



Volume 4, Number 1, January 2009

RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP

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About us

Membership is open to anyone who is interested in the heritage of the town of Ryde, Isle of Wight.

Research is centred on Ryde Cemetery, and the people who are buried there, their links to Ryde's past, their lives, homes, businesses, families and descendants.

Website

www.rshg.org.uk

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Serious crimes like murder, fraud, cruelty and robbery are often thought of as a modern phenomenon, but a look through old newspapers shows these types of crime are nothing new. Law was a hot topic in the Victorian era and it didn't take much to be brought before the courts and punished. Even trivial offences such as shouting in the street or driving 'furiously' could land the offender in the Ryde Police Court. Fines, prison and hard labour were just some of the punishments the culprits could expect.

Ryde has had its fair share of criminals. Here are a few cases from the 1800s. The names of some of the people involved have deliberately been omitted.

GUILTY OF CRUELTY TO A SERVANT

At Ryde Petty Sessions on Thursday 1 May 1851, Henry B. B., minister of the Wesleyan chapel in Nelson Street, Ryde, and Eliza, his wife, were charged with cruelly treating Eliza Cox aged 14, a serving maid in their employ.



Two years previously the defendants, while at Bristol, had taken charge of the girl who was the daughter of a labouring man. The agreement was that they would provide her with food, clothes and other necessities for a period of time.

Shortly afterwards they came to Ryde, bringing the girl with them in the capacity of servant. They behaved well to her for a considerable time after their arrival, but then their behaviour suddenly changed and everything was done to make the life of the girl wretched and miserable. She was underfed, her clothes taken from her and the small amount of money she possessed extorted from her. Often, with insufficient clothes, and drenched with water, she was turned out in the cold air on a winter's evening. She was shouted at and at times she would be locked in the coal-cellar for up to 24 hours.

The threat of another beating from her master finally caused her to flee from the house and seek shelter in some nearby fields adjoining Trinity Church where she was found by a woman named Scott.

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Mrs Scott took the girl to her own house, where she was clothed and fed, before being taken to the magistrates to tell of the treatment she had endured. This led to the arrest of her former employers and their subsequent prosecution.

Eliza Cox was sworn in and after relating the circumstances of her being a servant in the employ of the defendants, proceeded to give an account of the treatment she had experienced since her residence in Ryde. In relation to the last three months, and assaults committed on her on the 26th, 28th and 30th of April, she said – *"They beats me most every day – missus beats me most. Last Saturday she got up, and came down and found fault with me. She beat me with a whip handle. I had no stockings on. I never was allowed stockings in doors – only an old pair of boots of master's. A little while afterwards I was going up stairs, and left my boots at the bottom. I went up to work, and by-and-bye the missus came up and beat me about the head with one of the boots, and I had nothing but bread and water all that day. On Monday I was washing down stairs, and my missus came down and took me by my hair and dragged me about. The same day she cut a stick in the shrubbery and beat me with it. She gave me a piece of dry bread about nine, and another piece about three, and that was all I had to eat that day. On Tuesday, Mr B. threw three buckets of water over me because I drank a little beer that was left overnight. Both of them locked me up in the back kitchen at nine in the morning till nine at night, and I had nothing but a piece of bread and some cold broccoli, and I stopped in my wet clothes all that time, and water kept dripping down my legs. On Wednesday I was called at five, and went down, and was ordered to go a washing; I had nothing but cold suds; I asked for some hot water, and missus said that master should give me some more cold on my head directly he came down; I then ran away, and was spoken to by Mrs Scott, who told me not to cry, for the policeman would take care of me; she dried my clothes and gave me some victuals, and then the policeman came down, and took me before the magistrate."*

Mrs Scott testified that she had examined the child's back which was covered with wounds. The Chairman addressed the defendants and expressed his regret that he could not commit them for trial at the Quarter Sessions at Winchester. As it was, the court inflicted the heaviest punishment the law allowed and they were fined five pounds each.

The fines were immediately paid, and the police proceeded to clear the court. This was not easily achieved due to an angry mob which took an hour to disperse to the street below where they waited for Mr and Mrs B. with feverish excitement, but after an hour they had still not appeared. A cab was seen at the back of the hall and the crowd directed its attention to that yelling in a most furious manner. The defendants came out under the protection of the police and were escorted to the carriage and conveyed to Monkton Street, accompanied by at least 300 people, mostly women who continued to shout and throw missiles of every description at the couple. When they reached the house in Monkton Street they managed to get into the property without molestation, but the mob continued to attack the house - every square of glass was broken, the fences were taken down and only the arrival of the police stopped further destruction. After that the police guarded the premises until the couple left Ryde a few days later.

Source: Daily News, Monday 5 May 1851. Illustration taken from The Newgate Calendar by Andrew Knapp and William L Baldwin

A MURDER AND EXECUTION

A horrible murder was committed at Elmfield, Ryde, in November 1877 by a navvie named Jimmy. The victim was a woman named Jane Barber with whom he had cohabited. The murder was committed at about half past ten on Monday morning, and at ten minutes to twelve the murderer left Ryde Pier by one of the steamers for Portsmouth. Owing to the absence of Jane Barber's father, a hawker, with whom the two lodged, the murder was not made known to the county police until 5 pm. Descriptions of the accused were at once dispatched to the various police forces. The news of the event reached Portsmouth at 11 o'clock, and a rigorous search of various public houses was instituted by order of Superintendent Jarvis. At seven o'clock in the morning a man answering the description was apprehended by Police Constable Thomas in the Victoria Tavern, Portsea, not far from the Dockyard gates. He gave his name as James C.

He was a man of 31 years of age, 5ft 2in in height, and somewhat thin features, but well set and strongly built. PC Thomas was at once sent to Ryde for witnesses to identify the prisoner, but before he arrived with the deceased's father, C. requested an interview with Inspector Hood at Portsea Police station, and made a full confession of his guilt. He said the woman had aggravated him and had threatened to leave him, whereupon he knocked her down with an axe.

He was later identified by Barber's father, and then conveyed back to Ryde and handed over to the Ryde police.

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The victim had been found, on the return of her father, lying dead on a litter in the corner of the room. There was a fearful cut on her head by the axe, and also several gashes across her throat, as if inflicted by a blunt instrument. James C. was condemned to be hung by the neck for the murder of Jane Barber and was executed at Winchester on 11 February 1878. The Times reported, "*He received the Holy Communion on Sunday, and walked to the scaffold with a firm step. Death was instantaneous.*"

Source: The Times 28 November 1877 and 12 February 1878.

A GRUESOME KILLING BUT NOT MURDER

At the Crown Court on Thursday 3 March 1864 Robert B. H. was indicted for the wilful murder of Mary Ann P. at Ryde on 9 December 1863.

The prisoner was a labourer living in his own house at Ryde and the deceased was a married woman, but for the last two years she had been living with the prisoner. She, however appeared to be a very abandoned woman, and was in the habit of going about with other men, and this caused bickering and quarrels between the couple. On the evening of 8 December the prisoner and his son, aged 16 years, Mary P. and a man named Saunders were in the prisoner's house drinking and smoking. They had a good deal of beer and some brandy. The prisoner sang and the woman danced, and they were all what was called "comfortable" together. About 11 o'clock Saunders went to leave but was persuaded to stay, and he slept with the boy in H.'s bed, while the prisoner and the deceased slept on the sofa downstairs.

In the course of the night Saunders woke and heard the woman cry, "*Father, Father!*". He thought nothing of it, and went to sleep again. Between four and five in the morning Saunders and the boy were awake "*by a fright*", but of what they could not tell. They jumped up, got a light, and rushed downstairs without stopping to put on any clothes. Upon getting to the bottom of the stairs they saw the woman lying on the floor, near the sofa; the prisoner was lying between her and the sofa. He was naked. There was a large pool of blood close to the woman's face. No word was spoken.

The front door was locked so the boy broke it open, and a man who was passing went for a policeman. When the policeman came he found that the prisoner had a very deep cut across his throat. The woman's throat was also cut and she was quite dead. There were no signs of any struggle. On the table were pipes, ale in the glasses, and a large carving knife wet with blood. There was no doubt the wounds had been inflicted with the knife.

The prisoner, Mr H., claimed that Mr Saunders and the woman had robbed him of 28 shillings. The prisoner was in a very dangerous state and could not be removed. He remained in custody in his own house until 28 December when he was formally charged with murder. He made this statement:- "*I want to speak to you about the thing - That woman sold up my house. I had a good lot of things when my mother died, and they are all gone, and you will find them at different places; but for all that I love her. On the night this occurred she told me she had been along with different men. She excited me, so I don't know what I did. Mr Woodward told me how it would be; I have been under his care for some time.*" The important question was by whom the wound had been inflicted. The prosecution urged that the prisoner had inflicted the wound, and that his motive was jealousy.

This wretched woman, it was clear, had been drinking and going about with different men, and particularly with a 'navvie'. About ten days before the event the prisoner was at a public house and, in an agitated state, he said to another woman, "*There goes that faggot of mine, drunk, arm-in-arm with a 'navvie,' it's enough to make a man do what he would not think of. I will do for her, and there will be an end of it.*" At another time he said to a man, "*My woman has been selling my things, my counterpane and my watch.*" The man replied, "*It serves you right, you have no business with her,*" the prisoner replied, "*So some people say, but I don't see it in that way, I'm ***** if I sha'n't cut her throat.*" It was proved that the woman used to sell the provisions which were in the cupboard and anything she could lay her hands on for the price of getting drink. After the prisoner had been some days in custody he said she cut his throat and kicked him out of bed.



The jury retired for about an hour and then came into court and asked whether, if they thought the man did it in a moment of passion arising from jealousy, they could return a verdict of manslaughter. The Judge said that if a man takes the life of another it is murder, unless he can satisfy the jury of something that reduces it to manslaughter. In this case the only scrap of evidence to that effect came days after the event when he stated that she had cut his throat first; he did not make that excuse until he had had time to think about his defense. The jury then retired, and returned in an hour and a half. They gave a verdict of Not Guilty.

Source: The Times 4 March 1864

FRAUD

At Ryde Police Court on Monday 25 November 1878, Daniel Attrill, of the firm of Attrill and Goodall, butchers of High Street, was charged with conspiring with Mr King, the late manager of the Ventnor branch of the Capital and Counties Bank, to defraud the bank of £1,000.

Mr Archinlop Brown, Inspector of the Capital and Counties Bank, said the prisoner kept an account with the Ventnor branch. In December 1877, a Mr Pound, of Tewkesbury, sent a draft of £1,500 to be put to the credit of his account. At that time the bank was known as the Hampshire and North Wilts Banking Company. Instead of the draft being placed to the credit of Mr Pound, it was placed by Mr King to the credit of Mr Attrill, and the sum was drawn upon by his cheques. The prisoner's account was overdrawn at that time to the amount of £2,300 odd.

Both Attrill and King were remanded. Mr King remained at large, but a warrant was issued for his apprehension.
Source: The Times 27 November 1878

CANNIBALISM AT RYDE

At Ryde Petty Sessions on 5 January 1869 Nicholas Gaskin B., a shipbroker, residing at Ryde, was convicted of a revolting act of cannibalism.

It appeared that on 30 December 1868 he was in the Black Horse Inn, Ryde and made himself obnoxious to the other customers by his unseemly conduct. He was much the worse for drink, and on being requested to go home threw a quantity of ale, a pewter pot, and three glasses at the landlady (Mrs Caroline Austin) and her son. Mrs Austin then requested her son to put him out, and on his attempting to do so, B. bit him severely on the cheek, drawing blood and leaving the marks of his teeth. He also took Austin's finger in his mouth and bit it nearly to the bone, and it was not until a bystander forced open his mouth that he let go his hold. Austin suffered severely from the injuries he received. The defendant said he was drunk, and did not know what he was doing. The Bench told him he had been guilty of a disgraceful act of cannibalism unbecoming a man, much less an Englishman. He ought to be thankful the complainant did not press for his being committed for trial at the Assizes. As it was they would inflict the highest penalty in their power £5 and costs, or two months imprisonment.

Source: The Times 6 January 1869



POACHING

"About a fortnight ago, a sheep, belonging to Mr Dashwood, the butcher, was slaughtered in one of his fields at Binstead, and part of the carcass was taken away. Sergeant Grant, with the usual vigilance, obtained a clue as to the perpetrators of the deed, and he and his men went to several houses of those suspected on Sunday morning, and seized their pots, and found what they believed some of the stolen mutton. Accordingly, Benjamin Cotton and Alfred Bevis were brought up before Dr Lind on Monday, and were remanded until Monday next, when strong evidence, we hear, will be brought against them."

Source: Isle of Wight Observer 8 March 1856

"We regret that Charles Bullock, the witness against the poacher Brading, at the Petty Sessions on Saturday was deliberately shot at on Saturday night in the Whitefield wood, about half past ten whilst on duty, by one of the same gang of poachers, named Chessel (who was fined three weeks ago at Newport for poaching), and he is so dreadfully wounded in the groin that little hopes are entertained of his recovery. The other woodman, after a severe struggle, secured Chessel and both are now in Ryde under medical supervision."

Jacob Brading, a local poacher, was charged with being "armed in the night in pursuit of game and assault on a game keeper". He was found with no less than 59 wires in his possession and sentenced to 6 months hard labour, and at the expiration to find sureties of the peace for 12 months, himself in 10s and two housekeepers in 5s each, or to be kept in confinement another six months.

Source: Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle 1864

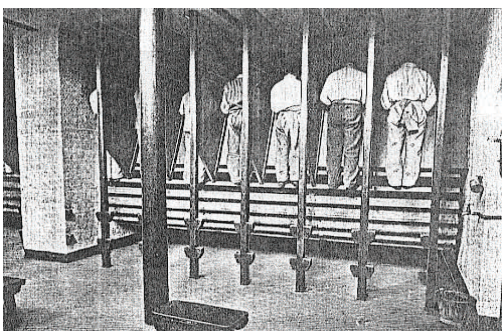
PRISON LIFE

Parkhurst Prison opened in 1838 and by the start of 1846, held 648 boys in custody. A further 102 boys were received from Millbank Prison in 1846, all awaiting transportation for between 7 and 15 years each. Their ages were from only 12 years old to 18. 130 prisoners were discharged in this year but only 22 were pardoned and set free. The remainder were sent to other prisons or asylums or exiled to Port Phillip, Australia. Six died in prison. 90 prisoners were selected 'on account of good conduct' for embarkation in the ship Thomas Arbuthnot to be sent as exiles to Port Phillip in 1847.

Source: Parkhurst Prison report 1 January 1847 presented to the Right Hon Sir George Gray, Secretary of State for the Home Department, published in the London Illustrated Times 1847.



Parkhurst Prison Buildings and Prison Cell



In January 1840, William and Henry Wanne, two boys living in Hill Street, Ryde, were fined, and in default sent to the treadmill, for cutting and carrying away an oak tree, the property of Sir Oglander.

The picture shows an example of prisoners working the treadmill. Invented in 1818, each prisoner in his own compartment had to walk the revolving cylinder for hours at a time; a demoralising and exhausting form of punishment believed at the time to deter re-offending. According to The Times in 1827, the amount prisoners walked per day on average varied in each prison, from 6,600 feet at Lewes to 17,000 feet in just ten hours at Warwick gaol.

It is interesting to note the Parkhurst Prison report of 1 January 1847 gives the condition of the prisoners: *"Their condition, physically, is very good; almost all wear the appearance of robust health. Many who are natives of the large towns came to Parkhurst with sallow complexion and somewhat sickly aspect, but most of these gained, after a short stay here, the ruddy hue of sound health."*

Prisoners were sentenced to hard labour for many different offences. On 13 January 1849, James Williams of Ryde was charged with the theft of 17 bricks, property of James Sanders, and received six weeks hard labour.

James Hart and Charles Board, two able bodied vagrants were charged with begging in the town on 13 March 1852 and sent to Winchester Prison for 21 days hard labour.

Also sent to the House of Correction at Winchester in 1852 for six weeks with hard labour was Daniel Ireland. He was summoned by a Mr Cutler for *"non performance of a contract for doing some joining work"*. He had been paid more than the amount stipulated in the contract, and then refused to do the work! The Isle of Wight Observer commented, *"We think it a most proper case for punishment"*.



Thanks to Ann Barrett for the Parkhurst pictures and information

DRUNK AND DISORDERLY



Fines were a common punishment for being drunk and disorderly. On 14 October 1852, before J Player Lind Esq., Charles Buxey was fined 12s 6d which he paid immediately. On Saturday 16 October he was again brought before the court for drunkenness and fined a further 5s. The following week Theresa Austin, a tramp, was fined for drunken and disorderly conduct on Wednesday night in the High Street and fined 12s 6d, or eight days imprisonment. On the same day James Tealing, an old pensioner, was fined 6s 6d, or seven days imprisonment at Winchester, for using "*most disgusting and obscene language in the streets*".

For leaving his horses and cart unattended for 20 minutes and causing an obstruction in St John's Road, while he was "*solacing himself in a public house*", William Burden of St Helens was fined 1s and 5s costs in 1869.

In February 1886, Ernest Willis, aged 17, a labourer of South Street, pleaded guilty to having been drunk and disorderly in Monkton Street. PC Flaherty proved the offence saying, "*the defendant who was in charge of a horse and cart, was so drunk that he fell under the horse's legs. He had to be removed in one of Messrs Pickford's vans*". He was fined 2s 6d and 7s 6d costs.



BIZARRE CASES

Some of the crimes reported now seem hard to believe they ever got to court. In January 1841, William Linnington of Ryde, was fined for sliding in the ice on the High Road. April 1848 saw Robert Templeman fined 5s and costs for taking a dog on Ryde Pier.



In 1864 George Read, a cab man from Ryde, was charged by Andrew Jackman with driving furiously on the highway, whilst conveying a wedding party out for a ride. The case was dismissed because Read could not be identified as the driver. Alfred Tangdon, a cab driver was fined 10s for refusing to take a fare. Cases of riding bicycles '*furiously*' were also common reasons for a fine!



1864 also saw two boys, Albert Hawkins, of Mitchells Road, Haylands, and Charles Fry, of Bedworth Place, charged with "*the objectionable practice of throwing sand at each other*". Evidently a gentleman sitting in a shelter near the beach complained "*rather strongly about such unwarrantable conduct*" when the sand pitched in front of him. The Chief Constable said he had received so many complaints, and the boys took so little notice of what was said to them, he was obliged to make an example of the boys, but as the penalty would fall on their labouring fathers, only gave the nominal fine of 2s 6d and 6s 6d costs. The Chairman told the boys that the magistrates "*meant to put a stop to this sort of thing, and if any more of these cases came before them a much heavier fine would be inflicted*".

The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle reported on 20 July 1876: "*The Borough Magistrates at Ryde have very properly fined some young men brought before them for indecent bathing within the limits of the Borough. We think a little police interference in this direction is required.*"

And a final editorial comment from the Isle of Wight Observer on 13 April 1889: "*It is stated that during Father Ignatius's services on Monday, at Ryde, several pockets were picked. One purse is said to have contained over £4. This must have been done, while persons were detained in the lobby, by light fingered gentry from the other side. The police should look out for fresh faces.*"