Bygones

GI bride's killing still a mystery 34 years on

The subject of GI brides has revived memories of a brutal murder which remains unsolved

JOAN Smith was one of those Nottingham girls swept away by the American soldiers who filled Wollaton Park in the months before D-Day in June 1944.

She was a teenager, working as a housemaid for Nottingham Council House architect Cecil Howitt at his Wollaton Park home, called The Thatch.

She met a handsome GI called Clarence Maschek (or Mashek).

By the time he set off for Normandy and the invasion of France, their romance was blooming.

He returned to Nottingham



Tragic: Joan Maschek, who was described as an "artistic type", was found dead at her Lenton flat in 1976

with a Purple Heart medal on his chest and love in his heart. And in the summer of 1945 they were married at Shakespeare Street Register Office.

Barry Roberts, who now lives in Kinoulton, remembers them well.

"My mother also worked at The Thatch. Joan often brought Clarence to our house at Cycle Road, Lenton, which resulted in a friendship with my parents. I was 12 and, as sweets were rationed, you can imagine how pleased I was to have a GI as a friend."

According to Barry, the couple settled in South Dakota and for two or three years, Joan corresponded regularly with his father.

But it seems that life in America didn't suit Joan and she returned home alone some years later.

She lived in Lenton's bedsit area, and became something of a character, described as "an artistic type" who wore large floppy hats and cloaks, by people who saw her in local pubs and clubs. In 1976 her name was thrust into the headlines. It was on a July day in that long hot summer her battered body was found at her home in Douglas Road, Lenton.

She had been brutally murdered, and more than 30 years later her killer has never been found and the file remains open.

Ex-city detective Alf Bowley remembers the case. "I was divisional commander at the Guildhall but they brought in Detective Chief Superintendent Roy Readwin from headquarters to lead the manhunt.

"My memories of it are that more than 100 detectives worked on the case, but they never turned up any leads."

According to neighbours, Joan Maschek enjoyed a good time, one saying: "A lot of people would come and go at all hours of the day and night.

"There always seemed to be parties or goings-on in the flat."

But all agreed she was never any trouble and no one could think of a reason why anyone would want to harm her.

The lack of an obvious motive hampered Supt Readwin's investigation but suspicion eventually fell on a "scruffy" young man known to have met Joan Maschek who police were anxious to interview.

A few weeks after the murder they released an artist's impression of a tall, slim, long-haired man in his 20s with bright red cheeks and a small, wispy moustache.

He was a man of good manners who would chat with Joan about classical music and ballet.

It was a detailed and distinctive description, but they never found him.

A second man, believed to come from West Bridgford, had been seen with Joan walking near County Hall early one morning.

In a bid to track him down, a young policeman bearing a close resemblance took part in

Bygones online

Visit our website for hundreds more Bygones features, photographs and movies

thisisnottingham.co.uk/bygones



No trace: A police reconstruction of Joan Maschek with an unknown young man in West Bridgford two weeks before her death. The police failed to trace him.

Mystery man: Was this a drawing (far left) of Joan Maschek's killer? . Despite the detail, he was never traced. She had married American GI Clarence Maschek (left) in 1945.

a reconstruction but no one ever came forward. Alf Bowley remembers a huge file being compiled on the Maschek murder, containing thousands of statements but the person or persons responsible disappeared without a trace.

Mr Roberts said: "The police made door-to-door inquiries. I heard from the cousin of one of the detectives.

More than 100 police worked on the case but never turned up any leads

Alf Bowley

"My family were able to give background information on Joan and Clarence to Nottingham CID together with relevant wedding photographs.

"I later rang and asked for the photographs to be returned only to be told they had been scrapped.

"A very sad ending to the story of a GI from 508 Airborne and his Nottingham bride."

Create
perfe
photo
Just uplo
FROM
£6.99
this is
1 Log on to the above
2 Select from a wide
3 Upload your own ph
4 Place your order. You