

Learning Activity

This resource provides learning activities for your students using People's Collection Wales. It forms part of a series of three learning resources relating to Swansea in the 1850s.

Victorian Swansea - Counting Heads
Victorian Swansea - People and Possessions
Victorian Swansea - People's Stories

➔ **Key Stage**

Key Stage 2

➔ **Title**

Victorian Swansea - People's Stories

➔ **Author**

**Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales**

Introduction

Swansea 1850s - People's Stories

How can we find out about the ordinary people who lived and worked in Swansea in the 1850s?

This Learning Activity explores some of the sources which briefly record moments in the lives of the people who otherwise disappear from history and encourages students to interpret the sources and create characters themselves.

What was Walter Butt doing with a pineapple? Why was Mrs Phillips criticised for selling fruit on a Sunday?

Learning objectives

Learners will be able to:

- Identify the ways in which the past is represented / interpreted
- Understand why people did things, what caused specific events and the consequences of those events
- Distinguish between 'fact' and 'opinion' giving some evidence / knowledge based reasons for this

1. Meet Walter Butt, a "juvenile freak"!

We would probably never know anything about Walter Butt, 14, if he hadn't been accused of stealing a pineapple from a fruit shop on Wind Street on a Sunday in March 1851.

Walter appears in the Swansea Court Reports in *The Cambrian* 28 March 1851, the same week as the census forms are being delivered to Swansea households.

Read the article "Juvenile Freaks" from *The Cambrian*.

dismissed.

JUVENILE FREAKS.—Walter Butt, a lad, son of Walter Butt, cordwainer, was charged with having stolen, on Sunday last, a pineapple, from the shop of Mrs. Phelps. The prisoner said he was tipsy—he could not tell whether he was guilty or not.

Mrs. Phelps was then examined, who said: My husband keeps a fruit shop in Wind-street, in this town. On Sunday last, a lot of boys, accompanied by the prisoner, came into the shop and bought some fruit. Immediately after they left the shop, I missed a pineapple. It was placed in the window, and I saw it there just before the boys came in. I went outside the door, and I saw some of the boys there, but the prisoner was gone. I ordered my servant to take one of the boys. She did so. In about five minutes, Thomas Vickridge brought back the pineapple, now produced. It is worth 5s. I saw the prisoner Butt in the shop with the other boys.

Thomas Vickridge, one of the prisoner's companions, on being sworn, said: About five o'clock on Sunday evening I met the prisoner in Salubrious-place—the Fisher-street end. He took a pineapple out of his pocket, and said he would give me a penny if I would take it back to the shop a little above Salubrious-place. I took the apple back, and delivered it to Mrs. Phelps, when she detained me, and gave me into custody.

Mrs. Phelps re-called by the Mayor: I lost half a hundred of cigars from the shop last Sunday week. I am in the habit of selling fruit on a Sunday.

Vickridge re-examined: Butt did not pay me the penny, but he promised to do so.

The Mayor said that it was a lamentable thing to see a boy of only 13 years of age commit such an offence, and being disgrace on his family. It appeared to him, however, that Mrs. Phelps had no right to keep her shop open on a Sunday, as a temptation for boys. Under such circumstances, the Bench were disposed to be lenient, and their decision was, that they would not punish Butt this time, but would require that the father should enter into sureties that the son should not offend again.—The father was then bound over in the sum of 10l., and the prisoner was discharged with a severe reprimand.

Patrick Sheen, a ruffianly Irishman, was charged with drunkenness, and ill-using P.C. George Jones. Strange to say, although

The Cambrian - Juvenile freaks 1851

Make a list of all the FACTS about Walter's case. Why can't Walter say whether he did steal the pineapple or not? There are several inaccuracies in the court report. Can you pick at least one out?

Go to the Excel transcript of Wind St in 1851. Search for Phelps in the surnames. If you can't find this, then can you find a similar surname? Or try searching for Fruiterer in Occupations. What do you find?

Does Mrs "Phelps" husband keep a fruit shop or does he have a different occupation? What does he have in common with Walter's father? What does a cordwainer do?

Why is Mrs "Phelps", the victim of the crime, criticised by the Mayor? Do you think this is fair?

What judgement does the court make? Do you think Walter was lucky?

Now look at the 1851 Census record for Walter Butt and his family. If the court had been harsher on Walter he might not have been in his family's census record but in the one for Swansea Gaol!

When you look at the names of his family you might notice another mistake in the court report!

[Wind Street Census](#)

[The Cambrian - Juvenile Freaks 1851](#)

2. Stealing a Pineapple!



The Cambrian Juvenile freaks 1851

Why would Walter steal a pineapple? Think of all the reasons you can why he would do that. Make a class list!

Where was the pineapple in the shop? What does this suggest about it?

Where did Walter hide the pineapple? What does this tell us about it?

How much was the pineapple worth according to Mrs Phelps? How much do pineapples cost today? Go to <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter> and enter the cost of the pineapple and 1851 and you will see what that amount is worth today. What does the value in 1851 say about who might be able to afford to buy a pineapple?

Now use the internet to see what you can find out about pineapples. These two sites might help you:

See the huge pineapple on the Dunmore Estate, Scotland added to a garden pavilion in 1777 <http://www.falkirklocalhistorysociety.co.uk/gallery/index.php?txtMode=view&cid=6&pid=116>

A review of the book *The Pineapple: King of Fruits* published in 2006 described the pineapple as the Prada handbag of its day <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/1036388/the-pineapple/>

Where do they grow? Why are they called pineapples? When did they come to Britain? How did they get here? When was the first one grown in Britain? Who in Britain could afford to grow and eat pineapples in the 19th century? Where would Mrs Phelps have got her pineapple from, do you think?

Now can you say why Walter stole the pineapple?

3. Walter Butt - "Disgrace on his Family"

Can we find anything else out about Walter?

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Parish or Township of		Subdivision or District of		City or Borough		Town of		Parish of	
Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of Male Inhabitants	Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, Deaf, or Dumb	Whether Sick, or Infirm, or Pauper	Whether Married, Single, Widowed, or Divorced
48 Victoria Road	John Butt	Head	Mar	37	Bookbinder, German	Switzerland			
	Mary	Wife	Mar	34		Switzerland			
	John	Son	Un	7	Bookbinder, German	Switzerland			
	James	Son	Un	5	Scholar	Switzerland			
	Julia	Daughter	Un	4	None	Switzerland			
	Walter	Son	Un	4	Scholar	Switzerland			
	Sarah	Daughter	Un	2		Switzerland			
	Emma	Daughter	Un	10		Switzerland			
	William	Son	Un	1		Switzerland			
	Ann	Daughter	Un	1		Switzerland			
11 Victoria Road	David Butt	Head	Mar	46	Cart Conductor	Switzerland			

1851 census butt family

Look at the 1851 Census record for Walter Butt and his family. Notice their address, the number of children, occupations and where they were all born.

Can you work out when the family moved to Swansea?

Notice the occupations in the family. Find out what they mean. How many people are earning in the family?

When you look at the names of his family you might also notice another mistake in the court report!

The pineapple was said to be worth 5 shillings and Walter's father had to pay a bond of 10 shillings to ensure Walter's good behaviour.

If the court had been harsher on Walter he might not have been in his family's census record but in the one for Swansea Gaol!

In groups, develop a small play about this week in Walter's life. You could include Sunday's robbery, the court appearance and the family around the dinner table filling in the census householder's schedule and talking about Walter's bringing disgrace on his family. Think about props and costume.

You might like to photograph or film the plays and upload them onto People's Collection Wales or use photographs to create a story for People's Collection Wales.

[Census entry for John and Mary Butt](#)