Shotgun horror leaves three dead in battle over custody of boy

By SIMON FERRY

YOUNG MOTHER Janice James was fighting for life last night after her boyfriend left her critically injured and shot her parents dead in their West Wales home.

After a lengthy operation by neurosurgeons on Saturday Mire James was on a life-support machine last night at Morriston Hospital, Swansea.

A hospital spokesman described her condition as critical but stable.

Heavy-drinking gunman Les Bowen shot 22-year-old Janice after a court battle over their three-year-old son David.

The boy was left without two of his grandparents—Jenkins and Aerona James—after Bowen shot them and his mother at home in Aberaeron in the early hours of Saturday.

Slightly-built Bowen then turned the shotgun on himself.

The events followed a county court hearing in which David’s grandparents were awarded custody of the child.

Yesterday prayers were said at local churches for the two families touched by the tragedy.

Neighbour Helen MacDonald said that everyone was thinking about David and hoping Janice would pull through.

Janice’s parents, undertaker Jenkin and his wife Aerona James, both 58, were both well-known members of the community in the holiday town.

Mrs James had run a women’s fashion shop for more than 15 years and gave organ and piano lessons in the town.

Both were described as quiet and caring people who had virtually brought up the toddler David. Last week they won an order to care for him permanently, and Bowen was said to be angry about this ruling.

Janice’s uncle Mr Graham Duggan, 45, who was comforting Mrs James’s parents—Dan and Clarice Evans—in a bungalow only yards from the horrific scene, said: “Obviously there was a problem in the family and this is the tragic result of it.”

After a heavy night’s drinking, gunfighter Bowen, 31, burst into the house where Janice—his common-law wife—was staying with her parents and cold-bloodedly shot dead the couple in their bed.

He then shot 22-year-old Janice as she cowered in the hallway of the bungalow, holding her head in her hands, before shooting himself in the head just outside the front door.

Townsmen said that the couple, who had split up just before Christmas, were earlier in the Holiday Inn public house where Janice sometimes worked and they were later seen arguing in the street.

The relationship between Janice and Bowen had always been tempestuous. The couple had lived together in the flat above the Jameses’ garage next to their bungalow and above the Spar shop in town.

After the split Janice had returned home, but local minister the Rev Dilwyn Jones—a cousin of Mrs James—said Bowen still used to call at all hours, which was why the family took out a court order to keep him away.

Mr Jones said that Janice’s older brother Jonathan, 28, had raised the alarm.

Jonathan, a close friend of Les Bowen’s sister Karina, was staying in the flat above the Jameses’ garage when he heard shots and went to the house.

Mr Jones said that Mr and Mrs James were shot first, Janice had apparently come down after hearing the noise and was shot as she cowered in the hallway.

“Jonathan came in and was confronted by Bowen, who handled him David and told him to take the boy back to the flat,” said Mr Jones.

“When Jonathan came down again Bowen had shot himself.”

Jonathan James and his brother Kenneth run a tyre firm nearby. Kenneth’s family in Llwyndyyn did not want to talk about the tragedy last night.

Mr and Mrs James lost a daughter Lorna, who died of leukaemia at the age of three, and another son Nevil died aged 21 after a car crash about 10 years ago.

The Bowen family, who are believed to be looking after David, were being comforted by relatives at home in Maesygroes, near New Quay, last night.

TRAGIC MUM FIGHTS FOR LIFE

INJURED . . . Janice James, mother of the gunman’s son.

DEAD . . . Aerona James, Janice’s mother.

DEAD . . . Jenkins James, aged 56.

DEATH HOUSE . . . The Jameses’ bungalow home and its annexe at Aberaeron.

NEIGHBOUR . . Helen MacDonald.