

Court hears how defendant chased 'terrified' wife through Wheatley

# Village man denies murdering his wife

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A HUSBAND threatened to kill his wife before chasing her through the street and slitting her throat, a court heard this week.

Russell Yeates murdered his wife Debbie Smith with a 20cm long kitchen knife before trying to kill himself, Oxford Crown Court was told.

Yeates, a 49-year-old carpenter, denies murder.

Amjad Malik, prosecuting, said Ms Smith was found unconscious in the couple's home in Bell Lane, Wheatley, by a neighbour on May 26 last year.

On the opening day of the trial he told the jury there was a history of violence in the couple's relationship and said Yeates had been cautioned by police for assaulting Ms Smith in December 2006.

Mr Malik said: "There is a background to the killing. There is a history of violence suffered by Debbie Smith in her relationship with this defendant. You will hear, of a man who is extremely violent towards his wife."

He added the couple's neighbour Anne Ledwith saw two people running through Bell Lane on the afternoon Ms Smith, 47, died. He said: "She looked through the glass panes of her front door to see who those two people were. It was the defendant chasing Debbie Smith."

Ms Smith was seen running out of her home on the afternoon she died by a 15-year-old girl, who cannot be named, Mr Malik said.

He said: "She will describe how terrified Debbie Smith looked and how she was crying uncontrollably"

Mother-of-two Michelle Bark, a friend of Ms Smith, said she saw Yeates trying to throttle Ms Smith during the summer of 2006.



■ **AFTERMATH:** Police sealed off an area of Wheatley after the body of Debbie Smith, below, was found



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Shirley Jones, who had known Ms Smith for about eight years, said the week before she died her friend asked her to tell Yeates to leave the house, but he refused. She said: "He said if I did not get her out, he would kill her."

She agreed with Nicholas Syfret, defending, that Ms Smith drank heavily leading up to her death and took drugs.

On the second day of the trial, neighbour Ms Ledwith told the court she realised there was something "horribly wrong" after hearing the couple arguing.

Ms Ledwith said: "There was a strange sort of howling — a half screaming noise. I had seen two figures go past the window. It was Debbie being chased by Russell. He was yelling and she was crying. There was definitely rage in his face, whereas her face was just terrified."

"Most of the noise was coming from Russell. It was not words — it was more of an animal noise. I felt there was something horribly wrong."

The case continues.