

The Bristol Mercury, Thursday, April 9, 1891

ADVENTURES IN A TRAIN

CHARGES OF ROBBERY AND ASSAULT.

A BRISTOL WOMAN'S STORY.

EXTRAORDINARY EVIDENCE.

Yesterday, at the Somerset Quarter Session, held at Wells, before Sir Richard Paget (chairman) and other magistrates, Edward Skinner (on bail) was indicted for committing an assault upon Anne Barrett, between Twerton and Salford, on the 9th January, and there was a second indictment charging him with stealing £3 10s, her property, at the same time and place.

Mr Douglas Metcalf and Mr Wilson Fox were counsel for the prosecution, and Mr Vachell was instructed for the defence.

The charge of robbery was first proceeded with.

Mr Metcalf, in opening the case, stated the facts, which will be found detailed in the following evidence. He said the prosecution had been taken up by the Great Western Railway Company, because the alleged offence was committed upon their line.

On Friday, the 9th January, the prosecutrix Mrs Barrett, who lived at Totterdown, received from her husband, who was a booking clerk in the services of the Great Western Railway Company at Bristol, a £5 Bank of England note, somewhere about four or six o'clock in the evening. She wished to make some purchases of dress at Bath, and she left Bristol by the 8.35 train, arriving at Bath shortly after nine.

At that time she had in her possession, in addition to the £5 note, two or three shillings in silver and two farthings. It was uncertain whether she would return that night or whether she would sleep at the house of a friend of hers - Miss Eames - who lived at Daniel street, Bath.

The shops were not open as she expected they would be, and after a fruitless search for Daniel street, she determined to go back to Bristol. She then went to the Railway hotel near the Bath station. Here she ordered a cup of tea, and, being cold, she had a small quantity of gin put into it. Prisoner and other young men were in the house at the time.

The prosecutrix tried to get the £5 note cashed in order to pay her fare back to Bristol; but she was unable to do so, and she said she would have it changed at the station. Prisoner then entered into the conversation with Mrs Barrett, and volunteered to accompany her to the station. The prisoner went out with the prosecutrix, and on the way he suggested that

she might be able to change the note at the Royal hotel. They went there, and the note was changed, prosecutrix putting the gold into her purse. At the hotel she paid for two three-penny worth of whisky for the prisoner, and had some gin herself.

They then left and went to the railway station and when they got to the booking hall the prosecutrix lost her memory. Whether that was due to the drink or to the effect of going from the cold into a hot room he did not know, but she would tell the jury that she remembered nothing until she found herself in the train. The prosecutrix was, however, seen by a porter being helped up the stairs at the railway station by the prisoner and another young man, and she was put into a third class carriage. She seemed to have given prisoner half-a-crown to buy her ticket, and to have told him that if he would see her back to Bristol she would pay his fare.



The only remaining example of a Dean 4-brake third class coach as used by GWR in late 19th C. The guard's compartment can be seen on the left. Photograph courtesy of Didcot Railway Centre and Frank Dumbleton.

The prisoner got into the carriage with the prosecutrix, and it would be proved that after leaving Twerton he attempted certain familiarities which she resisted. She screamed out "Murder", at the top of her voice, and the guard, hearing her cries, came to her assistance. The latter would state what he saw, and also prove that on the way to Salford he was given into the charge of the stationmaster, and the guard proceeded on to Bristol with the prosecutrix, who then found her money was missing. The guard found an empty purse and 6d in the carriage.

Prisoner was detained at Salford, and the police were sent for. Whilst at Salford station he ran away but was followed by two men named Ollis and Shepherd and captured. Upon him

£3 10s in gold was found, together with a farthing, and singularly enough the prosecutrix found the other farthing in her pocket.



A moonlit Saltford station in "1891" (created from late 1890s daytime photo)

When taken into custody the prisoner at first accounted for the possession of the £3 10s by stating that he had received it from his master for work done at Bitton, but subsequently he admitted that it belonged to the prosecutrix. There was no doubt that the prosecutrix was the worse for drink at the time, and whether the prisoner intended to take advantage of her state, and thought he might get her money and escape scot free, it would be for the jury to judge. Though, he believed, the prisoner had previously been a man of good character, there was no doubt that on this occasion he was tempted and fell very grievously, appropriating moneys which belonged to another.

Counsel then called the following evidence:-

The husband of the prosecutrix, Charles William Henry Barrett, living at Totterdown, Bristol, said he was a booking clerk in the employ of the G.W.R. Company at Bristol, and had been so employed for over seven years. On Friday, the 9th January, he gave his wife a £5 Bank of England note for the purposes of making some purchases at Bath. She left Bristol for Bath by the 8.35 train in the evening.

Witness met the train arriving at Bristol at 11.15 the same night, and his wife arrived by that train. The guard, who was with his wife, made a complaint to him. Witness had been married about three years. His wife had in addition to the £5 note, two shillings and two farthings.

Cross-examined - This was his wife's first visit to Bath during their married life. Witness had friends there. His wife went to Bath to purchase a hat and jacket.

Mr Vachell - Do you mean seriously to say that with your concurrence and sanction she left Bristol to go to Bath by a train arriving after nine o'clock at night to do some shopping?

Witness - Yes, sir.

Mr Vachell - There are some excellent shops at Bristol. Why should she go to Bath?

Witness - She thought if the shops were closed she could stay with her friends and do the shopping in the morning. He added that his wife intended to stay with a friend, Miss Eames, of 17 Daniel street, Bath. She had made no preparations for staying the night in the shape of taking a nightdress, brush, and comb, or anything of that sort.

Mr Vachell - Is she in the habit of leaving you for the night that way?

Witness - No, sir.

Mr Vachell - Is your wife in the habits of intoxication?

Witness - Not that I know of.

Anne Barrett, the prosecutrix, who is a young woman of prepossessing appearance, gave evidence as to receiving the £5 note from her husband and proceeding to Bath, where she arrived about nine o'clock. When she reached Bath she was perfectly sober. As the shops were shut, she tried to find where her friend lived, but could not do so, and then she determined to return to Bristol.

Up to that time she had had nothing to drink from the time she left home. She went to the Great Western hotel, which was about three minutes' walk from the railway station, and had a cup of tea with two pennyworth of gin in it. It was a very cold day. That was between half-past nine and a quarter to ten. She stayed there about ten minutes.

Whilst she was there the prisoner came in. Witness, in his presence, asked the barmaid if she could change the £5 note, and she said she could not.

Prisoner then said to witness, "Good evening, miss"; and she replied, "I'm not miss; I'm missus."

Witness went with the barmaid's brother to try and get the note changed, but they were unsuccessful, and she then returned to the Great Western hotel for her umbrella. Prisoner volunteered to see witness to the station, and she asked him to have something to drink, as it was very kind of him.

They left the hotel together, and as they were going to the station prisoner asked her where she was going. Witness said, "To Bristol," and the accused then said, "Perhaps I can get the note changed at the Royal hotel."

They went to the Royal, and she again asked prisoner if he would have something to drink. He had some whisky, and witness had some gin. She got change for the note - two sovereigns, five half sovereigns, and 10s in silver.

They then went to the station together, and witness waited in the booking hall for the office to be opened. Whilst there two young men came into the booking hall and spoke to the prisoner. Witness remembered nothing more until she was in the train, but she recovered consciousness before leaving Bath. She did not know whether she had a ticket.

The prisoner got into the carriage and sat on the opposite side of the compartment. Witness had her face to the engine. Witness remembered the train starting and its arriving at Twerton. After leaving Twerton the prisoner got up and sat by her side, putting his arm around her waist. She told him to take his hands off, as he had the advantage of her.

He said "Never mind about that. I am going to do what I want to do."

A violent struggle ensued, and she got from the accused and lowered the window, and screamed "Murder!" twice.

Prisoner then caught hold of her and pulled her on to the seat, with her head against the window, and put his hand over her mouth.

The guard then came to her rescue, and she told him that the prisoner was trying to ruin her. At that time she did not know that she had lost her money.

The guard stayed in the carriage until the train got to Saltford, where he put the prisoner out; but witness remained in the carriage. After arriving at Saltford she found that her pocket was torn and the purse missing. The guard subsequently found the empty purse on the ground, together with sixpence and a halfpenny. After she got home she found a farthing in her pocket.

Cross-examined - her husband gave her the £5 note because she asked him for some money to buy a hat and a jacket.

Mr Vachell - Why did you not spend the money in Bristol?

Witness - Because I preferred Bath. I had heard Bath was a stylish place, and I wanted some stylish things.

Mr Vachell - Hitherto Bristol and Clifton had satisfied you?

Witness - Yes.

Mr Vachell - Did you expect to find these stylish shops open at nine o'clock?

Witness - I thought they might be, and if they were not, I intended to try and find my friend in Daniel street. If I could not find her, I meant to come home.

Cross-examination continued. - On arriving at Bath she found the shops shut, and then inquired for Daniel street. A gentleman told her it was a long way off.

Mr Vachell - Did you ask a policeman? (Laughter.)

Witness - No. I did not see a policeman. She added that when she could not find Daniel street she went towards the station to go home. She was not in the habit of taking the gin, and she had it at the Great Western hotel because it was very cold. That was the first drink she had had since leaving Bristol. She was in the Great Western hotel for about ten minutes, and she stood the prisoner a drink because of his kindness in volunteering to go to the station with her.

Mr Vachell - Are you in the habit of standing drinks for strangers in this way?

Witness - No. She did not want the prisoner to accompany her. It was at his suggestion that they went to the Royal hotel to change the £5 note. She wished to obtain change to pay her fare back to Bristol. She did not remember what took place after she got to the booking hall at the station.

Mr Vachell - Your memory seems to have failed you at different times. Was it the drink that caused it?

Witness - I don't know. I faint sometimes.

Mr Vachell - Do you remember two young men with their arms entwined about you helping you up the station steps?

Witness - No, I do not.

Mr Vachell - Do you remember saying to the prisoner, when in the carriage, "If you sit there I will pay your fare to Bristol"?

Witness - No, sir. I do not remember it.

Mr Vachell - Do you remember saying to the prisoner that you did not like the look of the other fellows who were with him?

Witness - No.

Mr Vachell - Do you remember throwing your legs upon the seat and your purse falling out of your pocket?

Witness - (indignantly) - I am sure I did no such thing.

Mr Vachell - Did he offer you the money, and did you refuse to take it?

Witness - I do not know.

Mr Vachell - Did you ask him to give it to you at Bristol?

Witness - I cannot remember.

Mr Vachell - What do you remember?

Witness - I remember the witness trying to take advantage of me.

Mr Vachell - Did he kiss you at any time?

Witness - I don't know that he did.

Mr Vachell - Did you kiss him?

Witness (emphatically) - Decidedly not.

Mr Vachell - Why do you think he was travelling with you?

Witness - I don't know, unless he was going to rob me. I will swear I did not ask him to come.

Re-examined - Prisoner tried to assault her, but did not succeed. His clothes were disarranged.

Elizabeth Surman, barmaid at the Great Western hotel, Bath, spoke to the prosecutrix coming into that hotel on the night in question. She had some tea with gin in it. Prisoner came into the room whilst the prosecutrix was there, and a conversation took place about changing a £5 note. The accused left the hotel with the prosecutrix, who was in an excited state.

Elizabeth Bateman, barmaid at the Royal Hotel, Bath, proved that the prosecutrix and the accused came to the house about half-past ten on the night of the 9th January. Shortly afterwards two other young men entered the house. Mrs Barrett had "three" of gin and prisoner had "two" "threes" of whisky. Mrs Barrett paid for all the drink. Witness got a £5 note changed for Mrs Barrett, and gave her two sovereigns, five half-sovereigns, and ten shillings in silver. Prosecutrix put the money into her purse. Mrs Barrett seemed very excited, but she knew what she was doing. They left together.

Re-examined - She seemed jolly, but from her appearance witness did not see how she could lose her senses at the booking office, which was only a few yards away.

Mark Love, porter at the Bath station, stated that on the night in question he saw two young men, of whom the prisoner was one, helping a lady up the stairs. He asked where the lady was going and Skinner replied "To Bristol." He heard the lady say to the young men, "Don't go so fast." Witness asked who was with the lady, and prisoner replied, "I am."

They came up on the platform, and all of them got into a carriage. The prosecutrix then took her purse out of her pocket and took out half-a-crown and gave it to Skinner to buy a ticket. Skinner got the ticket, and when he returned she put the ticket and the purse into her pocket.

He heard Mrs Barrett say to Skinner "I will pay your fare to Bristol if you'll sit here." He then left to attend to his duties.

Cross-examined - They were all jolly together.

John James Morgan, guard in the employ of the G.W.R. train, said he was in charge of the train which left Bath for Bristol on the night in question at 10.45. He saw the prosecutrix in the next compartment to his van at Bath. The prisoner and three others were on the platform, and just as the train was about to start the accused jumped into the carriage in which the prosecutrix was.

When they got to the other side of Twerton tunnel witness heard a female scream out "Murder" once or twice. He opened his window and saw Mrs Barrett's head partly outside the window and a hand on her mouth. He got out on the foot-board and went to the carriage door, and saw Mrs Barrett with her clothes disarranged. Prisoner, whose clothes were also disarranged, was struggling with her.

Witness, finding the door locked, went to the other side of the train and got into the carriage by the opposite door. Prisoner was standing in the middle of the compartment arranging his clothes, and Mrs Barrett was in the corner. She was screaming and was very excited. The prosecutrix said the prisoner had tried to ruin her. On the way to Saltford the prisoner tried to get out of the carriage, and witness prevented him.

At Saltford witness gave the prisoner into the custody of the station master, whom he told what had occurred. Prisoner said, "Here's her blooming ticket," and gave it to witness.

He afterwards tried to get away, but was followed and detained. After they had left Saltford, witness found sixpence and a halfpenny on the seat of the carriage, and an empty purse and a respirator on the floor. At Bristol he told the husband what had occurred.

Cross-examined – Prosecutrix was very hysterical.

Mr Murrow, relief station inspector on the Great Western Railway, stated that he was on duty at Saltford on the night in question. When the 10.45 train from Bath arrived, Morgan gave the prisoner into witness's charge, and accused him of assaulting a lady. The accused ran away, and was followed by two men named Ollis and Shepherd.

After the train had gone, witness went to see where the prisoner was, and about 120 yards away he found the accused and the two men on the ground. Prisoner was very violent, and they had to drag him back to the station. Witness wired to the police at Keynsham, and before they arrived witness asked prisoner if he had any money.

Mr Vachell objected to the evidence, on the ground that as the prisoner was in custody he ought not to have been asked questions by the witness, and that any answers given would not be evidence.

The Chairman thought the evidence was admissible.

Witness, continuing, said that the prisoner pulled out of his pocket one sovereign, five half sovereigns, 6s 6d in silver, six pennies, a halfpenny, and a farthing.

At that time witness had no idea that a robbery had been committed. Prisoner said he had received the money from Mr Clark for "doing out" some houses at Bitton.

Cross-examined - Prisoner was not drunk, but he had had some drink. He said that the lady was mad drunk, and that he prevented her from jumping out of the train.

Isaac Shepherd, living at Saltford, proved catching the prisoner after he ran away from the station.

John James Ollis, a farmer, of Saltford, gave similar evidence.

Walter Edwards, cashier in the employ of Mr Clark, auctioneer and builder, of Bath, said the prisoner occasionally did work for that gentleman. On the day of his arrest he paid the prisoner 2s, and before that he had only paid him £1 since Christmas.

Cross-examined - Prisoner had always borne an excellent character, and witness had always found him honest and steady.

P.S. Pratt, of Keynsham, proved receiving the prisoner into his custody at Saltford station about one o'clock on the morning of 10th January. He charged him with assaulting and robbing a lady, and searched him, finding the money spoken to by Murrow upon him. When he took charge of the money prisoner said, "That's my money." On the way to the station the prisoner began to cry, and he said, "She led me into this. The money you took I was paid for a job I finished at Bitton."

The following day, about four o'clock, when at Keynsham station, the accused asked if he could telegraph to his father, and witness said "Yes but you will have to pay for it." Prisoner then said that 1s 4½d of the money belonged to him.

Cross-examined - He understood from the latter statement that the rest of the money belonged to someone else. Prisoner had been drinking on the night in question, but he knew what he was talking about.

P.C. Willey stated that on the Sunday after his arrest he saw the accused in his cell. He was crying, and said, "This is what companions lead a fellow to. That money you found in my pocket was not mine; it belonged to the woman I rode with from Bath." He added, "While we were riding from Bath together she put her hand on my shoulder and said, 'I am glad you were with me, as I did not like the look of those other fellows who were with you, for I was afraid they were going to rob me.' I then commenced to take liberties with her, and while I was doing so her purse fell out of her pocket, and the money went about the floor. I picked up the money and put it in my pocket, and her purse I put on the seat, but she would not pick

it up. The only money I had that night when I left home was 2s, which was paid me by my master for work done at Bitton.”

This was the case for the prosecution.

Mr Weatherly addressed the jury on behalf of the prisoner (Mr Vachell having had to leave to attend a case in the other court), and said the simple question for them was which they thought the more worthy of belief - the prisoner or the prosecutrix. The case for the prosecution rested entirely on the evidence of the prosecutrix, and the jury must look first and foremost to her character, because it was upon her statements that the fate of the accused depended.

She stood before them apparently a very respectable young woman, and she posed as an insulted wife. But what was her story? Her husband, with a kindness most creditable to him, had given her a £5 note to buy some articles of dress, and instead of going to Bristol and Clifton, close to her home, she went to Bath, because as she said, Bath was the more stylish place.

He contended that she had not proved that she went to Bath for a definite purpose. Was it likely that she would go to Bath at a quarter past nine in the evening, if she wanted to do some shopping? Had the jury ever heard of shops, of the stylish class, being open at that time? There was no satisfactory explanation of the prosecutrix's journey to Bath.

Was it likely that her respectable young husband would allow her to go to hunt for a friend whose residence she did not know? It was for the jury to say whether, from the very outset, the prosecutrix came before them with a likely story.

Then, what was her conduct after she got to Bath? She wandered about for 35 minutes, and then she got to the Great Western hotel. She was in an excited state when she got there, and no doubt the jury would form an opinion as to what she had been doing during that half-hour.

At the hotel she was “chaffed” with the first person she met about her being “missus” and not “miss.” Was that the conduct of a virtuous matron? Then she volunteered to stand drink to another young man. Was that the conduct of a modest young woman?

She was eventually seen staggering up the station stairs with two young men, laughing and joking together. Did she think about her husband at home? No; she went for a spree, and a spree she had (laughter).

The shopping and Miss Eames were mere excuses. Why was not Miss Eames there to give an explanation of the prosecutrix's conduct? He supposed she thought the prisoner a nice young man, and she invited him to have a drink and to come to Bristol with her. He did not present the prisoner before them as a model of virtue, but as an ordinary young man who was met by a fascinating young woman.

That the prosecutrix had charms must have been obvious to the jury, and she added to those charms the invitation to the prisoner to drink. She took his arm and staggered upstairs with him, and crowned all by inviting him to come to Bristol with her.

Invited her for what? The jury were men of the world, and they would perhaps agree with him that when a woman acted as the prosecutrix had done she must not be surprised if a man took liberties with her, especially if the man was under the influence of drink which had been given to him by the woman herself.

He suggested that when in the train the woman was suddenly seized with a feeling of remorse. She had forgotten herself, and suddenly the familiarity indulged by the prisoner brought her to her senses, and she began to scream; but because she screamed after the event the jury should not find the prisoner guilty.

In the struggle the purse fell down, and possibly the prisoner put the money into his pocket, but there was no evidence he intended to deprive the prosecutrix of it for ever. As to his trying to escape, the prisoner was not the first innocent man who had run away when suddenly confronted with such a charge. In the confusion of the moment he might have made an untrue statement in accounting for the possession of the money, but as soon as he came to his senses he told the truth.

The prosecutrix by her statements had shown herself to be absolutely worthless, and not respectable, and he appealed to the jury to acquit the prisoner.

The Chairman summed up the evidence with great care, commenting on the peculiarity of the night journey to Bath, the indefinite manner in which the prosecutrix wandered about there, and the readiness with which she entered into conversation with the prisoner and invited him to drink. He also dwelt on the remarkable manner in which the prosecutrix lost all memory of what took place at certain points of the case, though she showed herself to be perfectly rational in her actions and alert at other times. Those were difficulties in the case and he commended them to the careful attention of the jury, charging them if they believed the man stole the money to find him guilty, but if they believed there were circumstances in the case which would justify them, in rightly exercising their duty, in giving the prisoner the benefit of the doubt, they would find a verdict accordingly.

The jury, after a short deliberation, found the prisoner not guilty.

The prosecution did not proceed with the charge of indecent assault.

Transcribed by Phil Harding, June 2016

Note: The images in this transcribed article were not in the original newspaper.