

Spate of Burglaries 1888



Hindon Petty Sessions

Alfred Bennett, residence unknown, was brought up in custody charged with house-breaking at Tisbury, on the 16th June. Prisoner had previously been brought before Mr W R Shaw Stewart and remanded. The following depositions (then given) were read.

Mr Supt Bull stated that he was called up at 3.30am on Saturday by Mr James Cuff, of Tisbury, who informed him that Mrs Gattrell's house had been broken into and a man seen by her in her bedroom.

He went to Mrs Gattrell's house and on examining the parlour window facing the street, he found that someone had entered by lifting up the window, and the flower vase outside had been lifted off the stand and placed further back. The edge of the vase stand was broken apparently by someone stepping upon it, and there were marks on the window sill as of someone getting through.

Upstairs, under the bed, witness found two keys, a candle and a box of matches, which he took possession of. At the front door witness saw marks apparently made by a man without boots.

On returning to Hindon, PC Grant arrived with the prisoner. The prisoner (who gave the name of Alfred Bennett) was searched in the presence of witness. In one of his pockets was found a pair of socks, wet and soiled with mud at the soles, also a knife, a pair of scissors, a French penny, a purse and 6s 10½d in cash.

Witness charged him with burglariously breaking into Mrs Gattrell's house at Tisbury that morning, and also with breaking into Mr Lovett's conservatory at Tisbury, and stealing a knife, scissors and other articles. Prisoner made no reply. On returning to Tisbury, witness found that a key had been stolen from the conservatory, and the lock on the conservatory door had been forced open. On examining the dwelling house of Mr Lovett, Mr Bull found that the keys, which he had found under Mrs Gattrell's bed, belonged – one to Mr Lovett's front door and the other to a room at the back part of the house.

PC Grant deposed to seeing the prisoner at Semley Station, as he answered a description given him, he asked him where he belonged to, and he said 'London'. He asked prisoner where he had come from that morning, and he replied 'Dinton'. Witness charged him with breaking into a dwelling house at Tisbury, and prisoner replied "Allright". After taking him to Hindon, witness searched him in the presence of Mr Bull, and found the articles before mentioned.

Mary Ann Gattrell said that on Saturday morning, June 16th, she was in bed at 1.30am. She saw the reflection of a light on her ceiling. Her room opened out on the landing. She thought it was Mrs Hayward going upstairs and called out, but there was no answer. She got out of bed and struck a light and went to another bedroom and found the door open. On looking in she saw the prisoner behind the door with his boots under his arm. She asked him what business he had and how he came into the house. Prisoner replied "I came in through the front window". Witness went downstairs and called her servant, leaving the prisoner upstairs. In her box room she found the things in a disordered condition, but she missed nothing.

Annie Hayward said that she was a servant at Mrs Gattrell's. On Saturday morning last she was called up by her mistress at 1.30am. From what her mistress told her she went upstairs and searched all the rooms but could not find anyone. Subsequently she went to Mr Gattrell's room to get her boots, and on stooping down to get them, she saw a man's foot and found the prisoner, who said in answer to her inquiries, that he came in through the front room window.

She then called out to her mistress and the prisoner got out from under the bed and rushed past her down the stairs. Prisoner had his boots under his arm. He ran along the passage, unlocked the side door and went out. Under the bed where the prisoner was, witness afterwards found two keys, a piece of candle, and a box of matches. At this stage of the proceedings Supt Bull asked for a remand for eight days so that further enquiries might be made in regard to the prisoner. Prisoner was then formally remanded till Wednesday next. Another charge of burglary will then be preferred against him.

Western Gazette Friday 22 June 1888

Hindon Police Court

Alfred Bennett, alias Alfred Oliver, was charged on remand with committing three burglaries at Tisbury, on June 15th, one at the residence of Mrs. Gattrell, in High Street, and the others at Mr. Lovett's Nursery and dwelling-house, also in High Street.

In the case respecting Mrs. Gattrell's house, the evidence given by Mary Ann Gattrell, Annie Hayward, Superintendent Bull, and PC Grant, was repeated. After the charge had been read over to the prisoner he pleaded guilty, and was committed for trial.

The charge of breaking into Mr. Lovett's conservatory was then gone into and the following evidence taken.

Charles Lovett, Seedsman and Florist, of Fonthill, said that he occupied a seed shop, conservatory, and dwelling-house at Tisbury. The dwelling-house was apart from the other premises. On the night of June 15th he locked up the dwelling-house (which he used as stores), placed the key on a shelf in his shop, and locked the shop up. He put the key of the shop in his pocket and afterwards gave it to John Freemantle.

On locking up the shop he left among other things a pruning knife, a pair of garden scissors, and a French penny which had some spot of mildew on it. Next morning, from information he received, he sent to the police. He recognised the articles produced (the knife, scissors and key) as his property. He valued them at 2s 6d.

John Freemantle, an assistant to the prosecutor, said that on the night of June 15th his master gave him the key of the shop, and he was present when his master locked the shop up. The following morning at 6.30 he went to the shop and found the door was a little ajar and that the lock had been burst open. He went across to the drawer and missed a pruning knife, scissors, and a key from the shelf. His master came at 7.0 a.m. and told him.

P.S. Orchard said that on Friday night, June 15th, at 10 p.m. he was on duty at Tisbury. At the time he noticed Mr. Lovett's shop door was shut. On the following morning, between seven and eight a.m., he received information from Mr. Lovett that his shop had been broken into. Witness immediately went down to the shop and found that an entrance had been effected by forcing the lock which was now produced.

Charles Lovett, re-called, said that he locked up the shop about nine o'clock. Prisoner was then charged and pleaded guilty. Committed for trial.

The third charge was that of breaking into Mr. Lovett's dwelling-house which he used as stores. Charles Lovett said that on the night of 15th June, he locked up the dwelling-house and put the key in his shop. Next morning at 7.30 he (accompanied by Sergeant Orchard) went to the house, found the door unlocked and no key there. He had previously missed the key from the shop. He missed a key from the back room also. Prisoner asked the witness whether he was sure he locked the front door and took the key away. Witness answered in the affirmative.

Mr. Supt. Bull said that on Saturday, June 16th, he visited Mr. Lovett's premises at Tisbury, having in his possession two keys, which he had previously found under a bed at the dwelling-house of Mrs. Gattrell, where a burglary had been committed that morning. He tried one of the keys in the front door lock and found it to fit exactly. During the time witness was there another key was missed by Mr. Lovett's man, Freemantle, from the back door. He compared the other key with the lock on that door and found it to fit exactly.

The prisoner, on being charged, pleaded not guilty. The Bench, however, committed him for trial.

Western Gazette Friday 29 June 1888

Wilts Assizes Devises

Alfred Oliver, alias Alfred Bennett, 21, porter, pleaded guilty to burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling house of Charles Lovett, at Wardour, on the 15th June, and stealing therein one pruning knife, one pair of scissors, one key, and one French penny, his property, and he also pleaded guilty to burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling house of Mary Ann Gattrell, at Wardour, on the 16th June, with intent to steal her goods and chattels. The grand jury threw out the bill charging prisoner with burglary and stealing a key, the property of Charles Lovett.

Mr Garland, who prosecuted, said the Scotland Yard authorities had found, prior to these burglaries, prisoner bore a good character. The Judge said it was a most unaccountable series of burglaries and as the prisoner's father offered to be bound for him, he would be allowed to go out on bail to come up for judgement when called upon.

Western Gazette Thursday 12 July 1888