
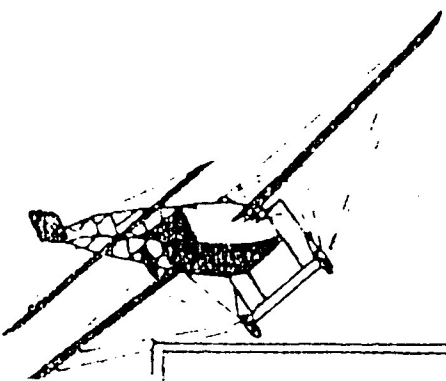
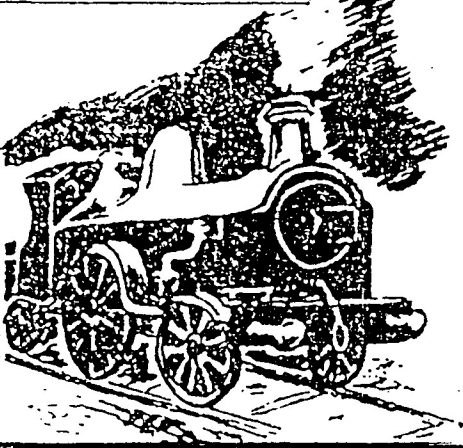


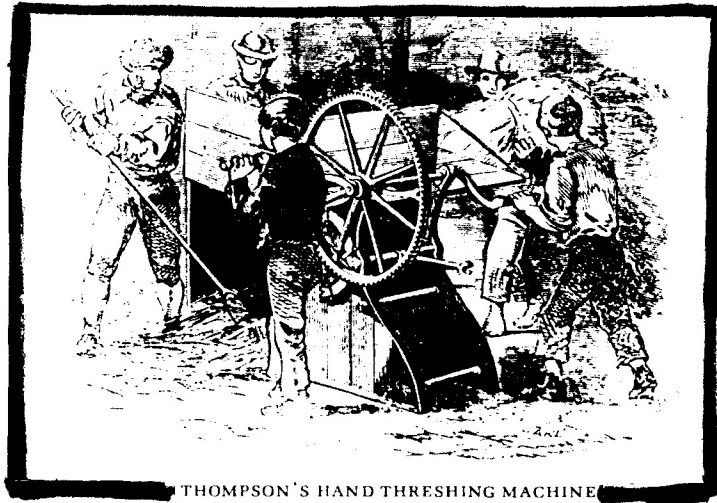
The agricultural riots of 1830.



*Eastleigh & District
Local History Society*
OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 16

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THOMPSON'S HAND THRESHING MACHINE

By the King.
A
PROCLAMATION

Against lawless and disorderly persons assembled together to compel their Employers to raise wages, and committing various acts of outrage.

OFFERS A REWARD OF

FIFTY POUNDS

For apprehending each and every person so offending:

AND A REWARD OF

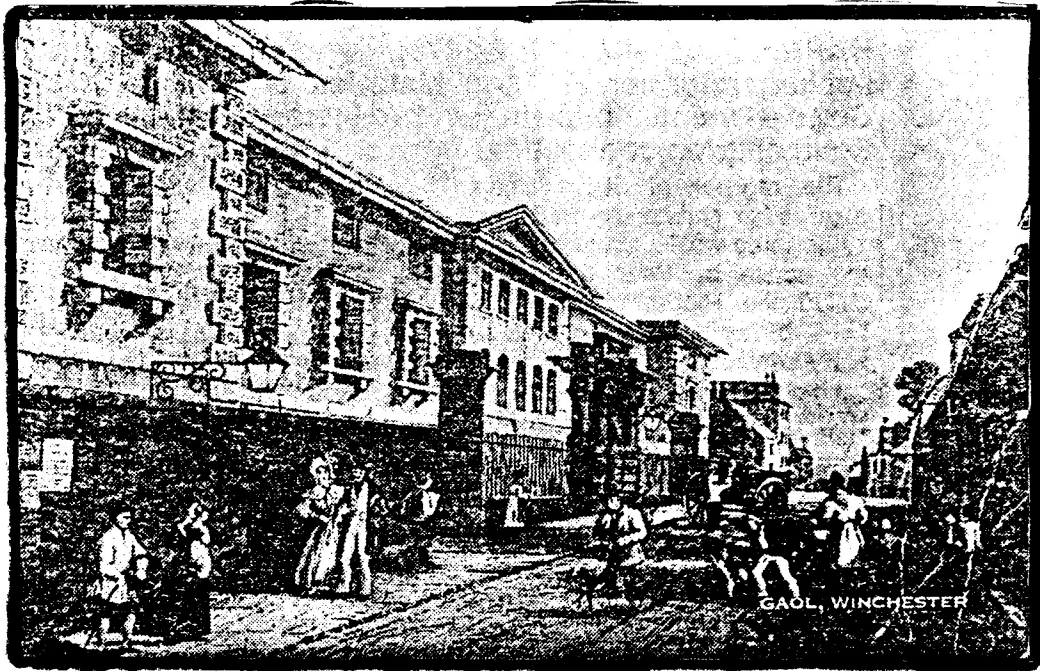
Five Hundred Pounds

FOR THE DISCOVERY OF BARRIERS.

To be paid on Conviction by any County Magistrate.

NOVEMBER 26, 1830.

WARRINGTON, PRINCE.



THE AGRICULTURAL RIOTS OF 1830

The basic causes of the agricultural uprisings in 1830 were the distressed conditions of the workers, i.e. the struggle to find work, the poor wages, the existence of only the bare essentials of life, with the poorhouse as the last refuge. One important factor was the increasing use of the threshing machine which could perform the work of ten men in any given time and as this was one of the main wage-earning opportunities during the winter months the workers feared for the livelihood of themselves and their families. Grievances transformed into violence and anger against the symbols of their misery. Barns, ricks and poorhouses were burnt. Machinery, in particular the hated threshing machines, were singled out and smashed. Initially there was a degree of sympathy from some magistrates and farmers, who recognised the need for a living wage and consequently there were few arrests and higher wages were sometimes granted.

The rioting began in Kent in the autumn and spread westwards as far as Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and northwards to East Anglia and Northamptonshire. But the main strength of the uprising was in the southern counties. The average wage of an agricultural labourer at this time was 1s/6d a day and with the working week confined to 6 days, when work was available, this meant a weekly income of only 9s/0d. One of the main demands was "Give us 2s/0d a day".

In November and December outbreaks of violence increased and the magistrates, encouraged by the Government, and with troops placed at their disposal, were in a position to suppress the incidents almost as soon as they occurred, with the inevitable result that the whole movement soon collapsed.

Fear of the violence was having its effect on the people of Hampshire. Rumours were spreading in Winchester of the rapid discontent of the labourers in adjoining villages where several farmers, on the receipt of threatening letters, were dismantling their machinery. On 27 November, the Hampshire Advertiser reported:

"..... (the City of Winchester) was in such confusion on Monday and Tuesday the 22nd and 23rd of November 1830, that business was totally suspended. Almost every householder was sworn in as a special constable, and they have continued on duty day and night, in consequence of the vague and alarming reports brought in. Companies of the 37th and 90th Light Infantry and 3rd Dragoons were quartered here and occasionally skirmished the adjacent country. A strong guard of soldiers is stationed at the gaol and prisoners from various parts continue to arrive ..."

The events of the riots in Hampshire have been well recorded, but one incident which appears to have escaped general notice is the following account of disturbances which occurred in the Eastleigh District. It appeared on the same day and in the same paper as the previous quotation.

“..... A numerous assemblage of agricultural workers took place at FAIR OAK on 23 November who, after breaking all the threshing machines in that neighbourhood, proceeded to MOORGREEN to MR. GATER's at WEST END. They extorted money at each place and pressed the labourers to join them. After partaking of beer at WEST END they proceeded to Dr. JONES at SWATHLING (sic) and demanded to know if he had any threshing machines. Dr. JONES, being a County Magistrate, desired them to disperse. Upon their refusal to do so, he read them the RIOT ACT. From there they went to General GUBBINS at PORTSWOOD and destroyed the threshing machine on his farm. On their return they were met by Dr. JONES, who rushed into the crowd and seized the ring leader (a fellow from ALRESFORD named CHILDS ...) but was obliged to relinquish him, They next visited Mr. JOHN TRIBE's farm and as he had destroyed his threshing machine they succeeded in extorting a guinea from him. They then made towards the estate of JOHN FLEMING, M.P. but that gentleman, having received information of their approach, collected his labourers and sallied forth in pursuit of them. They met in a field opposite Mr. TRIBE's lane and Mr. FLEMING apprehended the first of the rioters that presented himself. Mr. FLEMING's example was immediately followed by his men and in all 45 labourers were take into custody. At this moment a detachment of the 3rd Dragoons arrived from Winchester and the rioters dispersed in all directions. During the scuffle that had previously ensued, Dr. JONES received a violent blow across the mouth from one of the mob and instantly levelled his pistol and fired, but fortunately it missed. The prisoners were escorted to Mr. TRIBE's where Mr. FLEMING, Dr. JONES and the County Magistrates and Clerk assembled and took their dispositions. Ten of the rioters were committed to Winchester Gaol. The others were bound over in their own recognisances of £10 each to keep the peace and give evidence. The riotous assemblage numbered 500 and were armed with hatchets, bludgeons, axes and clubs”

The fact that Mr. FLEMING's labourers rallied to his aid against their own class is easily explained by his benevolence as an employer. A table of his wage rates in December 1830 survives and shows:

Able bodied labours between 18-45	if married, 12s/- p.w.
	unmarried, 10s/- p.w.
Inferior labourers 45-60	9s/- p.w.
Infirm labourers over 60	6s/- p.w.
Boys under 14	3s/- p.w.
Boys between 14-16	4s/- p.w.
Boys between 16-18	5s/- p.w.

Thus, the pay of able bodied workers was equal to the maximum demands of the rioters. Mr. Fleming had also introduced an incentive scheme as a reward for good conduct and industry. For example,

“To the five married labourers who shall support the largest family by their own exertions and honest industry with least assistance from the parish during the preceding year - £3, half in money and half in clothes”

THE TRIAL OF THE PRISONERS

On the 25 November 1830, the Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Duke of Wellington, and the Magistrates met and agreed to a series of strong resolutions. A special Commission was to be issued for the trial of the prisoners and a Committee of Magistrates was appointed to examine them previous to their trial. JOHN FLEMING, M.P. was one of those sworn to sit on the Grand Jury. The Special Commission sat in the Castle at Winchester between 20 and 30 December of the same year. There were 298 cases to be heard (only Wiltshire with 330 cases exceeded the Hampshire total).

The verdicts on the ten local rioters were as follows:

RICHARD PAGE, WILLIAM MITCHELL, THOMAS SMITH and WILLIAM SCOREY were all acquitted due to a legal technicality. The PROCLAMATION (commonly known as the RIOT ACT) was passed in 1715 and stated that if after notice had been given by a magistrate for them to disperse, and persons remained assembled for an hour, they should be deemed felons and liable to punishment as such. The magistrate had first of all to demand silence, then read the Proclamation and end with the time honoured phrase "God Save the King (or Queen)". Dr. JONES had written these words on a card but had failed to pronounce them to the assemblage. Mr. Justice ALDERSON considered it such a serious omission that he directed the jury to acquit the prisoners.

JOHN REEVES, aged 30, from SOUTH STONEHAM was found guilty of feloniously breaking a threshing machine, the property of WILLIAM GOSLING of STONEHAM, and sentenced to seven years transportation.

JAMES VARNELL, aged 23, also from SOUTH STONEHAM to be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for eighteen months for involvement in the same offence.

WILLIAM WITCHER, aged 26, WILLIAM KINCHIN, aged 19, and THOMAS COOPER, aged 23, all from SOUTH STONEHAM, were convicted of breaking and destroying a threshing machine, the property of General GUBBINS on the 23 November 1830. All three were transported for seven years.

ABRAHAM CHILDS, aged 48, of ALRESFORD, the ring leader, was sentenced to 'Death recorded'. This latter is slightly misleading. It meant that the prisoner, although warranting the death sentence had been recommended to mercy under an Act of George IV which allowed the judge to refrain from actually pronouncing the dread sentence and to order instead 'Death recorded' to be entered on the judgement records. The prisoner was then transported for life. To emphasise this, the Judge when pronouncing sentence on CHILDS added the comment "You will not remain in this country or ever return to it".

Of the 298 prisoners on trial in Winchester, 108 were acquitted, 2 were fined, 68 were jailed, 16 received a sentence of seven years transportation, 101 were sentenced to 'Death recorded' and 3 (some sources say 2) were executed. In total, 117 prisoners from Winchester were transported (this included those sentenced to 'Death recorded'). 50 of the prisoners arrived in New South Wales and 57 in Van Diemens Land (Tasmania). It is assumed that 10 died on the voyage.

One miscarriage of justice is recorded concerning farmer JOHN BOYES of OWSLESBURY, who was sentenced to seven years transportation. He was inadvertently amongst the rioters who extorted money from Lady MARY LONG, although it was ascertained that he had used his best influences to see that little damage was done. The City of Winchester presented a petition to His Majesty for a commutation of service and he was allowed to return home in 1834.

Over the country as a whole, 19 men were executed, 505 transported, 644 jailed, 7 fined, 1 whipped and 800 acquitted. 24 of those transported did not reach Australia.

In 1835, Lord JOHN RUSSELL pleaded for the use of the Royal Prerogative and obtained pardon for 264 of the transported men. In 1836, a further 86 received clemency. In 1837, that is when all those transported for seven years, but not those transported for life, had completed their sentence, a general amnesty was granted to the remainder with the proviso that they stayed in Australia for the duration of their sentence.

Only about 20% actually returned. Some could never afford the passage home; others decided that the new land offered better opportunities than the life that had forcibly been taken away from them in England.

Joy Barber, June 1986

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