

Rector of Semley Fined 1924



The Rector of Semley, the Rev. Richard Morgan Rees, was at Gillingham Petty Sessions on Tuesday summoned for fraudulently using a motor cycle license, an offence for which he was liable to a penalty of £30 or six months imprisonment. He pleaded guilty and elected to be dealt with summarily.

Mr J L Torr, deputy clerk to the Dorset County Council, prosecuted, and said that the Rev. R M Rees had a New Hudson motor cycle and sidecar, which was licensed till June 30th, and also a James motor cycle, which was unlicensed.

On Sunday, June 29th, he transferred the license from the New Hudson to the James, and rode the latter. It was most unfortunate for a gentleman of his standard to have committed such an offence. The County Council and parliament regarded the offence as one which could not be leniently dealt with, and they felt they were obliged to come straight to the court, as it was not a case where a mitigated penalty could be imposed as they did in the lesser cases, such as driving without license.

Mr Torr added that although the James motor cycle had not previously been licensed, a letter was sent to the Wiltshire County Authority on Saturday, before the offence was committed, for a quarter's license in respect of it.

PC Barnes of Kington Magna, said that on the Sunday evening in question, he was in Church Street West Stour and saw the James motor cycle outside the church. It bore a license issued for a New Hudson. When the Rev. Rees came out of church, witness questioned him and defendant then said that his other machine had broken down and he transferred the license to that cycle on purpose to get to the church that day. The defendant, in a statement to the Bench, said on Sunday June 29th, there was a general interchange of pulpits for the purpose of missionary sermons, on behalf of the SPG and he (defendant) had to preach at Bourton and West Stour.

On the Saturday he discovered that the New Hudson would not work and it would be some days before a spare part could be obtained. As he could not give up the engagement, he had either to hire a taxi or use the James, which had been laid up for over a year. The hire of a taxi would cost more than the collections would be, so he determined to ride the James. He wrote two letters on the Saturday, one to the Inspector of Police at Shaftesbury and the other to the Inspector at Gillingham, telling them he would be in the neighbourhood and hoped to avoid them. The fact that he had changed the license was, however, discovered.

The transfer of the license seemed to have been regarded as a serious misdemeanour, which he did not realise at the time, but the system of licensing was as much to protect the owner from having his cycle stolen as to raise revenue and it showed that the New Hudson was not being used also. Realising it would be some time before the cycle could be repaired, he sent a cheque for a quarter's license for the James, and as the current quarter had only two days to run, he told the authority to make it available for the next quarter. If it had not been that particular Sunday, there would have been no necessity to use the cycle until the following Tuesday when the license would, and did, arrive.

The Chairman (Sir Harold Pelly): I think it would have been cheaper to hire a taxi. The letters written to the police at Shaftesbury and Gillingham were handed in to the Bench and Mr Torr explained that although they were posted on the Saturday, they were not in fact received by the police until Monday, as there was no delivery of letters on Sunday. There was, therefore, nothing in the nature of a trap on the part of the police to catch defendant, but the offence was detected by the constable on his inspection of the license.

The Chairman said the Bench felt there might have been some extenuating circumstances, but at the same time they could not overlook the fact that a serious offence had been committed. Defendant would be fined £2.

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