



Site of the London Joint City and Midland Bank as it appears c2011 and place of the theft in 1922

Bank Theft 1922

At a special sitting of the Devizes borough magistrates yesterday, before the Mayor (Mr T H S Ferris) in the chair, Col K Steele, Capt B H Cunnington and Mr G Cately.

Vincent James Drake (21) of Seend, until recently employed at the Devizes branch of the London Joint City and Midland Bank, was charged with the theft of an oak cash box, valued at £2, containing £1300 in Treasury notes and £600 in bonds. Defendant was remanded in custody from the previous Wednesday.

Mr Maurice Mosely of 20 Buckersbury, EC4, prosecuted on behalf of the bank. Defendant was, he said, until recently a clerk at the Devizes branch of the London Joint City and Midland Bank, which was, as they were aware, situated at the corner of St. John Street and the Market Place, with entrance at the angle of the square. On entering the bank there was a counter on the right hand side. The other side of the counter was divided into two sections, one where the cashiers stood, and which was separated from the rest of the bank by a partition a little more than breast high, against which were the desks. The inner portion was entered only from the back part of the bank by means of a swing door. No one had any right in this portion except the manager and cashier. They would realise how material was that statement presently.

On August 22 accused attended his work as usual. And there was also at the bank Mr Austin, the cashier, who commenced his duties early in the morning by going into the strong room with the manager and receiving a box containing a sum of money which varied from day to day. There was, however, always a goodly sum in it, which would not be known to anyone except Mr Austin and the manager. Mr Austin placed the box near where he was working, and at about one o'clock went to dinner. Another clerk, Miss Warr, returned from lunch at that time, and she and accused were the

only two in the bank. In the box there was £1300 in Treasury notes and certain documents. Before he went to dinner Mr Austin locked the box. Shortly after this the accused made some excuse to go to the counter, a place where he had no right to go. He then went to Miss Warr, who was in another portion of the bank, and said he was going home to his apartments to fetch his coat, as he had forgotten it, and was going on to Trowbridge straight from the bank. He had no right, as he well knew, to go out in this way and leave Miss Warr alone in the bank. He (Mr Mosely) would suggest that prisoner went to the counter in the inner portion of the bank, took the box, and placed it on the counter in a position such that he could take it as he left the bank without being noticed. Miss Warr saw him pass the window going in the direction of his lodgings. But as she could not see the lower part of his body she did not see whether he was carrying anything.

Accused returned to the bank about twenty minutes later, resuming work. He had a conversation with Miss Warr, she remarking that he looked flushed, and he replied he had had a wash, which accounted for that. He (Mr. Mosely) would suggest that the reason why he washed was that he went to his room at his lodgings, climbed on to the roof, and concealed the box behind a chimney stack, and, getting his hands dirty, had to wash them.

Mr Austin returned to the bank at about 2.15 pm and at once missed the box. Everybody was questioned about it, and all denied any knowledge of the box. Prisoner was questioned with the others and he, too, denied any knowledge. Mr Lloyd, the manager, was communicated with and he, in turn, informed the police. All the officials were asked for an explanation, but none could throw any light upon it. Later, Mr White, an inspector of the bank, while looking into the prisoner's banking account, noticed that some small transactions did not appear to be clear. He cross-examined Drake at some length, and eventually suspicion fell upon him by reason of his evasive replies and prevarications. At length finding evasions and prevarications of no further use, Drake said he had taken the box and hidden it on the roof of the house, and offered to go and get it. The police, however, recovered the box. The contents had not been interfered with. Prisoner could not have known what amount was in it, except that it was a considerable sum.

After he had been cautioned by the police prisoner made a statement, which would be produced, that the real reason why he took the money was that he had felt queer for a month or so, and had tried to get a shift three or four times, but could not. He thought if he could "tackle" £250 he could put up with chucking banking. No one else knew anything about it. He was instructed to say that, so far as prisoner was concerned, there was nothing previously known against him. He proposed to charge prisoner under Section 17 of the Act of 1879 with the larceny of £1300, the property of his master.

Hector Hugh Austin, of Little Cheverell, cashier at the bank, spoke as to the loss of the box and of informing the manager.

Miss Gertrude Ethel Warr, clerk at the bank, said that on the day in question she remembered prisoner going to the inner portion of the bank by reason of hearing the door go. He afterwards left the bank and returned later. She did not see him take the box away.

George Griffin, of 18 Victoria Road, Devizes, spoke to meeting prisoner in the Brittox, Devizes, carrying a cardboard box (produced). He did not see the oak box.

Superintendent Foreman said at 3 pm on August 22 he received information respecting the loss of the cash box at the bank. In company with the Deputy Chief Constable and PS Slade he visited the bank and after inquiries came to the conclusion that the robbery had been committed by someone in the bank. He interviewed the officials on duty and decided that prisoner was the culprit. Later two bank officials interviewed defendant. Witness had already made up his mind to charge him with the offence. In consequence of certain investigations in the bank books prisoner was charged by PS Slade in bank at 11 pm with the offence. They then proceeded to prisoner's lodgings at 60 New Park Street, Devizes, and on the roof there behind a chimney stack witness (who has to climb through a small window for the purpose) recovered the box intact.

PS Slade, stationed at Bromham, spoke to visiting the bank in company with Supt Foreman on August 22. It came to witness's knowledge that prisoner had taken a box home that afternoon and which he

stated, when questioned, would be found on his bed at his lodgings. With prisoner's consent, and in his presence, witness went to his lodgings where he found the cardboard box (produced) on his bed, prisoner saying: "That is the box I brought from the bank". Witness failed to find the stolen property then, but later saw the box recovered. When charged prisoner said: "I did not know the bonds were in there."

Prisoner was committed for trial at the next Quarter Session. His father applied for bail, and prisoner was released on bail on his own security and £500 of his father, Mr Jessie Drake, and Mr Sydney Joseph Wood, each in a similar amount.

Western Daily Press Thursday 31 August 1922

At the Devizes Borough Session on Monday, a young bank clerk, named Vincent James Drake, son of a Seend farmer, was sent to prison for twelve months in the second division, and ordered to pay £30 towards the cost of the prosecution, for stealing an oak cash box, containing Treasury notes of the value £1300 from the London Joint City and Midland Bank Ltd. He pleaded guilty, and Mr F J Tucker defended, Mr J E Y Radcliffe prosecuted, and in passing sentence the Recorder said it gave one a great shock to have to pass a sentence upon such a well educated young man, but that was the least sentence he could give consistent with the crime.

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