

**Commentary on:** Wu AHB, Bellantoni NF. Stability of cholesterol gall stones after 165 years of burial. *J Forensic Sci* 2003;48(3):633–634.

Sir:

The paper of Wu and Bellantoni on the stability of gallstones after long term burial brings to mind one of the most famous and notorious forensic cases of the century—the “Acid Bath” murders by John George Haigh in 1949 in England (1).

His nefarious exploits included putting the body of one of his female shooting victims in a 40 gallon steel tank filled with concentrated sulfuric acid for several days. He had then poured out the contents presuming total degradation had occurred. He confessed to this and other crimes a week later.

Following the drive to the site shortly thereafter, Professor Keith Simpson, head of Forensic Medicine at Guy’s Hospital and Home Office Pathologist, picked up what appeared to be a small pebble, about the size of a cherry, and looking through a hand lens, seeing it had polished facets, remarked “I think that’s a gallstone.” He knew that older, portly women (she was 69 and “fairly plump”) are

prone to gallstones, which are covered with a fatty material and thus would resist dissolution with sulfuric acid. Told later it was a lucky find, he remarked “I was looking for it,” to a somewhat astonished police officer, following tests proving its human origin.

Two additional gallstones as well as eroded bone fragments and even dentures and a hairpin were ultimately recovered from the sludge. A memorable, if not historic, beginning to a unique scene investigation, subsequent trial, and conviction for murder (2).

## References

1. Wu AHB, Bellantoni NF. Stability of cholesterol gallstones after 165 years of burial. *J Forensic Sci* 2003;48(3):633–4.
2. Simpson K. *Forty Years of Murder*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1978;159–66.

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