

# Man, 81, killed wife in despair at dementia

**Rosemary Bennett**

Social Affairs Correspondent

A retired lecturer killed his wife with drugged cocoa and a plastic bag because he could no longer cope with her dementia.

John Parry, 81, had been ringing round desperately to find an emergency care home bed for Meryl, 80, last September and killed her after being told that none was available, an inquest was told. When police and paramedics called at the farmhouse in the Eden Valley, in the Lake District, they found her dead in bed with a plastic bag and a pillow over her face.

Mr Parry broke down but told the police officer: "I don't regret it."

However, after paramedics told him that he could have had his wife admitted to hospital the previous night he asked: "So I need not have done all this?"

Mr Parry was charged with his wife's murder, but he was found dead in remote countryside in December, before he was due to make his first appearance at Carlisle crown court. He had drowned in a local river.

Mrs Parry's inquest was told that on September 1, the day before she died, Mr Parry had taken her to a north Cumbrian care home. He was due to have an operation and wanted to make sure that she was properly cared for in his absence.

However, after Mrs Parry, a retired teacher who had suffered from demen-

tia for six years, wandered out of the grounds, the home said that it could not cope with her and returned her "like a farm animal" to her stressed husband.

Alison Armour, a Home Office pathologist, said Mrs Parry died from asphyxia. Tests showed that she had been given a large, but not lethal, dose of sleeping pills in her hot chocolate.

PC Ian Carrick told the coroner's court in Cockermouth that he was one of the first on the scene and found Mr Parry sitting in the kitchen looking ill. The officer said that Mr Parry told him: "I gave her a massive dose of sleeping pills. I put it in her cocoa."

Later Mr Parry told him: "I'm amazed I could do it. I don't regret it. I definitely don't regret it."

Angela Wilson, a paramedic who spoke to Mr Parry before police arrested him, told the hearing: "Mr Parry said he should not have been there. He'd tried to kill himself in the garage."

Sergeant Claire Sampson, of Cumbria police, said she had spoken to Mr Parry a few months earlier when his wife had last gone missing from home. Mr Parry told her he had no support in caring for her. "He said how saddened he was by his wife's disease — how it had taken her away and how overwhelmed he felt about the cruelty of the illness that his wife was suffering," she said.

She described how caring Mr Parry was towards his wife when she was found.

The hearing, which is expected to last for four days, continues.