



Whose Money?

A singular case of fraud by a pauper has just been detected. Jane Neate, who resides at Foxham a hamlet in the parish of Bremhill, has been receiving parochial relief for nearly forty years.

On Monday week, the relieving officer, accompanied by a policeman, went to her cottage, and on searching her bed found three bags concealed.

In one bag there were 262 half-crowns and seven crowns; in a second bag was found 82 sovereigns and five £5 notes; in a third bag 74 half crowns, 21 shillings, four crowns and one half sovereign. Making altogether the sum of £163 6s.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette Thursday 5 September 1850

Neat v Harding and another. 1851

This was an action on which William Neat complained that the defendants, Harding and Bounds, were indebted to him in the sum of £163 received by them for his use.

The defendant Harding was the relieving officer of the parish of Bremhill, and Bounds was a police officer. It appeared that an old woman, of the name of Jane Neat, had been receiving 2s 6d a week from the parish of Bremhill, as a pauper, for forty years.

The plaintiff was her son, and used to work at a small garden; he was a weak man in mind and body, but, some years ago, an uncle of his died and left him £200, which was put in the funds, and he used to receive the dividends through a bank in the neighbourhood. He had a sister who was in the habit of giving him some money, and he was particularly fond of changing his money for crowns and half crowns.

At length his mother became very old and ill and required a nurse and a doctor. Her bedroom was in a filthy condition and abounded with fleas. It was wished to move her bed into the lower room, but this she most strenuously opposed; this and other circumstances led to suspicion, and the defendants went to her cottage and moved her bed, and broke open a cupboard of which the plaintiff had the key. In that cupboard they found £163, a great part of which was in crowns and half crowns. This money they took away.

Mr Sergeant Kingslake addressed the jury for the defendants, and detailed some circumstances which he afterwards adduced evidence to sustain, and from which it appeared that when the existence of this money was discovered, the plaintiff only claimed £4 and subsequently £7, as his portion of it; that the woman acknowledged that the money belonged to her; and executed a deed, about three months before her death (after the money had been forcibly carried away), by which she consented, upon having the interest secured to her during life, to transfer the principal to the parish officers after her death for the purpose of its being applied to the relief of the poor. (Jane Neat was an infirm old woman, aged 84, when this deed was executed).

The surgeon of the Calne Union and one of the board of guardians deposed that they had heard the old woman say she should not leave her money to her children, as they had not used her well; and that she readily signed the deed produced in evidence, upon its being read over and explained to her.

Most of the witnesses for the defence agreed in describing the plaintiff as weak both in mind and body, and, therefore, likely to have misunderstood the questions put to him when it was said that he claimed the sums of £4 and £7 only.

The Learned Judge went carefully through the evidence, and more than once expressed his opinion that no importance was to be attached to the deed of gift produced on the part of the defendants.

The jury, after a short consultation, returned a verdict for the plaintiff for £163 6s.

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