

A Bad Boy And A Pudding

Wells Journal

November 10, 1898

A Bad Boy And A Pudding – Albert William Alfred Hatcher of St Thomas Street aged 12 was charged with stealing a plum pudding and basin value 3s the property of Mr F Brand George of the Swan Hotel.

Alice James a servant at the hotel said she knew the prisoner who was in the habit of calling at the kitchen door for scraps of food. She saw him on the morning of the day in question about seven o'clock when he was standing by back door with a bag in his hand. That morning at a quarter to seven before the boy came there were four puddings on the table in the pantry and at half past seven one was missing.

Police Sergeant Knight on being informed of the theft then went to Hatcher's house and spoke to the boy's sister who showed him the basin her brother had brought home that morning.

P.S. Knight then went to St Thomas Street School where he saw the boy who denied knowing anything about the pudding and denied being at the Swan Hotel at all that morning. When taken to the cells the prisoner told P.C. Hyatt that he was very hungry and did take the pudding.

The magistrates aid that they did not like to send the boy to prison and he would be bound over in his own reconnaissance to come up for judgement when called upon.

This is not the last that we hear of Alfred William Albert Hatcher as four months later he is up before magistrates again this time for stealing half a pound of cocoa from the hotel.

Wells Journal

February 16, 1899

The Mayor remarked that the boy was one of six children who were not looked after at home and had drunken parents who neglected him but they had to note that he had taken the cocoa.

They therefore decided that Alfred should be sent to a reformatory school until the age of 18. Pending the finding of a suitable school the defendant would be sent to Shepton Mallet prison.

Quaint custom

Wells Journal

November 15, 1906

The dining room at the Swan Hotel presented a brilliant appearance on the occasion of the Mayor's Banquet. The Mayor received his guests The Rt Hon Lord Hylton MP, the Lord Bishop and Mr T B Silcox MP.

The menu was choice and ample and the dinner served in an admirable manner. Grace was sung by the Cathedral glee singers and the quaint custom of circulating the loving cup was observed.

Dining room

Wells Journal

June 1885

Mrs Louisa George wished to announce that a dining room has been created in the Swan Hotel which is 65 feet long and that the hotel may now be said to be one of the best appointed in the West of England.

BREACH OF PROMISE CASE CAUSED SENSATION

‘SUCH A DESPICABLE COWARD’

HE CONTINUALLY KISSED AND CARESSSED OTHER GIRLS

In the Victorian age a man's promise to marry a woman was considered a legally binding contract and the wish to break that engagement enabled the woman to sue for compensation.

Of its time a Breach of Promise case was verging on the scandalous and so when Mr Frederick Brand George of the Swan Hotel in Wells was sued by Miss Edith Laura Boys, it was big news in our sleepy city.

The case was heard at the Guildhall in Bristol and the lawyers for each side were very high profile which made the case more sensational. The Honourable Bernard Coleridge appearing for Mr George was related to the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and was a sitting MP for Sheffield.

Mr Charles Mathews was a senior counsel who later appeared in several infamous cases including Oscar Wilde's suit for libel against the Marquis of Queensbury and he was a friend of the Prince of Wales.

The case was the main news item not only in the Wells Journal but in the Bath Chronicle, Bristol Mercury, Western Daily Press, the Sheffield Independent and the Nottingham Evening Post among others.

Mr George did not appear at court but was willing to accept their judgement which was as good as an admission of guilt and the damages awarded to Miss Boys of £500 is equivalent to about £50,000 today.

Wells Journal

August 1892

Breach Of Promise Case – On Thursday morning the Under Sheriff of Bristol (Mr C.A.D.Chiltern) and a common jury sat at the Guildhall for the purpose of assessing damages in a breach of promise case, Boys V George, in which the defendant allowed the judgement to go by default.

Mr Charles Mathews QC (instructed by Messrs Reed and Reed, London) appeared for the plaintiff, Miss Edith Laura Boys and the Honourable Bernard Coleridge QC MP (instructed by Messrs Davies and Mawer Wells) appeared for the defendant, Mr Frederick Brand George.

Mr Mathews in opening the case said he appeared for the plaintiff Miss Edith Boys, for the purpose of asking the jury to assess as to such damages as they thought she was entitled to receive by reason of a breach of promise to marry made to her by Frederick Brand George of the Swan Hotel in this city.

He wished to say nothing unduly harsh of the defendant but he must in placing the case before the jury make use of such terms of conduct or rather of misconduct as the defendant deserved.

It would seem that the plaintiff, some 28 or 29 years of

age, was the daughter of Thomas Henry Boys, an auctioneer, carrying on business at Bridgewater and there doubtless the plaintiff and her people were in a very good position.

That they were highly respected he did not think the jury would dispute.

The defendant Frederick Brand George was 31 years of age and was the eldest son of the late Frederick George who upon his death was the proprietor of the Swan Hotel Wells, a house with a very considerable reputation. Frederick George died in the year of 1884 and left in his will two codicils under which he made the defendant one of his trustees. Immediately upon the death of Mr George his widow came into possession of the hotel and this remained so until the present time and the defendant as the eldest of six children became his mother's assistant in the management of the business.

He became next to his mother, the controller of the hotel and he was in the position of offering a very comfortable home to whom he chose to marry. The jury would hear how kind and considerate Mrs George was in her dealing with the young lady and how she had consented that upon the marriage of the two young people she herself would leave the hotel and take up residence elsewhere that the young people should run the hotel and the defendant take a salary.

This would have been an attractive and suitable position for a young lady.

The defendant made the acquaintance of Miss Boys when she visited the Swan Hotel in 1887, the visit being repeated from time to time. The jury would hear of a very natural friendship warming into affection until June 1891 when the defendant wrote the following letter;

“My Dear Edith,

You will no doubt be surprised to receive a letter from me, and even more surprised when you read the contents. You no doubt remember that last Sunday you were here saying that you would trust me with anything, even your life.

Edith, I love you. Will you be my wife?

Don't imagine I am writing to you with idle words. I mean what I say. I have thought it well over and have put all sorts of questions to myself but can only come to one conclusion and that is I love you.

Don't answer my question hastily. Take a week, a month or longer before deciding such a delicate question.

I must remind you that your life will not be all comfort.

Remember also that I am not well off and that my business is such that few would care about it.

Take every minute, detail into consideration before an-

swering this letter. I am what people call a flirt and it will be impossible for me to give up all my friends immediately I become engaged.

I am very fond of life, some people say I am fast but I think that a man of 31 does not wish for things at 25.

If you love me say you will be mine but let me beg of you again to think well over this matter I would rather you refuse me ten times than say yes at once and regret it ever afterwards.

If on receipt of your reply I learn that you think favourably of me I shall write to Mr Boys and out the whole matter before him. Until this is done I should be glad if you would keep it a secret.

This letter is not made up of spooony sentences.

If you accept me I will try to make you a good husband and make myself worthy of such a wife.

With much love and, believe me, yours affectionately Brand.”

After 24 hours consideration the young lady replied to what she termed her “dear beautiful letter” and said she was deeply sensible of the honour he did her in asking her to be his wife. She did however ask her “dear generous boy” to give her time to consider everything.

Other letters followed between them in the course of which the defendant asked her to remember that her future happiness depended upon her decision.

She ultimately wrote accepting his offer saying that she had thought over every little detail and with God's help she would try to make herself worthy of him.

With reference to an allusion in his letter to other female acquaintances the plaintiff said she was not “one of those jealous exacting girls who expected a man to give up every acquaintance the moment he becomes engaged.”

A letter from the plaintiff's father to the defendant was also read.

Mr Mathews said this correspondence showed that it was no impulse that had been acted upon. The parents were brought into negotiations and the correspondence was continued in the most affectionate terms.

It told, or purported to tell, of love on both sides and the defendant was always vowing that his love was unchanged and unchangeable that he was looking forward to the day when he would have the plaintiff for his wife.

The defendant visited the plaintiff's house at Bridgewater and the plaintiff visited the Swan Hotel.

Other letters were referred to in which the plaintiff addressed the defendant as her “dear old boy”

The letters continued to be affectionate until after a visit of the plaintiff to Wells In

December last and on her return home on January 2nd she complained of his having appeared strange and slighting her before his friends and stated to him that he appeared ashamed of his love for her.

He replied saying that her letter had surprised and grieved him that anything he said had been in jest and declared his continued love for her.

The correspondence continued until February 13th when an incident occurred. The lady had words with her father about remaining at Wells too long and she left home and went to an uncles where she said she would remain until her father recalled her.

Although the defendant advised her to remain with her uncle he seemed to have got cooler and he wrote on February 27th stating it appeared to him, since her visit to Wells at Christmas that things had got a little strained between them and that they did not get on as well as they used to do.

After a great deal of consideration he had reluctantly come to the conclusion it would be best for both of them that their engagement should cease.

He was perfectly certain that could not get on together although up until the last two weeks he had considered their life in the future would be one of complete happiness.

The unpleasantness that had occurred between her father and herself he also felt would be a stumbling block to their happiness.

He could not and would not meet her father in the future as he had in the past and she would naturally take her father's part. The plaintiff answered this letter as follows;

“My dear boy,

Your letter shocked me and horrified me beyond my power to tell you.

You wish to break off our engagement because I have an irritable man for a father. Surely this, to a man of honour, is a very lame and childish reason and would be laughed at by people of sense.

This reason, Brand, should have brought us closer together, knowing for whose sake I bore all those harsh word from my father and then knowing I would not mind as I had dear old Brand to comfort me. Your love for me cannot have been very deep or strong or instead of absenting yourself and wanting to break off the engagement you would have come to me.

You came to me a simple, stupid girl and made me care for you. You have shown me, have taught me things have altogether opened my eyes to many things I was ignorant of and now you are tired of me.

Oh Brand, how can you write to me in such a manner?

Why did you not propose to one of those girls you know in Wells and left me alone?

I was perfectly happy and innocent until you came to me and should have been so still but for you.

Oh Brand Oh Brand, I could not have thought you would have behaved so.

As to my letters to you there has not been the least sign of coolness in them.

My dear boy it really makes me cross when I think of the lame excuses you have offered.

Tell me what I have done, what reason can you have for breaking off our engagement. I can then be a better judge whether I can release you.

What about the last visit you paid me?

Was there anything the least strained then?

I think, Brand, that on Saturday your behaviour showed you were more fond of me than ever.

Oh I can go filling sheets of paper but would it be of any use?

What I should like to know is why you want to break off our ties?

God, how can a man with one spark of honour suggest such a thing!

Whether you have really ceased to care for me and why?

What evil thing have I ever done to you to have such a letter written to me?

I have not said anything to father or my brother but of course you must write to them but write to me first please so that I may know of what I am accused. You did make me feel very jealous at Christmas and I was very vexed at you but I have already almost forgotten the circumstances. I cannot help my father's bad temper but surely this is no reason for a man to do as you suggest. You do not marry my father and if as you say you have been wanting me for two or three years it cannot be at an end in so short a time. I will say no more but await your next letter.

From your Edie.”

Mr Mathews said that among the correspondence there some histories of his past with other girls and he evidently thought justified in confiding them but he (counsel) thought that the jury would agree such confidences should not be given by any man affianced to a woman unless there was absolute necessity for it.

In the letter to the plaintiff the defendant said that the love he had once had for another young lady was returning, whereupon on February 28 the plaintiff wrote:

“Dear Brand

Yours to hand and acting on the advice of my father and brother I most distinctly refuse to release you from our engagement. What I think of your conduct I cannot now say. You will, I dare say, hear quite enough from my father and your own family and friends but if this behaviour is usual with Wells people it is not our way down here.

We are simply truehearted people and when a man asks a girl to be his wife it is accepted and he does not play with her for a few months and then cast her aside as he would an old glove.

I can only thankful that in all our intercourse with each other and in spite of what you tried to teach me I kept my honour unscathed and intact. I know I am not now so innocent of things as I was before I knew you. I shall certainly go about with my eyes open now as before they were closed.

Your women, perhaps, think nothing of this but to me my honour has been dearer than my life. It was adding grossest injury to hint to me of your affection for another girl. You might have spared me this but it has not surprised me in the very least. I have always known that the girls you cared for were legion but this one, if