



Crime News - The Sovereign Coin affair Little Hinton 1859

SWINDON POLICE COURT

Thursday, March 24th

Magistrates present: Rev. G. A. Goddard (chairman), Rev. Giles Daubeney, David Archer Esq., and George Alexander, Esq.

Charles Rolfe, of Little Hinton, trainer, was charged by William Henry Dormer with having on the 20th of February last stolen a letter containing a sovereign, his property. Mr J. W. Brown appeared for the complainant, and Mr Townsend for the defendant. William Henry Dormer, the complainant, said: For some time past I have been living and boarding with the accused, at Little Hinton. He is a trainer of race horses. I have been in the habit of receiving money from my parents. I had reason to believe I should receive a letter about the 20th of February containing money, as I had written for some. I did not receive a letter on the 20th of February. I saw the defendant on that day, in the afternoon. The letters are delivered in the usual course at Hinton about 11 o'clock in the morning. I was at Swindon on the morning of that day, but got home between 4 and 5 o'clock, when I saw Rolfe, and asked him if there was any letter for me and he said there was not. Mr Hartree, who had driven me over from Swindon, then came up, and in his presence I again asked Rolfe if he was sure there was no letter, and he said no there was not. I afterwards obtained information that a letter had been received. On the following Wednesday Mr Rolfe called me into his room, and said he had taken the sovereign out of the letter, knowing me so well he thought he could take the liberty with me, and asked me the sake of his wife to forgive him, and not tell any one about it. I said I would think about it. I did not wish to prosecute him for the sake of his family. I have not slept at his house since. He still has the sovereign, and I am deprived of it .

To Mr Townsend : My friends live in Warwickshire. I have been residing on and off with Rolfe since last October. I was at Oxford six weeks about Christmas time, and at Liverpool a week. Rolfe came to me at Oxford. We have been on intimate terms together. I never missed any letter before. My friends have been trying to get me a situation. I never in my life asked Rolfe to open my letters when I was from home, and I have never said to any one that I had given Rolfe instructions to open my letters. Before Rolfe called me into his room two of Rolfe's men told me that Richard Goater had given Mr Rolfe a letter for me., and from its weight concluded there was money in it. Rolfe then promised to give me the sovereign the next day. I do not owe Mr Rolfe a shilling, except a bill coming due May 8th, for £10. I know a Mr Bennett. I have told Mr Bennett of Rolfe having had this letter; this was three or four weeks after Rolfe had this letter. And I told Bennett that for the sake of his wife and family I would not prosecute him. On the 9th of February I

lent Rolfe a sovereign to go to Reading races; he has paid me back 12s. Of this some. I gave Rolfe the bill on the 8th of February; it was an accommodation bill; both of us wanted some money, and I was to have had half of it, but have had less. Mr Rolfe has brought some horses for me; I have not paid for them, and I think Rolfe has not; the price was 24 guineas for one, and 45 guineas the other. Rolfe has told me he has been sued for these horses two or three days after I found out about Rolfe having me letter, I went to the post office and told them not to send any more of my letters to Rolfe's home. I had no open rapture with Rolfe about the letter, till one day when we were returning in a trap from Ashdown meeting. I did not say to a man by the name of Bennett, now I have him in my clutches, I will have my spite upon him, and that I would have a warrant for him, and have him taken up for opening the letter. I recollect telling him Rolfe had stolen a letter and a sovereign of mine, but for the sake of his wife and family I would not prosecute him: but this was not on the day after the Ashdown meeting. I did not tell Bennett yesterday that if Rolfe would give me a receipt for all I owned him, I would not prosecute. Bennett has this morning offered me £5 not to prosecute, in the presence of two witnesses, at Wanborough. I first made up my mind to take these proceedings when Rolfe insulted me coming from Ashdown.

To the Bench: I did not take proceedings against Rolfe when I first knew about the letter, in consideration of his wife and family. I have now taken proceedings because he had not acted fairly with me.

Richard Goater said: I recollect the 20th February; I was in the stable. James Short brought in a letter directed to Mr Dormer. I took the letter directed to Mr Dormer. I took the letter into my hand; there was something in it. I gave the letter back to Short. My master, Mr Rolfe, was in the yard at the time. There were three other letters, one for Short and two for Rolfe.

Mr Samuel Hartree said: I recalled driving Dormer to Rolfe's house on Sunday, 20th February, we got there about five o'clock. I heard no conversation between Rolfe and Dormer about the letter. Before we left Swindon Dormer told me he expected a letter.

James Looker said: I was at Mr Rolfe's on Tuesday, February 22nd, I was in the stable, and heard My Dormer ask Mr Rolfe if there was any letters for him. Rolfe said, no there isn't. Dormer then said, Jim said there was one. Rolfe then said, yes, there was a letter: I will go and find it for you; and he went away to find the letter, as I thought, but he could not find it. I and Mr Dormer then went indoors with Rolfe, where Rolfe said that if we were going on to Mr Harding's he would find the letter by the time we came back.

At this point, it having been suggested by the Bench, that there was no evidence to show that the letter contained a sovereign, and also that there was no positive evidence of the defendant having received a letter on the day in question. Mr Browne asked for an adjournment to procure additional evidence. This application was subsequently granted, and the case therefore stands adjourned for hearing on this day fortnight.

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SWINDON POLICE COURT

Thursday, April 7th

Magistrates present: Rev. Giles Daubeney (chairman), Captain Johnson, R.N., David Archer Esq., and George Alexander, Esq.

Charles Rolfe, horse trainer, of Little Linton, surrendered to his bail. Charged with stealing a letter containing a sovereign, on the 20th of February last, the property of Mr William Henry Dormer. Mr Kinneir appeared for the prosecution and Mr J.C Townsend for the defendant.

The evidence taken at the former hearing of the case having been read over, the following additional evidence was addressed.

William Henry Dormer said : I received a half sovereign in a letter on the Sunday after I had seen Rolfe on the Wednesday, and when he confessed to me that he had taken the sovereign. I received this letter from Rolfe unopened. I have endeavoured to find Short, who was in Mr Rolfe's service, but have failed to do so.

To Mr Townsend : If at the last examination I said I had received no money from Rolfe since the affair of the sovereign taken from the letter, it was false. The letter with the half sovereign in it was received on the 28th of February. On the 28th I and Rolfe went that evening to Gloucester, and afterwards to Liverpool Steeplechase. When at Gloucester Rolfe gave me a half sovereign towards the sovereign I had previously lent him. When we started from Swindon, I had a few shillings with me besides the half sovereign sent in the letter, which with the half sovereign given me by Rolfe at Gloucester made about 30s. In the whole. I borrowed no money from Rolfe on the journey. Mr Packer, of Wanborough, was present when I lent Rolfe the sovereign, of which the half sovereign paid me by Rolfe at Gloucester was in part repayment. The witness was here pressed as to the statement made by him on the last occasion that a Mr Bennett had offered him £5 on behalf of Rolfe to compromise the matter, and his answer bore a different construction to his statement on that occasion, he now saying that Mr Bennett had said he would rather give £5 than have anything to do with the matter.

Mrs Elizabeth Dormer: I live at Barthard, near Warwick, I am the mother of the prosecutor. I twice during my son's stay with Mr Rolfe sent him money in letters. The sovereign was sent about the middle of February: the money was inserted in a card. I directed the letter to my son at Mr Rolfe's, Little Hinton. My husband posted the letter. I sent the half sovereign about a week after that was sent in the same way.

To Mr Townsend: I put a penny postage stamp on the letter. The letter consisted of an envelope, a sheet of note paper, a card with a sovereign inserted in it. My husband also posted the letter with the half sovereign in it.

Philip Johnson: I live at Shrivenham, and am postman from Shrivenham to Bishopstone. Mr Rolfe was in the habit of sending his man to meet me for his letters. I have delivered letters for Dormer five or six weeks ago on a Sunday. I delivered a letter addressed to Dormer to one of Rolfe's lads. I told the lad to be careful of the letter, as I thought there was something in it. I thought so from the feel of it. I don't believe there was more than one stamp on the letter.

To Mr Townsend: I recollect it was on a Sunday when I had the letter for Dormer, but I cannot tell to a week when it was. I do not remember ever having a letter for Dormer since that. If there had been a letter afterwards containing anything like the former one, I should have noticed it.

Mr Kinneir here asked the Bench to further adjourn the case for the production of the lad Short. It appeared the prosecutor had been unable to find out where short was, until the present, and that he would now be in a position to produce him if the case was adjourned for a week.

Mr Townsend opposed the adjournment.

The magistrates having retired, Mr Daubeny said the inclination of the Bench was to dismiss the case, considering the charge had not been sufficiently brought home against the defendant, but, if the

complainant pressed for an adjournment, they felt they should be bound to grant; the application for adjournment. The case was therefore adjourned till this day week.

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OPC note

I am unable to find a newspaper article covering the conclusion of this prosecution.