

## Robbery and Attempted Murder at Beanacre, near Melksham

One of the most audacious acts of robbery, accompanied with violence, that has taken place in the country for a long time past, was perpetrated at Beanacre, a short distance from the Melksham Railway Station, last Sunday evening.

The first farm house on the road from Melksham to Lacock is occupied by Mr. Butler; and it appears that for a long time past Mr. Butler, whilst attending his place of worship on Sunday evenings has been in the habit of getting his brother Ralph, who lives nearby, and who himself a married man with a family (but in rather humble circumstances), to remain in the house and take care of its contents.

He was so engaged last Sunday evening, when he heard a tap at the front door, and on opening it, he was (according to the account he had since given) somewhat surprised to see his brother-in-Law, Worthy Rich, who had recently been working as a porter in London, and of whose presence in the neighbourhood he had not previously been aware.



After the usual salutation of "How are you, Ralph?" and "What's that you, Worthy?" the brother-in-Law walked in, and the two sat down by the fire. Many minutes however had not elapsed before Worthy suddenly jumped up, seized a blunderbuss that was over the mantel-piece, and with it dealt Ralph Butler a blow across the head, which had the effect of partially depriving him of consciousness.

A scuffle however appears to of taken place, in which the blunderbuss was used with almost deadly effect, breaking Ralph Butler's jaw bone in two places, knocking out six of his teeth, and beating him with such ferocity about the face as to expose the cheekbones, besides inflicting severe injuries at the back part of the head.

Having accomplished this brutality and levelled his brother-in-law along the floor, apparently in a dying state, Worthy Rich (if the identity be correct) proceeded upstairs, broke the of a bed-room door in which Mr. Butler was in the habit of keeping his money, and having crept through the aperture, removed by force the top of a chest of drawers, abstracted £20 in gold and notes, set the place on fire, and then decamped.

It was not long before Mr. Butler and his wife returned from the chapel, and their astonishment may well be imagined at finding Ralph Butler weltering in blood, in a state bordering upon insensibility, and the house full of smoke. Fortunately the fire in the bedroom had not gained so much head but that by prompt and vigorous efforts it was subdued, and a doctor immediately sent for, and every attention has since been paid to Ralph Butler.

He was however considered so bad late on Monday night that two magistrates were sent for to take his disposition: and it is impossible to say what the result may be, as his jaw is dreadfully fractured, and his head and face much battered. Of course, if the robber and attempted assassin be (as Ralph Butler asserts) Worthy Rich, there is little doubt that he will soon be in the hands of justice, if he is not there already.

But the fact of Ralph's wife's brother behaving in such a manner seemed almost incredible. Still, if Ralph Butler is clear upon the point, there can be no possible doubt about the matter, because he states that they not only recognised each other, but that his brother-in-law actually sat with him, chatting, by the fire side some minutes before he made the attack upon him with the blunderbuss.

There is this fact also in support of the identity, that the assassin left his hat behind him in his hurry to be off, and this hat has since been identified by young Butler from a peculiarity about it which his uncle out to him some time previous, when they were together in London.

Again, Worthy Rich is said to have been seen the same evening in Broughton Lane, where he bought a "Jim Crow" of a man for 1s. and exhibited a lot of money which he had about him. These facts, of course, tend to support Ralph Butler's statement, and we hope many days will not elapse before the matter is satisfactorily cleared up.

We understand that there were in the drawer, besides the £20 which were stolen, a cheque, which was left; and other bank notes, which in the hurry appear to have been overlooked.

**Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, 9 December 1869**

## Wiltshire News Section

### The Heifer Stealing Case:

From what we can learn there seems to be no doubt that the man, Worthy Rich (who is now in Devizes gaol, awaiting his trial for the brutal assault upon his brother-in-law, Ralph Butler, at Beanacre, near Melksham) is the man who was seen driving Mr. Spackman's stolen heifers along the road towards Frome very early on the morning after they were stolen, the 28<sup>th</sup> July last, and who sold them in Frome market the same morning.



A farmer from Somerset who purchased some of the heifers has seen Rich in gaol, and has identified him as the person who sold him the heifers. The two other persons who saw the cattle on the road, have also seen the prisoner and they both speak to him as being the person they saw driving the beasts.

It will be recollected that the stolen cattle passed through several persons' hands at Frome, and were last of all purchased by a Mr. Robert Brown, of Farrington Gurney, where they were subsequently found by Inspector Luffman and restored to the owner. At the following quarter sessions at Marlborough an Irish cattle dealer named John Donovan was tried upon the charge of stealing these heifers, but he brought a host of witnesses from Ireland who conclusively proved an alibi, and he was acquitted.

The investigation of the present charge has been placed in the hands of Mr. Superintendent Harris, of Trowbridge, and active steps are being taken by Inspector Luffman - under Mr. Harris's orders- to clear up the case. - Devizes Gazette.

### The Salisbury and Winchester Journal and General Advertiser, Saturday, January 22, 1870

