



Murder of Thomas Sherwood by Robert Brown

Murder

A murder was on Friday the 11th inst., committed at the village of Littleton Drew, in this county. It appears that a man named Robert Brown, with this family, occupied a house belonging to Mr. Lee; and during nine years paid only £6 towards his rent. Mr. Lee, wishing to get rid of such an unprofitable tenant, liberally offered to cancel the whole of what was due, if Brown would peaceably quit the house; but this offer was rejected. Mr. Lee, in consequence, took legal measures to eject him. In executing these measures, two men (who were called in to assist the constable), named Thomas Sherwood and Thomas Thompson, were stabbed by Brown, with an old bayonet; the former of whom died within half an hour after, and the latter is seriously injured.

An Inquest was on Monday last held before W. Adye, Esq., on the body of Sherwood, when the following evidence was adduced:

William Harding (Sheriff's officer, at Bradford):- On Friday the 11th inst. I went to the house of Robert Brown at Littleton Drew, to execute a warrant on a writ of possession. He was then in the garden, and he asked me my business? I told him I was come on the business between him and Mr. Lee. He then asked my name - from whence I came - and my authority? I told him that I came from Bradford, and I read the warrant to him. I then went to the door for the purpose of entering the house, but I found it fastened; I requested Brown to give me admittance, otherwise, I told him, I should be obliged to force an entrance; he refused; I then sent a person for an iron bar, and forced the door open; and afterwards, with the assistance of the deceased (Thomas Sherwood), Thomas Thompson, and a young lad named James Clark, removed the goods from the house into the road. I then desired Brown, with his wife and children, to leave the house, and prevent being put out by force. I again read my warrant to him, in the presence of the constables and other persons. They refused to leave; the wife of Brown offered greater resistance than Brown himself did, persisting that she would not leave. I called on the deceased to assist me in turning them out. We took hold of the wife by the arms; she resisted violently, but we pulled her towards the door and got her outside. I then observed Brown make a blow at the deceased, and a second at Thompson, my other assistant. The deceased immediately went back, and said, exhibiting a wound in his chest, "he has stabbed me!" Thompson also exclaimed, "I am stabbed!" I requested the constable to

take Brown into custody. The wounded men were placed in the window seat whilst I went for a surgeon. The deceased was not then dead, but said, "I am dying."

James Clark:- After the goods were removed, and while Harding and Sherwood were removing Brown's wife, I saw Brown take an instrument resembling a bayonet from his inside coat pocket, and stab Thompson in the small of his back. I became alarmed, and having no weapon I went away. I sat up with Brown in the night of Saturday, and in the course of conversation Brown said, "It would not have happened if Shears (Sherwood was commonly called Shears) had not been there, as he wished to take the house over my head. I would not have thought of stabbing any one else if the deceased had not been there."

Richard Walter (a labourer of Littleton Drew):- Having heard that Brown's goods were being removed, I went, and saw the Sheriff's officer, the deceased, John Daniells (the constable), and T. Thompson, removing brown's wife. She made a great noise; and I heard the Sheriff's officer and Richard Lee (the proprietor of the house) tell her, that it was no use, as they must go out, they had better go quietly, if they did not they would be put out by main force. I went away a little distance to prevent being called on to assist. Shortly after, the Sheriff's officer came to me, and begged that I would assist two men in a dying state. I went into Brown's house, and saw Thompson and Sherwood leaning back on the window seat looking like corpses. I caught Sherwood, who was falling, in my arms, and asked him if he was hurt; but he could not speak. After holding him about 20 minutes or half an hour, he died. I sat up with Brown (who was in custody) the same night; I said to him "Brown, it is a bad job!" Brown replied, "he did not think it was a bad job: there were two others he should like to serve the same, for they were doing things unlawful to him." I asked him what he did it with? He said, "it was an old Spanish bayonet, which belonged to an old Spanish gun, and it was not so long as those used in this country."

John Daniels (constable of Littleton Drew) confirmed the preceding evidence: he said, I saw Brown strike Sherwood, but did not see anything in Brown's hand. At the desire of the Sheriff's officer I took Brown into custody: I afterwards took him to the Salutation Inn, on the Chippenham road, and sat up with him. During the night, he said, he stabbed the man with a thing he had in his side pocket, and that he had dropped the instrument from his pocket while in my charge.

Thomas Thompson, of Sherston, farrier:- I was requested by Mr. Lee, to assist the Sheriff's officer, in giving him possession of the house occupied by Brown. After the goods were taken from the house, and while the officer and Sherwood were removing Brown's wife, I was standing on the outside of the house, when Brown came behind me, and struck me in the small of the back. I looked over my shoulder and saw him plunge at me twice more. I then saw him strike Sherwood in the breast, with some instrument, about the length and size of a butcher's steel. Brown then turned round and went away. I found myself wounded by some sharp instrument, in the right arm and side.

John Atkins, of Hullavington, laborer:- About two or three years ago, I went to Brown's house for some plants, when he told me there was a dispute between him and some others respecting the house he lived in, and the garden: he then took down two old bayonets, (one having a handle, and the other a part to fix it to a gun) and said, if anyone opposed him, he would put them into him; and if one would not do execution, the other would.

Mr. Adye explained the law on the case; and the Jury, without hesitation, returned a Verdict of WILFUL MURDER against Brown.

Committed to Fisherton Gaol: - Robert Brown, charged (on the inquest of Mr. Adye, coroner) with the wilful murder of Thomas Sherwood, in the parish of Littleton Drew.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 21 April 1828

23 July 1828 - The Trial

At Salisbury, on the 23rd, Robert Brown was tried for the wilful murder of Thomas Sherwood, at Littleton Drew, on the 11th of April last. The prisoner was in possession of a house belonging to Mr. Lee, an attorney ; he was ejected for arrears of rent, but resisted the officers; and Sherwood, one of the persons who assisted, was mortally wounded with an old Spanish bayonet. The principal circumstances are detailed in the following evidence.

William Harding:- "I am the officer to whom the warrant was directed ; on the 11th of April I went with this warrant to the house of the prisoner; he was then in the garden ; I told him I was come upon an unpleasant business between him and Mr. Lee ; he asked me where I came from; I told him, and what I was ; I then read the warrant to him ; I went to the door and found it fast. I told him he had better give me admittance, or I must make a forcible entry. I then got an iron bar and broke open the door, and proceeded to remove the goods; other persons assisted; amongst them was Thomas Sherwood. We had got the furniture out, and I then told him he had better leave the house; and told him if he did not, we should be forced to turn him out. He said he would not go. I then read the warrant again, and we proceeded to turn out his wife; the deceased assisted me; we put her out by taking her by the arms; when we got her to one end of the room, she turned back again; Daniel and I took hold of her by the arms, and Thompson and the deceased I told to assist; and we got both of that out of the house. The next thing that I observed was the prisoner making a blow at Sherwood; after he had done it, he stepped back; what the blow was struck with, I did not see; the deceased then came to me, and said Brown had stabbed him, and showed me the wound."

Cross-examined:- "Up to the time the door was forced open, there was no resistance. The mother, I believe, had a child in her arms when we compelled her to leave the house. I believe she was in the family way. I do not think the child was on the ground during part of the time; they had just got her out of the house when the blow was struck."

Thomas Thompson:- "I went to assist the Sheriff's officer. I saw the prisoner's wife put out of the house, and saw Brown at the same time; he had a child in his arms, and walked before his wife, and tried that we should not get her out. We told her she must go; on getting her out of the house, Brown came back into the house again, and left the child. He then came out, and struck me in the back with some instrument;

I had a candle in each hand; the blow caused me to throw both candles over my shoulders; I fell to the wall; I saw him do something to the instrument; he then struck me again in the side; he then struck at me again with the instrument, which went right through my arm; he then turned round, and struck forward at Sherwood in the front ; he was standing facing him. The prisoner and the deceased before this time were good neighbours."

John Atkins:- "I know the prisoner Brown; I went to his house two or three years ago; I had a conversation with him; I said ' you have a very good house and garden;' he said I have had a disturbance about it, and if any man do interpose with me again' - he then reached down two things; this is one of them (it was just such an instrument as described by the former witness); the other was an old bayonet he said if one did not do for them, the other should."

The prisoner, in his defence, said:- "I did it in a moment of passion, and I am very sorry for it, seeing that my wife and children were being used so ill."

Mr. Justice Park summed up, and the Jury found the prisoner Guilty. Mr. Justice Park then proceeded to pass sentence. He was afraid the prisoner had retained that feeling in his bosom for some time, which had proved so fatal to a fellow-creature' - earthly hopes he could not hold out, he therefore most earnestly entreated him, for the few short hours he had to live, to attend to his spiritual concerns. The sentence was passed in the usual form, directing the unfortunate man to be executed on Friday next, and his body

to be anatomised. The prisoner left the dock with a very firm step. During the whole trial, he was apparently quite composed, with the exception of now and then a slight quivering of the lip.

The Spectator, 26 July 1828