



Crime and Punishment

Melksham

SHEEP STEALING 1828

William Brunsdon, Joseph Knee and Robert Somner (all of Seend) stood indicted for feloniously killing and stealing a wether sheep at Poulshot, the property of Mr C Chandler.

The sheep was missed early on Sunday morning the 27th April; and, on searching the prosecutor's field, the skin was found with the entrails wrapped in it; the prosecutor observing some very large foot marks, suspected the prisoner Brunsdon; and on searching an orchard in which Brunsdon's house is situated, a shoulder of mutton and other parts of a sheep, with a quantity of suet, tied up in a bag, were found concealed, upon which Brunsdon was taken into custody: one of his shoes was afterwards compared with the foot marks in the field, and found to correspond exactly. It having been ascertained that the other prisoners were drinking with Brunsdon late on Saturday night at a public house at Seend, the prosecutor caused their houses to be searched, but nothing was found. A Mrs Jones of Melksham, however, informed the prosecutor that Somner came to her house as early as six o'clock on the Sunday morning, with a piece of mutton and some suet, part of which was cooked for breakfast, dinner and supper, and of which Somner and Knee partook; and the prisoner Knee, having afterwards said to a woman who lodged with Jones that he wished to see Somner, for that Brunsdon was in custody about stealing the sheep, that the mutton had been found which was hid in Farmer Porter's rick, and he wished to see Somner for fear he would peach; they were both apprehended, and, with Brunsdon, committed to Devizes Bridewell, for further examination.

Whilst in prison, and before his final committal, Brunsdon contrived to extract a great many of the nails from his shoes, and throw them out of his cell window, but they were afterwards found and fitted with the shoe. The prosecutor produced the turf in which was one of Brunsdon's foot marks in court, which was compared with Brunsdon's shoes (of extraordinary length of 13 inches) Brunsdon however, brought a shoemaker of the name of Ruffy, who made the shoes, to prove that he had often made shoes for other persons off the same last; but unfortunately, in his cross examination he admitted that some of nails found under the cell window were originally in Brunsdon's shoes; and this fact, coupled with the evidence of the witnesses for the prosecution, left no doubt of Brunsdon's guilt; A very strong case, consisting of circumstantial evidence, was made out against the other prisoners, but, there being nothing positive, the jury acquitted them, and found Brunsdon alone guilty – and the judge having intimated to him that he would not remain in this country, he was taken from the dock.

The prisoner Brunsdon is a man of extraordinary strength and stature, and has long infested the neighbourhood of Seend, living solely by plunder. Too much therefore cannot be given to Mr Chandler for his exertions in bringing him to justice. **Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette Thursday 24 July 1828**

[According to the Criminal Registers William Brunsdon was sentenced to death at the Wiltshire Summer Assizes 19 July 1828. His conviction was commuted to transportation for 14 years and he was sent to New South Wales on 12th March 1829 aboard the Convict Transportation Ship "Waterloo"]