

## Alleged Village Scandal 1905

### Dairyman's Charge against Knoyle Labourers

At Tisbury Police-court on Monday, before Mr J M Benett-Stanford and Mr C E Maudslay, Albert Matthews and Samuel Matthews, labourers, of East Knoyle, were charged on remand with unlawfully and maliciously inflicting grievous bodily harm on Edgar Rawlings, at Milton, East Knoyle.

Mr J F Rutter appeared for the defendants.

Prosecutor, whose head was swathed with bandages, said he was a dairyman in the employ of the Hon Percy Wyndham, of Clouds, and lived at East Knoyle. On the night of September 4<sup>th</sup> he was proceeding homewards from the village at twenty past ten, in company with a man named Albert Foster and Princess Christian's motor-car driver. As they were passing the sawyard, the defedants came up from behind, and Albert Matthews caught hold of witness round the arms and tripped him up. Witness fell to the ground and his assailant held him down with his left hand and beat him about the head and face with his right fist. Witness tried to get up, and managed to throw Albert Matthews on one side, but as he was rising from the ground, Samuel Matthews struck him across the head with a stick and knocked him back again. Defendants kicked witness about the legs and body as he lay on the ground, and also beat him about the head and arms with their sticks. During the assault, witness heard Samuel shout to his brother "Kill him." The two defendants eventually went away, leaving witness by the side of the road.

After some time he was able to go home. As the result of the injuries to his head, witness said he was kept in bed a week under the orders of Dr Farnfield and was still under medical treatment.

In reply to the Chariman, Rawlings stated that his two companions went off when the row was started.

The Magistrates' Clerk, Mr J Mayo: Did they help you at all?

Witness: Not that I am aware of

Superintendent Maloney: They ran off for assistance

Mr May: They might have rendered assistance themselves

The witness put in a quantity of blood stained clothing which he said he was wearing on the night of the assault.

In reply to questions put in cross examination, prosecutor said he was a married man with two children. He knew Edith Grace Matthews, a sister of the defendants, through her coming to the dairy for milk, but he had never been for a walk with her. He denied that he had given her a brooch, a gold ring, or a bangle, and he had not purchased such articles for her in a shop at Shaftesbury or in Salisbury. He gave denials to suggestions that he had committed adultery with Edith Grace Matthews in the Park at East Knoyle on August 21<sup>st</sup>; at Trodmill on August 30<sup>th</sup>; or in an orchard at Trodmill on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>. He had never committed adultery with the girl at all, and knew nothing about her.

Mr Rutter: Do you know that your connection with this girl was the talk of the village?

Witness: I have never heard of such a thing

Mr Benett-Stanford: We have nothing to do with the talk of the village

In reply to further questions, Rawlings said he could give no reason for the attack which the defendants made on him. He thought he was on the best of terms with them. With reference to his injuries the prosecutor said his body and his legs were covered with bruises. The wounds on his head bled freely and the doctor said it was a very good thing that he was called in the same night or the loss of blood might have proved serious.

Alfred Foster, second coachman to the Hon Percy Wyndham, at Clouds, East Knoyle, deposed that he was returning from East Knoyle village to Milton with prosecutor and another man on the night of September 4<sup>th</sup>. He noticed two big men standing on a bank on the west side of the road. Witness and his companions passed along, and the two men followed them to a point near the sawyard. All at once there was a scuffle and Rawlings was thrown to the ground. Witness went to the assistance of his friend, but one of the men struck him on the chest, knocking him back into the hedge. He recovered himself and went towards the man again, when he heard the swishing noise of a stick. He recognised that he was no good against his assailant and he ran off towards Clouds to get assistance. The motor man had already gone away. Witness did not know either of the defendants, as he had only lately come to East Knoyle.

At the Seymour Arms, East Knoyle, a few days after the assault, witness met the defendants, and some conversation took place with respect to the row on September 4<sup>th</sup>. Samuel Matthews said to witness "I didn't wish to hurt a hair of your head. We had the man we wanted, and we should not have touched you if you had not attempted to help Rawlings."

In reply to a question from the Bench, Foster said that on the night of the assault he returned with assistance to the scene of the disturbance, but Rawlings and his assailants had already gone. Witness went to Rawling's house and found the injured man in a frightful condition. He was covered with blood.

Cross examined by Mr Rutter, witness said he did not understand what the row was all about on the night of September 4<sup>th</sup>.

Mr Rutter: You understand it now, don't you?

Witness: No, sir, I do not. I don't interfere with other people's affairs.

Continuing, witness said he did not know Edith Grace Matthews and he had heard no village talk about her and Rawlings.

Police Sergeant Hillier, station at Tisbury, stated that he arrested prisoners on a warrant taken out by the prosecutor on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

This concluded the evidence for the prosecution.

When formally charged, Albert Matthews said "It is all lies that this man (the prosecutor) has said from first to last" and the accused intimated that they wished to give evidence on their own behalf.

Albert Matthews first entered the box and, having taken the oath, said he had been in Queensland for 23 years and returned home on May 15<sup>th</sup>. He heard rumours in the village about Rawlings and his sister Edith Grace, and he watched them until he was satisfied that adultery had been committed. He had watched them in an act of misconduct and he picked up a letter in his sister's writing on the day after the row.

In reply to the Clerk, Mr Rutter said the letter was not signed with a name. Mr Mayo said he did not think it could be received as evidence. Mr Rutter: It is addressd to "My dearest Edgar."

Mr Benett-Stanford: It had better be put in. Mr Rutter then read the letter as follows:

"My Dearest Edgar, I am just dropping you these few lines as I do so want to let you know about Saturday night. I was being watched by A. He must have followed me out when I went, as he did not come in until after I did. but I am sure he did not see us together. Did you see him after you left me as he must have been watching somewhere? He was fair mad and told me I ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself and that he had not finished with you yet. So be careful, dear, and try not to have a row if you see him, for my sake. He said it was quite a scandal and talk of the place and that we had been watched by different ones in the Park. He could tell me more than I knew myself, and so I told him. He said the b. (?bangle) I have got was bought in Salisbury, as some woman saw us go in a shop together and buy it. I told him it was all d..... lies. You must excuse me, dear, but I was upset. He would not believe what I said, but that does not trouble me in the least. He tried to come round yesterday (Sunday), and asked me to promise to finish it off, but I would have none of it, as I cannot forget somet things he said quite so easily. I am miserable and unhappy. I wish we were together a thousand miles away, but I shall always love you and be true to you, come what may, as I know you will be to me, and if anything else happens, I will arrange a meeting somehow. With my fondest love to you, from G. He was not out last night till after 12. I hope you did not see him or have a row."

Mr Rutter put in the letter, also an evelope in which it was alleged to have been found, which bore the words "Destroy this when you have read it."

Albert Matthews further stated that on Monday evening, September 4<sup>th</sup>, he and Samuel went out to look for Rawlings, and found him at the Seymour Arms. They went outside the Inn and walked up to the Park to wait for him. Rawlings came along the road with two companions. Witness and his brother allowed the party to pass and followed them to a point near the sawmills, where witness caught hold of Rawlings and threw him down into the hedge. Witness had a walking stick in his hand, but he let it drop when he threw Rawlings down. He used nothing but his fists on Rawlings, and did not kick him at all, but he gave him one cut with the stick to finish up with. Samuel did not lay a hand on Rawlings, or hit him. Samuel had no stick. Witness had spoken to his sister about her relations with Rawlings.

Mr Rutter: Why did you thrash Rawlings?

Witness: I gave him the thrashing in revenge for what he did to my sister.

My father is alive, but is 75 years of age. My sister Edith was 21 last birthday.

Samuel Matthews corroborated his brother's statement relating to the attack on Rawlings, and said he did not touch prosecutor at all.

Mr Rutter, addressing the bench, submitted that there was no evidence at all against Samuel Matthews. With regard to Albert, he had admitted and justified the beating he gave Rawlings. The complainant had really received no serious injury. He certainly had a scalp wound, which bled freely, but the bleeding was perhaps beneficial rather than otherwise, and conduced to his speedy recovery. Continuing, the solicitor for the defence said it was a well known principle of law that if a husband found his wife committing adultery, he might actually kill the adulterer.

The Clerk: That is a strong statement to make.

Mr Rutter: But the law does justify it.

Continuing, he said if it were true that improper relations were existing between a married man and this young girl, it was necessary that something should be done to vindicate the honour of the family. The law provided no remedy in such a case, and this was one of those instances where a man must take the law into his own hands. The father of the girl was 75 years of age, and it therefore devolved upon the eldest son to take the necessary steps to see that an end was put to the alleged improper relations. He argued that Albert Matthews acted from a sense of duty, and said he thought no jury would convict on the evidence before the Court. It was true that Rawlings denied any improper relations with the sister of the accused men, but after reading the letter put in by the defendants, he (Mr Rutter) thought any jury would come to the conclusion that Albert Matthews was absolutely justified in doing what he had done.

After a short consultation, the magistrates dismissed the charge against Samuel Matthews, but committed Albert Matthews to take his trial at the next Wiltshire Quarter Sessions.

They accepted bail for his appearance at the Sessions, his own recognisance of £10 and two sureties of £5 each.

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