

The Trial of George Woolgar, Police Constable 210N – Part 2

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“Central Criminal Court, Jan 11 Old Court. (Before the Right Hon. the RECORDER)

George Woolgar, 22, a metropolitan policeman of the N division, was charged with a highway robbery with violence.

Mr. G. S. Griffiths was counsel for the prosecution; Mr. Warner Sleigh for the defence.

The prosecutrix was Sarah Guyton. Being called as a witness, she said she was an unfortunate, and lived in Emma-street, Haggerston. On Thursday morning, the 23d of December, she was going home about 2 o'clock, and saw the prisoner at the corner of Hans-place, about five minutes' walk from her lodgings. He was in uniform. He wanted to take liberties with her in the street, and she refused to allow him. He asked her what she had got in her pocket. She replied nothing that was not her own, upon which he threw her down and took 2s 7½d. from her pocket, which was all she had. He had asked her to let him look at her purse, and she showed it to him. The money he took from her was loose in her pocket. Upon asking him to give her back her money he told her he would take her for highway robbery. She went home crying, and made a complaint to her landlady. Next evening she went to a police-sergeant on duty in the neighbourhood, and told him what had happened. He advised her to complain at the police-station. She saw the prisoner next day at the Kingsland police-station among 18 policemen, and picked him out. On her doing so he said he had never seen her before.

Being cross-examined, she said she had not seen the prisoner before the night of the robbery. She was positive about that. She knew the Pritchard Arms, in the neighbourhood of her lodgings, and a young woman called “Flash Kate”. They had been driven away from there by a policeman, but never by the prisoner. She had seen a man named Fisher about half-past 11 on the night in question, near the Pritchard Arms. When the prisoner robbed her he threw her down and hurt her. She did not call out at all – she was frightened. She did not tell the sergeant the same night, but on the following one. She also told her mother. She went out next day after the robbery to go to the Kingsland-road station, but called to see her mother on the way. She had never been in a public-house with Fisher. She had wished the matter to go before the Commissioners of Police rather than to the police-court. She was summoned to the police-court to give evidence in the matter. She had been in “trouble” one night, and that was for answering a policeman. She was discharged. She had never seen the prisoner that she knew of until the night in question.

Re-examined – Why she did not call out was that she was frightened, and that the prisoner said he would have her up for highway robbery.

John Fisher, Ann's-place, Hackney-road, a baker, said he remembered seeing the prisoner on the night in question opposite a publichouse in the road. He asked witness if he had seen “Flash Kate”? Witness said “No”. The prisoner saw a girl coming, who

proved to be the prosecutrix, and he went with her towards Marion-square, witness accompanying them part of the way.

Cross-examined – He had known prosecutrix by sight for six or eight months, and had spoken to her when she came to his “place”. He had taken a glass of ale with her once or twice at the Pritchard Arms. He knew “Flash Kate” by sight. She lived in Emma-street, next door to the prosecutrix. Between 10 and 11 on the morning of the alleged robbery the prosecutrix spoke to him in his shop, and asked if he knew “that policeman”. The witness had been in trouble once, but was acquitted.

Sarah Lamude, living at 9, Emma-street, said the prosecutrix lodged with her. She remembered her coming in crying, late at night, a few days before Christmas Day. Witness was in bed at the time, and spoke to her. The prosecutrix made a complaint to her. She had been in her house about seven weeks.

Police-constable Henry Scott remembered being on duty two or three days before Christmas Day on the adjoining beat to that of the prisoner. He came to witness between 1 and 5 in the morning, and said he had had “a jolly lark” with a girl, and had got out of her 1s 1½d. or 2s 1½d., witness could not remember which. Witness told him he would get himself into trouble if he did not mind. Two or three days afterwards the night men were paraded at the police-station. He did not see them paraded; he was in bed at the time; but he knew that the parade was ordered with the view to the identification of some one charged with a robbery. He believed he had always been on good terms with the prisoner. He never threatened to report witness, so far as he could remember. He had never threatened to report him in respect of a house in Emma-street, not for frequenting brothels. Four policemen on duty near Marion-square would go to the corner of Pritchard-road from 20 minutes to half an hour after each other in the course of the night.

Police-Inspector Ramsey said on the 23d of December, between 11 and 12 at night, the prosecutrix called at the station and made a complaint. Next day witness had 18 men paraded, and she identified the prisoner without difficulty. Being told to state what the prisoner had done to her, she said she met him in Pritchard-road; that he walked with her to the corner of Marion-square, where he threw her down and took from her 2s, a sixpence, and three half-pence. She asked him to give it to her, and he refused, and said he would charge her with highway robbery. He said the charge was false, and that he had never seen her before. She said that Fisher had seen them off together, and he said he did not see Fisher after half-past 11 o'clock. The prisoner would be on duty in and about Marion-square that night. He joined the force in June, 1868, and had been at that particular station about six weeks. His conduct had not been entirely satisfactory. He had once slept on his beat: that was the only thing.

Mr. WARNER SLEIGH, for the defence, reminded the jury that it was unfortunate for the prisoner that his mouth was closed, and called attention to material discrepancies and improbabilities in the evidence which might well lead them to doubt. He particularly commented, as a suspicious circumstance, upon the prosecutrix having gone to the witness Fisher before she went to the police station on the following day, and he submitted how unlikely it was for the prisoner, well knowing the public feeling with respect to the police, to have perilled his reputation by robbing an unfortunate woman like the

prosecutrix, and again, if he had done such a thing, how improbable that he would have gone about making evidence against himself.

He also remarked upon the circumstances of the prosecutrix allowing him to rob her and throw her down without raising an alarm, although she was within a few doors of her own lodgings. The whole area, he said, was surrounded with suspicion so far as the prosecutrix was concerned, and he appealed to them to give the accused the benefit of any doubt that it might have raised in their minds.

The RECORDER, in his address to the jury, said it was a case of great importance, and they might set out with the presumption that it was not a likely thing for the prisoner to have done that with which he was charged. The fact of his position showed that he had borne a good character up to this affair, both to have been admitted into the police force and to have been retained to it. On the other hand, there was nothing against the woman's veracity except that which might possibly arise from her mode of life and the looser morals which it implied. The learned gentleman then reviewed the evidence with great care, and again reminded the jury of the exceeding importance of the case. It was one, he said, of a most serious description, and must carry very grave consequences with it if established. Looking at it with the same care as if it were the case of any one of themselves, they would say whether the evidence was sufficient to satisfy them, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the prisoner was guilty of the offence with which he was charged.

The jury, after deliberating in private more than three hours, returned into court with a verdict of Guilty, accompanied with a strong recommendation to mercy on the ground of discrepancies in a portion of the evidence.

On being asked in the usual way if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed the prisoner replied that he was not the man.

The RECORDER, speaking at times with evident emotion, said, addressing the prisoner. After a long and patient inquiry the jury who tried you have found you guilty of highway robbery; and your case has this aggravation, that you being one of the police, and therefore bound in duty to protect Her Majesty's subjects, have made use of that position to rob and then assault this unfortunate woman. I do not remember any case of highway robbery, unaccompanied with brutal violence, which is of so aggravated a character as this. No one can have a greater desire to uphold the police in the discharge of the duties confided to them than the members of this Court, yet they must always at the same time, feel themselves bound to protect the public from any abuse of the trust reposed in the body of which you are a member. The gentlemen of the jury have recommended you to mercy on the ground of the discrepancies in the evidence. I confess, however, taking that recommendation into consideration, I can find no reasons for adopting a mild view of your case. Both on the part of your counsel and of the Court everything was said that could possibly be urged in your favour, and it was scarcely possible for 12 men to have arrived at any other conclusion. Under all the circumstances the Court, having regard to the duty they owe the public and to the police force, feel they have no alternative but to sentence you to be kept in penal servitude for the term of seven years."

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