

### **Charge of Receiving Stolen Property near Hitchin.**

Thomas Jeeves, aged 30, publican, of Gosmore, near Hitchin, and Ann Jeeves, aged 28, his wife (both on bail) were indicted for receiving two bushels of maize, value 10s., the property of Mr. Charles Cholmeley Hale of Kings Walden, well knowing it to have been stolen, on the 2nd of March.

Mr. Fulton and Mr. Wedderburn prosecuted; and Mr. Woollett and Mr. Holland defended the prisoners.

The case occupied a very long time, but although a somewhat complicated one, the main facts are comprised within a small compass. Mr. Hale, the prosecutor, lives at Kings Walden, and had in his employ a carter named Matthew Reeves. On the 25th February, Reeves was instructed to fetch a quarter of maize from Messrs. Franklin's of Hitchin, being furnished with a written order for that purpose. For some reason which did not transpire, Reeves either did not fetch the maize upon that day, or did not take the whole of it; but upon the 2nd of March he was sent with an empty cart to Hitchin to fetch three quarters of oats from Messrs Franklin's, and he then received, in addition to the oats, four bushels of maize, which at his request were put into two sacks, one of them having Messrs. Franklin's mark upon it, and the other one, the mark of the Great Northern Railway Company. The prisoners live at Gosmore, on the road between Kings Walden and Hitchin, where they keep the Bull Inn; and the principal witness in the case was Matthew Reeves, the carter, who pleaded guilty before the magistrates to stealing the maize, and who was now brought up in charge of a prison warder. He stated that on the morning of the 2nd March, while going towards Hitchin with the empty cart, he called at the prisoners' house about nine o'clock, and Thomas Jeeves asked him if "he would get him a few maize that day", and Reeves said he would try. He then went on to Hitchin and received the oats and the maize, the latter at his request being put into two sacks. On the way home he again called at the Bull, about eleven o'clock, and there saw Mrs. Jeeves, whom he told he had brought her some maize, and she told him to put it behind the club-room door, where he left the sack with Messrs. Franklin's name upon it. Mrs. Jeeves gave him 3s 6d and a pint of beer, which he, and a man called "Snip" and Mrs. Jeeves drank between them. He (Reeves) then continued his journey to Preston, where William Jeeves keeps the Chequers public-house, and there he saw both William and Thomas Jeeves. In cross examination, the witness said he had never been charged with stealing before, and that he should not have been upon this occasion if he had not been bothered into it by Thomas and William Jeeves.

Police-constable Day stated that about eleven o'clock on the morning in question he saw Matthew Reeves take something heavy in a sack from his cart and carry it into the Bull Inn; and Superintendent Reynolds stated that about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, in consequence of something he had heard, he went to the Bull and asked Mrs. Jeeves if Reeves had left anything there that day, and she replied, "Not that I am aware of". On looking about, however, he saw the sack in the clubroom and saw that it contained maize but at that time he had not heard of any maize being stolen. He returned to the house a couple of hours later with Police-constable Day and took possession of the sack, and directly after leaving he met Thomas Jeeves on the road, and asked him if he had ordered any maize that day, and he replied, "No, but I don't know whether my wife has, as I have been away all day". In cross examination, the witness said that when he spoke to Mrs. Jeeves, she said (pointing to the sack), "If anything has been left, it must be that, but I have been away at a funeral and left the house in charge of my little girl".

William Stevens, who lives close to the Bull, stated that after Inspector Reynolds had left the house, Mrs. Jeeves called him into the taproom and asked him if he wanted to earn a pint of beer. He replied, "Yes, he should not mind," and she told him to go to William Jeeves at Preston and tell her husband to come home as quick as he could.

George Reeves, a wood-dealer, brother to Matthew Reeves, stated that on Friday morning, 3rd March, he saw William and Thomas Jeeves together. William said to him, "Your brother Matt is locked up, "and on asking what for, he said, "About some maize, and ----- if me and my brother Tom won't be locked up too." The prisoner Thomas said that, while going home the previous evening, he met his wife's sister on the road and that he had then returned to the Chequers to tell his brother to do away with the maize (it was alleged that some had been left there also) so that the police should not find it. Thomas Jeeves also said that he would not mind it costing him £20 or £30 if Matthew Reeves did not get into trouble.

Samuel Reeves, another brother, and groom to Mr. Hale, stated that on the 4th March he had some conversation with Thomas and William Jeeves about his brother Matthew's case; and William said, "If the stupid (meaning Reeves) had not brought me into it, I would have paid all expenses." Witness said, "Well, but what is he to do now?" and William said, "He can say he had a lot of beer, and lost it on the road." Witness then turned to Thomas Jeeves and asked how about the maize which had been left at his house; and he replied that Matthew could say "he had left it there because the load was too heavy for the pony." Both the Jeeves' said that they would give £10 or £20 if Matthew Reeves would keep them out of it. In cross examination witness said both men said they would give £20 rather than have it occur at their houses, but they also said what he had already stated, that they would give £10 or £20 if Matthew would keep them out of it. Edward Roberts, Mr. Hales postman, was also examined for the prosecution, but he appeared so stupid that little or nothing could be made out of what he stated.

This completed the case for the prosecution and Mr. Woollett for the defence said that he would prove that Matthew Jeeves was not only a thief but a liar also. He contended that Reeves left the maize at the Bull in the absence of Thomas Jeeves and his wife, intending to call for it later on, but finding him baulked, he trumped up this accusation against the prisoners to shield himself. The following witnesses were then called for the defence:-

George Bates, alias "Snip", a tailor, who lodges at the Bull stated that he got downstairs soon after eight o'clock on the morning of the 2nd March but that he did not see Thomas Jeeves all day, he having gone to work before he got down. Matthew Reeves called at the house on the way to Hitchin, and spoke to the witness about some tailoring he wanted done for himself and witness told him to buy the stuff in Hitchin. Reeves did not see Jeeves at all as the latter was not there. On his way back from Hitchin, Reeves called again and brought the stuff for the tailoring, but by this time Mrs. Jeeves had gone out and had left the house in charge of Emily Currell. Reeves had some beer to drink, for which he paid himself and witness helped him to drink it.

Emily Currell, a girl of nineteen, stated that she went to keep house for Mrs. Jeeves on the 2nd March. She got there about ten o'clock in the morning and Mrs. Jeeves, who was going to a funeral, left at half past ten. She did not see Thomas Jeeves all day. After Mrs. Jeeves had gone, Reeves called saying he had a parcel to leave there and witness told him to put it in the club-room and she would tell Mrs. Jeeves about it when she came home. Witness did not give him any money but Reeves had a pint of beer for which he paid her a penny and two halfpennies, and "Snip" and a man named Wray helped him to drink it. In cross examination

witness said she told Inspector Reynolds when he came to the house the same evening that she had received the sack and that Mrs. Jeeves was not at home when it was brought. She was present before the magistrates, but was not called to state what she knew about the case. (This was explained by its being stated that the magisterial examination occupied a very long time and the magistrates having intimated their intention of committing the prisoners for trial, the solicitor for the accused reserved their defence.) Alfred Wray, a hurdle maker, who had gone to the Bull to get his lunch, corroborated the last witness as to Mrs. Jeeves not being present when Reeves called.

James Palmer and Joseph Peters, both of whom work for Capt. Darton of Preston stated that Thomas Jeeves was also working for him on the 2nd March and that they saw him at work on the premises at nine o'clock in the morning.

Capt. Darton stated that Jeeves had worked for him for about two years and he spoke to him in his orchard at half-past nine on the morning in question. Witness saw what work Jeeves had done before he spoke to him and he should say he must have been at work quite half-an-hour before. Jeeves lived two miles from witnesses' house. Witness had known him all his life and had always found him to be a respectable, honest man. The witness then said he should like to know whether a convicted prisoner was allowed to talk to the witnesses concerned in the case. He, together with the rest of the witnesses, had been waiting out of Court since the case had commenced and he had noticed Matthew Reeves talking to his brother Joseph Reeves (who was concerned in the next case) and whispering in his ear so quietly that no one could hear what he was saying. It had nothing to do with the present case but witness thought he would mention it as he liked to see the rights and the wrongs of the case. The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Martha Chalkley, sister to the female prisoner, stated that the latter was with her from twenty minutes to eleven until half-past four on the 2nd March and that during that time they went to a funeral together.

This closed the evidence for the defence and Inspector Reynolds and Police-constable were recalled by the prosecution to contradict Currell's statement that she told them she received the maize and that Mrs. Jeeves was out when Reeves brought it. Mr. Reynolds said he saw her at the house the third time he went there, between eight and nine o'clock and he believed she said something but he did not know what it was because two or three people were talking together at the time. The constable, being otherwise occupied, said he did not pay any attention to what was said.

The chairman, in summing up, said the jury would agree with him that it was a very strange story and that on one side or the other there had been portentous perjury. But even if they believed the story for the prosecution to be true, it would be their duty to acquit the female prisoner; because he thought they must take it that she was under what the law recognised as the influence of her husband. Alluding to the evidence of the principal witnesses for the defence, he said he saw no reason to distrust it; but, on the other hand, the jury must remember that Matthew Reeves, the chief witness for the prosecution, was under conviction at the present time and that when he first made his statement he had the strongest possible reason for assisting the prosecution.

The jury after three or four minutes deliberation returned a verdict of not guilty against both prisoners.

The verdict was received with some slight attempt at applause which was at once suppressed.

The accused were then discharged.

William Jeeves, aged 38, landlord of the Chequers Inn at Preston was then indicted for receiving the remaining two bushels of maize (that in the sack belonging to the Great Northern Railway Company) belonging to Mr. C. C. Hale; but after the verdict given in the former case, no evidence was offered for the prosecution and a verdict of not guilty was returned by the jury.

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