



The Leeds Dripping Riot: 22nd February 1865

Although there were several outbreaks of Civil Unrest in Leeds in the later part of the Nineteen century this is by far the strangest...

In January 1865 Eliza Stafford was sentenced to one months imprisonment for stealing 2lbs of dripping from her employer a Mr Henry Chorley. Henry Chorley, who resided at number 18 Park Square, was a prominent surgeon and magistrate. Why he did this is something of a mystery, dripping would have been abundant in a wealthy household following Christmas and the New Year, and it was not the preferred foodstuff of the upper classes. However Mr. Chorley chose to have her arrested and charged with larceny. Why? It would have been easier, and have attracted less publicity, to simply dismiss her from her position.

Once news of Mrs Stafford's incarceration became known there was a groundswell of public opinion against Mr Chorley. This came mainly from the working classes of the City and such was the feeling of sympathy towards Mrs Stafford that £100 was raised on her behalf. (A considerable sum in those days)

It was not long before slogans such as "Chorley's Dripping" began to appear on walls in the Town Centre and printed ballads, which ridiculed Chorley began to be sold in the street and in public houses.

On the cold and snowy morning of 22nd February 1865 a large crowd of several thousand assembled outside Armley Jail. They had gathered to welcome Mrs Stafford on her release and making her the subject of a demonstration. Unfortunately, for the masses, the authorities had released Mrs Stafford early and on her request had dispatched her to Scarborough where her daughter lived. The crowd took the news in good humour and proceed to snow-ball each other and passers by.

Then, fortunately, for the masses, a "tall man" dressed as a woman emerged from one of the local houses and declared himself to be Mrs Stafford. This delighted the crowd and upward of a thousand of them made their way towards no: 18 Park Square where they broke a few pains of glass and generally created a disturbance in the usually quiet

(Dripping Riot continued)

neighbourhood. Mr Bell the Chief Constable arrived on the scene and quickly cleared a large area on either side of Mr Chorley's house. Mr Bell slips and breaks his wrist and the crowd is swelled by workers taking their lunch break.

The disturbance then becomes more serious, more missiles are thrown and part of the crowd rush to the rear of no:18 only to be headed off by the police. Meanwhile the Lord Mayor convenes a meeting of magistrates and telegrams are sent to Bradford and York for additional police and military assistance. Placards are displayed in the area warning people that they must disperse or risk arrest.

The crowd dwindles as some people return to work and shortly afterwards the police charge the mob and clear Park Square entirely. In the melee George Hudson, a potter is crushed and taken to the General Infirmary. (He dies on the 23rd March at his sister's in Beeston)

Later that evening more crowds gather in Park Lane (now the Headrow) but are kept at bay by the police. The extra police from Bradford and the troop of the 8th Hussars from York are not deployed. The incident finally fizzles out.

Despite the press stating that the crowd was made up of "thieves and the lowest type of mill-workers" the four men arrested and charged all have trades.

The incident gives some indication of the dissatisfaction and sense of injustice felt by the working classes at this time. One question remains unanswered. Why did Henry Chorley not simply dismiss his cook ? It could have saved a lot of trouble and spared a mans life.

Rob Kirk. *Shatterproof Theatre Co.* 19.1.09



Sources: _____

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