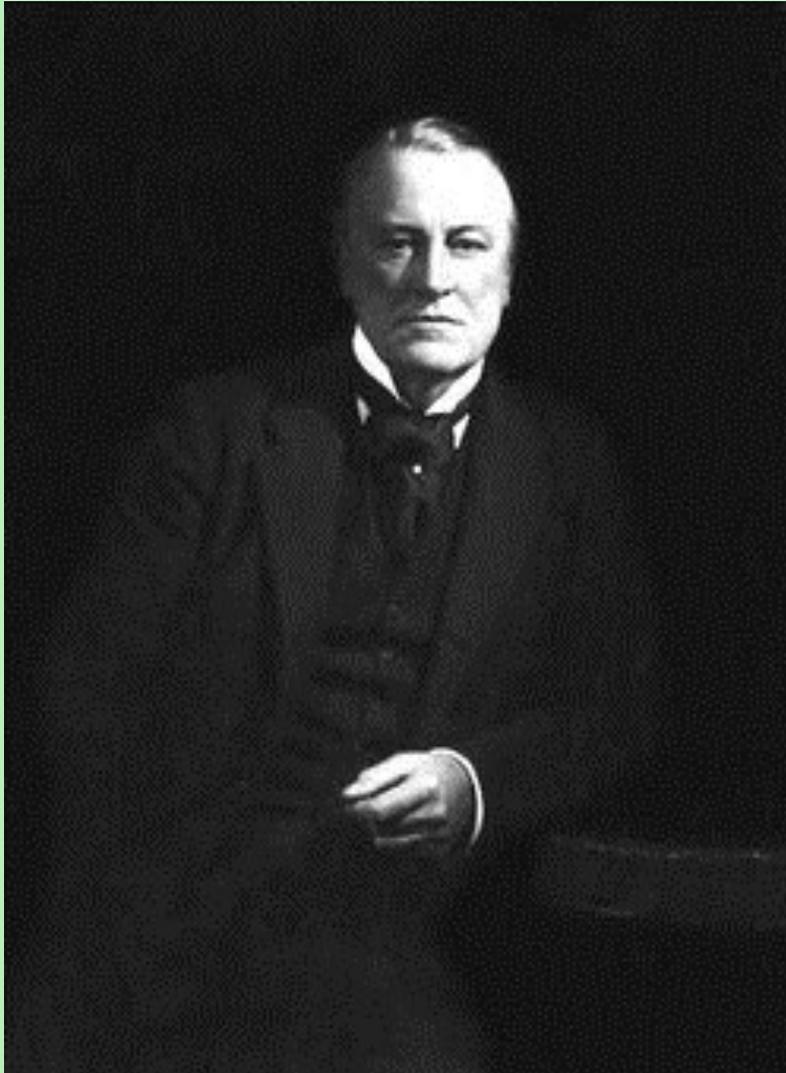


Edward Marshall Hall



'My profession,' once said Marshall Hall, 'and that of an actor are somewhat akin, except that I have no scenes to help me, and no words are written for me to say. There is no back-cloth to increase the illusion. There is no curtain. But, out of the vivid, living dream of somebody else's life, I have to create an atmosphere – for that is advocacy.'

Marjoribanks (Famous Trials of Marshall Hall, 1929)

Inner Temple Library, 2013



Edward Marshall Hall



Edward Marshall Hall was one of the most prominent legal figures of his day, and known as 'The Great Defender' because of his passionate defence of murder suspects in high profile cases.

Born in Brighton in 1858, he was a tempestuous youth; he was removed from Rugby School and was sent to become a tea merchant. However, his father decided to send him to St John's College, Cambridge and his legal career began.

Called to the Inner Temple in 1883, and based in chambers at Fountain Court and 3 Temple Gardens, he had a bright start to his career but his reputation fell dramatically when he faced accusations of inappropriate tactics in a libel case against the Daily Mail.

However, his career was re-launched following his successful defence of Robert Wood in the Camden Town murder case. Further high profile cases followed, including the Green Bicycle Case and his defence of Marguerite Fahmy, which served to increase his renown and gave him his nickname.

He was appointed King's Counsel in 1898, and knighted in 1917. However, his secondary career as a politician, following his election to Parliament in 1901 as the Unionist MP for Southport, was not as successful, and his work in the law continued to be his primary focus and main achievement. He died in 1927, aged 69.

The Great Defender

Edward Marshall Hall's reputation as one of the greatest criminal barristers of his time, encompassing the Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian periods, was earned through his participation in a number of fascinating and newsworthy cases. He belonged to a school of advocacy which fell out of favour even during his own lifetime; one newspaper noted, "When he lays aside his wig and gown, there will go the last representative of a school of barristers." His emotive style, florid language and lengthy statements (he was known to speak for three hours without pause) would certainly not be accepted in today's court but they were greatly enjoyed by the public and, more importantly, the juries of his time.

One of the best illustrations of this is in the first case that made his name and reputation, the Maria Hermann case. Hermann was an Austrian prostitute accused of murdering her clients, and had she been found guilty of this crime she could potentially have faced a death sentence. However, Marshall Hall's tearful plea to the jury persuaded them to convict her on the lesser charge of manslaughter as opposed to murder. He pleaded, "Look at her, gentlemen of the jury, look at her. God never gave her a chance, won't you?"

The Green Bicycle Case

What became known as The Green Bicycle Case centres on the murder of Bella Wright in Leicestershire in 1919. Wright, a factory worker, was found dead in a field with a gunshot wound to her head. The police enquiries centred around the hunt for the male rider of a green bicycle who was seen accompanying Wright on the night of her disappearance. This man was revealed to be Ronald Light, an ex-army officer now working as a school teacher, who was only discovered when someone spotted him dismantling his green bike and throwing it into a river five months after the incident. When this river was dredged it yielded a gun holster and bullets which matched the single bullet found at the scene of the murder. During the trial Marshall Hall abandoned his usual emotional style in favour of a more technical and calculated approach. He persuaded Light to admit to being with Wright, to admit ownership of a revolver, and to admit that the holster found in the river was his. He then focused his line of inquiry on technical details of the case, giving particular attention to the evidence of the ballistics expert. Marshall Hall's argument was that the shot was more likely fired from long range, because a closer range shot such as Light was alleged to have fired would have caused more impact damage to the body. This argument, plus Light's well spoken evidence, was enough to convince the jury of his innocence. This case is interesting as it highlights Marshall Hall's technical proficiency as a barrister. He is often described as being more of an actor than an advocate, but in this case he called upon his experience of previous cases, and his comprehensive knowledge of firearms helped to present a credible alternative account to that put forward by the other side.

The Seddon Poisoning Case

Frederick Seddon was an insurer by trade, and had an obsession with money which resulted in him choosing to take on Miss Eliza Mary Barrow as a lodger while already earning a generous income. In 1911, after rewriting her will with Mr. Seddon's help and naming him her executor, Miss Barrow became ill and died shortly afterwards. Seddon arranged a very quick and cheap funeral, which aroused the suspicions of some of Miss Barrow's family. Upon exhumation of her body it was found that she had died of arsenic poisoning, and Mr. Seddon and his wife became the prime suspects, accused of murdering her with arsenic acquired from fly-paper in order to profit from her will. At this point in his career Marshall Hall was familiar with the task of defending seemingly shocking charges against individuals. However, he was uneasy with the Seddon case when presented with it, describing it as "the blackest case I've ever been in." Although the same evidence was used against them both, Mrs. Seddon was acquitted whereas Mr. Seddon was found guilty and executed. He insisted on testifying, yet turned the jury against him by his cool and calculating manner. This stands in stark contrast to Marshall Hall's Camden Town murder case, in which Robert Wood testified in his own favour but was perceived by the jury as being foolish rather than dangerous, and consequently acquitted. In both cases Marshall Hall recommended that the suspect should not testify, and the dramatically different outcomes demonstrate the unpredictability of the jury's emotions that he tried to manipulate in his clients' favour.

Material in the Inner Temple Library

Behind the Bar (Bowker, A. E. ; 1947) An account by Marshall Hall's clerk.

Shadow of the noose (Cooper, R. ; 1989) A narrative of Marshall Hall's life, and the basis of a BBC TV series of the same name.

Defender's triumph (Lustgarten, E. ; 1951) Contains an account of the Robert Wood trial, AKA the Camden Town murder.

Famous trials of Marshall Hall (Marjoribanks, E. ; 1950) A biography and account of his most famous trials.

The life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall (Marjoribanks, E. ; 1929) A biography of Marshall Hall.

K.C.'s and their chambers (Myers, A. ; 1903) A look at Marshall Hall as a K.C. in chambers.

Marshall Hall : a law unto himself (Smith, S. ; 2016) A biography of Marshall Hall by a Master of the Inner Temple Library.

The green bicycle case (Wakefield, H. ; 1930) An account of his famous defence of Ronald Light.

Trial of the Seddons (Young, F. ; 1925) An account of the important Seddon case.

Unique Material Held by the Library

Notes of cases (Hall, E. Marshall ; 1916-1926)

Notes of cases heard by Marshall Hall as Recorder of Guildford. Some entries in his own hand. Newspaper reports of the cases attached in many cases. Gilt-stamped on front cover: E. Marshall Hall K.C., 3 Temple Gardens E.C.

Press cuttings relating to the career of Sir Edward Marshall Hall (39 volumes ; ca.1883-1927)

In two sequences: Legal (trials) and Political (speeches, etc.). Compiled by or for Marshall Hall himself ~ some volumes have EMH's bookplate with motto: "Crescit sub pondere virtus"

Letters addressed to E. Marjoribanks, author of 'The life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall' (1929) found inside 2 volumes.

