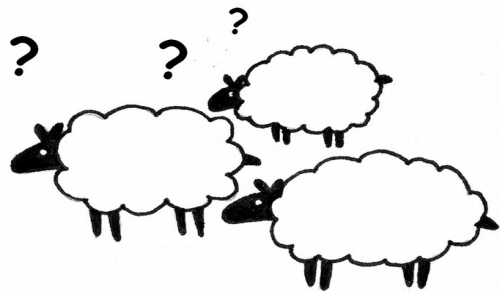
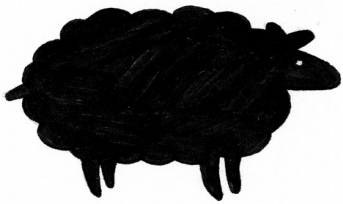


# Black Sheep !

What...?

*in East Brent...?*



...Yup!

Compiled by  
John Rigarlsford

2018



## Black Sheep of East Brent!

We like to think that we live in a quiet pleasant village that is almost crime free. Which for much of the time it is.

But this has not always been so. As anyone who has dabbled in their family history knows, lurking somewhere in most family trees there is a family skeleton or 'Black Sheep' !

One of mine was an uncle who while flogging items on the black market which should have been on ration and by moving about sharing the beds of several lady friends around London, somehow managed to evade most of his military service for much of WW2 . On the few occasions the Red-caps managed to catch up with him he sat his time out in the 'Glasshouse' at Colchester Barracks! But lets keep that to ourselves. Some of his kids might still be around!

Over the centuries East Brent has had its fair share of black sheep or people who came up in front of the man in the big wig, for committing what was regarded at the time, some serious crimes, some with sentences that now look ridiculously harsh to us in today's world.

Many early offences were of petty theft or "Larceny", often committed by the desperate poor merely to survive, crimes these days that would not even provoke a visit from the cops!

## Dont drink the water!

In the old days most people got their water from wells or streams that were likely to be contaminated by sewage etc, seeping from the Dunny down the garden -- (Which is why a lot of folk died young from Dysentery!) - and until tea and coffee were discovered, most folk drank home made beer, cider or mead, it was often disgusting stuff but somewhat safer.



*We have the Rev Denison to thank for piping the first clean spring water from the knoll to our village.*

Unless you are teetotal or an angel, we all know what happens if we partake of too much alcohol. We tend to do things that we probably would not have when we were sober. And so to a cider filled hungry farm worker, that old spade belonging to the boss or for a poor domestic servant, a spare bedspread belonging to the lady of the house could be very tempting to stick under your pinafore or up your jerkin! No one will notice will they? ...Wrong.... And if you were found out it could get serious or even mean transportation to Australia or at least a week or two on the dreaded treadmill at Shepton Mallet jail!

### **The Serious Stuff**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century although many crimes carried the death sentence, much of the time these were reduced to transportation or long periods of hard labour.

A surprising number of those from our parish who broke the law were Transported, Many because they had previous convictions. I have only found one case where the culprit was actually executed and that was the case of George STEELMAN of East Brent who was hanged for his sins on 23 April 1823 outside Ilchester Gaol. His crime was described as "Highway robbery". And he only went to the hangman because George got a bit violent with his victim and as you will see, the judge handing out sentences that day always came down hard on people who got a bit violent!

### **Medieval Law and order**

In medieval times life was hard and short. If you reached your late 40's you were regarded as a senior citizen. But if you misbehaved life got even harder and often much shorter! With the absence of any kind of policing, local crime among the commoners was regulated and dealt with by the wealthy land owners and the aristocracy and punished by



fear of death or mutilation if found guilty. Or humiliation if you got lucky! The stocks for instance were usually placed where all sorts of obnoxious things as well as rotten fruit could be chucked at you on market days!

### **The all powerful king!**

Although King John is credited with the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, which at least allowed the accused to appear and plead some kind of defence, it also gave away much of the abuse of power that the king wielded. King John was not a very nice man at all! Lets just say, he was a drunken, raping, sadistic ruler who thought up all kinds of gruesome deaths for those who did not obey his every whim. His Barons had had enough, so they got together and he was more or less forced to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymede which was in the middle of a swamp! The Barons were fed up with among other things the heavy taxes he imposed on everyone rich or poor and having to fight crusades and wars on the continent which he had no hope of winning, at the cost of thousands of lives, while he stayed at home bedding their wives and daughters!

While the so called local aristocracy controlled the working classes, the king could still decide which nobles had rubbed him up the wrong way and who should be beheaded.

One of those who induced the ire of King Edward IV was Humphrey STAFFORD, Earl of Devon (1439-1469),

Its a long story but briefly, Humphrey, by arranging the downfall of all those who's titles he wanted, had worked his way into the favour of King Edward IV gaining a lot of influence over the whole of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, even getting himself Knighted by Edward.

Early in 1469 he instigated the execution of Henry Courtenay, seventh Earl of Devon, hoping to get the earldom for himself. He was already doing very nicely on the taxes from the people of Somerset and Cornwall. Quickly in that same year he was sworn in on 7 May and yes... was created Earl of Devon!

One of his duties was to help raise an army for the king to defend against the Scots and others. He was sent with seven thousand archers to help William HERBERT the Earl of Pembroke to oppose Robin of Redesdale at Edgecote in Northampton.

He argued however, with HERBERT and in a fit of pique threw his toys out of the pram and stomped off with all his troops, with the result that Pembroke was defeated. Edward IV was livid that STAFFORD had disobeyed his instruction and ordered the sheriffs of Devonshire and Somerset to "Put this Stafford to death as soon as he was captured".

He was caught hiding near Brent Knoll by some villagers, hauled off to Bridgwater Castle and beheaded on 17 Aug. 1469. His very short term as Earl of Devon was over. His bits were buried in Glastonbury Abbey.

...and the Clergy looked after its own!

Clergymen who were accused of a crime could sometimes claim 'Benefit of Clergy'. This allowed them to be tried by their own Ecclesiastical court instead of the civil courts. To be tried by the Ecclesiastic court all the defendant had to do was to appear with his head partly shaven and in ecclesiastical dress and recite psalm 51. Because this proof of clergy-hood was largely abused it was later replaced by a literacy test, where the accused had to read from the Latin Bible. Mostly the illiterate had simply memorised psalm 51 but if asked to read another passage and couldn't, then they got defrocked and sentenced as impostors!



### **Rule by Fear**

To keep law and order, the punishment was very harsh in Medieval England. Mostly decided by the King and his nobles, or locally by the church and the aristocracy. Those in charge of law and order believed that people would only learn how to behave properly if they feared what would happen to them if they broke the law. Even the 'smallest' offences had serious punishments. Some really gory!

The rich feared the poor; Because there were many more poor than rich and any uprising could be potentially damaging to wealth of the upper classes, as the Peasants Revolt in 1381 proved.

The poor feared the rich; Because it was the rich who dished out the judgement and punishment.

Often guilt was decided by trial by ordeal. Where the accused person had to go through an **ordeal**. Some of the more humane (yes humane!) ordeals were:

**Ordeal by fire.** An accused person held a red hot iron bar and walked nine paces. His hand was then bandaged and left for three days. If the wound was getting better after three days, you were innocent. If the wound had clearly not got any better, you were guilty.

**Ordeal by water.** An accused person was tied up and thrown into water. If you floated you were guilty of the crime you were accused of ie: Saved by the devil. If you sank you were innocent so hopefully they fished you out before you drowned!

**Ordeal by combat.** This was used by noblemen who disagreed or had been accused of something. They would fight in combat with their accuser. Whoever won was right. Whoever lost was usually dead ! If you moved in the right circles and had the cash, you could pay someone to fight for you!

Unhappy that churchmen were still using these trials by ordeal, in 1215, the Pope replaced trial by ordeal with trial by juries. *The catholic church was still running the show at that time.* But conveniently he did not end system of 'Benefit of Clergy'.

With 'Trial by Jury' instead of your fate being in the 'Hands of God' it was in the hands of your neighbours! To start with, this wasn't too popular with the people, as they felt that if their neighbours might have a grudge against them they would use the opportunity to get on the jury to get revenge.

Even after 1275, the law still allowed people to be tortured if they refused to go to trial before a jury. These days I guess it would be termed as getting a confession with menaces!

If you were eventually found guilty of a crime you would expect to face a severe punishment. Thieves had their hands or an ear cut off. If you did it again the other ear would go and a third time you got an 'F' branded on the

forehead to show you were a Felon. If you persisted after that you would have your eyes taken out. Not many committed a crime after that. It's a bit difficult when you cant see what you were nicking!

Women who were found guilty of committing murder, especially of husbands were often burnt at the stake. Wives were regarded as the husband's property and killing him was regarded as treason, the same as if you had committed a crime against the kings property - Sometimes the women were strangled (garrotted) first? It was felt it was not proper to burn a lady while she was still conscious!

People who illegally hunted in royal parks, had their Bow pulling finger or ears cut off and high treason or anything that upset the king could be punishable by being hung, drawn and quartered.

There were very few prisons as they cost money and local communities were not prepared to pay for their upkeep. It was cheaper to execute someone for serious crimes or mutilate them for all to see and then let them go. Even these harsh punishments did not stop lawbreaking altogether. Most towns had a Gibbet placed just on its outskirts. People were hung on these and their bodies left to rot over the weeks as a warning to others. However, even such violent punishments clearly did not put some desperate people off.

But understandably most ordinary folk tried to keep their noses clean!

Through the centuries most goods stolen by the poor were livestock, and food and grain.

In 1361 The Justice of the Peace Act was passed. The JP's were still the local landowners, merchants and lords of the manor, who were given the power to hear and judge less serious crimes, which they did with their own interests in mind no doubt. They held 'Quarter sessions' courts 4 times a year. Where a travelling judge would hear the more serious cases.



## Vagrancy

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century under Edward IV a number of new offences soon became punishable as 'Criminal' offences. His Puritan advisors believed that, not working was a sin and the law against Vagabonds became much harsher. The number of vagrants and beggars had increased. The 1547 Vagrancy act forced beggars to work, it also ordered they should be whipped and branded.

One was 'Vagrancy', which outlawed unemployed tramps and vagrants wandering around looking for work. Because every parish was responsible for its inhabitants, wandering out of work beggars and vagrants were soon shoved over the border into the next parish! Many villages to this day, still have a place named after a 'Beggars Bush, often on the borders of two parishes. These were places where beggars could hide and dodge back and forth over the parish boundary to avoid getting kicked out! The one in East Brent was according to the



1840's Tithe Map right on the borders of the parish with Brent Knoll half way up the side of Hill Lane! (See No's 413 and 414 on the tithe records).

To gain 'Settlement' status you had to either be born, live or work in a parish for a least 12 months. So out of work drifters had a hard time convincing anyone that they needed help and work and would like to settle down in the village!

Many of the unemployed were forced to take up new ways of surviving. Highwaymen held up coaches to steal from the passengers or the mail. Poachers hunted game on the rich estates and Smugglers brought goods into the country to avoid paying the Kings tax on them. But woe betide 'em if they got caught.

Highwaymen were not liked by most people because of their sometimes violent ways. But smugglers were. By avoiding the tax and duties on imported goods they helped to provide cheap goods for the locals and the Somerset coast was ideal for this activity with just one customs man to cover the whole of the Somerset coastal ports. It was not unknown for a customs man to take a backhander from some captains!

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century printing had been invented and pamphlets and books etc on the wrongs of such crimes as Vagrancy and smuggling etc. were being printed and distributed. These books were intended to increase people's fear of committing theft or poaching etc. But only the wealthy were educated enough to read at that time and most of those for whom the threat of fear was intended would have been illiterate and unable to read 'em anyway!

Early crime was mostly committed by the poor because sometimes they had to steal to survive and poverty was a big cause of theft and vagrancy. Some vagabonds were no doubt hardened criminals but others were poor and unemployed. There weren't enough jobs to go round and if a harvest failed food prices rose and the poor became really desperate.

Tax systems were set up in towns and villages which meant the rich had to help the poor. As moving about became easier the rich had to pay for both the mobile travelling poor as well as their own parish poor which really got up their noses. So the parish overseers soon pushed the wandering vagrants on to the next parish!

An early example of how keen parishes were to offload those who needed aid onto someone else can be seen in the case of poor old Nicholas GRIFFIN. Nicholas was *"A poore old man of the age of threescore and thirteen not able to keep himself"*

Under the 'Settlement Act' in 1651 East Brent went to the "Quarter Sessions" to obtain an order to remove the old man to Badgeworth where they thought he belonged. The order was granted *"Until Badgeworth shall shew better cause to the contrary"*

Badgeworth put up an argument but lost. The sessions ordered that *"East Brent be absolutely discharged and free from receiving and entertaining the said GRIFFIN"*

It was Queen Elizabeth I who brought in laws to give some protection to the poor. It was she who encouraged the system of the parish supporting its own. The parliaments who passed the early Laws on crime and punishment were mostly made up of wealthy land owners who wanted to protect their property from thieves and others. With the church being central to the daily lives of

the people, most crimes were dealt with locally under the regulation of the church.

The Civil War in the 1600's made many poor people feel uncomfortable. Much of our area was Protestant at the time. The Protestants were trying to oust the Catholics from running the church and therefore the country and the strict moral views of some extreme Protestants began to rub off on the general public as Protestants believed in hard work and compulsory attendance to church. A situation which after the 'Restoration' would reach well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Make friends with your local Bobby**

Until the late 1800's most petty crimes would be dealt with by parish overseers or church wardens, who in effect were mostly from the richer landowning families in the parish anyway! Some larger towns and parishes employed a constable to keep an eye on the local villains and deal with any minor offences. These village 'Bobbies' knew who to keep an eye on.

The first known parish constable in East Brent was a Thomas PERRY who was village policeman from 1857 until after 1881.

By 1891 P.C. John POPE had the job. From sometime before 1901 P.C. John CREES was village policeman until 1911 when the job seems to have been shared with a P.C. Reg. DUNSTER?

During the War years our village policeman was an Edward PADFIELD. There have been several others since...

The early village policeman' appear to have lived in Brent Street and Church Street. After the war the Somerset Constabulary built a dedicated police



station and house at the end of Bristol Road at its junction with the A38 which was in use until around the 1970's -80's? But we no longer have a village 'Bobbie' and our ex village policeman's house is now a private residence.

What stories could these guys tell us!

At the present we have a couple of Community Support Officers on bikes, and just one police constable to cover our village - I assume he has access to a vehicle - these three also have to cover all of Burnham, Brean and as far as Puriton!

### **Axbridge Petty Sessions**

IN our area, the monthly 'Petty Sessions' at Axbridge or Weston dealt with the smaller stuff like punch ups in the pub, neighbour disputes and who should be admitted to the Workhouse etc.

Many of the minor or shorter prison sentences came with the addition of 'Hard Labour' Which for men would mean breaking stones for road maintenance or many hernia inducing hours on one of the six treadmills at Shepton Mallet prison which powered a flour mill outside the prison walls. A favourite punishment for women



was 'Picking opum' which entailed picking apart short strands of tarred rope to be used for plugging gaps in ships decks etc which would be very harsh on a woman's hands.

More serious crimes like treason, murder, or nicking a loaf of bread or even a pair of socks from next doors clothes line, were dealt with at Somerset Quarter Sessions held at Wells or Ilchester.

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## East Brent Offenders!

The first known recorded offence I have found by any resident of East Brent which went to the Quarter Sessions, was one of 'Bastardy' in 1618, involving a Joane EALE and a Christopher LOCKE, And at the same assize another involved a Thomas JOURDAN of East Brent and a Johan STOCKE of Winscombe. See below.

### Bastardy

The Bastardy act was brought in in 1565. The mother and child born out of wedlock at this time would often have been banished from home or employment and have to be supported financially by the parish. If the reputed father denied that he was responsible, then to minimise the burden of upkeep by the parish the authorities acted swiftly. Immediately a local 'Examination' to establish the identity of the father was carried out by either the



parish Overseer of the Poor or the Churchwardens or the case could be even taken to the County Quarter Sessions. The father was normally known to the mother and named by her during the examination. If she was a domestic servant as many young girls were, the father was quite often an employer or someone of influence in the parish!

DNA, blood or Paternity tests were obviously unheard of back then. So the poor mother had only her testimony to convince the judge of who the father was. The girl was often further punished as the guilty party. Even publicly whipped as seen below. The child's record would be shown as 'Base Born'. She had no welfare state to fall back on.

A couple of early cases of 'Bastardy' follow.

## **Christopher LOCKE v Joanne EALE**

Not much is known about Christopher LOCKE apart from a record of his baptism in East Brent in 1601. In April 1621 a Joanne EALE named him as the father of her child. There was a baptism of a daughter "Onner" (Honor)? LOCKE in Aug 1621. No mother's name is recorded.

Christopher LOCKE appears to have married an Agnes PODFORD/RODFORD in Oct 1664 and he died in East Brent 1677.

Even less is known about Joanne EALE. It appears that poor Joanne did or could not fully convince the magistrates at the Ilminster Quarter Session that Christopher LOCKE was the father.

*1621 April Bastardy. (At Ilchester)*

*"An order made 11<sup>th</sup> April 1621 by John MAY and Nathaniel STILL esquires. (Probably the parish overseers)?*

*Christopher LOCKE the reputed father, shall pay 6d weekly to the churchwardens and overseers of East Brent. The money to be kept for a stock for the placing of the child. Joane EALE, the mother of the child, to keep it herself or else pay the weekly sum of 12d. Both parties to put in sufficient security into the Officers for the performance of this order.*

*The said Joane EALE shall be publicly whipped in the nearest market town on the next market day.*

*As it doth not plainly appear but by the confession of the mother that the said Christopher LOCKE is guilty of the said offence, he is left to be further ordered herein by the Ecclesiastical Laws. "*

*Could this last paragraph indicate that Christopher LOCKE was in some way connected with the church?*

## **Thomas JOURDAN v "Johan" STOCKE**

Another early case of 'Bastardy' at the same Quarter Sessions at Ilchester concerned a Thomas JOURDAN of East Brent and a Johan STOCKE of Winscombe.

Both Thomas JOURDAN and Johan STOCKE were to pay the overseers and churchwardens of the parish of Winscombe who were responsible for the poor there, sufficient funds to support the child in order for it not to become a burden on the funds of the parish.

*1621 April Bastardy. (At Ilchester)*

*"An order made 11<sup>th</sup> March 1621 by John MAYE and Nathaniel STILL esquires."*

*"Thomas JOURDAN of EAST BRENTE husbandman the reputed father, shall pay 6d weekly to the churchwardens and overseers of Winscombe at the end of Morning Prayer at the parish church, the money to be reserved for a stock for the placing of the child.*

*Johan STOCKE the mother shall keep the child, or else pay the weekly sum of 1 shilling. Both parties to put in sufficient security into the Officers for the performance of this order.*

*The father is found giulty only on the confession of Johan STOCKE.*

*The mother as soon as she shall be able to travel abroad, to be brought to the next market town. And then stripped from the neck to the girdle and openly whipped, for an example of others to avoid the like offence."*

In those class and male dominated times, If the so called father denied it and the mother had difficulty proving who the father was, it would seem the main punishment in these cases would fall upon the unfortunate mother. Apart from the social stigma of her situation she could be publicly beaten and humiliated before all and sundry for her so called sins!

### **George GLOVER**

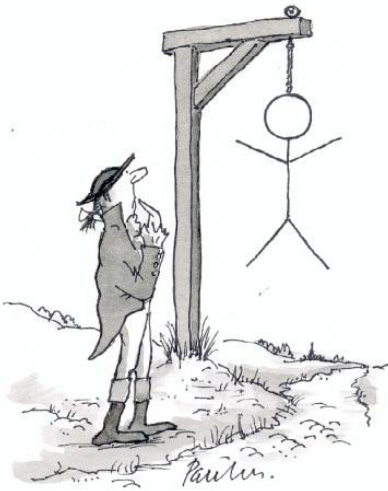
A similar but later case was that of George GLOVER who was born in East Brent in 1805 the son of William and Susanna Glover. The family moved to Backwell, where in Oct 1824 George was arrested and held on remand at Ilchester until Jan 1825 when he was acquitted for 'Refusing to give indemnity for a bastard child at Backwell'

### **Thomas VENN**

According to the Ilchester Somerset Assize records for 1812, on March the 28th a Thomas VENN of East Brent was charged with the murder of Elizabeth COOMER. whom he had reputedly got pregnant. He was remanded until the Summer Assizes in August 1812 where he was acquitted and discharged.

*The story goes that he was desperate for her not to name him as the father, so arranged to meet Elizabeth in a field one night. Before meeting her he went to the local pub and bought a pint of brandy and borrowed a glass. She was found dead next day in the river with what looked like two sets of footprints. Her post-mortem showed a full pint of brandy in her stomach?*

## A date with the hangman



In the 1500's during the reign of Henry VIII, there were many new capital crimes introduced: Among these were High treason, counterfeiting coin, petty treason, murder, rape, piracy, arson of a dwelling house or barn with corn in it, highway robbery, embezzling ones master's goods, horse theft, robbing churches and robbing a person in a dwelling house. Even shoplifting, theft or burglary of items more than the value of 1/- was a capital offence.

## Witchcraft

Witchcraft was soon added to these capital crimes and hundreds of women and even some men were hung or burnt on the hearsay of others. The Witchcraft offence was not repealed until 1712. When a Jane Wenham from Hertfordshire became the last woman to be condemned for witchcraft in England, She was reprieved. (*Search for Jane Wenham witch in Wikipedia*)?

In the early Middle Ages, witchcraft was regarded as a minor crime and was dealt with by the church courts. But in 1542, Henry VIII by now having disposed of most of his wives became paranoid about the power of women. So he passed a law which made witchcraft punishable by death, usually by burning at the stake.

Lots of things could mark you out as a witch. Especially if you had fallen out with your neighbour or a relative! Even owning a black cat or having a wart on your chin made you a suspect!

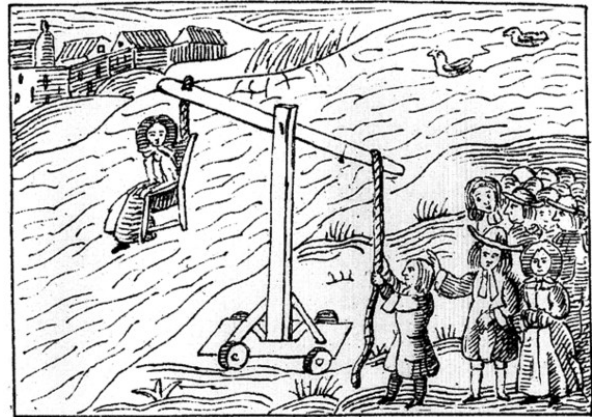
Women with a knowledge of herbal cures were often accused of being a witch if her remedy didn't cure the patient, especially if the patient died.

Once accused you were on a loser guilty or not! Trial by 'Ducking stool' was used quite a bit to decide if you were a witch or not? If you drowned you were innocent if you didn't, you were guilty!



Many women and sometimes men were executed for witchcraft between 1542 and 1603.

Somerset seems to have been one of the counties where so called witchcraft was pretty rife. We have all heard of the legends of the witches of Wookey and Crowcombe etc, and the 1600's a number of serious witch trials took place at various assizes in Somerset.



But so far there does not appear to be any record of witches or 'Duckings' in East Brent!

The practice of burning convicted women at the stake was ended in 1790. the last woman to be executed this way was a Catherine Murphy in March 1789. She was found guilty along with her husband of Petty Treason by counterfeiting coins! (Catherine Murphy (counterfeiter) Wikipedia).



In 1810. English and Welsh law listed 222 capital offences. In practice, there were only about 20 offences for which people were actually executed. Often sentences for what were once capital offences were often reduced to transportation on appeal.

## George STEELMAN

**I have found just one case where an East Brent man was executed.**

That was of *George STEELMAN* of East Brent who was hanged for his sins on 23 April 1823 at Ilchester Gaol. His crime was described as "Highway robbery".

George STEELMAN/STILLMAN was born in East Brent, the son of William and Ann STILLMAN in 1896. Sometime after his birth his parents moved to Mark. In 1808 at the age of 12 he was apprenticed to an Adam WESTLAKE a tailor at Street in Somerset.

George STEELMAN appears to have had several brushes with the law? In 1820 and again in 1822 he was arrested and accused of 'Larceny of the person'. In both cases the records show he was found 'Not Guilty'. But in March 1823 he was Sentenced to Death for cruelly beating and robbing one James LUCAS who he met in a pub in Glastonbury. "LUCAS treated STEELMAN to some beer and eventually left to walk home. Accompanied by STEELMAN. Once they neared Compton Dundon STEELMAN persuaded LUCAS to return to the pub. As LUCAS turned STEELMAN clubbed him over the head and robbed him of his silver pocket watchworth 13/6d and 18/- in silver from his purse. On hearing a horse and wagon approaching he ran and left his victim for dead." His victim survived.

At an appeal hearing, 30 of the 31 prisoners under sentence of death on that day at the same Assize at ILCHESTER had their sentences commuted to 'Transportation'. George STEELMAN was the only one not shown clemency. The presiding Judge emphasised that... *"I have made it an invariable rule not to recommend clemency to a prisoner found guilty of Highway robbery attended with acts of cruelty and violence"*.

*"George STEELMAN 27 tailor? of E Brent. Accused of assaulting John LUCAS on the Kings Highway and robbing him of a silver watch valued at 13s-6d. Sentenced to death. Executed on 23 April 1823 and buried in Ilchester."*

Elizabeth DAUNTON (below) actually did commit murder - infanticide - and more than once. She was sentenced to hang, but because of her mental state she was eventually committed to an asylum.

## Elizabeth DAUNTON

In 1874 She was charged with the "Wilful Murder of her unnamed infant male child at East Brent."

This time she was sentenced to be hung! In Aug 1875 her death sentence was lifted and she was sentenced to life of Penal Servitude. An Elizabeth DAUNTON was admitted into Broadmoor on 15<sup>th</sup> Sep 1875. She was later transferred to Pembroke Asylum where she died on 23 Oct 1877.

Clearly a very disturbed person!

In 1869 Elizabeth DAUNTON was sentenced to 1 years Hard Labour for "Wilful murder of her baby daughter Lucy Daunton at East

Brent on Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 1869" She had previously been sentenced in 1866 to 21 days Hard labour at Shepton Jail for "Breaking windows at Axbridge workhouse" because the guardians of the workhouse would not take her baby off her hands! Again in 1873 she was fined 10/- plus 18/6d costs or 14 days in Shepton Jail for assaulting neighbour Eliza DAY at East Brent. Born in East Brent in 1844 Elizabeth was the daughter of Samuel DAUNTON and Hester HATCH who married in 1840 and lived in Rooksbridge. They were obviously a poor family as they spent a much of their lives in and out of the Axbridge Workhouse. Hester died there in 1877 and Samuel in 1886. There were three daughters all born in the workhouse.

**Caroline** (HATCH/DAUNTON) born 1838 before Samuel and Hester married,

*In 1905 there was a Caroline DAUNTON living in Ashcombe Road, Weston?*

## CHILD MURDER AT EAST BRENT.

### CONFESSION OF THE ACCUSED.

CONSIDERABLE excitement prevailed in this district, on Saturday, consequent on a rumour that the dead body of a newly-born male child had been discovered in a ditch at the rear of some cottages, situate on the road leading to Rooksbridge. The rumour proved but too true, such body having been found by a woman named Harriet Fowles, who took it to the nearest cottage—occupied by one Samuel Daunton—in company with a Mrs. Cook, when Daunton's daughter began crying, and subsequently admitted that she was the mother of the child; that it was born alive, and that she had thrown it into the ditch, immediately after birth. The police were at once informed of the circumstances, and Elizabeth Daunton was accordingly apprehended and conveyed to the Axbridge Police-station, but in consequence of her delicate health she was subsequently removed to the workhouse.

An inquest was held on the body on Monday afternoon, before Mr. S. Craddock, coroner, and the following jury:—Rev. H. P. Denison, Messrs. John Hutson, W. Peddle, J. Emery, Geo. Higgs, W. Purnell, G. M. Frost, William Hutson, E. Jarvis, George Higgs, jun., J. Onion, and Richard Bennett. The first-

**Charlotte** born 1840 *In 1861 Charlotte was working in Clifton Bristol where in 1866 she married a James TOWNSEND,*

**Elizabeth born 1844.** She never married but had four children by unknown fathers. Three were born in the workhouse and a fourth at home in Rooksbridge.

First born Richard was born on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 1865 and died at the workhouse 1 month later on 6<sup>th</sup> March. 2<sup>nd</sup> child Lucy was born 5<sup>th</sup>

Sept 1869 and was released with her mother Elizabeth from the workhouse on the 25<sup>th</sup> Sep. A week later Lucy's body was found drowned in a ditch at Lympsham?

In 1872 Elizabeth was back in the workhouse where she gave birth to a son Charles in February. Because of Elizabeth's mental condition it is believed that her parents took Charles away and looked after him as a child? When Charles reached the age of 17 he enrolled into the army in 1888 and served in both the Boer War and WW1.

A fourth unnamed child was born in Rooksbridge in 1875. It is believed this child was born alive but immediately thrown into a ditch behind the cottage, for which Elizabeth was sentenced to be hung at Wells Assizes. (Above)

The woman who now stands charged with the capital offence, is a poor half-witted looking person, who, although she may possess a knowledge of the difference between right and wrong, certainly presents an appearance which no one would say was that of a person endowed with all their faculties. Although still young, she has had four illegitimate children, one of whom was found dead in bed; a second was removed—through the kind interposition of some friends—from her custody, in consequence of her repeated threats towards its life; a third was found dead in a ditch at Lympsham in 1869—when prisoner pleaded that the child rolled out of her lap, whilst she was nursing it by the roadside, and was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment; whilst the fourth was found in a ditch at East Brent, as above described.

## Transportation

**A round the world Cruise? Well, half way actually!**

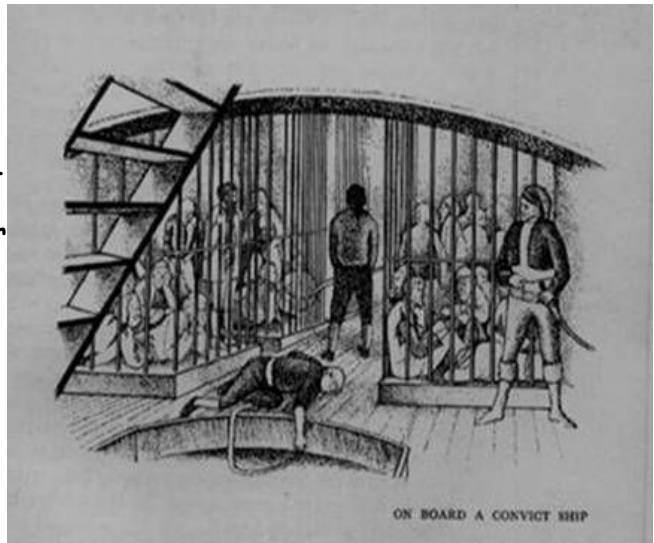
**Two! Strikes and you're out.**

While some of the offences that follow appear to be not serious to us, if you had a previous record it was quite common for a repeat offender to be Transported.

Often 'Transportation over the seas' was an alternative punishment to hanging. Convicted criminals were transported to the colonies to serve their prison sentences. It had the advantages of removing the criminal from society and being quite cheap, the state only had to pay the cost of the journey one way!

On arrival and after the obligatory number of days/weeks in chains until their attitudes were assessed, they were usually put to work on government road or building projects or signed over to farmers and other employers as cheap labour.

Unless they were sentenced to Transportation for life, at the end of their sentence when they received their Certificate of Freedom, they could return if they wanted to. Not many did! They couldn't afford the fare. On release most stayed. Some became quite successful landowners many by pushing the local Aborigines off their land.



## The Bermuda Triangle?

**You didn't disappear, but this cruise to Bermuda was no holiday!**

During the early 18th century, the government started to send prisoners to penal colonies in America, usually from seven years up to life. This stopped when the American War of Independence broke out in 1775 and when the Americans had gained their Independence from Britain they definitely weren't prepared to play host to our 'Riff-Raff' any more. So we started sending our criminals right round the other side of the world as far as we could to Australia.

Once America claimed its Independence from Britain in 1776, they kicked us out of all the ports we held on the American east coast. Then someone realised that we could do with a navy base in the Atlantic to help with defence if the Yanks got even bigger ideas! So it was decided to build a Royal Naval Dockyard on Ireland Island on Bermuda which we still held. Then, someone had another bright idea and suggested we could use convict labour to build it! So what they did, they cut the masts off of some old rotting ships in Bermuda and installed lots more bunk beds and used these 'Hulks' to accommodate 'Transported convicts', freezing in winter and over 40C in summer with no air conditioning or 'en suites!

If you had any kind of craftsman skills you were a sought after candidate. Two young men both born in East Brent in 1820 and both were carpenters living at Mark and sentenced to transportation at the same time and had to take the Bermuda Cruise! They were John PRICE and John FROST.

In 1787, transportation started to the first penal colonies in Australia set up in Botany Bay and later Van Diemens Land - modern Tasmania.. Captain COOK had discovered Australia 1770. But for a criminal in the 1800's this means of transportation was no Cooks Tour!

Over the years, about 160,000 people. Men, women and children, sometimes as young as nine years old had to endure at least a 3 sometimes 4 month journey in cramped pitiful conditions after being held sometimes for more than a year in a rotting floating prison hulk in England waiting for a place on a convict ship.

Those who survived the journey and completed their sentences were allowed on their release to return to Britain. But most stayed, married or settled in the new country. Some becoming quite well off!

## **Joseph CARTER**

Son of Richard and Mary CARTER of Weare. At the time of his sentencing he was working and living in East Brent.

In October 1814 17 year old Joseph CARTER was 'Sentenced at Taunton Assizes for stealing from Richard COLSTON Stocking maker and tailor of Rooksbridge, several items of material and clothing valued at over £7.

Due to the high value of the goods he stole he was sentenced to be 'Hung' later commuted to 'Transportation for life'

He was sent to a prison hulk at Portland in May 1815 where he languished until he left aboard the ship 'Ocean' along with another 219 convicts in August 1815 arriving in New South Wales on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1816.

In the 1820's Joseph CARTER was assigned to a James DUFF who in 1823 moved to Jerry Plains to set up his father's new land grant and took Joseph and another convict James EDWARDS with him.

in May 1829 Joseph gained Permission to marry 14 year old Frances HAM daughter of another transportee in Newcastle NSW and they five children the eldest a daughter Ann.

Ann CARTER married twice. She first married a former convict William SMITH in Nov 1850. They had three children before William died in July 1856. Ann's second marriage was to a James PITTMAN son of another convict from Somerset who she had seven more children with.

Joseph CARTER was recommended for a Conditional Pardon and gained his Certificate of Freedom in April 1837. He died in 1840. After he died his widow Frances took off with James EDWARDS and had five more children.

(Ref: John CARTER 26/1/2017 <https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts> )

## **Benjamin COMER**

Benjamin COMER was born in East Brent in 1815 Son of George and Elizabeth COOMER East Brent.

Age 21. a farm servant he was tried 8 August 1835 at Somerset Assizes at Ilchester and sentenced to transportation for life for stealing a scythe. He had one prior conviction.

He arrived in New South Wales on the convict ship 'Strathfieldsaye' in 1836

In Australia before his pardon in 1848 he appears to have married a local 15 year old Ellen WOODS in Aug 1846. They settled in Maitland NSW.

They had three children two boys and a girl. Benjamin died in 1853.

## Edward HAM

Born in East Brent in August 1783 he was the son of Caleb and Mary HAM According to his Gaol records of 1830 he was a married man from East Brent with two children?

He may have married an Elizabeth MEDLAM? in Mar 1804.?

In Jan 1825 Edward HAM was sentenced to 2 weeks at Ilchester Gaol for stealing a Reap-hook belonging to an Edward SINGLER.

In July 1829 he was again sentenced to 6 mth gaol for 'Larceny'

In August 1830 He was again arrested at Wells and charged at the Ilchester Somerset Assizes for "Robbing Edward DAY on the kings Highway and stealing a silver watch".

Because of his previous offences, he was sentenced to 'Death', later commuted to 'Transportation for life'. He was held in a prison Hulk at Portsmouth until, along with 225 other convicts he departed on the 'Isabella' on 22 Nov 1831 arriving in New South Wales on 15 Mar 1832.

He served his sentence at the Moreton Bay penal Settlement which was off the coast of Brisbane. Moreton Bay had a reputation for holding hardened criminals and life was tough. New arrivals wore leg irons for the first 9 months. The overseers were convicts themselves, chosen from some of the most brutal inmates to terrorise other convicts to keep them in line!

**T**HE undermentioned Prisoners of the Crown, holding Tickets of Leave, being absent from their Districts, are illegally at large. Their Tickets of Leave are cancelled :—



There appears to have been a mass walkout of inmates from Moreton Bay and on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1851, 9 prisoners were named as being AWOL among them was Edward HAM! They had earlier earned their 'Tickets of leave' which allowed them out into the community to find work, but seems they neglected to report back to their probation officer or forgot to go to church every Sunday, which was a requirement!

### James POOLE

Born in East Brent in 1818, Son of John and Mary POOLE of East Brent. When his mother Mary died in 1856 she had been living in the 'Poor House' at Rooksbridge.

He was a Harness maker living in Bristol when he was arrested for "Stealing a Razor" property of Isaac BOLEY Sentenced at Wells Quarter Sessions to '10 years Transportation'. He had an earlier offences of Larceny.

Held at Ilchester Gaol 29<sup>th</sup> Oct 1841

Sailed 21<sup>st</sup> April 1842 on the 'Susan' along with 299 other convicts arrived in Van Diemens Land 25 July 1842.

While serving his sentence in Australia he appears to have been a bit of a trouble maker! He kept getting bits added to his sentence for misconduct such as 24 hrs Solitary for asking for tobacco, Hard labour and time in chains for arguing and disrespecting orders. In 1845 he even stole a couple of sheep which got 4 years added to his sentence!

He got a 'Conditional Pardon' in Sep 1856. But it seems old habits die hard... In Nov 1869 he was sentenced to 3 mths Hard labour for Larceny!

He eventually got his 'Free Pardon' granted in April 1870. They were probably glad to see the back of him!

James died at Hobart Hospital in Feb. 1879 aged 61 he was recorded as a 'Saddler'

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#### **PENAL ESTABLISHMENT.**

*Secretary's Office, 11th April, 1870.*

**I**T is hereby notified to the under-mentioned individuals that His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to grant them Free Pardons for the offences of which they were severally convicted in the Island of Tasmania:—

Richard Hill, per D. Malcolm.  
James Poole, per Susan 2.

**C. T. BELSTEAD, Secretary.**

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## John HOLE

John HOLE was born in East Brent in 1799. The illegitimate son of Elizabeth HOLE.

John HOLE was convicted at Bristol on 9 April 1847 and Transported for 10 yrs for stealing a cow.

He stole a cow from his employer, a Mr JONES at Cotham Bristol and sold it to a Butcher in Bath.

Because of a previous conviction he was sentenced to 10yr transportation and sent to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) arriving 1851.

After being held in a prison hulk here for more than two years he departed for Van Dieman's Land on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1850 on the convict ship 'Maria Soames' along with 259 other convicts, arriving on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1850.

According to his Australian conviction records he was born in East Brent Somerset. a farm labourer, Protestant, single, about 4'11" in height and could read and write. And had a brother Henry?

He had no record of misconduct and he was granted a 'Ticket of Leave' which meant he was able to work for an employer for wages.

Early in 1852 he applied for permission to marry. And he married a fellow convict Mary Johnstone on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1852. John HOLE was issued with his certificate of 'Freedom' in July 1857. and settled in Richmond Tasmania. He died in August 1881 and was buried in a paupers grave at Richmond.

Mary Johnstone alias Mary O'Brien from Ireland was convicted in 1847 and arrived on the convict ship 'Asia' on 21 July 1847. She appears not to have mended her ways and broke the law in Australia several times being imprisoned for larceny etc right up until 1880.

## **George DAUNTON / DANTON**

B East Brent 1801 Blacksmith.

Dec 1835 he was sentenced to 12 months in Shepton Mallet prison for assault. in July 1837 Sentenced to 7 years Transportation at Ilchester Assizes for Larceny 'Stealing a Hammer'.

He had a couple of previous convictions, Stealing Iron and Assault etc!

After 6 months in chains in a prison hulk he eventually sailed on the 'Lord William Bentinck' on 11 April 1838. Arrived in Van Diemens Land 26 Aug 1838. along with 320 other convicts. Previous voyages of the 'Lord William Bentnick had carried less than 200 convicts so it must have pretty cramped!

He appears in Australian records as DANTON.

On 23/6/1845: he was granted permission to marry a Henrietta Haywood who had been sentenced to 7 years Transportation in 1843.

No registration of a marriage was found? But Henrietta did marry a Henry Goldsmith on 15/1/1846.

In May 1846: George got his Certificate of Freedom.

In 1853 he married Bridget Stapleton, aged 24, he was 42, at St. George's church, Hobart.

Children:

1/5/1853: Jane Danton, born Hobart.

12/4/1856: John Danton, born Hobart.

John Danton was placed in the Queens Orphan School on 21/11/1866, aged 10 - no mention of where mother was..discharged on 28/2/1871. Discharged to Allan McKinnon, Hagley, but he absconded from McKinnon.

9/12/1858: Margaret Ann Danton, born Hobart.

From the The Mercury, Hobart:22/8/1860

“MAINTENANCE.\_\_\_George Danton, blacksmith, was brought up by warrant

charged with deserting his wife and was ordered to pay 10s. a week, towards her support."

28/1/1870: George Danton, Blacksmith died at the General Hospital, Hobart of Diarrhoea and fatty degeneration of heart. Aged 69. Bit of a messy ending.

15/10/1870 *The Tasmanian Times, Hobart:*

*"Report of a girl named Jane Danton, (she would have been 17 years old) was charged with stealing three pence from Dinah Chase, a widow, who said that Jane had been in her service for 9 or 10 years - Detective Morley stated that the prisoner was an orphan, her father having died some time ago and her mother having deserted her a long time ago - she was sentenced to 6 weeks' imprisonment." ref; D Wong: <https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts>*

## **George WALL**

George WALL was born in East Brent about 1804 he was the son of Daniel and Maria WALL

His first offence was 1822 when he was brought before the Somerset Quarter sessions at Ilchester. Charge unknown

Again in March 1823 at Somerset Assizes he "Stole two Cheeses property of a Thomas COOK" was charged with 'Felony' sentenced to 6 months Hard Labour in Wilton Jail.

He was released on 29<sup>th</sup> Sep 1823. He obviously had not learnt that crime doesn't pay for he was again charged in Sep 1824 with an unknown felony? This time George WALL alias John CHAPPELL was sentenced to 'Transportation for life'

At the time of his arrest he was a labourer living in Banwell.

After spending time in a prison hulk he eventually embarked for NSW along with 179 other criminals - along with 9 others who had been sentenced at the same Assizes - on the 'Norfolk' on 15 April 1825 arriving in NSW on 18 August 1825.

A census in 1828 has him as a labourer at the residence of Mr. Thomas Hapall (? writing hard to understand).

Asked permission to marry Ann Cox 1834 this was refused as Ann had stated on arrival that she was married. She had been sentenced to life also. Their Application for convict marriage was later approved 1836 - Registration place Cobbitty, Narellan NSW. They had a daughter Margaret born 1834. (Ann died 1849 - Coroner's report states "visitation from God" !!! )

George had a conditional pardon 1842. In 1849 he had a register of lease for a parcel of land in the Yass area.

He remarried 22 Aug 1852 in Yass to Mary Ann Stoneham who migrated with her family at the age of 9 years.

George died 25 March 1861. ref. Joy Maguire,

## **John PRICE**

B: East Brent 1820. Was a Carpenter at Mark

In March 1835 aged 15 he was sentenced to 10 weeks jail for "Stealing a Fixture"?

In Mar 1839. aged 19 Convicted at Wells for stealing a spade and a lock.

Due to his previous conviction he was sentenced to 7 years

Transportation for 'Larceny' At Ilchester Assizes. Held on the hulk

'Leviathan' at Portsmouth. He was transported to Bermuda on Aug 22

1839. And held there on the hulk 'Coromandel' Most of the time there he is recorded as being of good behaviour but by the December muster 1844 he must have got upset about something as his behaviour now was "VB"

Very Bad! Conditions were on the hulks were pretty awful and the

Overseer of the hulks was appealing to the Governor of Bermuda back in England to release or return some of the prisoners who had done their time.

## **John FROST**

John FROST also born in East Brent 1820 who at the time of his conviction was also a carpenter living in Mark.

Sentenced to **10 years** Transportation at same Mar 1839 Ilchester Assizes aged 19. It is likely that John FROST and John PRICE knew each other? I can find no indication of what crime he was sentenced for, no doubt serious one for the times to get 10 years!

He was transported to Bermuda and held there on a convict hulk 'Dromedary' After several grovelling appeals by the prison overseer to the Governor of Bermuda in London to relieve some of the pressure on the prison hulk staff John Frost was granted a pardon along with many other prison residents in Dec 1846 and given the opportunity to get passage back to England.

## John MORGAN

B:1800 in London.

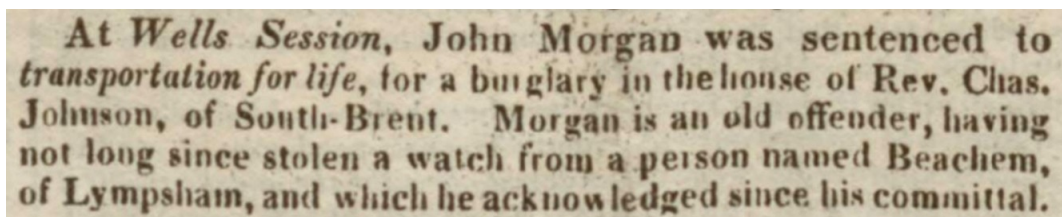
In 1820 he was given a month in jail for stealing a couple of chickens.

In Dec. 1822 he was charged with an unknown offence at Ilchester.

However, 1824 he was a baker living in East Brent.

According to the Ilchester Gaol register he was married with 3 children.

At the Ilchester Assizes in Sep. 1824 he was sentenced to death later to 'Transportation for life' for "*Breaking and entering the dwelling house of Rev. F. C. Johnson at South Brent, by getting down the chimney, and stealing therefrom several silver spoons and other articles*".



At Wells Session, John Morgan was sentenced to transportation for life, for a burglary in the house of Rev. Chas. Johnson, of South-Brent. Morgan is an old offender, having not long since stolen a watch from a person named Beachem, of Lymsham, and which he acknowledged since his committal.

Bath Chronicle 28<sup>th</sup> Oct 1824

He arrived in Australia on the 'Norfolk' in 1825!

## John LEWIS

John Lewis was luckier than some. In Oct 1842 he was accused at the Ilchester Quarter Sessions of Stealing an Anvil and receiving stolen goods. He got his sentence of 7 years 'Transportation reduced to a period of penal

servitude in jail possibly because he was married with two young sons. More likely on flimsy evidence! On a further appeal he was acquitted.

John Lewis was a blacksmith, born in 1804 the son of George and Grace LEWIS in East Brent.

In 1851 he was living with his wife Elizabeth and two sons William and Henry at Mark Som. By 1871 he was a widower at Mark lodging with local shopkeeper George TRICKEY. In 1881 he was lodged with Mark blacksmith Bert HANSFORD.

He died in 1885

### **Petty Sessions or lesser crimes!**

#### **William LLOYD**

William LLOYD was born in Monmouthshire in 1784.

In Mar 1822 while living in East Brent he and his wife were charged with receiving two silver spoons knowing them to be stolen. He was sentenced to 18 month in gaol and his wife Mary was discharged.

#### **William BOWERS**

Sentenced to 6 weeks Hard Labour at Wilton Gaol At Ilchester Assizes in Oct 1823 for stealing 2 Ducks! Property of a James HALL.

B: East Brent 1804.

#### **Peter BAKER.**

Peter BAKER was a butcher in East Brent born 1792.

on 17 Feb 1825 he was brought from remand in Wilton Jail and fined £12/10s for an unspecified offence?

He married Hannah TUTTON from Mark in 1815 and they had three children. He died in E Brent in 1870.

### **Rachael WALL**

Born in East Brent 1813 daughter of Joseph and Ann WALL

In July 1829 16 yr old Rachael WALL was sentenced at Ilchester gaol to 5 weeks in jail with one week in 'Solitary' for stealing a Bible.

## **Keeping it in the family!**

**"Gordon Bennett!"** ....

Well there was not actually a Gordon, but Jane, William, George, Charlie BENNETT for certain were children of a local family destined for a life of crime, persistent petty thieves and mischief makers!

They were the family of Ambrose and Anne BENNETT who were living in the parish when Jane, Charles and William were born in Rooksbridge. In 1861 they were living and working at Tarnock. By the time young George was born in 1865 the family had moved to Weston.

From the early 1870's the siblings spent a lot of their time in Shepton Mallet Gaol!

Even their father Ambrose was often drawn into the family's misdeeds.

There are numerous press cuttings involving the arrests and charges of the BENNETTS during the last 30 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

William especially seemed to get his name in the papers most weeks!

### **William BENNETT**

The first of the BENNETTS to offend (or get caught) was the youngest, William.

Born in 1860 at the age of 11 in 1872 he was given 1 month hard labour and 5 years in a juvenile reformatory for stealing a coat and between 1878 after his release from juvenile custody, and 1899 he was brought before



the magistrates no less than 21 more times on various charges of robbery and GBH. Each time being sentenced to various terms of Hard Labour at Shepton Mallet jail, which did not seem to deter him in the least! In both 1881 and 1891 census when the family were living in Weston William BENNETT shows up as residing in Shepton Mallet Jail. In Oct 1889 he was convicted of assaulting a William WOODWARD. He was well known among the Weston locals and police and earned the nickname 'Jumbo'. He was even known to carry a coal hammer with which he threatened his victims and was not afraid to use!

In 1891 using the alias William WOLFE he appears to have moved on to Croydon Middlesex where he continued his criminal activities. On Oct 8<sup>th</sup> he was sentenced to 3 years Penal Servitude for larceny. 1894 and back in WSM he was given another 3 yrs for Burglary and stealing several watches and rings from the home and shop of a Frederick NIBLETT  
From 1870 - 1900 there are dozens of reports in local papers of the many charges William BENNETT faced and also many for his siblings! Far too many to be reproduced here

## Jane BENNETT

Jane BENNETT was born in East Brent in 1856

Weston Gazette  
29 Oct 1870

Jane's criminal tendencies were obviously well honed by the time she left school. Here she is charged with stealing items from her employer at the age of 14!

As a domestic servant, Jane appears to have penchant for nicking bed linen!

22/2/1878 "Charwoman. 2 cases of stealing bed linen sentenced to 1 month and another 6 weeks hard labour. Stole a blanket value 8/- from Edward Lye

at WSM and counterpane from James Galley WSM. And on 9/11/1878 2 mths hard labour for assaulting Rose LANEY at WSM."

In 1880 she was working as a Laundress at the Wells Asylum where she was accused of 'Stealing a quantity of wearing apparel and blankets etc'. The charges were dropped when she pleaded she had taken the items for safe keeping while there was alterations work going on at the Asylum .

From press cutting from the period Jane also supplemented her income by knowing where to to fence the stolen goods. Often in the local pubs or Couch's Pawn Shop in James Street WSM!

Jane and brother Charles would distract the victim while William stole what ever he could lay his hands on, be it a coat or a silver watch

If that didn't work William would beat it out of his victim and then Jane would nip off to the Pawn shop or the pub to dispose of the loot.

Jane Bennett  
Taunton Courier, and  
Western Advertiser  
27 February 1878

**PETTY SESSIONS.**—Thomas Cox, of Glastoubury, for being drunk and riotous and assaulting P.C. Smith, was committed for two months' hard labour.—Charles and William Bennett was charged on remand with stealing a coat, value 30s, the property of Albert Heywood. They were each committed for one month's hard labour.—Jane Bennett, sister of the last-named prisoners, was charged with stealing a counterpane and blanket, and was committed for one month for the first offence and six weeks for the second. The Bennetts belong to a family of five children--three are now in Shepton Gaol, one in a reformatory, and the other on board the training ship.

## Lewis BAILEY

Lewis BAILEY was born in East Brent 1835 son of tailor Thomas and Rhoda BAILEY of East Brent.

In 1851 he was working for farmer John And Maria HIGGS in East Brent.

**PUCKLECHURCH.**—At the adjourned petty session on the 29th inst., before R. B. Hale, G. W. Blathwayte, and F. B. N. Diskenson, Esq., Lewis Bailey, a domestic servant of Mr. David Perry, Abson, charged with feloniously milking a cow in a tin can, the property of the said Mr. Perry, on the 27th inst., was committed for trial at the next Gloucester session.

By the age of 19 in 1854 he was working on a farm near Gloucester. Where in Sept 1854 he was sentenced to 14 days Hard Labour at Gloucester Assizes for stealing one and a half pints of milk belonging to his employer farmer David PERRY! At Abson and Wick Glos.

In 1856 he married a Sarah Williams. He died in 1864 at Chipping Sodbury.

## Charles COLLARD.

Charles was born in East Brent in 1853. His father William was a house painter and his mother Hannah was a school teacher.

In 1851 the family were living in Church Street by 1871 they had moved to Strowland Cottage East Brent. He had two older sisters Lucy and Martha. Sometime before 1890 he had moved to Cirencester where he was employed as a house painter and where in Dec 1890 he was remanded for "Sending a letter with menaces demanding £5". It appears that he tried to extort a fiver from a Mr Lane with a threat to expose him? In court he pleaded guilty and showed great regret for his actions! Never the less he was sentenced to 6 months Hard Labour at Cirencester Assizes.

He married Solome JONES in 1893 and they went on to have four children.

Charles died in Cirencester in 1935.

## Arthur Fry

In 1879 Arthur FRY was a 60 year old inmate at the Axbridge Workhouse. He was sentenced to 1 month Hard Labour at Shepton Mallet Gaol.

"Did make use of profane and obscene language and threaten to assault John Hurlestone another inmate with a poker on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1879"

He appears to have been a bit of a handful as he had already in Dec 1878 been given 8 days Hard Labour under the 'Poor Law Act' at the Axbridge workhouse..

### **Send 'em to the Workhouse**

In 1834 a new Poor Law and Workhouse Act saw large institutional workhouses introduced. - Ours was in Axbridge - These served several parishes instead of small individual parish poor houses. The records show that several families and individuals from East Brent spent time in the workhouse, most were paupers who had nowhere else to live or were old, mentally or physically handicapped. In Victorian times, many a young unmarried mother was banished to the workhouse by her parents! For instance, unmarried Ann FIELD gave birth to at least four children in the workhouse.

Samuel DAUNTON was admitted several times during his life with his family, usually getting himself admitted during the cold winter months and requesting release in the spring to find work locally. All of his children were born in the workhouse as were three of his daughter Elizabeth's children. Who as is seen above was not of a sound mind and eventually was sentenced to death for infanticide! To Samuel workhouse life was better than life outside?

Some people welcomed the workhouse act because they believed it would:

- reduce the cost of looking after the poor

- take beggars off the streets
- encourage poor people to work hard to support themselves

The new Poor Law ensured that the poor were at least housed under cover, clothed, fed and receive some kind of medical care all be it very basic.

Children who entered the workhouse would receive some schooling. In return for this care, all workhouse paupers would have to work for several hours each day.

However, not all Victorians shared this point of view. Some people spoke out against the new Poor Law, calling the workhouses 'Prisons for the Poor'. Mostly the poor themselves hated and feared the threat of the workhouse. But for others the conditions were better than life outside.

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