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James Maybrick was known as an "arsenic eater." He became addicted to it when he was prescribed arsenic as treatment for a case of malaria. This poison was used in all kinds of consumer goods during the 19th century. Beauty-advice columns and makeup, during the Victorian age, also featured arsenic-infused products. This 1898 advertisement—for "Dr. Campbell's Safe Arsenic Complexion Wafers"—is just one example.

Although James Maybrick started his marriage as a wealthy cotton merchant, hard times hit the family soon after they moved into a beautiful home in Liverpool. Battlecrease Mansion is still standing and looks much the same as it did when the Maybricks moved there in 1887.

Aigburth, a wealthy suburb of Liverpool near the River Mersey, was a fashionable address for the Maybricks. But the move caused the family to live above their means, and tensions developed between Florie and her husband.

Financial concerns were not the only reason for family quarrels. By 1887, Florie had discovered what other folks already knew: Her husband still had a mistress who, at least for a time, lived in the Whitechapel district of London.

Worse, while the Maybricks were struggling financially, James sent his "other woman" £100 per year. Florie was furious and banned James from her bed. According to reports at the time, they never shared the same bedroom again.

Long before 1887, Maybrick was a full-fledged "arsenic eater." Later, a chemist (Edwin Garnett Heaton), from whom Maybrick obtained his "medicine," said that Maybrick came into the shop on Exchange Street East as many as five times a day to get his "pick-me-up."

By 1887, the "pick-me-up" was producing disastrous effects on Maybrick's personality. He was short-tempered and started to beat Florie.

Ever the headstrong woman, Florie took a lover—Alfred Brierly—a friend of the Maybricks. It came as no surprise to family friends, but when Maybrick realized the truth, he was outraged.

The fact that Maybrick had kept a mistress throughout his marriage was beside the point. Victorian England had many double standards for men and women. What mattered to Maybrick was that his wife had a lover—and—everyone who counted knew about it.

Maybrick was mortified. On at least one occasion, he gave Florie a black eye over her affair.

Tensions in the Maybrick household worsened. James frequently visited his brother Michael, a composer, who lived in London. At the time, Michael (whose stage name was Stephen Adams) had more popular songs than Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame). Indeed, "The Holy City," one of Adams' most famous songs, is still

performed.

But even Michael Maybrick was unable to soothe his brother. The Maybrick marriage was in serious trouble.

By June of 1888, Maybrick began to experience health problems. Always a hypochondriac, his doctors thought nothing was really wrong. Between June and September, he saw the family doctor about twenty times.

Had modern medical technology been available, Dr. Hopper would have realized that Maybrick was suffering from years of drug abuse. But today's medical advances were completely unknown to Dr. Hopper, so Maybrick's true condition went undetected.

Maybrick prescribed his own treatment: ever-increasing doses of arsenic and strychnine. While Maybrick's own treatment produced greater physical strength and stamina, it also produced ever-worsening emotional problems.

From Maybrick's recently discovered diary—maybe genuine, maybe not—we learn that he decided to stop taking huge doses of arsenic during the spring of 1889. Medical knowledge, available at the time, stated such a step could produce fatal results for a long-standing "arsenic eater."

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Media Stream



Battlecrease Mansion

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The Maybricks

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River Mersey

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Whitechapel District - East London

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Michael Maybrick

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Stephen Adams

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