

THE CURIOUS CASE OF P.C. EDWARD JARRETT.

Successive Superintendents at Merthyr were involved in what became known as the 'Battle for China'. Not only did they have to deal with the serious crime and civil disorder in that district, but also with the agitation stemming from the Chartist Movement. Chartism was at its height between 1836 and 1848. It stood for radical reform of Parliament, the electoral system, and manhood suffrage. It also wanted the abolition of the new Police Force. It was very strong in Merthyr; frequent meetings were held in the town and there was a good deal of agitation in support of the Movement. There was often confrontation between police and agitators.

In 1843 a particularly violent affray between soldiers, civilians and the police took place in Dowlais. Some soldiers, when drunk, attacked a workman with a bayonet. A Sergeant Wrenn attempted to arrest one of the soldiers where upon he (the soldier) said that he would "rip the b----y guts out of Sergeant Wrenn". Fortunately help arrived and the soldiers were taken into custody.

Sergeant Wrenn, a single man, lodged with P.C. Edward Jarrett and his wife at Dowlais Police Station. P.C. Jarrett was employed by the Iron Company as a "private company" man, and the station was provided by the Company as a lock-up. The County Police were allowed to use it. P.C. Jarrett had been a Sergeant at Cowbridge, but in 1842 he had been reduced in rank to constable for "misconduct". The reason is unknown, although it was probably for being drunk and disorderly on more than one occasion. He later became a Sergeant in the Ironworks at Rhymney and then Superintendent at the Tredegar Ironworks.

Sergeant Wrenn became Superintendent at Merthyr in 1846 and renewed the campaign against the 'China' trouble spot. Within 12 months more than 60 of the criminals from this district had been jailed.



In this photograph taken in 1889 at Bridgend, PC Evans is seated on the right, while Sergeant Davies (who investigated the case) is standing on the left.

At the Hearing, the Sergeant testified that on the day before the incident (Easter Monday) he had posted PC Evans on duty at 2 pm with orders to return to Station duties at 5 pm and to meet on the beat at Nash at 8pm. Evans did not return and the Sergeant had to make the Nash meeting himself. On his return to Cowbridge he saw the Constable in the town and told him that he would be reported for being absent from the station without leave.

The next morning Evans was booked out on duty at 8.30 am and returned to the station at 1 pm when “he appeared to be in a sullen mood and scarcely spoke”. The Sergeant then continued, “About 2pm I saw him preparing to go out and I told him I did not want him to go out, to which he replied that he was going out because he wanted to see PC Williams of Llanharan. He

“Directly we were on the ground he made for my eyes and I said, “Leave my eyes alone and prevented him two or three times by removing his hands, but he came back and had his thumb in my eye and had it out, and started on the other one. I shouted, “Roberts, Roberts” and I thought I was finished, but fortunately Mrs. Trott came out and dragged him off me. I was then taken to Trott’s house and Dr. Mellor removed my eye completely.”

The Sergeant also testified that a prisoner had complained to him months earlier that PC Evans had attacked his eyes and injured them in a struggle.

Cross examination revealed that the defence would be that the Sergeant was drunk, that the injury to the eye had been caused by the handle of the door to the Eagle Stores as he fell, and not by the deliberate action of the defendant as described by the witness.

The Sergeant admitted that he had had one drink at the Cowbridge Arms (which was near the “Duke” on the same side of the road) and one at The Bear Hotel, but denied that he went into the Duke of Wellington, had a drink there, and was assisted out of the house by the licensee who left him holding on to the door-post.

He also denied that he had to use his hands to steady himself when he left the Bear; that he staggered as he stood outside the Mason’s Arms; that he was under the influence of drink in the Horse and Groom; that he fell against the warehouse door and that he had not reported himself for drinking on duty. He testified that he had told the Superintendent about it.

To an objection to the examination as to drinking, the defending solicitor said he could bring half a dozen witnesses to prove the Sergeant was under the influence of drink that night, which the prosecution countered by saying that if this were allowed he would bring a dozen witnesses to prove otherwise.

For the prosecution, Mrs. Trott and a Mrs. Morgan testified that the whole struggle took place on the ground and that the parties had not fallen against the storehouse door. Mrs. Trott, who had run to the scene to pull away the Constable, corroborated the Sergeant in that Evans was working his hands over Martin’s face. Sergeant John Davies of Bridgend (later to become Superintendent there) produced a statement made by the defendant which made no mention of the fall against the warehouse door of the Eagle Stores.

did go out and did not return until 4pm. This was quite contrary to the rules. When he returned he walked straight into the garden at the back of the Station, passed me by the door and did not say a word. He appeared terribly sullen. When my wife sent the girl to ask whether he wanted tea, he said no."

"I left the Station about 6.15pm and returned at 6.30pm to look for the defendant. He was not at the Station where he ought to have been. I next saw him on duty by the Town Hall at about 9.30pm. I spoke to him and asked if anything particular had occurred. I saw him next shortly at 11 pm and told him what I had heard about him, that instead of being at the Station he had been out in plain clothes, fishing, and that I would report him. He said that I could do as I liked. This was on the road near the Masons Arms."

"I next saw him near the Eagle Stores shortly after midnight, on my way to the Station. A man named Roberts was with him. Roberts said to me, "You did all you could to harm me last Tuesday". When I asked him what he meant he said, "You swore I was drunk and I lost the case when I had old Jenkins on in court". I told him not to bother me, or we would lock him up. At this point, Alderman Edward John opened his window to us and I said "All right Mr. John, we are off" and walked with the defendant towards the Police Station, then after 50 yards, turned to walk the town again."

"As we walked a conversation took place between us. The defendant started it by saying, "You don't know your job, talking of locking up a man who had committed no offence". I told him I did not wish to lock him up, only to get rid of him. He then said, "You are not fit to be a Sergeant, I am a better man than you and know my duty a great deal better". I said, "All right, if you do" to which he said, "You are not fit to be a Sergeant talking about locking people up." Then he accused me and said, "You are down on me too". I told him I was not, but his manner warned me that something was about to take place."

"We were just opposite the Globe (*which was a public house in The Butts*), when I said to him, "Unless you drop it I shall go back to the Station" and the words had scarcely left my lips when he sprang on me like some infuriated brute. He tried to get me down, and I tried to free myself. I got away, but he flew at me again, tripped me and I fell in the channel at the side of the road, with him on top of me."