

Chapter 21 An incident at the Bay Horse, Langcliffe

The story

In 1871, Christopher Wright was a beer keeper at the sign of the Bay Horse. He was 75 and had lost his right arm. He lived with his wife and two granddaughters, Agnes and Annie Atkinson. Agnes was a servant and Annie occasionally assisted in the beer house. On the eighth of January, some navvies from the Settle-Carlisle construction gangs were drinking in the beer house. Ellis Parker, (sometimes known as Nelson), arrived with his mate Tom. Ellis and Tom didn't order any beer but got their drink from the others. It was a custom amongst the navvies to buy a quantity of ale and then pass round 'a lot', a small glass, which they filled from the big pot. They got 'fresh' but not drunk. At about eleven o' clock when the landlord called closing time, Ellis moved with the others to the door and let them all out except Tom. He closed the door and stood with his back to it. Then he and Tom moved into the house. Mrs Wright demanded to know what they were doing. She offered them sixpence if they would go. Ellis swore he would go, "as true as God in Heaven", but took the sixpence and still refused to go. He then demanded a gallon of ale and asked Kit or Agnes to fill it. They refused to do this and asked him to go repeatedly. Ellis and Tom stayed on.

At about twelve o' clock, Annie Atkinson was sent to get a constable, Christopher Jackson. Unfortunately the constable had been moved to another post the previous week and Langcliffe was without a police officer. Agnes and Peter Smith, a friend of Agnes who had been waiting outside, went to Settle in search of a constable. They returned without finding one and joined Christopher, his wife, Annie and an Irish boy in the kitchen. Agnes told her grandmother that the police were coming. Ellis shouted, "If three came I'd master them all" and "if six policemen came I'd punch their bloody brains out". Ellis then demanded some supper saying that he knew Mrs Wright had some cheese. He bolted the door and said he was 'Champion of London' and he would let them see who was landlord of the house.

Christopher protested, "I will have my door open", and went to pull the bolt. His wife followed with a candle. Ellis pushed Christopher away and knocked Mrs Wright against a partition which cut her arm. Christopher again tried to pull the bolt but was knocked down onto the flagged floor. He was kicked and punched repeatedly then dragged through the house and thrown down to the floor hitting his head on the long settle. His wife ran from the house but was brought back by Annie and Mr Smith. Christopher called, "Lord have mercy on me, Agnes, you won't see me killed". Agnes went to lift Christopher's head and Ellis threatened to "dash her bloody brains out if she didn't let him alone"; "let the old bugger suffer". Agnes and Mr Smith lifted Christopher and took him to his chair in the kitchen. He cried out and complained of the pain in his back. Ellis laughed and jeered, "he's makin' it", and put his arm in a sling to mock him. At four in the morning Christopher dragged himself to his bed. At five o' clock, Ellis and his mate left of their own accord.

Dr Altham was called later in the day and tended Christopher until he died, almost a week later. According to the post mortem, the cause of death was injury to the brain and kidneys and general shock to the system.

Ellis was apprehended by William Taylor, a police constable from Settle on the ninth of January. Agnes accompanied the constable and pointed out Ellis. Ellis was sleeping in a railway hut at Willywood. Ellis was wearing clogs with iron rims. Ellis claimed he had been in bed and then said 'He struck me first'. The constable took Ellis to Christopher Wright's house where Agnes and Annie identified him. He was then taken to the lock-up at Settle.

After the inquest on the seventeenth of January, Ellis was charged with the murder and manslaughter of Christopher Wright. He said, "It's a bad job". Ellis was sentenced to five years penal servitude.

The licence of the Bay Horse was revoked although one suspects that it continued to sell beer until the early years of this century when it was a shoe shop at the front and a selling-

out shop at the back. It was referred to locally as the Pig and Whistle.

The Bay Horse case

Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer Saturday January 14th, 1871, page 5, col. 1

SETTLE — BRUTAL ASSAULT.—Ellis Parker, recently employed on the new Settle and Carlisle Railway, now in course of construction, was yesterday brought up on remand, from Tuesday last — before Mr John Birkbeck and the Rev. H. J. Swale—charged with having committed a violent assault upon Christopher Wright, a beerseller, at Langcliffe, near Settle, on the 9th inst. After hearing the evidence of Mr Altham, Wright's medical attendant, from which it appeared somewhat doubtful as to whether Wright, who is in his 76th year, would recover from the injuries received, the bench decided to remand the prisoner until Monday next.

Thursday January 19th, 1871. page 3, col. 1

Wanted.

SETTLE.—Ellis Parker, *alias* Nelson, has been committed by the magistrates for trial on the charge of the wilful murder of Christopher Wright, a beerseller, at Langcliffe, near Settle.

(Before Mr Justice BRETT.)

CHARGE OF MANSLAUGHTER AT LANGCLIFFE.

Ellis Parker, *alias* Nelson (25), labourer, was indicted for the manslaughter of Christopher Wright, at Langcliffe, on the 8th January last. Mr Forbes appeared for the prosecution, and Mr Waddy with Mr S. Cadman for the defence. The deceased was the keeper of a beerhouse called the Bay Horse, at Langcliffe, which is about a mile from Settle. The Settle and Carlisle extension of the Midland Railway is at present in course of construction, and the navvies engaged upon it frequented the Bay Horse. On Sunday night the 8th January, the prisoner and another navvy entered the house about nine o'clock. Prisoner at the time was fresh of drink. He had no drink supplied to him while there, but some of the other navvies in the house gave him some. About eleven the deceased, who was 75 years of age, and had only one arm—his left—got all the company out of the house with the exception of prisoner and his companion, who refused to go. Mrs Wright asked them to go out, but they stated they intended to remain all night. She said if they would go out she would give them sixpence. Prisoner said he would, but after getting the money still refused. Afterwards, one of deceased's nieces was sent to Settle for a policeman, but returned without one. Prisoner, however, was informed that the police were coming, whereupon he bolted the door, saying he did not care for any bobbies; he would punch their guts out. Prisoner stood against the door, and on deceased asking him to come away from the door, prisoner took hold of him, threw him on the flagged floor of the lobby, and then kicked him three times with his clogs in the side. He next dragged the deceased along the lobby into the house, threw him down, his head striking against the settle, and kicked him again. On his granddaughters coming to the assistance of the deceased, prisoner threatened them, but they persisted, and got the deceased away and into a chair. While sitting there prisoner made game of him; said his own arm was broken, and that it would cost deceased £10. Ultimately the deceased was got to bed. He died from his injuries on the 15th January. Up to the time of the assault he was said to have been a healthy man. Prisoner and his companion remained in the house until five o'clock on Monday morning.—Medical evidence having been given to the effect that the injuries deceased had sustained were sufficient to account for his death, his LORDSHIP (in reference to a portion of the cross-examination) said he should tell the jury that the old man had a right to lay hold of the prisoner, and had a right to use as much violence as he liked, even to the point of killing him, in putting him out of the house.—The jury found the prisoner guilty of manslaughter.—Witnesses were then called to speak to prisoner's character as a peaceable and industrious man.—Sentence deferred.

NISI PRIUS COURT—SATURDAY.

(Before Mr Justice BRETT.)

THE CASE OF MANSLAUGHTER AT LANGCLIFFE.

Ellis Parker, *alias* Nelson (25), labourer, convicted of the manslaughter of Christopher Wright, at Langcliffe, on the 9th January, was brought up to receive sentence.—The JUDGE said that prisoner's conduct was as great an outrage as he had heard for many years, and he could not sufficiently express the contempt he felt for the mode in which he (prisoner) had behaved himself on that night. It had been asserted that his conduct had been exaggerated, but having looked into the depositions he saw no reason to think that that was so. If he (prisoner) had used weapons, there could not be the least doubt but he would have been guilty of a murder for which there would have been no forgiveness, and his life would have been forfeited. But because he had not used a weapon people thought it right not to charge him with murder. The sentence was that he be confined to *penal servitude for five years.*