



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

IN SEDLESCOMBE

CONTENTS

- Early local 19th century background page 3
- Sussex Militia in Sedlescombe page 4
- Dennetts, Crime and Transportation pages 5-11
- Various Sedlescombe crimes pages 12-14
- Magistrates page 15
- Begging, Fraud, Poaching pages 16-18
- Battle Workhouse page 19
- Animals pages 20-22
- Sedlescombe shooting accidents page 23
- P.C. Bryan Graves page 24
- Acknowledgements page 25

IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY IN SEDLESCOMB – THEN WRITTEN WITHOUT AT “E” AT THE END:

- Poor people were starving because of the high price of wheat (a soup kitchen was set up in Hastings).
- Serious crimes were punished by transportation to the newly-discovered country of Australia. Even children could be whipped for a minor offence.
- There were lots of early deaths, especially of children from disease and illness, including influenza.
- The people were involved with animal farming, hops, the tanyard, charcoal and gunpowder.
- There were serious worries about invasion. 1800 was a time of political and social unrest in Britain and of warmongering abroad. The French led by Napoleon Bonaparte had already taken over several European countries and now had his eyes set on Britain just across the Channel from France. Napoleon, or Boney as we called him, is said to have dismissed the English Channel by describing it as *“but a ditch”* which *“anyone can cross who has courage”*. There were newspaper rumours of a massive flat French raft powered by windmills and paddle-wheels that would be able to cross the Channel. Most surprising of all, was that in 1800 Napoleon had a plan to secretly dig a tunnel under the Channel to reach our shores. Fortunately, the French were not successful although we were at war with them between 1803 and 1815.

THE CHURCHWARDENS FOR SEDLESCOMB(E) WERE TASKED WITH DRAWING LOTS TO FIND MEN FROM THE PARISH OF SEDLESCOMB(E) TO SERVE IN THE SUSSEX MILITIA IN CASE OF INVASION BY THE FRENCH

In 1810, a notice appeared in the Kentish Gazette newspaper offering a FIVE GUINEA REWARD (equivalent today to £250) for the apprehension into custody of a man named **JOHN MOON** who, it was said, had been drawn in a lot to serve in the *Sussex Local Militia, for the Parish of Sedlescomb*.

John Moon was at the time living at Boughton under Blean, near Faverham, Kent where he was employed in husbandry work but he was, when requested, expected to report for duty in the parish of his birth. (John Moon does not, however, appear in the Parish Baptismal Register for the 18th century.) John Moon had absconded and the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish of Sedlescomb were therefore offering the reward of 5 guineas to anyone who could provide information regarding his whereabouts.

At the bottom of the advert, was a description of John Moon which would probably describe many men of that time:

“John Moon is about 5 feet 6 inches tall, rather stout, of light complexion and about 20 years of age.”

The records do not record whether John Moon was ever found or whether anyone claimed the reward!

IN THE 18TH & 19TH CENTURIES, SEDLESCOMBE'S ROADS WERE BAD IN THE EXTREME. DEEPLY RUTTED FROM THE ANIMALS AND CARTS TRANSPORTING HEAVY IRON, CANNONS, GUNS, ETC. MADE LOCALLY. IN SUMMER, THEY WERE INCHES DEEP WITH DUST.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, roads in this area were dangerous places, especially outside towns and villages. Many a lone traveller on horseback would be attacked by one or more highwaymen who stole anything of value and left him tied up by the roadside.

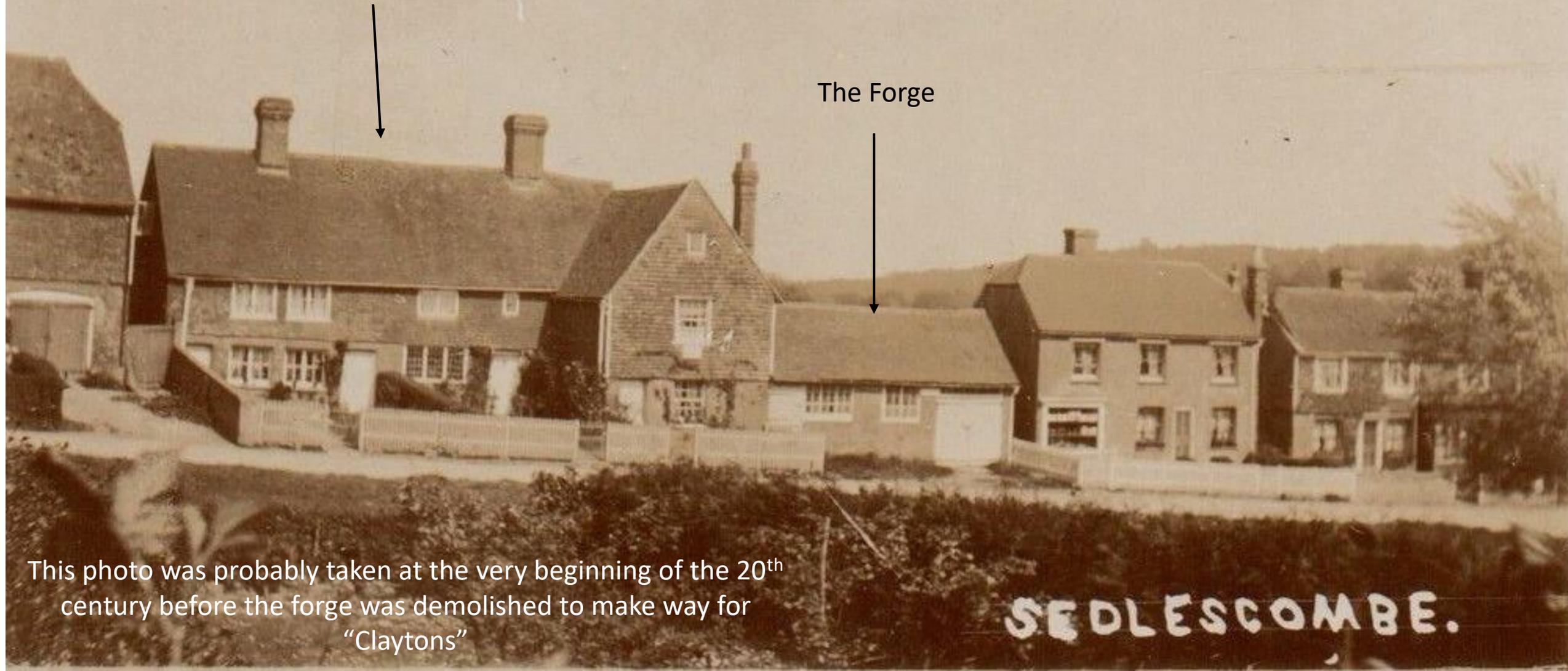
Highway robbery was one of about 200 crimes that carried the death penalty.

So, it was no surprise that when in 1797 Sedlescombe's **WILL DENNETT** was found guilty at the Court of Sessions at Lewes Assizes of committing highway robbery, as well as burglary, Will was condemned:

TO BE HANGED BY THE NECK UNTIL HE BE DEAD

Will was one of six sons of the Sedlescombe Village Blacksmith living in Forge Cottages in the centre of the Village beside the Green. Born in 1776, he was christened in Whatlington Church.

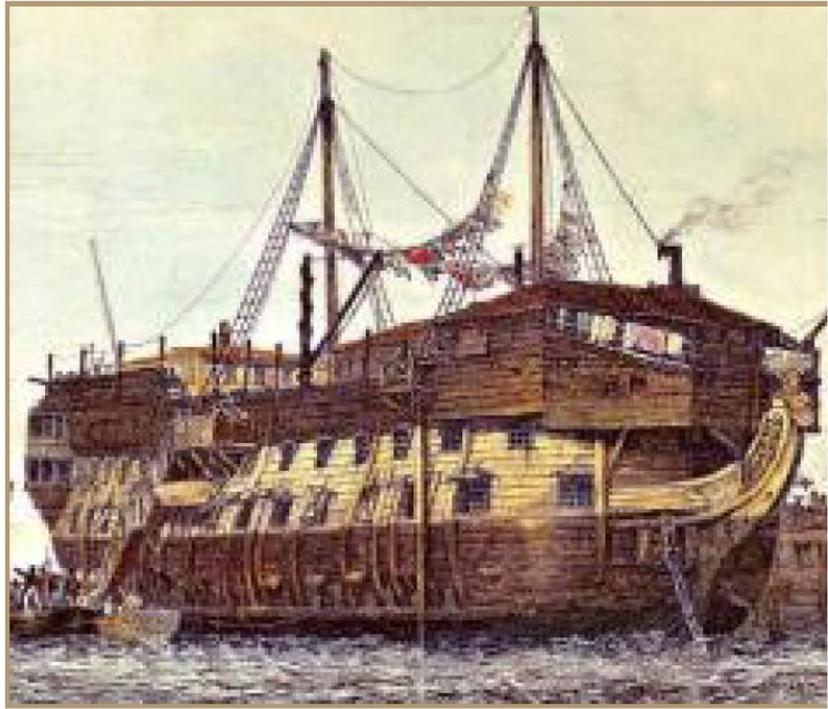
Forge Cottages have their origins in the 15th century and parts of the building are now thought to be the oldest surviving in the Village.



This photo was probably taken at the very beginning of the 20th century before the forge was demolished to make way for "Claytons"

SEDLESCOMBE.

Transportation was a good choice for authorities as it got rid of people who were causing trouble, was cheap as the only cost was the journeys and it avoided public scandal of hangings which sometimes resulted in demonstrations and unrest.



Prison Hulk

TRANSPORTATION FOR WILL DENNETT OF FORGE COTTAGES, SEDLESCOMBE

Despite Will Dennett being given a capital sentence, he like many others escaped this ultimate form of punishment. The authorities were concerned that capital punishment did not achieve the intended aim of deterring others from committing crime. Despite significant numbers of executions in earlier years, crime had continued unabated.

Transportation to the new Great British colonies was becoming an accepted alternative to capital punishment. This was especially the case if the prisoner was young and healthy and, maybe, as in Will's case, had some skills, such as blacksmithing, which could be useful in the new colonies.

After a couple of years of imprisonment, possibly on one of two dreadful prison hulks in The Thames, Will's appeal against his harsh sentence was heard in the Court of Common Pleas and allowed with the words:

LET HIM BE TRANSPORTED BEYOND THE SEAS FOR 14 YEARS

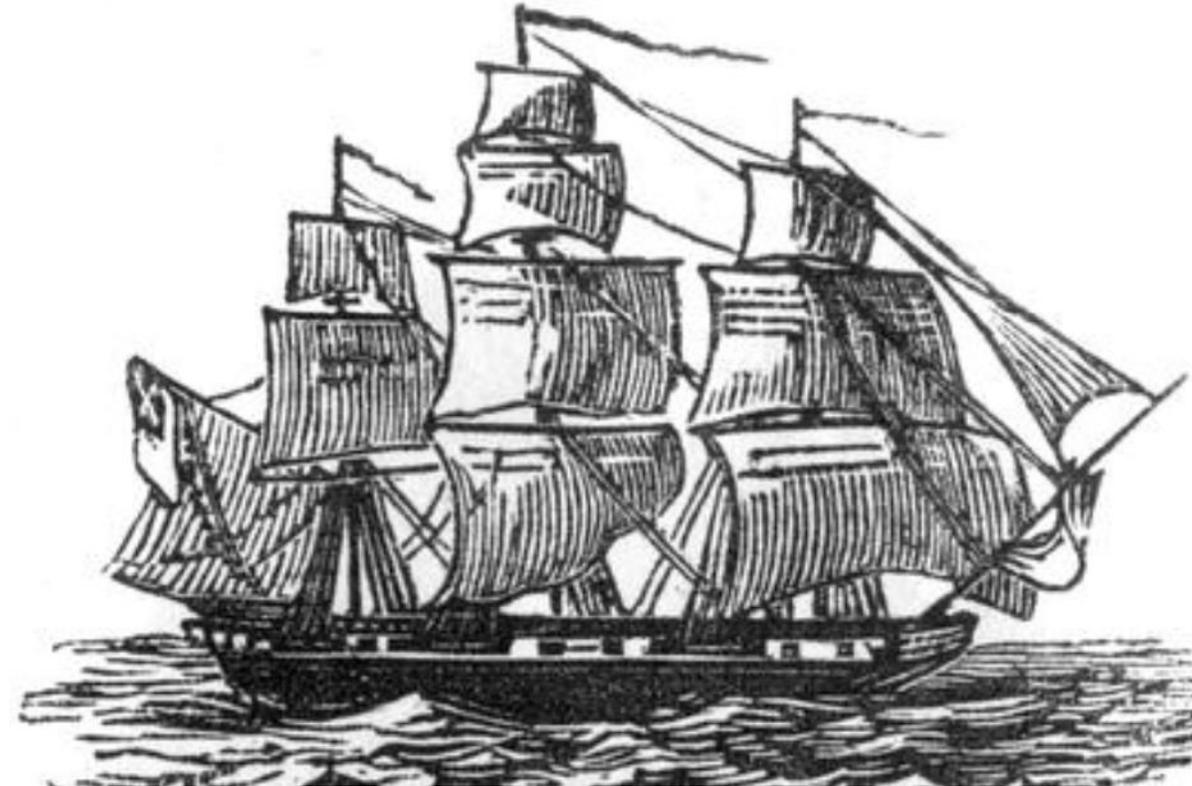
TRANSPORTATION TO AUSTRALIA FOR WILL DENNETT

We know that Will Dennett sailed on the **ROYAL ADMIRAL 2** in 1800 in convoy with other fighting ships for protection against the French. She had 24 guns of her own. This was only the third convict ship to arrive in Australia since discovery of the land by Europeans.

The journey from London to Norfolk Island took 7 long months. 300 convicts were on board as well as 11 missionaries on their way to the South Seas. From contemporary accounts, the voyage was thoroughly unpleasant with unrest amongst the convicts and crew as well as goal fever, probably actually typhoid.

We can only imagine the horrors of being shackled in a dark hold close to other delirious men, crawling with lice, being sick all over the place while the ship pitched and tossed in rough seas or wallowed from side to side when becalmed in the hot and unpredictable doldrums near the Equator for nearly 2 months. Many a man in these circumstances did not survive the journey across the world.

Fights were always breaking out amongst the convicts who would steal from each other whenever they could. Any minor misdemeanour would be rewarded with a couple of dozen lashes from the Captain.



The Royal Admiral 2 and other ships in the convoy had an encounter with a couple of French frigates off the coast of Brazil.

WILL DENNETT ON NORFOLK ISLAND WHO LATER BECOMES A FREE MAN

When Will and the other convicts arrived on Norfolk Island in 1800, many of them were still ill and very weak after their gruelling voyage. 45 people had died on that journey across the seas. Two years after their arrival, it was said that several of the convicts were not expected to ever recover. Men who did survive, were put to work in clearing the land and making it habitable.

Will seems to have been relatively OK and must have worked hard for eventually, after ten years on the island, in 1810 he was granted a pardon, the slate was wiped clean and Will became a free man.

We know, he went on to settle down and in 1813 married Elizabeth Garland, born free on Norfolk Island, and they had ten children. Will never returned to his native Sussex, although when his freedom was granted he could have done so, if he could have afforded to or indeed wanted to. Will died in 1855 and Elizabeth in 1867, both in Tasmania.



Location of Norfolk Island

Descendants of Convicts' Group,

Incorporated.



This is to certify that

Eileen Joyce Jackson

has been admitted as a Descendant Member of

The Descendants of Convicts' Group, Incorporated,

having proved lineal descent from

William Dennett who arrived in Sydney

on the 20th November, 1800 on the ship *Royal Admiral I (2)*

Laurie Cross
Examiner of Proofs

1159

Membership No.

A. Gulliver
President

21 June, 2002

Date



FREE SETTLER OR FELON

Nowadays, in Australia, descendants of convicts from Great Britain seem to be proud to be associated with their felonious ancestors.

In 2002, Eileen Jackson sent the Archives a copy of her Certificate of membership of a Convicts' Group in Australia because she is descended from William Dennett of Sedlescombe.

Beryl Lucey, Author of "Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe" reported that she also had had other descendants of William Dennett visiting her when they were in England, proud to show her copies of the 1797 document by which Will was condemned to death and the slightly later document that changed his sentence to transportation to the new land of Australia.

DENNETT NUMBER 2 FROM SEDLESCOMBE TRANSPORTED TO AUSTRALIA

We do not know what Will Dennett's parents or his siblings thought about his crime or whether they even knew where he had gone.

A generation after Will Dennett's crime, in 1830 there was an important meeting held in Battle at which the speaker was William Cobbett. The meeting was attended by many local agricultural workers and tradesmen who were all affected by the introduction of machinery on farms and the loss of income for labourers and tradesmen alike. Three members of the Dennett family, James, John and Thomas attended the meeting and signed the "Battle Declaration" in favour of Cobbett.

In 1829, a blacksmith from Sedlescombe called **THOMAS DENNETT** the younger, aged 33, was found guilty at Lewes of robbery of:

- 2 live tame geese price 10 shillings from John Times
- 3 live tame ducks, price 10 shillings from John Times
- 1 coat, price 2 shillings from Richard Rich
- 1 cloak, price 1 shilling from Richard Rich
- 1 whip, price 6d from Richard Rich
- 1 dead rabbit, price 6d from Richard Rich
- 1 coat, price 2 shillings from the Duke of Manchester

His trial was on 17 January 1829 and at it he was sentenced to be transported to Australia for life. We know he sailed from London on 12 March 1829 on a ship called "The Waterloo", arriving on 9 July 1829. This was Waterloo's first voyage of six convict journeys from either England or Ireland to Australia. The Waterloo was a 414-ton merchant ship built in Bristol in 1815. Thomas appears to have absconded in 1834 and disappeared, probably changing his name. He was not listed on a convict list in 1837 nor listed as having died.

1835 – BOYS TO BE WHIPPED AND PUT IN PRISON FOR TWO DAYS FOR STEALING TWO EGGS

The 19th century, saw men, women and children sleeping rough and, in the countryside, this could be in a farm building, with or without the farmer's knowledge. In 1835, two boys, George Upton and David Whyborn were brought up in custody by a police constable called Cruttenden. He found them at an early hour with a couple of hen's eggs in their possession. When questioned, the boys admitted they had stolen the eggs from a cart lodge on Almonry Farm, Battle, where they had slept the previous night. The boys lived in Hastings and had been enticed to come out into the countryside by a boy named Tilden. The boys were obviously friends because the three of them had been convicted the previous year of stealing provisions at Sedlescombe.

Upton and Whyborn were advised to avoid Tilden in the future. For the current offence, the two of them were sentenced to

TWO DAYS' IMPRISONMENT AND A PRIVATE WHIPPING

They would be returned to their parents after the sentence had been carried out

For sleeping in a barn in Ewhurst on one night in 1895, George Turner and Thomas Hall were sent to prison for 14 days with hard labour, because they had no visible means of subsistence.

CRIME IN SEDLESCOMBE

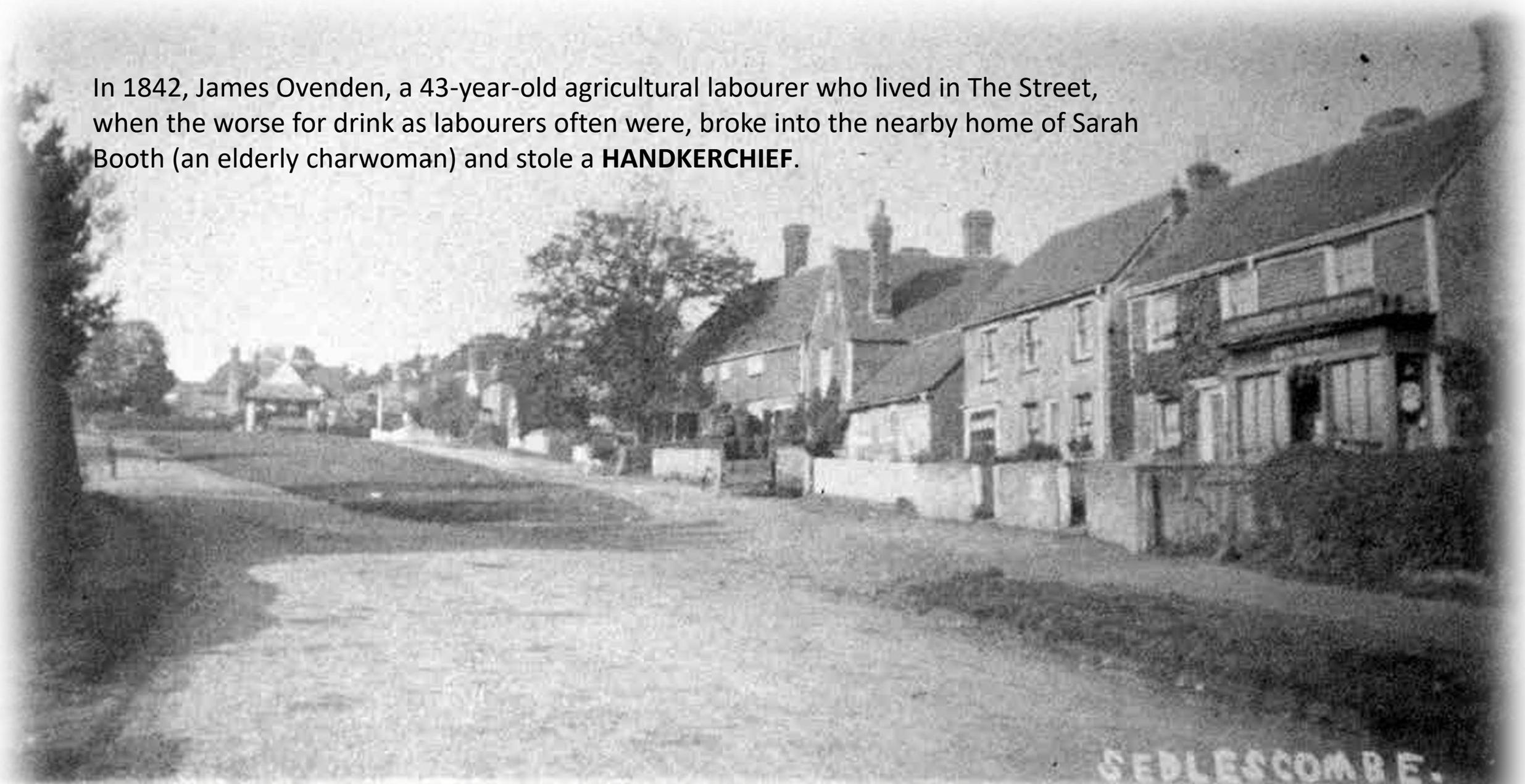
The theft of small items in Sedlescombe were the most usual matters in the 19th century coming before the Battle Petty Sessions reported in the local paper:

- 1837 - Theft of wheat in the chaff – 3 months imprisonment and hard labour, except the last fortnight in solitary confinement.
- 1840 - Theft of cheese and lard from a shop – 6 months imprisonment with hard labour, except the last fortnight in solitary confinement.
- 1842 - 3 boys stealing food from another boy – 21 days hard labour.
- 1849 - Theft of 1 duck by 3 men searching for work on the railway and being very hungry took one seen under a coop in Sedlescombe – committed for trial.
- 1953 - Theft of a pair of clogs – six weeks' hard labour.
- 1857 – Theft of underwood belonging to H Sharpe of Oaklands Manor – Fined with costs, £1:1s
- 1859 - Theft of half a gallon of potatoes – 6 weeks hard labour
- 1865 - Theft of a chisel – committed for trial.

The use of bad language came before the courts on 2 occasions involving the same couple of women, one of whom, Charlotte Reed was a married women with a large family, who lived in Riverbridge Cottages. The language was so filthy it could not be repeated in court. Charlotte was bound over to keep the peace for 6 months on the second occasion. She had fallen into a fit before the first case could be called.

Cases of vandalism did come up but not all that regularly. Boys were in trouble for throwing stones onto the Powdermills roof and breaking the tiles and another boy broke the fence belonging to a local landowner in order to throw sticks into a chestnut tree.

In 1842, James Ovenden, a 43-year-old agricultural labourer who lived in The Street, when the worse for drink as labourers often were, broke into the nearby home of Sarah Booth (an elderly charwoman) and stole a **HANDKERCHIEF**.



SEDLSCOMBE.

For this crime, James Ovenden was given 9 months imprisonment, the first week in each month in solitary confinement.

ACTING MAGISTRATES FOR BATTLE. PETTY SESSIONS HELD ON ALTERNATE TUESDAYS

Although most people committing petty crimes were the less well off in Sedlescombe society, those who judged them in the courts were inevitably the well-off landowners, because the job was voluntary.

In 1883 a list of Acting Magistrates was published in the local paper. They were:

- Thomas Papillon Esq. Crowhurst Park, Battle
 - Philip Oxenden Papillon, Esq. Crowhurst Park, Battle
 - Boyce Harvey Combe, Esq., Oaklands, Westfield (now in Sedlescombe parish)
 - Hercules Brabazon Brabazon Esq., Oaklands, Westfield (now in Sedlescombe parish)
 - William Rushton Adamson Esq., Rushton Park (now Vinehall School), Mountfield
 - Edward Christopher Egerton Esq., M.P., Mountfield Court, Hurst Green
 - John Henry Wagner Esq., Hemingfold, Battle
 - Owen John Augustus Fuller Meyrick Esq., Bodorgan, Anglesea,
 - Charles Hay Frewen Esq., Coghurst Hall, Ore
 - Thomas Brassey, Jun Esq., Beauport
-
- Later, William Mullens Esq., Westfield Place became a magistrate too

BEGGING

April 1895 - At the Police Court on Wednesday, before Mr Harvey T B Combe (of Oaklands, Sedlescombe), **HARRY WICKENS** of no fixed abode, was brought up on the charging of begging.

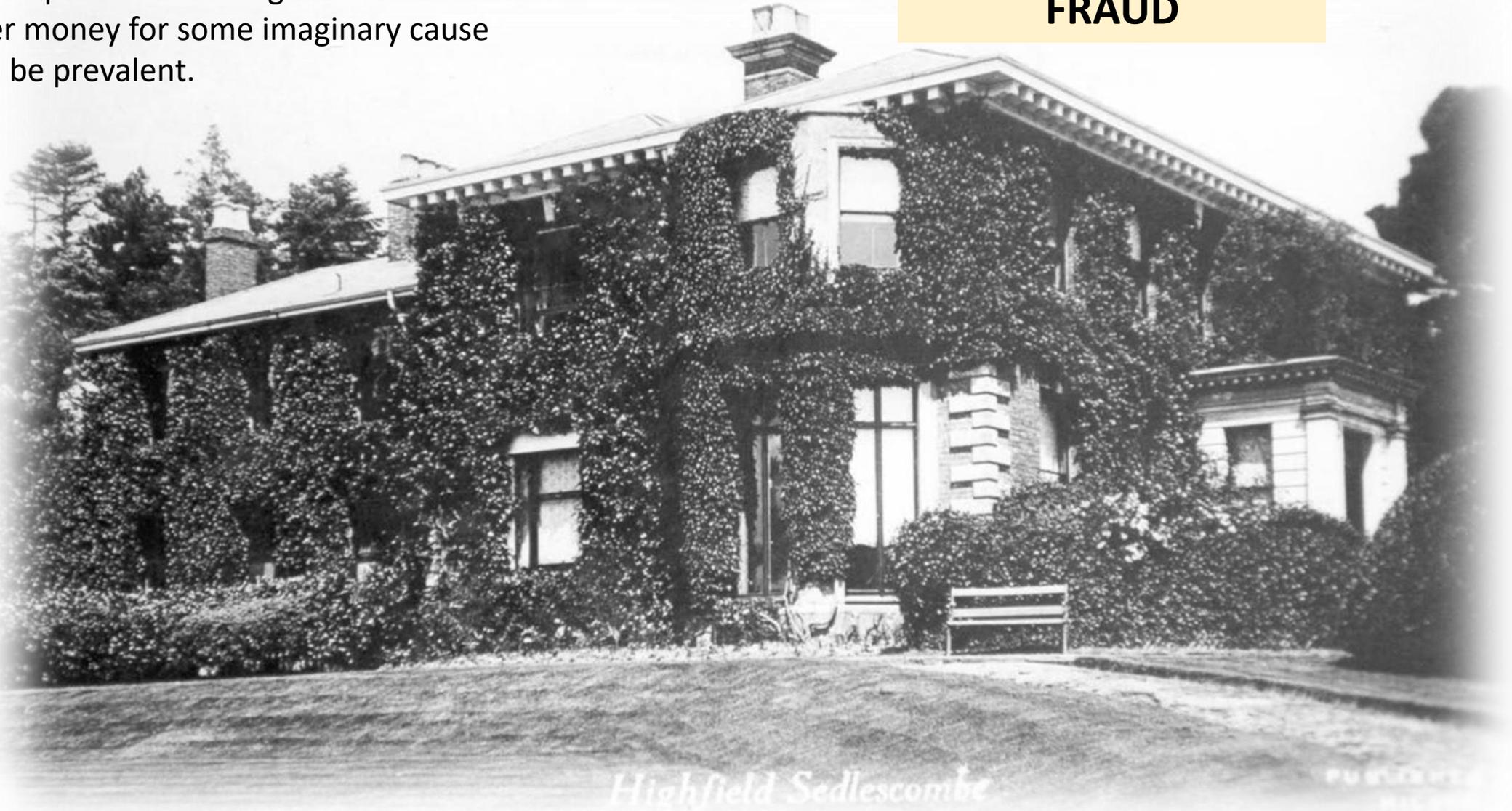
P.C. Harry Paine, stationed at Sedlescombe deposed that being on duty in private clothes at Sedlescombe on Tuesday, he saw prisoner go to the Rectory and followed him. He then heard the prison beg for bread, which was refused. The prisoner said that he should not have gone there if he had not been hungry. He had only a farthing on him. Prisoner was convicted, and sentence to seven days' imprisonment.



A month later, David James was charged with begging at Sedlescombe in front of the same Mr Harvey T B Combe. He was sentenced to 7 days' hard labour.

Blatant attempts at defrauding the well-off into paying over money for some imaginary cause seemed to be prevalent.

FRAUD



In 1912, two attempts were made to get Miss Agnes Elizabeth Pratt of Highfields to pay over money to a man who said he was widowed with 5 children to keep who had damaged first his bandaged hand by a tree falling on it and secondly somehow damaged his arm which was in a blood-stained sling. Miss Pratt was not taken in. The man was sent to prison with hard labour for 14 days. Hard labour could mean breaking stones or using a treadmill or screw that gradually was made harder and harder.

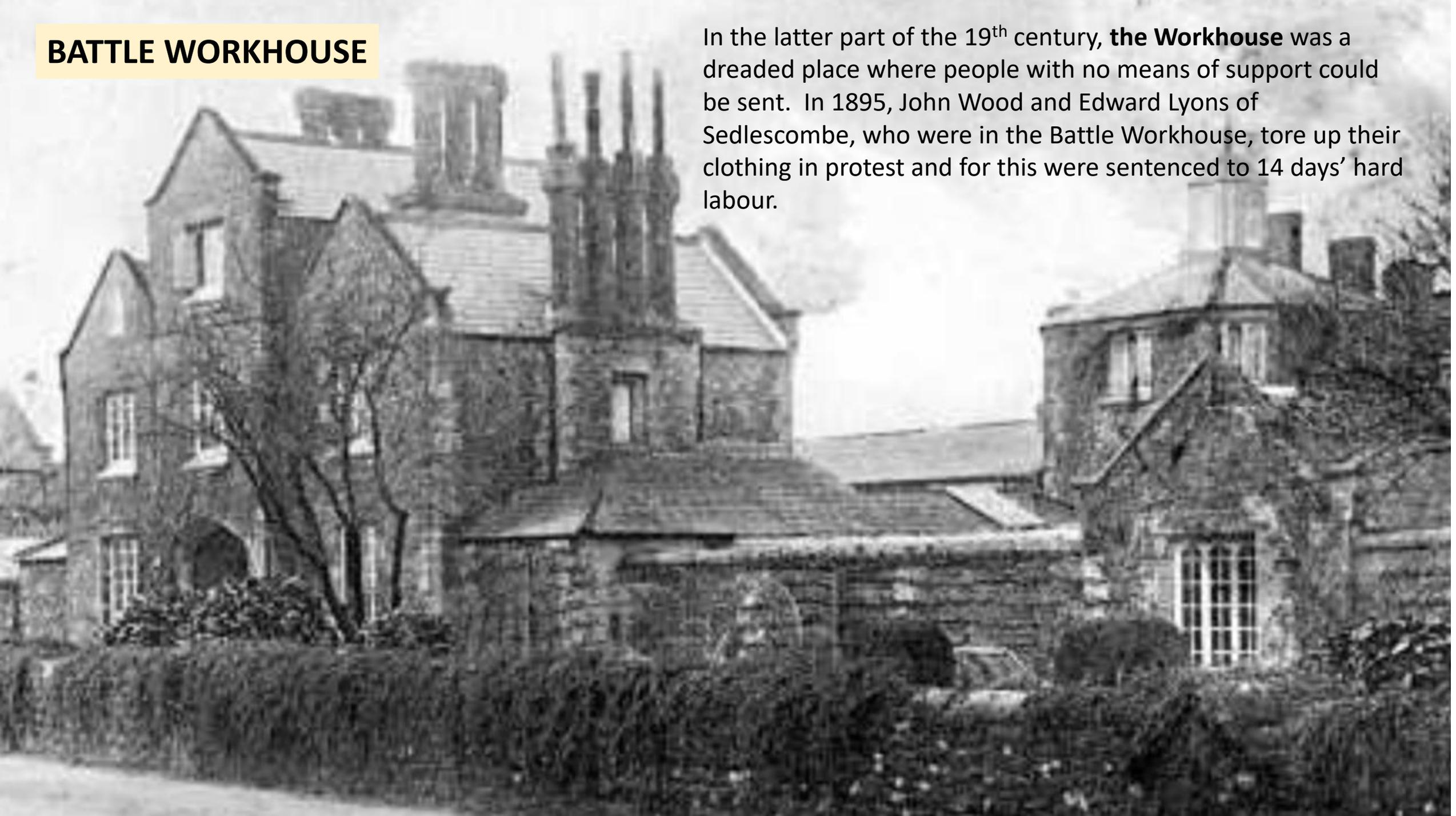
1936 – P C Latter, Sedlescombe, said that at 5.30pm on September 20th, he was on duty at Kent Street, when he saw George Alfred White cycling from the direction of Sedlescombe. He noticed that his boots were wet and the knees of his trousers were muddy. In addition, he was carrying a basket on the handlebars of his cycle. On searching the defendant he found he had 10 nets and 2 rabbits. The defendant said “I have got to do something for my youngsters”. He had previous convictions and was fined £1.



POACHING

BATTLE WORKHOUSE

In the latter part of the 19th century, **the Workhouse** was a dreaded place where people with no means of support could be sent. In 1895, John Wood and Edward Lyons of Sedlescombe, who were in the Battle Workhouse, tore up their clothing in protest and for this were sentenced to 14 days' hard labour.



ANIMALS

There was **poaching and setting snares to catch wild animals** on land belonging to the local landowners, who were often friends of the justices of the peace before whom the alleged culprits were brought.

Men often thought up clever excuses. This was one given in 1861 – Rowland Wise and Samuel Apps, 2 Sedlescombe labourers, were charged with trespassing on land not belonging to them. One of them did not appear in the court but the other pleaded “not guilty”.

He said he was looking for an adder as he had been told that rubbing adder’s fat on a bad shoulder would cure it.

Cruelty to animals came up to the courts a couple of times with a huntsman’s hound being struck with a prong and having a brick thrown at him with sufficient force to kill him and working an unfit horse in Sedlescombe. Hunting of various wild animals was popular in the 19th and 20th centuries until it was banned by the Government. Although perfectly legal, details of some hunting incidents in Sedlescombe in those centuries, verging on cruelty, have been included here too.

HUNTING was extremely popular in the 19th century. Newspapers reported the hunts in considerable detail and with, it seems, absolutely no acknowledgement that the animal was being treated quite unreasonably and, probably cruelly. One such event in Sedlescombe was an otter hunt in 1825 where after a 5-hour chase of the poor creature, it was taken up and put in a room so the chase could continue the next day. Amazingly, the otter managed to escape up the chimney, onto the roof and down to the ground. All to no avail as after two days it was discovered again at Sedlescombe Bridge and hunted again for another 4 hours with 800 spectators following. Where did almost twice the population of Sedlescombe come from?

Worse still was the 1872 report of a stag hunt, where all the well-known landowners of the area took part. It started in Church Farm, Sedlescombe, in the occupation of the Rev. F J Pratt, where, together with a quantity of hounds, there were 221 gentlemen and ladies on horseback, the occupants of 22 carriages and no less than 3,000 persons waiting to witness “the uncarting of Miss Fanny”. The poor animal must have been captured earlier and when let out of the cart, the whole hunt was underway with the 55 minute chase being detailed. The final sentence said *“This closed the hunt, which was of a character such as has not been seen in this neighbourhood before.”*

Of course foxes were regularly hunted where even though they ended up by going to ground, the hounds were allowed to dig the animals up and kill them.

Finally, badgers were dug up and kept in boxes in pub yards where men would encourage dogs to attack them. This was written in 1922; *On Wednesday last at Brede a bitch badger was turned out near the Maypole Inn. The Udimore beagles were laid on which showed the finest sport ever seen. She ran near 15 miles, crossed the river three times between Brede and Westfield, as hot as possible. She was took and sacked near Sedlescombe; 50 people were present at her sacking, all highly pleased. They then took her back to the Maypole and baited her, but she showed no sport, being quite spent.!*

IN 1936, G TOMLINS OF ASSELTON HOUSE, SEDLESCOMBE WROTE TO THE LOCAL PAPER

*“I think Oscar Wilde sums up the situation perfectly with ‘**The unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable**’”.*

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS AND THE BAND OF MERCY IN SEDLESCOMBE

Soon after the opening of the second Congregational Chapel in Chapel Hill, regular meetings of the Sedlescombe Band of Mercy were being held. At the 1894 annual meeting, it was reported that 56 members had been recruited during the year. Prizes were given to those children who had attended 40 out of 46 meetings that had been held.



The Band of Mercy was an organisation taken over in 1882 by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals. It actively recruited children and young people to pledge that they would be kind to birds and animals and awarded them a bronze medal if they did so. The design of the medal was approved by Queen Victoria and the red medal ribbon was the same colour as the Victoria Cross ribbon.

**THE PLEDGE: I WILL TRY TO BE KIND TO ALL
LIVING CREATURES AND TRY TO PROTECT
THEM FROM CRUEL USAGE.**

Following on from the appalling treatment of wild animals in Sedlescombe in the 19th century that can be seen through the local newspaper reports, recruiting mainly children and young people to the Band of Mercy here would have been an important feature in the life of the Village

ACCIDENTS

For completeness, a couple of accidents involving guns that occurred in Sedlescombe in the 19th and 20th centuries are included here:

In December 1837 – “On Friday, as Mr Eldridge of Sedlescomb, Sussex, was returning in a chaise from a shooting excursion, his gun by some accident exploded, and the whole charge passed through his side, breaking several ribs and causing instantaneous death. The event is rendered still more deplorable by the fact that his wife (to whom he had been recently married) not being aware of the accident, opened the door to receive him on hearing the chaise stop, and thus suddenly discovered that he was a corpse”

In 1906 – “On Friday, Mr John Mannington of Stream Farm, was out shooting when by some means his gun prematurely went off, and three of the fingers of his left hand were shot off. The injured gentleman was taken to the Hastings and East Sussex Hospital, where it was deemed advisable to amputate the remainder of the shattered hand. Mr Mannington is son of Mr William Mannington, a member of East Sussex County Council, who resides at the Abbey Farm, Salehurst. Much sympathy has been expressed with the family on the sad event.”

SEDLSCOMBE'S POLICE CONSTABLE



A Police presence in Sedlescombe was established in the 20th century and many constables lived and worked in the Village, helping to maintain law and order.

In 1984, Police Constable Bryan Graves moved into Sedlescombe's Police House as its community policeman. He followed his father who also, many years previously, had been Sedlescombe's Police Constable living in Springfield Cottage, Brede Lane. During his time in Sedlescombe, Bryan was very involved with promoting the Youth Club in the Village Hall.

When he left Sedlescombe, Bryan became a Detective Constable working in CID and Intelligence and, in 2002, became a Drugs Development Intelligence Officer. He died suddenly in 2010, aged 65.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The majority of the information about local crime contained in this presentation has been gleaned from local newspapers, as have details of hunt and Band of Mercy reports.
- Transportation details of William and Thomas Dennett have been found from various websites.
- Photographs of the late Bryan Graves from Sedlescombe Archive collection and information from his obituary published in the local paper (much further information available).
- Historic photographs of Sedlescombe from Sedlescombe Archive collection. Website picture of Battle Workhouse.
- Eileen Jackson, from Australia, provided a copy of her Descendants of Convicts Group certificate.

**PART OF THE 2020 SEDLESCOMBE LOCAL HISTORY VIRTUAL EXHIBITION
COLLECTION ADDED TO BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY WEBSITE 2024**

Copyright © 2024 Pauline Raymond.

Permission granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only.
Commercial copying, hiring or lending is prohibited.