

William Sandlant

Newspaper Reports of his trial

June/July 1838

Detection of a Gang of Burglars

AT ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH.

A system of robbery has been in existence at Ashby, and in the neighbourhood, for nearly ten years, which has been conducted with astonishing success and audacity, by a number of men, some of whom have been almost openly known in the town as the guilty parties. The remainder of the number, against whom evidence has been adduced, were unsuspected by their neighbours. The master-spirit, or presiding-genius, of this gang of rogues, is an old man named Sandlant, frequently called "Billy Jarsey," who is supposed to have acquired this nick-name from having been originally a jersey-comber. Sandlant, in the early part of his life, some forty five years ago, learnt his business from a man of dishonest character, and he has been a noted character ever since. At a late examination before the Magistrates, which, we are informed, led to the exposure of the whole scheme of villainy, a witness present said that Sandlant had been charged with an offence forty years ago. "No," replied he, "it was no such thing—it was only thirty years ago!" He is between sixty and seventy years of age. Sandlant was in the habit of buying and selling small lots of wool with farmers, and this gave him a plausible appearance of respectability, and would account for his having been in the possession of wool in large quantities, which he had stolen from neighbouring farmers. Thomas Pickering, another individual who figures in the report underneath, had lived with some of the farmers, and bore a fair character with them, previous to his first connection with Sandlant, seven years ago. He and Knott were suspected of having lived by

ago. He and Knott were suspected of having lived by poaching.—Whether this system of robbery has gone on thus unchecked from the neglect of the local police, or the cunning of the thieves, we are unable to state, but to say the least of it, it is remarkably strange, that no more prompt and effective steps have been taken to detect them.—Persons in a better condition of life, than might have been suspected, are said to have been the regular purchasers of the stolen articles. The names of those who have been before the Magistrates, as principals, are Thomas, Henry, and John Pickering, William Knott, Moses Kirby, William Sandlant, and Elizabeth Bodell. Another or two have been discharged. We present to our readers a report of the examination on Friday, before the Magistrates (the Rev. John Piddocke and William Wootton Abney, Esqrs).

STEALING WOOL AT NORMANTON.—WILLIAM SANDLANT and THOMAS PICKERING, labourers of Ashby, were both charged with having broken into a building, at Normanton-le-Heath, on the 30th of August last, and stolen therefrom 84 lbs. weight of wool, the property of Robert Green, Esq. of Swepstone.

The prosecutor stated, that early in July last, about 175 fleeces of wool were deposited in his granary at Normanton, the property of his late father, Valentin Green, Esq. Mr. Bourne's man came to look at the wool, for the purpose of purchasing it, and it appeared less in bulk, but he (prosecutor) did not suspect any of it had been stolen: it was sold about that time, and a person came ten days afterwards to weigh it. They then counted the fleeces, and found a considerable quantity missing—witness was sure there were thirty-three fleeces missing: sold it at 35s. the tod.

George Thompson, waggoner to the late Valentine Green, Esq. remembered putting a quantity of wool in the granary, but could not speak as to the precise number of fleeces. Witness went occasionally to the granary, but did not notice the wool, as the shutters were closed in that part of the granary. When Mr. Bourne's man came, he (witness) assisted him in packing the wool. He said he thought there was not so much wool as Mr. Green expected: they unpacked the wool, and found a considerable quantity missing.

Thomas Mount and James Palfrey, two youths — the latter a brick-yard boy — both stated that they met Sandlant and Pickering, about one o'clock one morning last corn-harvest, coming on the footpath between Packington and Ashby, with bags on their heads, which they pulled over their faces as they came by them, and also turned their heads away. The bags appeared to be full of something.

Pickering voluntarily confessed that about the month of August last, he and Sandlant went to Mr. Green's granary, at Normanton. They picked the lock, and took away about seven fleeces: as they were returning with the fleeces on their backs in bags, they met two boys near Mr. Fisher's mill, at Ashby, whom they did not know. A few nights after, he, and Sandlant, and Knott, went to Normanton again, and once after that: they brought away 23 fleeces altogether, and carried the wool on their backs. Sandlant and himself (Pickering) took the wool to Sandlant's house. They took the wool from the granary on Wednesday night, and went again the next night, but it was gone: on the Friday morning about one o'clock, they left Ashby with the wool, and went to Leicester. They took the wool, intending to sell it to a

person named Cooper, who lived near the Fish and Quart, but not in the same street: they waited for Mr. Cooper, but he did not come, and another man came up and asked the price of the wool. This man's warehouse was near to Cooper's, on the opposite side of the street, and he gave him (prisoner) 28s. 6d. a tod: the lot came to £18. Prisoner got about £5, and Sandlant the rest. Cooper came up, and they told him they had sold the wool. He made them promise to bring him the next load, and they said they would.

ANOTHER CASE OF STEALING WOOL.—The same prisoners were examined on a second charge of having stolen out of a building adjoining the house of Messrs. Davy, wine-merchant, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, 100 lbs. weight of wool, and two gallons of gin in a cask, the property of the said Messrs. Davy, on the 17th of March.—Pickering was charged with feloniously receiving some of the articles.

Mr. J. Davy deposed that, in March last, he had upwards of 100 lbs. weight of wool, in his warehouse at Ashby, and missed it in the April following. On the morning of the 17th of March, a cask of gin was missed from a cart in the yard. The cask was numbered in a book he kept: it was never delivered, nor was the party ever charged with the gin. The cask now produced by Thomas Price, the constable, was identified by the witness, as the one which had been entered in his book, and contained the gin: he had no doubt whatever respecting it.

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Pickering voluntarily confessed to the truth of this charge, and proceeded to give some of the particulars connected with the robbery. Sandlant brought the wool to him, and told him of the robbery. It appeared by Pickering's confession, that he had been more of a receiver than a thief.

STEALING GROCERY.—The same parties were charged with having broken into a building occupied by Mr. C. R. Crossley, grocer, Ashby, on the 1st of February, and stolen therefrom 28 lbs. of sugar, 2 lbs. of tobacco, five brushes, some soap, and other articles.

Mr. Crossley stated that he missed the articles in January or February. The brushes produced by Price were his property.—The prosecutor's son gave similar testimony.

Thomas Price, constable, said that he found the brushes, along with several skeleton keys, in Sandlant's house, on the 4th of June.

Pickering again confessed that he and Sandlant committed the robbery, and detailed the particulars. Sandlant told him (Pickering) he had sold the sugar to old Mrs. Bodell, of Swadlincote.

Sandlant denied the charge altogether.

STEALING GLASS, ASHBY.—WILLIAM SANDLANT was then charged with stealing ninety-four glasses, the property of James Cliffe, of Swadlincote, on the 1st of May, from a warehouse in Ashby.—This case was proved from the fact of the glass being found at Sandlant's house, and from Pickering's confession.

There was a second charge against SANDLANT alone, for stealing 100 pieces of earthenware belonging to Thomas Litherland, of Ashby, on the 9th of November. This was similar in character to the last case, and was proved by the witnesses.

Sandlant was committed to Leicester County Gaol after this day (Thursday's) examination; and was brought in custody of Mr. Goodyer, Superintendent of Police, who had been engaged in assisting to bring the above parties to justice.—Pickering was also committed.

The Ashby Gang.

WILLIAM SANDLANT, 69, was charged with stealing a quantity of wool and a cask of gin, belonging to Messrs. John and Thomas Davys, of Ashby, on the 17th of March. Mr. John Davys and Charles Lee (assistant to Messrs. D.) having deposed to the gin being sent by a boy, in a cart, the latter stated that he did not miss the cask till he had got nine miles from Ashby towards Stapenhill. Price (the Ashby constable) produced the cask, which he found in the prisoner's house. Thomas Pickering (an accomplice brought from goal to give evidence) said that Sandlant brought the cask of gin and some wool to his (Pickering's) house in Ashby, and said that he had got the property from the prosecutors. There were several marks on the cask which Sandlant burnt out. Pickering underwent a very severe cross-examination by Mr. Burnaby (Mr. Hildyard being for the prosecution) who showed clearly that Pickering was a thorough-paced villain. Notwithstanding the marks had been erased, the prosecutors identified the cask. Mr. Burnaby, in addressing the Jury, commented on the fact of Pickering being a person of very bad character, and also that his evidence was unsupported, in which the Chairman, in a great measure coincided, but, notwithstanding, the Jury found the prisoner Guilty. A previous conviction was then proved against the prisoner, but owing to there being several other charges against him, his sentence was deferred.

SANDLANT was again arraigned for stealing several brushes, and a quantity of other articles, from the shop of Mr. Crossley, grocer, Ashby, and an old woman named ELIZABETH BODELL, was charged with receiving some of the goods, knowing them to be stolen. Mr. Hildyard again conducted the prosecution, and Messrs. White and Burnaby defended the prisoners. Pickering (being again admitted Queen's evidence) said that, about last Michaelmas, he and Sandlant got into the prosecutor's warehouse about midnight, by means of some skeleton keys, and carried off the goods in question. Price (the constable,) deposed to finding some of the stolen property in the houses of both the prisoners. Thomas Astle said that he saw Sandlant and a companion go towards the female prisoner's house, at Swadlincote, with a bag in his hand, which, from their suspicious motions, (Sandlant and his companion having walked before the door for some time while there were other persons in the shop,) he supposed they left there. Reuben Newbold having corroborated the last witness's evidence, Mr. Dewes (attorney for the prosecution) was sworn, whose testimony was objected to by Mr. Hildyard, but eventually he was allowed to give his evidence, which was to the effect that the female prisoner, when before the Magistrate, stated that she had never bought anything of Sandlant in her life, that she had not known him for three years, and that she knew nothing of Pickering. Mr. Crossley identified the

property as that which he had missed from his warehouse, and said that he had never sent any goods to Swadlincote. William Radford, a lodger at the female prisoner's, said that Pickering had repeatedly come to Mr. Bodell's shop with potatoes. After Pickering had been very roughly handled by the Learned Counsel for the defence, both gentlemen addressed the Jury for their respective clients, (Mr. Burnaby urging that the prosecution was vindictive, considering that Sandlant had been convicted,) and Mr. White (on behalf of Bodell) called her charwoman, (Marianne Ward) who said that Pickering had brought some malt and potatoes to the house in a bag, but that he did not say he brought them from Sandlant. Two or three other witnesses deposed to the fact of Mrs. Bodell having purchased potatoes, malt, &c. from various parties, and others were called to her character. Mr. Hildyard, in his reply, denied that the prosecution was vindictive, remarking that the case against the female depended on the conviction of the male prisoner, and that, Sandlant being already liable to transportation for life, a second conviction would not be of much consequence, as far as he was concerned. The Chairman having summed up at considerable length, the Jury found both prisoners Guilty, when Sandlant was sentenced to transportation for life, and Bodell to nine months' hard labour.—This case alone occupied the Court nearly five hours. Pickering, being admitted Queen's evidence, was not tried: we suppose he will be detained in custody until he has given evidence against the remainder of the gang, (which embraces some of his near relations,) who, we believe, have been sent to Derby for trial. The four other indictments against Sandlant were not pressed.