

## THE BEANACRE OUTRAGE 1869



Considerable excitement prevailed in Melksham on Monday last in consequence of the rumoured apprehension of the perpetrator of the daring outrage, which took place at Beanacre on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> December last, when it will be remembered the house of Mr. William Butler was entered, ransacked, and robbed of £20 in notes, gold, and silver; Ralph Butler, brother to the tenant, left weltering in his blood, with his jaw broken in two places, six of his teeth knocked out, and severe scalp wounds; and the house set on fire. Such was the scene presented to the farmer on his return from chapel in the evening. The perpetrator was said by the injured man to be his brother-in-law, Worthy Rich, but so long a time had elapsed since the commission of the offence that it was feared the prisoner had made his escape to a distant country. While the public however had almost arrived at this conclusion, and were beginning to doubt the efficiency of our police organization, investigation was quietly proceeding; P.C. Priest was, it appears, on the track of the ruffian; and much to the satisfaction of all parties, that most unworthy of Worthys (Worthy Rich) was on Saturday night last captured in one of the back slums of London, in the neighborhood of Kennington.

Although the prisoner seemed at first to have baffled the police and got clear to London, yet once in the metropolis, apprehending we presume that he was beyond reach of danger, he failed to disguise his name, and hence fell into the hands of justice. P.C. Priest was provided with a photograph of the prisoner and was thus enabled to identify him.

A curious and indignant crowd assembled at the Town Hall on Tuesday, when the prisoner was brought before Mr. Wadham Locke, and charged with the offence.

William Butler was the first witness called. He said: - I am a farmer, and reside at Beanacre, in the parish of Melksham. On Sunday evening, 5<sup>th</sup> December inst., I went to chapel with my wife, leaving my brother, Ralph Butler, in charge of my house, alone. He has been in the habit of keeping the house for me on Sunday evenings for 2 years. We returned from chapel at about eight o'clock. I noticed that the door of the house by the side of the road was not fastened and that there was no light in the house. I went into the sitting-room, and saw my brother Ralph sitting in a chair, I did not know him. He kept groaning. His arm was on the table and his head on his arm. When I got a light I saw two large pools of blood, one on the floor and the other on the table. I said to him, "Who's been here, who has done this?" He said, "Worthy, her brother." I went up stairs, and found the smoke coming from a bedroom; the panel of the door was broken in. My candle went out and I fetched a lanthorn. I went into the room and found the bedclothes on fire. I saw the drawers of a chest, which stood in the bedroom, were open. I saw my cash-box was broken open. I missed a £10 bank note; £5 in gold, and £5 in silver money. A cedar chest had been opened and searched throughout. My brother Ralph's under jaw was broken in two places, and 6 of his teeth were knocked out. He was seriously injured, and remains still under medical treatment. I missed also a great coat. I found a hat in the room where Ralph was sitting, that did not belong to me.

William Butler, junior, said: - I am son of Ralph Butler, the prosecutor - the nephew of the last witness - and nephew of the prisoner, Worthy Rich. Three weeks ago last Sunday night I went to my uncle's (William Butler's) house at Beanacre, where my father was, and I found my father's head beaten about very much. I was shown a hat there: that hat is now produced. I swear it is the same hat, and that it is Worthy Rich's hat. I saw Worthy Rich wearing this hat in Bristol about 5 weeks before the 5<sup>th</sup> December. To my knowledge he had had that hat for ten weeks, as I was in his company all the time.

Upon this evidence, a remand was asked until Monday next, and the prisoner was removed in custody.

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