

The Peterborough Riot in 1914

In a previous article a couple of weeks ago I covered a brief description of the part played by Sir Richard Winfrey who was mayor of Peterborough in 1914 during the infamous riot. In 2014 I wrote a book entitled "Peterborough at War 1914-1918" in which I covered the riot in much more detail, particularly in relation to the people involved in the riot and their subsequent appearances at court after the event. It seems appropriate to add these details here to finish off the story told by Sir Richard.

Newspaper report of the court proceedings and punishments handed down to the rioters of the night of Friday 7th August 1914:

On Saturday 15th August 1914, the 'Peterborough Advertiser' published the following lines: "The early stages of war excitement at Peterborough took the form of rather serious ebullitions against one or two excellent residents of Teutonic nationality in the centre of the city."



Frank's Butcher Shop, Westgate

This rather restrained statement describes a particularly ugly riot comprising of thousands of Peterborough people in the city centre that began on the night of Friday 7th August. The targets of this disturbance were the butcher's shop of Mr. Frederick Frank in Westgate, and his villa in Fletton Avenue, most of the windows being smashed. Also having his windows smashed was Mr. Metz, pork butcher, Narrow Street, Peterborough. On the Saturday evening all the windows

in the Salmon and Compasses public house were broken and this rioting continued through Sunday night until the Mayor read the Riot Act from the steps of the Town Hall on Monday 10th and introduced a 9pm curfew. The authorities had to swear in a large number of Special Constables in order to control the riot and at one point things had got so out of hand that the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, then bivouacked at the Corn Exchange, had to be called out to assist the police. Deprived of supporters due to the curfew, the main instigators were unable to continue with the disturbance and twenty-five of them found themselves in the cells at Peterborough Police Station.

On Wednesday 12th August all the defendants appeared at the Petty Sessions where they were dealt with, "very discriminately" as follows: Harry Miles, Westgate; Charles Blythe, Queen's Drive West; Harry Sumpter, porter, Fengate, were charged with being guilty of an affray and disturbance of the peace at Peterborough on 7th August; and Charles Bean, labourer, Westwood Street; John William Dewberry, labourer, Reform Street; William Sterman, dealer, Dogsthorpe; John Wincup, coremaker, Queen's Drive West; James Few, labourer, Monument Street, were charged with a similar offence the following day, August 8th. John Wincup was also charged with using bad language.

John Drury, labourer, 103 Eastgate, was charged with throwing stones and being drunk and disorderly; Frederick Arthur Reeve, labourer, Wellington Street; James Bird, labourer, Westwood Street, and William Sterman, were summoned for doing damage to a window boarding, the property of Frederick Frank, to the amount of 2s. 6d. Frederick Freeman, bargeman, Silver Street, New

Fletton, and Frederick Fulcher, wood carrier, 42, Cobden Street, were summoned for committing damage to a window, the property of Charles Guest, (Salmon and Compasses), to the amount of 2s. 6d. at Peterborough on August 8th. Alfred John Haycock, labourer, 88, Padholme Road, was charged with assaulting P.C. Covell while in the execution of his duty on 7th August. Walter Neave, labourer, Garton End, was charged with others, inciting to riot at 11pm on 7th August. Peter Jolly, motor driver, Granville Street and Walter Wheatley, labourer, Main Street, Farcet, were charged with doing wilful damage to a window of the Salmon and Compasses by throwing a stone on August 8th. Joseph Smith, labourer, 24, City Road, was charged with obstructing Police Inspector Drake, P.C. Adam, P.C. Hall, P.C. Bedford and others in the execution of their duty in Cumbergate at 12:05am on Sunday; further with assaulting P.C. Adam and doing damage to a police uniform. Charles Barnes, groom, Castor; Ernest Powley, moulder, 149, Westwood Street; George William Posnett, fitter, 184, Westwood Street, and Stephen Steels, labourer, 7, Prospect Cottages, Stanground, were each charged with doing damage to the Salmon and Compasses window on Sunday morning. Alfred George Morton, elastic braid hand, 4, Prince's Court, Albert Place, was charged with abetting Posnett. Alfred Bent, 33, Water End, was charged with assembling with others and inciting to riot in Fletton Avenue at 1:40am on 9th August; and John William Howes, 316, Gladstone Street, was charged with being guilty of an affray at Peterborough on August 8th.



Rioters outside Frank's Butchers in Westgate

The cases of Miles, Blythe, Sumpter and Neave were taken first, Blythe not appearing – The Mayor, (Sir Richard Winfrey, M.P. was one of the Magistrates), said: "You are charged with a very serious offence, and the magistrates can send you for trial or bind you over. Are you willing to be bound over to keep the peace?" – The defendants said they were, and they were bound over for the sum of £10 each.

The cases of Dean, Dewberry, Sterman, Wincup, Few and Howes were then heard, Sterman not appearing. The mayor again explained that unless they were prepared to be bound over they would have to go for trial, whereupon each of the men consented to be bound over, though Howes denied the offence. Bent was similarly dealt with. The mayor told the men that the bench had decided to take a very lenient view of the occurrence which was a disgrace to the city. They were very fortunate

in not being sent for trial. They were bound over in £10 to keep the peace for two years. He then told them that as Chief Magistrate he had been placed in a very difficult position and he very much regretted that they had been forced to take steps in Peterborough by which he hoped they would avoid what had taken place in other towns. He did not think he could do better than to read to them what a London magistrate had said to men who were brought before him in similar circumstances:

“What you have to do today in this country is to show an example how Englishmen can behave themselves. Over in Germany they have shown how Germans behave to Englishmen, and it is very bad behaviour. You should be like most Englishmen – their behaviour is magnificent, behaving in the utmost calmness in this hour of danger. Germans amongst us are a very small minority and it would be quite easy to bully them and smash all their shops.”



Frank's Butchers after the riot

The mayor added: “I would just like to ask how many of you who have shown very patriotic feelings would be prepared to go to the front?” Three of the eight men – Bean, Bent and Neave held up their hands and Miles said he wanted to go but couldn't. The mayor said: “Well just take their names and we'll send them.” Blythe subsequently appeared in the court with the Recruiting Sergeant who said he was being sent to the front at once, and in those circumstances the Bench remitted the costs and did not impose a fine.

The other rioters were sentenced as follows: Drury pleaded guilty to both charges against him. Sergeant Sleigh said he was very drunk and threw several stones at Mr. Frank's window. Witness and another officer got behind him in the crowd and saw him throw a few more stones before he disappeared in the 'Bull' yard. P.C. Powley corroborated. Defendant was sentenced on the first charge to a month's hard labour, and on the second to 14 days, the sentences to run concurrently.

Sterman appeared next. The mayor: “Are you prepared to enlist?” The Chief Constable: “No sir, he went to the recruiting office yesterday but they would not have him, and he kicked up a disturbance.” The defendant pleaded

guilty. On the first charge of disturbing the peace, he was bound over; in the second case of doing damage, P.C. Powley said that the defendant was taking a leading part in the riot, rushing about, shouting and cursing the Germans. He pulled the boards off the front of Frank's shop. Defendant: “I had good instincts – patriotic instincts.” The Chief Constable: “There are several previous convictions. He takes advantage of every opportunity to lead hooligans and he is the worst of the lot.” The mayor said the Bench wished him to say that the defendant's idea of patriotism was a mistaken one. It was always cowardly for a number of people to attack one man at any time, he then sentenced him to a fortnight's hard labour.

Reeve pleaded guilty. Detective Sergeant Smith said that on Saturday afternoon he was in front of Frank's shop which had been boarded up. Reeve helped to pull the boards down and break the window and had been drinking. Fined 10s., 2s. 6d. for the damage, and 2s. costs.

Fulcher pleaded not guilty. P.C. Ball said that at 11:15pm he was in duty in Long Causeway with Special Constable Baker, when he saw Fulcher throw a stone. Fulcher denied throwing the stone and said: "You have made a mistake this time". Special Constable Baker corroborated. Fulcher strenuously denied throwing a stone saying that he wished he might be shot where he stood if it were true. He was returning home after shopping with his wife. Mrs Fulcher also denied that he had thrown anything: "As true as God is in heaven" she said. The Bench gave the defendant the benefit of the doubt and dismissed the case.

Freeman pleaded not guilty. P.C. Bedford said he saw the defendant throw a stone and break the Salmon and Compasses window but owing to the crowd he could not approach the defendant at that time. Freeman said: "If ever I touched a stone on Saturday night, may my wrist drop off." Special Constable Jones said he was perfectly certain it was Freeman. He had known him ever since he was a boy. The defendant giving sworn evidence said if he threw a stone, he "hoped he might be struck dead." He was in the crowd and couldn't get out of it. Freeman, who had a good record, was fined 10s., 2s. 6d. for the damage and 2s. costs.

Jolly pleaded not guilty. P.C. Dewberry said he saw the defendant throw a stone and immediately heard glass fall, and P.C. Bland corroborated. Jolly said that he was standing in the crowd when someone near him threw a stone and the police arrested him.

Wheatley pleaded not guilty. Inspector Drake said that at about midnight he saw the defendant acting suspiciously and kept an eye on him, and then saw him throw two stones. At the police station he admitted the offence and said he had been dragged into it. Wheatley now said he couldn't remember anything of Saturday, he had had drink.

Barnes and Powley pleaded guilty. Special Constable Burton said that he thought Powley had thrown a stone and had kept an eye on him. Later he saw him quite distinctly throw another and at the police station a stone was found in his pocket. The Bench, in view of the good character of Jolly, Wheatley, Barnes and Powley, and of the fact that they had been in prison since the previous Saturday now bound them over.

Posnett pleaded guilty and Morton not guilty. P.C. Andrews produced a large parcel of missiles which were found in Posnett's overcoat pocket. The mayor: "He was apparently supplying the others." Posnett said that stranger had handed him the tiles and he threw one of them, but before he could do further damage he was arrested. Both prisoners were bound over for twelve months in the sum of £3.

Steels pleaded guilty. Detective Sergeant Smith gave evidence that he saw the defendant put his elbow through the glass door of the Salmon and Compasses. He said he had been led into by others. Steels was bound over.

Haycock pleaded guilty of striking P.C. Covell in self-defence. P.C. Covell said he was on duty near Farrow's shop on the Friday night, helping to hold a crowd. There was a rush, and the defendant struck him a hard blow on the face. P.C. Bland corroborated and denied that Covell struck the prisoner. Haycock said Covell struck him first and he struck Covell afterwards. He said he just wanted to "have a look" at what was happening. Haycock was fined 10s. and costs.

Smith pleaded guilty to obstructing and assaulting the police. P.C. Adam said the defendant threw him down and kicked him. Smith said he was urged on by the crowd. The Bench said the prisoner had kicked Adams so severely it was a mercy he was not injured for life. He was fined 10s. and costs in the first case, and 30s. and costs in the second.