



## *SWING RIOTS IN WOODBOROUGH*

The Swing Riots, so called because a number of threatening letters were signed in the name of the mythical leader Captain Swing, began in the summer of 1830.

The main causes of the uprising were low wages and lack of regular employment, the high price of bread (the harvest of 1829 had been particularly poor) and the introduction of threshing machines which took work away from the men.

Until early November the riots were confined mainly to Kent, Surrey and Sussex, but by late November they had spread to most of Southern England. The first attack in Wiltshire was reported on Monday, 8th November 1830 when a wheat rick was set on fire at Maddington.

The riots took on several forms – initially, rick burning and threatening letters but, as the trouble spread, large gangs of local men, under the leadership of a Captain, roamed the countryside demanding money, food and drink, and destroying farm machinery. Many farmers dismantled their threshing machines in the hope that this would placate the mob, but the rioters would still break up, or set fire to, the machine parts, typically demanding payment of one sovereign for each machine destroyed.

The first recorded trouble in the Vale of Pewsey arose on Sunday, 21 November when a mob, which included a local man (James Lane), destroyed a thrashing machine at the farm of Joseph Perry at Allington in the Parish of All Cannings. Rumours that further trouble was imminent were circulating the following day when it was known that men had been going around the farms and villages in the All Cannings, Patney and Manningford areas, persuading men to join them in their demand for higher wages and the destruction of machines. Later, some would claim that they were 'pressed', rather than persuaded.

On the morning of Tuesday, 23 November a large mob was met by Sir Edward Poore at Manningford Abbots. Sir Edward offered to mediate between the men and their employers, with the aim of improving their wages, and to meet again the next day, either at his own home or in Pewsey. The men agreed and, giving them a sovereign, Sir Edward returned home believing that the mob had dispersed.

However, by mid-day the various mobs circulating the area, now numbering between 200 and 300 men, had assembled at the Rose & Crown in Little Woodborough and Charles Davis had made himself their Captain. Another leading member of the mob was James Lane, who had been seen in the mob destroying a thrashing machine at Allington in All Canning two days earlier. Augustus Hare, the Rector at nearby Alton Barnes, later wrote that the greater part of the rioters were in fact men that worked at the Wharf at Honey Street in Woodborough. The Rector also recorded that these men earned between 12 and 20 shillings per week (more than twice that earned by agricultural labourers),

spending much of this in the local beer shops. The newspapers would later refer to the mob as the 'Woodborough Rioters'.

Having refreshed themselves with bread, cheese and beer, the mob headed for the farm of John Clift in Woodborough. Many of the men were armed with sledge hammers, iron bars and hammers. A small party of seven men, including Laban Stone, was sent a little way ahead of the main party and confronted John Clift demanding money and telling him that they were there to break his machines. John Clift gave Laban Stone two half crowns, following which the mob broke open two barns and destroyed a thrashing machine, a chaff cutting machine and a haymaking machine.

However, the mob was still not satisfied and, surrounding the windows of the house waving their weapons, demanded more money. Initially, John Clift gave them two half crowns and a five shilling piece but it took a further payment of half a sovereign before the mob were finally satisfied and left the farm.

The mob then moved to two further farms in Woodborough, run by Mr Miller and John Neates, breaking machinery at both, before heading northwards crossing the bridge over the Kennet and Avon canal at Honey Street and onto Alton Barnes.

The mob arrived in Alton Barnes just before 2 o'clock in the afternoon and caused considerable damage (see separate account of the Swing Riots in Alton Barnes), before later moving onto Stanton St. Bernard.

Word of the mob's activities was hurriedly reported to Devizes where the Devizes, Chippenham and Melksham troops of the Yeomanry under Captain Warriner were stationed. The Yeomanry mobilised and by 6 o'clock were following the mob from Stanton St. Bernard back to Woodborough.

Some of the mob had returned to the Rose & Crown in Little Woodborough, doubtless with the intent of spending the money they had collected during the day. After a short confrontation 28 rioters were captured and taken to the Old Bridewell House of Correction in Devizes. At Chirton, on the way back to Devizes, an attempt was made by some of the scattered rioters to rescue the 28 prisoners, but this was repelled.

In the following days the Devizes troop of Yeomanry scoured the villages of Alton, Allington, Manningford and some of the other villages in the Pewsey Vale looking for the 'Woodborough Rioters'. The Captain of the mob, Charles Davis was captured on the following day (24 November), together with another known rioter, John Rose, who had only recently returned from transportation in Australia. Charles Davis was easily recognised as he had received a wound to his head from a shot from a pistol owned by Robert Pile of Alton Barnes.

The continued presence of the Yeomanry and the capture of the mob leaders ensured that there were no further major disturbances in the Vale of Pewsey, although isolated cases of threatening letters and rick burning were reported for some months. However, by the end of November 1830 the worst of the riots in this part of Wiltshire were over.

Those rioters that were identified and captured, being in the main local men, were sent for trial at the Special Commission, which opened at Salisbury on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1830. The trial of those charged with events at the farm of John Clift in Woodborough was held on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1831 and details of the charges and convictions are set out below.

**Offence: On 23 Nov 1830, at Woodborough, destroying a Thrashing Machine of John Cliff**

Surname	Forenames	Age <sup>1</sup>	Born <sup>2</sup>	Occupation	Abode <sup>3</sup>	Verdict	Sentence
Burden	James	36	1794 <sup>4</sup>	Labourer	Chirton	Guilty	7 Years Transportation
Dunford	Stephen	21	1809	Ag Lab	Manningford Bruce	Acquitted	
Gardener	James	22	1808			Acquitted	
Goddard	Thomas	20	1810			Acquitted	
King	Harry	22	1808			Acquitted	
Lake	Edward	29	1801	Labourer	Manningford Abbots	Acquitted	
Lane	James	36	1794 <sup>5</sup>	Labourer	All Cannings	Guilty	7 Years Transportation
Pinchin	John	26	1804 <sup>6</sup>	Labourer	Pewsey	Guilty	7 Years Transportation
Roberts	Isaac	22	1808	Labourer	Manningford Bruce	Guilty	7 Years Transportation
Romain	Robert	25	1805		Urchfont	Acquitted	
Smith	George	36	1794 <sup>7</sup>	Blacksmith	Marden	Guilty	7 Years Transportation
Wells	Thomas	21	1809	Labourer	Patney	Guilty	7 Years Transportation

**Offence: On 23 Nov 1830, at Woodborough, robbing John Cliff of 1 sovereign & other monies his property**

Surname	Forenames	Age	Born	Occupation	Abode	Verdict	Sentence
Burden	James	36	1794	Labourer	Chirton	Acquitted	
Davis	Charles	31	1798 <sup>8</sup>	Ag Lab	Wilsford	Guilty	Transported for Life <sup>9</sup>
Dunford	Stephen	21	1809	Ag Lab	Manningford Bruce	Acquitted	
Gardener	James	22	1808			Acquitted	
Goddard	Thomas	20	1810			Acquitted	
King	Harry	22	1808			Acquitted	
Lake	Edward	29	1801	Labourer	Manningford Abbots	Acquitted	
Lane	James	36	1794	Labourer	All Cannings	Acquitted	
Pinchin	John	26	1804	Labourer	Pewsey	Acquitted	
Roberts	Isaac	22	1808	Labourer	Manningford Bruce	Acquitted	
Smith	George	36	1794	Blacksmith	Marden	Acquitted	
Stone	Laban	22	1807 <sup>10</sup>	Groom	Urchfont	Guilty	Transported for Life <sup>11</sup>
Wells	Thomas	21	1809	Labourer	Patney	Acquitted	

<sup>1</sup> As recorded at the time of arrest in 1830.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated back from age in 1830 – although this may not be accurate (reference known baptism dates).

<sup>3</sup> Abode taken from transportation documents, evidence from Parish records for marriage/ birth of children and place of own baptism (in that order).

<sup>4</sup> Baptised Manningford Bruce 8 September 1793.

<sup>5</sup> Baptised Bishops Canning 11 October 1795.

<sup>6</sup> Baptised Beechingstoke 15 September 1803.

<sup>7</sup> Baptised Marden 15 June 1794.

<sup>8</sup> Baptised Wilsford 30 September 1798.

<sup>9</sup> Original sentence was death by hanging, but this was reduced to transportation for life. However, Charles Davis died at Liverpool Hospital, in New South Wales, shortly after reaching Australia on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1831.

<sup>10</sup> Baptised Urchfont 18 May 1807

<sup>11</sup> Original sentence was death by hanging, but this was reduced to transportation for life.