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A floral tribute at the gate where Derrick Bird shot dead his twin brother David, the first of his victims
Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

Travelling a 44-mile journey into depravity

Paul Lewis

Retracing the 44.3 miles Derrick Bird is believed to have driven on his murderous journey and stopping by each of the 18 places he is known to have fired a weapon, two things became clear yesterday.

The first is how the 52-year-old driver evaded police for so long, managing to kill nine men and three women. A taxi driver with more than two decades experience of west Cumbria's lanes, Bird took backroads, tracks and sidestreets, some close to his home, that only he could have known so well.

The second inescapable horror about Bird's fatal journey is how it became more depraved as the minutes ticked by. It may have begun as an attempt to settle a dispute but it descended rapidly into something unreal; a drive across a serene countryside, piercing an otherwise tranquil day with potshots at people unlucky enough to be by the side of the road at the wrong time.

What police believe was the first leg of Bird's journey was a short one. The drive from his home in Rowrah, a hamlet near the village of Frizington, to a nearby country home could not have taken more than five minutes.

The view from High Trees House, where he is believed to have shot his twin brother, David, is picturesque. Couched on the side of a hill, the only sign of human activity are the rooftops of distant farmhouses. How early he arrived there is unclear. It is thought Bird may have pulled up in his grey Citroën Picasso before 10am, perhaps earlier. At noon, recalled Shirley, 58, who works at the reception of Dock Ray Meadow caravan park half a mile down the road, armed police arrived, asking for directions to the secluded house. "Sometimes you hear gunshots because it is a farming area," she said. "You wouldn't necessarily think anything of it. There is a moor up there where people sometimes shoot."

From High Trees, Bird is believed to have headed to the home of his family solicitor, Kevin Commons. There is one sighting of Bird at Commons's house at 5am. Bird knew exactly where he was going. Mowbray Farm, the Commons's family home, is almost completely concealed behind trees on a road leading from the village.

A derelict concrete track cuts through nettle bushes to where, yesterday, a huddle of cars were parked in front of a cottage and farm outhouses. It was

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Police believe grudges may have ignited killing spree

Taxi driver held guns legally and had no history of violence. PM and home secretary rule out 'knee jerk' rush to tighten firearms regulations

Caroline Davies
Helen Carter
Severin Carrell
Alan Travis

A taxi driver's killing spree that left 12 dead and 11 injured in Cumbria was fuelled by a grudge that spiralled into "simply random killings", police believe.

As detectives examine the financial and domestic pressures on Derrick Bird, 52, whose rampage on Wednesday left communities scarred and shattered, speculation centred on two feuds - one with his twin brother, David, whom he shot dead, and another with fellow cab drivers in the coastal town of Whitehaven.

It was also disclosed that Bird had legally held the shotgun and the .22 rifle he used in the killings, but ministers ruled out what were described as "kneejerk curbs" on gun laws.

Bird had a shotgun licence for 15 years and a firearms licence covering the rifle since 2007. Police said he had never been to prison - although he was convicted of a theft offence 20 years ago.

He had no history of mental health problems and there was no record of him being on medication.

The leading detective on the case, Chief Superintendent Ian Goulding, said police were looking at why certain individuals had been singled out.

"A key part of the 'why' in this inquiry is to try and establish why those killed were chosen. Because of a ... grudge or simply random killings," said Goulding.

"Our initial assessment shows we have a combination of both and I will not speculate further at this time". Bird may have taken his motive to the grave, he added.

Unconfirmed reports have suggested Bird was upset over a will drawn up by his terminally-ill mother, Mary, 90. But as police searched for a motive the devastated daughters of Bird's twin - believed to have been his first victim - denied a family rift.

In a statement, Rachel, 28, Tracey, 26, and Katie, 19, said: "We are utterly devastated about the death of our dad. He was the nicest man you could ever meet."

"He was a loving husband and doting dad and granddad. We would like to take this opportunity to say there was absolutely no family feud. Our dad's only downfall was to try

and help his brother." David Bird, who lived alone, was found dead at his house in Lamplugh.

Derrick Bird was also embroiled in a dispute with other taxi drivers, including Darren Rewcastle whom he shot at point blank range, over touting at the Duke Street rank in Whitehaven where he worked.

David Cameron and the home secretary, Theresa May, pictured below, are to visit west Cumbria today, with the government promising that Cumbria police would be provided with additional funding for their investigation if necessary.

Both warned against a rush to further tighten the gun control laws in the aftermath of the shootings. "You can't legislate to stop a switch flicking in someone's head and for this dreadful sort of action to take place," said Cameron. May however promised that once "all the facts are known" all the options for gun law reform would be considered.

Alan Johnson, the shadow home secretary, said there

needed to be a review of the gun laws focusing on background mental health checks on applicants for gun licences.

Seven of the 11 injured in the shooting spree remained in hospital yesterday. Two were in a serious but stable condition. Surgeons treating them revealed five had been shot in the face. Charles Brett, clinical director of West Cumberland hospital in Whitehaven, said: "It is clear that he was directing at the face and head."

About 100 detectives are working on the case, described by Cumbria's chief constable, Craig Mackey, as "the most horrific incident I've seen in 25 years of policing".

It also emerged that Bird was due to have an appointment with Kevin Commons, the family solicitor whom he killed, sometime on Wednesday, though it remained unclear what it was about.

Iris Carruthers, 49, who went to secondary school with Bird, saw him in his taxi at the end of Commons's drive between 5.30 and 5.45am on Wednesday. She spoke to him, but he did not reply, and was "in a world of his own," she said.

Simon Jenkins, page 31 »



BP chief digs deep to reassure City over \$10bn dividend

Terry Macalister and Tim Webb

Tony Hayward, BP's embattled chief executive, will risk incurring further wrath in the US over the Gulf oil spill today by defying calls from politicians to halt more than \$10bn (£6.8bn) worth of payouts due to shareholders this year.

He will hope to appease City investors by promising in a conference call with analysts to stick with BP's dividend policy amid mounting concern about a plunging share price.

BP declined to comment on its strategy last night but it is understood that Hayward will say he is confident the company can pay for liabilities resulting from the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion - now

estimated by analysts at \$20bn to \$60bn - as well as rewarding investors.

The move follows demands from senators Charles Schumer and Ron Wyden in a letter to Hayward all dividends be halted until the cost of the clean-up is known.

Analysts warned that committing to the dividend risked further political opprobrium in the US, with Alex Stewart from Evolution Securities fearing it could force



Tony Hayward defied pressure from US politicians to withhold share dividends until the cost of the disaster is known

Hayward to make a U-turn next month. BP reports its results on 27 July, when it will announce the size of its next quarterly payout, but it is expected to spend more than \$10bn in total dividends this year.

"The problem they have is that the oil is likely to be still flowing by the time they announce results," said Stewart. "It's not going to look good paying about \$3bn in [quarterly] dividends to shareholders if at the same time local fishermen are having their livelihoods destroyed in the Gulf."

However, BP's dividend is of crucial importance to the City and to the pensions of millions who depend on payouts from profitable companies to boost their retirement funds. Together with rival Shell, BP accounted for 25% of the total dividends of £50bn paid in the UK market last year. Any

cut in the dividend could result in investors selling BP shares, further weakening the company, which has lost nearly 30% of its value since the disaster began.

Hayward's handling of the crisis has been called into question, and he chose Facebook to apologise for his latest gaffe: saying he wanted his life back. His position has become more troubled since he said in an interview with the FT yesterday that it was "entirely fair criticism" that BP was not fully prepared for the oil leak.

Analysts were yesterday openly questioning the future of Hayward as chief executive, and whether his company could be taken over and broken up.

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