



Thefts by Gypsies 1889

At a special Petty Sessional Court held on Tuesday.

John Hughes and George Frankham, gypsies, were brought up on remand, charged with stealing a copper boiler the property of Mrs Eliza Macey of Chicklade.

The boiler was previously owned by the late Mr Hayden who bequeathed it with other property to Mrs Macey, his housekeeper. Prisoners were further charged with stealing a pair of trousers from Sidney Stone of Chilmark. Supt Bull said the Bench would also have to consider a third charge of stealing a pair of sheets, the particulars of which were recorded in our last issue.

Eliz Macey, prosecutrix in the first charge, said on the 12th inst between five and six o'clock in the evening she saw the copper in the back yard, where it had stood for years as a receptacle for rainwater. She missed the boiler on the morning following, and after communicating with the executor under Mr Hayden's will, gave information to the police. The copper produced was the one. Since she last saw it had been considerably damaged, holes being knocked in the bottom as well as the sides. Its shape had also undergone alteration. Thomas Fry, insurance agent of Chicklade who was a constant visitor at the house of the late Mr Hayden also identified the boiler. He last saw it on the 10th December. The colour of the outside of the boiler had, since he last saw it, undergone considerable alteration, owing to its being burnt or knocked about.

George Stephens of Chicklade, farmer, who was constantly at the house of the late Mr Hayden saw the boiler there about the 10th inst, and remarked to Mrs Macey. "This is a thing that is sure to sell". Prosecutrix replied "Yes, several persons have wished to buy it but Mr Macey would never sell it." The copper produced was the same.

William Shute, labourer, of Compton Chamberlayne, said he saw prisoners coming from Compton Hut towards Compton on the 12th Dec about 4pm. They had a horse and cart with them. The Compton Road let into the Salisbury Road. Cross examined: Was a "chain" (22 yards) distant from the prisoners when he saw them.

James Reed, carter of Compton Chamberlayne, said on the morning of the 13th about six o'clock he saw the prisoners on the road leading to Salisbury. - Cross examined: Was a foot or two from prisoners as they passed and was enabled to identify them by the light of the moon.

Arthur Clement, gamekeeper of Fovant, employed by Mr Drewe, met the prisoners between the Rabbit Warren and Fovant Hut on the Salisbury and Shaftesbury Old Coach Road at 9.30am on the 13th December. Frankham wished him "Good morning", and he returned the greeting. Saw prisoner's cart was heavy laden, the contents being covered over with hay and a cloth. At Fovant Hut prisoners turned in the direction of Bowerchalke.

John Hockey, railway porter at Blandford Goods Station, said on the 14th December prisoners brought two bags to the goods station at Blandford. They said the bags contained rags. Witness told them there was something more than rags in one of the bags for the contents rattled, and consequently he consigned the bags as "Rag, &c". Asked Hughes what name he should put down as consignor and he replied "West". The bags were consigned to Mr Houguez, marine stone dealer, Romsey. The weight was 2cwt 10lbs. Edwin Lewis, porter at Romsey Station, and clerk at the goods shed, said on the 16th inst he received two bags consigned from "West, Blandford" for Messrs Houguez at Romsey. As the guard was unloading the van, witness was asked "What else do you want?" to which he replied "Two bags for Houguez". The guard said "I have got a drum here, if that is what you want." Witness observed that one of the bags was broken, and that it contained a copper, which caused him to remark "Here's a copper to make some Christmas soup" (Laughter). The copper had been subject of much merriment in the Romsey goods shed. The bags were handed over to William Rose, consignee's foreman.

Rose produced invoice book showing receipt of the bags. He set down the value of the copper at £1 9s - 4d per lb, for which amount a postal order was sent prisoners. Witness produced a letter received by his employers from Hughes intimating that the copper had been sent from Blandford Station.

PC George Shearing of the Hants Constabulary, stationed at Romsey, said on the 17th inst upon information received from Supt Bull, he enquired at Messrs Houguez's Stores if they had recently purchased a copper, and was informed that they had received one the previous morning from Blandford, which, after further communication with Supt Bull, he took possession of and handed over the following morning to Sergt Brinsdon of Dinton.

Sergt Brinsdon in company with PC King, traced prisoners from Dinton to Woodcot's Common, near Handley, where they apprehended them on the 17th inst. Hughes told him that they arrived on the Common on the day previous. Asked prisoners to account for their whereabouts on the evening of the 12th and the morning of the 13th. They replied "We were in the New Forest on Thursday. We came to Morris' Furze that night, and on to Handley on Saturday". Charged prisoners with the various thefts, and they replied "We were not near the places". Found two sheets converted into a covering for Hughes' tent. PC King showed him a pair of trousers which he had found in Frankham's cart. - Cross examined: When charged on suspicion with stealing the sheets, Hughes said he purchased them at Fordingbridge.

This concluded the case for the prosecution upon the charge of stealing the copper.

Before the charge was read over to prisoners, Mr William Drewe of Barford St Martin said his keeper had been summoned as a witness by the police, but had not been called upon to give evidence. He protested against this, as with only one keeper he was put to great disadvantage.

Supt Bull: The keeper has given evidence.

Mr Drewe: Then I beg your pardon. He said it was a very wrong thing for the police to summon a man whose evidence was not material. He only wanted to protest. He did not wish to use one word of disrespect to the Bench, but it seemed hard lines that a man whose evidence was not worth that (snapping his fingers) should be summoned there.

The Chairman: The magistrates are the judges of whether the evidence of your keeper is material. We consider that it is very material.

Mr Drewe: Then I bow to the decision of the Bench.

Hughes pleaded guilty to stealing the copper and threw himself upon the mercy of the Court, and asked to be leniently dealt with. Frankham pleaded not guilty.

The charge of stealing a pair of cord trousers, value 3s, the property of Sidney Stone of Chilmark was then proceeded with. Prosecutor said the trousers produced belonged to him. They were last in his possession

on the 12th inst when they were hung upon a clothes line in his garden to dry.

Frankham said that he picked up the trousers on Handley Common among some rags.

Caroline Stone, prosecutor's wife said on the 10th the trousers were hung out to dry. Saw them on the line on the 12th, but on the following morning she missed them, and thinking they had been blown away made a search but failed to find them. The trousers produced were her husband's. PC King proved finding the trousers in Frankham's possession.

Supt Bull said his reason for associating Hughes with the charge of stealing the trousers was because the men were confederates throughout. He left it to the Bench to deal separately with prisoners.

The Chairman said it was entirely within the power of the bench to send prisoners for trial, but they thought it advisable that, the prisoners consenting, the charges should be disposed of that day.

Hughes pleaded not guilty to stealing the trousers, as did also Frankham, he accounting for their being in his possession by saying he found them on Handley Common.

The Bench retired, and on returning into Court, the Chairman announced that they found both prisoners guilty of the theft of the copper, and sentenced them to two months' imprisonment each, with hard labour. They dismissed the charge of stealing the trousers against Hughes, but found Frankham guilty, and sentenced him to a fortnight's hard labour.

Mrs Doreymead, who at the last Court laid a charge of theft of a pair of sheets against prisoners, now appeared and asked to be permitted to withdraw the charge, as she was in doubt as to the identity of the sheets.

The Bench consented to the withdrawal of the charge, and ordered the return of the sheets to Hughes' wife.

Western Gazette Friday 27 December 1889