



Crime News

Assault

Bishopstone 1897

Swindon Police Court, Monday

An Aged Prisoner

William Wheeler, an old man, of Bishopstone, who said he was 86 years of age and had no friends or relations, was brought up in custody charged with indecently assaulting **Martha Matilda Cockhead**, a girl of 12 years, at Bishopstone on April 29th.

The girl said she was standing at the door of her mother's house on Thursday, April 29th. About one p.m., when prisoner asked her "to go to the Copse" with him. It was not far away, and she went with him. He there committed the assault upon her, afterwards giving her sixpence. She consented to what he did, and did not scream or call out.

Elsie Ellen Johnson, in the employ of Mr. Dore of Bishopstone, said from what another girl named Florence Telling, of Ashbury, told her, she went to the copse where the prisoner was with the girl Cockhead. Both were lying down, and she could see them by looking over a low hedge.

Sarah Cockhead, mother of the child having given some formal evidence, P.C. Randall was called, and said he saw prisoner at his lodgings on Friday last, and told him he should charge him with indecent assault. Witness did not caution him. Prisoner admitted being in the copse with the girl. Witness then apprehended him, and brought him to Swindon. Prisoner had nothing to say in reply to the charge, and he was committed to take his trial at the Assizes this month at Salisbury.

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 8 May 1897

The Serious Charge Against a Bishopstone Man **Death of The Prisoner**

The borough Coroner, Mr. G. S. A. Waylen, held the inquest at the Devizes prison, Friday evening, on the body of **William Wheeler**. The deceased was a man aged 86, who was admitted on the 3rd May, having been committed for trial from the Swindon division on a charge of indecent assault at Bishopstone, which he described as his native place. He was a feeble old man, and on the 10th inst. Dr. Carless, gaol surgeon, ordered him into the infirmary diet, but previous to this he had been on the diet usual in the case of prisoners awaiting trial, which is superior to prisoners diet, and also had a better bed. There was nothing to indicate he was going to die, but he expired somewhat suddenly while in bed in the infirmary on Thursday morning, in the presence of George Bartlett who was on duty as temporary assistant, Dr.

Carless being at the time in the prison precincts. The Coroner had given time for inquires to be made as to prisoners friends, also for an examination to be made of the body as deceased had a black eye. The result of the inquires of the Swindon Divisional Police showed that nothing was known as to any friends of the deceased and that the black eye resulted from his falling out of bed while he was in the cells at Swindon police station, his bed next night being made up on the floor. That this was so was also the version of the old man himself, when asked about it on admission to the gaol. Dr. Carless's examination of the body proved that the inquiry to the clerk had nothing to do with death which resulted from syncope. In witness called were Mr. J. L. Smith (Governor), Dr. Carless, Supt. Buchanan and George Bartlett. The jury returned a verdict of "Death from Natural Causes".

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 15 May 1897