



Charge of Bigamy

At Salisbury on Monday, before Mr Justice Collins, Ernest Morecroft, forty-four, engraver, on bail, was charged with bigamy. Mr. J. Anderson Foote prosecuted: Mr. F. R. Y. Radcliffe defended. The prisoner married his first wife at Stratford, in Essex, she being a widow much older than he was. They lived together for fifteen years, but in the interval the prisoner was in Australia on three occasions. He finally returned in 1890, and in 1891 went through the form of marriage with a young woman, his cousin, at Collingbourne Kingston, for which he is now being tried. The prosecution was instituted by a son of the prisoner's wife, who accused him of having deserted her. The defence was that the prisoner had good grounds for believing that his first wife was dead when he contracted the second marriage.

Witnesses were called to show that he had made enquiries in 1890 as to where his first wife was, she having left the house where she was living when he left England. It was also stated that a gentleman now in Ontario wrote in 1889 from London to the prisoner in Australia saying he had heard nothing of the prisoner's wife or her family. It was suggested that this gentleman had had to pay an allowance to the prisoner's wife at his request. The second wife also gave evidence, saying she knew of the inquiries which were made, that the prisoner thought his first wife was dead in 1891, and that their marriage was, at his request, announced in a local paper. His Lordship, in summing up, pointed out that if the prisoner, in good faith and on reasonable grounds, believed his wife to be dead at the time of the second marriage, although seven years had not lapsed since he heard of his wife, he would be entitled to an acquittal within the terms of the case "Reg. v. Tolson" (23 Q.B.D., 168 C.C. R.)

Dealing, however, with the evidence, he asked the jury whether they were satisfied that the prisoner really had made proper inquiries on the point. The prisoner was found guilty. His Lordship sentenced him to four months' hard labour.

Berkshire Chronicle, 19 November 1892

OPC Note:

From Marriage Indexes - March Quarter 1872 West Ham Registration District - Ernest Morecroft and either Semiramies Ramsden or Elizabeth Rachel G. Smith

March Quarter 1891 Pewsey Registration District - Ernest Morecroft and Ida Louise Pierce