he wrote on the bathroom mirror; below, a young Ann-Marie with her aunt Ann



'I don't want her seen as this elderly victim who didn't know what she was doing'

thing as I thought it would be in terms of awareness of this kind of crime".

She adds: "It doesn't matter if you're an octogenarian or a teenager, you can be taken in and gaslighted at any age".

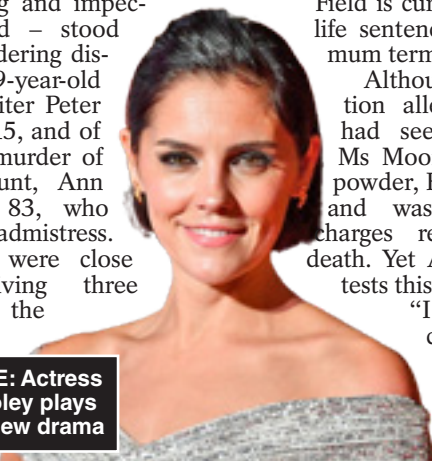
Her aunt was a sociable retiree who lived three doors down from Mr Farquhar. Field targeted her in November 2015, a month after he had murdered her neighbour.

She had never married or had children but was very close to her niece Ann-Marie, a married mother

of four who lived less than an hour away – almost like a grandmother to Ann-Marie's children. But once Ben Field entered her aunt's life, he began to isolate her from her niece.

"My aunt and I would talk every day, but he started intercepting her phone calls and deleting messages from the answering machine," says Ann-Marie. "We used to write to each other all the time, too, and he intercepted those letters. He removed trinkets we had sent her.

"He was focusing on getting her to be dependent on him. She'd been a bit of a social butterfly, but



PIVOTAL ROLE: Actress Annabel Scholey plays Ann-Marie in new drama

SINISTER FIGURE: Eanna Hardwicke as churchwarden Ben Field with Ann Reid as victim Ann Moore-Martin in BBC drama *The Sixth Commandment*



we went from going out to the shops, to lunch, to the cinema and all these fun things to her not being able to leave her bedroom. She became just a shell of herself.”

Ann-Marie says Field avoided or rebuffed her attempts to meet and engage with him.

“My aunt was talking about being in love and marriage and those sorts of things,

“But she’s a woman alone in a house with a complete stranger that nobody knows.

“I suggested we go out for dinner together with Ben and get to know each other, but those conversations about their relationship always ended with her saying, ‘Ben told me you wouldn’t understand.’”

ONCE Field was in a romantic relationship with Ms Moore-Martin, he began writing messages on mirrors in her home that instructed her to change her will in his favour.

A devout Catholic, Ms Moore-Martin believed his story that they were messages from God.

She also gave Field £27,000 towards the cost of a dialysis machine for his brother and £4,000 to buy a car. Eventually, Ann-Marie

was so disquieted by her aunt’s relationship with Field that she went to the police.

But she had no idea whether they would take her seriously.

She worried they might think her crazy or paranoid. In fact, they took her very seriously indeed.

“And it spiralled from there,” she recalls. “At the time I had no idea of the magnitude of what we were going to be dealing with and of the roller coaster nightmare journey that it turned into.”

At that point, police had no idea both Peter Farquhar and Ann Moore-Martin were romantically linked to Field.

The coroner ruled Mr Farquhar had died of accidental acute alcohol intoxication, but once Ann-Marie brought her worries to light about Field’s manipulation of her aunt, they examined further and, in 2018, charged Field with Peter’s murder.

Ms Moore-Martin changed her will back to disinherit Field, but Ann-Marie says she never recovered from his betrayal before her death in May 2017.

“She went through a whole array of emotions and angst about it,” she explains. “She said, ‘You know, I’m an intelligent

woman. I was a headmistress. I’ve taught children. How could I be so stupid? How can I let this happen?”

“We reassured her she wasn’t stupid, that this could have happened to anybody. But she didn’t want to be portrayed as being vulnerable and elderly.”

Ann-Marie recalls her last meeting with her aunt. “She looked so tiny, sat in this chair,” she says.

“I put her in bed and we were just holding hands and she said to me, ‘I love you. You know that,

don’t you?’ And I said, ‘Of course I do. I love you, too’. And she said, ‘But no, I want you to know that I really, really do love you’.

“I kissed her and said I’d be back in the morning and then thought, ‘That was a really odd conversation’.” Ms Moore-Martin died in hospital a few days later in Ann-Marie’s arms.

Subsequently Ann-Marie was a witness at Field’s trial at Oxford Crown Court in 2019.

“I wanted to go in there and be strong enough to be able to tell my own story,” she says today.

“There was a screen up so that I couldn’t see Field.

“I had quite bad PTSD and I didn’t want to trigger that by seeing his face in the courtroom.

“I just wanted the jury to get a sense of the fact that someone can be very well-spoken and intelligent, they can have a very nice background.

“But that can be a mask for a very dark side.

“In my opinion, Ben Field is an individual who is absolutely intrinsically evil.”

Ann-Marie visited the studio set of *The Sixth Commandment* and has watched the whole series, but she admits she found Eanna

Hardwicke’s extraordinary, performance as Ben Field upsetting.

“It actually made me feel sick,” she says. “I couldn’t look, in the end. I turned away every time he came on the screen.

“Eanna found that dark personality trait of Field’s and brought that out in the character, even down to the way they made him look.”

At times it has been difficult for Ann-Marie to talk about what happened to her aunt.

But she is eager to ensure that her aunt’s legacy is not one of having been duped by a predatory man. Instead, she wants her aunt remembered as a vibrant and intelligent woman who was much loved.

“I don’t want her seen as this elderly victim who didn’t know what she was doing,” says Ann-Marie, welling up with tears, her voice cracking.

“She is not a victim of Ben Field. Her name is Ann Moore-Martin and she was the strongest, most empowering individual I’ve ever met.

“She had this natural, inspirational manner about her that made an impression whenever she came into a room.

“She was everything to me. She was my idol.”

● *The Sixth Commandment* starts Monday at 9pm on BBC One



EVIL: Peter Farquhar with his killer Ben Field, who was jailed for 36 years for the murder