



Crime and Punishment

Ebbesbourne Wake

A Gun Threat

A sequel to an Ebbesbourne Wake Farmer's alleged gun threat was heard at the Salisbury County Sessions, on Tuesday, when, before the Earl of Radnor and other magistrates, Frederick Chown, Newton, Handley, summoned Charles Coward, Chase Farm, Ebbesbourne Wake, farmer, for shooting at him with intent to do him grievous bodily harm, on January 29th.

Coward cross-summoned Frederick Chown and Walter Chown for game trespass in the day time. The complainant was represented by Mr. Vincent (of the firm of Messrs. Trethowan & Vincent), and the defendant was represented by Mr W. F. Rutter, of Shaftesbury, who pleaded not guilty.

Mr. Vincent said Frederick Chown and his brother, Walter, were walking along the road from Alvediston to Handley on the day in question, when, suddenly, a gunshot whizzed over their heads. They went along to see what was the matter, and they saw the defendant in a bush with a gun. He started to threaten to blow their brains out, and while they were talking Coward actually ejected a spent cartridge from the gun and put in another. Then, pointing the gun at the Chowns, he told them that if they did not go he would shoot them. He (Mr. Vincent) understood Coward's grievance was that someone had been trespassing on his land. Complainant then informed the police.

Chown said he was a private in the 2nd Dorset Regiment, and his home was at Newtown, Sixpenny Handley. He described the alleged shooting as related by Mr. Vincent, and added that when it took place he (complainant) was on the public road which the defendant's land adjoined. When the shot was fired Coward was 20 yards away. He asked defendant what was the matter, and he replied "Do you know anything about this ferreting?" Witness replied that he did not. Coward then said "If you don't get out of my sight I shall blow your brains out." He then took an empty cartridge from the gun and put a full cartridge into the gun. Pointing the gun at the complainant Coward said "If you do not go I shall pull it on you." Complainant told Coward he would hear more about it, and walked away. He had never given Coward any trouble.

POACHING DENIED.

Cross-examined by Mr. Rutter, who appeared for Coward, Chown said he had never been on Coward's land. It was not true that he and his brother had ferrets and traps laid on defendant's land on that particular day, nor had he seen Coward previous to the gun going off. Chown was quite sure the shot fired was not a blank one.

PURCHASED A FERRET THE PREVIOUS DAY.

Complainant, pressed by Mr. Rutter, admitted that he purchased a ferret on the day previously and that his brother borrowed some nets.

Replying to Mr. Vincent, Chown said he had not used these ferrets or nets on Mr. Coward's land.

Walter Chown, labourer, complainant's brother, corroborated the evidence given by his brother — Replying to Mr. Vincent, he said he heard the shots fly by.

Asked by the Chairman how near the shots went to him, witness said he could not say.

“BUT FOR HIS LITTLE FRIEND!”

P.C. Boden (Bowerchalke) said he took a statement from the defendant, which he read. “I am not going to say much, don't you worry.” He went on to state that he caught two poachers on his land, Frederick and Walter Chown, who had a ferret and 12 nets. They were ferreting in the Cliff. He (defendant) got within 20 yards of them, and as soon as they saw him they ran away. Defendant waited a quarter of an hour until the ferret came out, and then the Chowns came up and threatened him, “and,” added Coward, “if I had not got my little friend with me -- (laughter) -- I should probably have got murdered.” He put a “dud” cartridge in the gun and fired to frighten them off. He could see them when he fired up in the air, and they were a hundred yards away.

A SERIOUS CHARGE.

Mr. Rutter, addressing the Bench, said his client was charged with a very serious, indictable offence, but he asked the Bench to say that, in view of the evidence put before them by the prosecution, there was no prima facia case upon which Coward could go upon his trial.

The Chairman said he did not know that he should like to go so far as to say there was no case, but the Bench was agreed that it was not a case that should go to the Assizes.

Mr. Vincent said he quite agreed.

THE MORAL.

The Chairman said the moral of the case was (1) that boys should not buy ferrets and borrow nets and go in the country with them, however innocent they might be; and (2) an elderly gentleman should not threaten active young men with a gun. The Bench, of course, had no intention of sending the defendant for trial.

Mr. Rutter said he was quite prepared to withdraw the summons against the Chowns.

Mr. Vincent said his client would be satisfied if Coward were bound over.

The Chairman said they had no jurisdiction to do that.

The case again Coward was, therefore, dismissed, and the summons against the complainants was withdrawn.

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