

Paul Donnelley's

MURDER MONTH

August

The Hungerford Massacre... On Wednesday, August 19th, 1987 Michael Ryan, 27, armed with several weapons including an AK-47 rifle and a Beretta pistol, shot and killed 16 people including his mother, and wounded 15 others, before shooting himself.

The carnage began at 12.30 p.m. when Ryan, clad in combat gear, abducted Susan Godfrey in Silvernake Forest. He shot her dead before returning to his home in Hungerford, where he shot his pet Labrador and set his house ablaze. Then he shot dead his mother and his neighbours.

He walked around Hungerford firing indiscriminately at any person or car that passed. Remarkably, 77-year-old Dorothy Smith told Ryan off: "I said, 'You are frightening everybody to death. Stop it!' He had a funny sort of grin on his face. So I yelled out that he was a stupid bugger."

Although people had called 999, the police refused to let most ambulance and fire crews into the vicinity because it was too dangerous. Police Constable Roger Brereton drove into the town pulling up just as a warning came over his radio about a gunman on the rampage. It came too late. Ryan unleashed 24 shots into the car – the policeman radioed for help and then died.

Linda Bright and Hazel Haslett drove one ambulance that did get through but as they reversed, they came under fire. Both women would get bravery awards. By this time, a police helicopter was warning people to stay indoors.

The first armed policeman arrived at 1.18 p.m. but he went to Hungerford Common and waited there. Douglas Wainwright was shot while driving with his wife to visit their son, Trevor, a local policeman, and daughter-in-law, Jane. By a terrible irony, Police Constable Wainwright had vetted Ryan when he wanted to renew his licence to cover the gun used in the Hungerford massacre.

At about 2.30 p.m. Ryan took refuge in the John O'Gaunt secondary school where he was spotted at 5.25 p.m.

The emergency services were at last allowed in and armed police surrounded the building. Negotiations began and during these Ryan had said to one policeman, "I wish I had stayed in bed."

At 6.52 p.m., Michael Ryan shot himself in the head. The police still took three hours to enter the building where they found Ryan's body in a classroom.



Michael Ryan