

### **September 18<sup>th</sup> 1860**

**SINGULAR AFFAIR – PILLAGING MESSRS HICKMAN'S "TOMMY SHOP"** Early on Sunday morning last, Inspector Adams and Police-constable Langdon being on duty, met with two men who had in their possession a quantity of tea and other articles. From the account they gave the Inspector was induced to go to the works of the Messrs Hickman, and at what is called the Store, or "Tommy" shop, found a number of the men formerly employed in the works. They were in the act of freely helping themselves to what the store contained. The reason for such a strange proceeding is said to be that wages are due to the men, and that they have, under such circumstances, "helped themselves". At all events, one of the men (the others got away) captured, whose name is **William Whitehouse**, and who was a boatman in the employ of Messrs Hickman, says that he took the tea and sugar for his wages, having been out with his boat for several weeks. Others of the men have, it is said, received a quantity of scrap iron from the works under similar circumstances.

### **October 10 1860**

**HICKMAN'S TOMMY SHOP CASE AGAIN** At the Wednesbury Police Court, yesterday, this case was again brought forward, when Mr J J Saint of the Midland Circuit, instructed by Messrs E and H Wright, solicitors to the petitioning creditor in bankruptcy, appeared to prosecute ; and Mr Whitehouse, of Wolverhampton, Mr Sheldon of Wednesbury and Mr J T Bailey of the same place were concerned for the defence. The following persons were summoned to answer the charge: - John Wainwright, Samuel Gillard, Arthur Wise, Abraham Johnson, Joseph Cooper, James Hammond, William Griffiths, William Wilkes, Thomas Wilkes, Joseph Waterhouse, Charles Cull, William Pigott, Benjamin Duffield, Thomas Langford, John Cox and Stephen Mills, all of Tipton. William Whitehouse, the man formerly charged, did not appear on his recognisances. Mr Saint opened the case at considerable length, and in the course of his remarks he stated that Mr Whitmore, the official assignee to the estate of the Messrs Hickman, considered it his duty to prosecute all the defendants for this most impudent robbery. The first witness called was George Pitt, storekeeper of the tommy-shop. He said that the stock of stores was taken on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, on which day he locked up the premises, and no one had any right to enter them except himself. Had the Messrs Hickman told him to give up the keys to anyone else he would have done so ; but they did not tell him to do so. Thomas Leech, shoemaker, stated that on Sunday night the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, he was sitting having his supper, about 800 yards from the Messrs Hickman's works, when he saw a light in the tommy-shop. He went towards the shop and saw the defendant Abraham Johnson coming along with something under his arm, which he was carrying towards his home. Witness went on towards the works and saw several men coming out of the warehouse – went on to the works and there saw Wainwright and Gillard standing before the watchman's fire. He hooted at them, and Wainwright fired a pistol ; a second pistol was fired. On going round to the back of the boiler, saw defendant (William Wilkes) and other men. Went and looked through a hole in the tommy-shop door, and saw defendant Arthur Wise, with other men, reaching something off the shelves. Defendant William Griffiths then came out and drove him away from the hole and put a tin up against it. A lad named Thomas Taylor came up and said, "They are robbing the tommy-shop", whereupon defendant Joseph Cooper said, "Hold your noise, it's we". Mr Inspector Adams came up shortly afterwards. Subsequently saw Cooper and Hughes carry a bag of flour to Hammond's house, and heard the latter say that but for one fool or another they could have cleared everything out of the shop. In cross-examination he admitted having had some of the flour from Hammond, and that it was given him not to "split", but he was ready to give it back. No wages were due to him from the Messrs Hickman. Had heard it said that Mr Hickman had given the men the keys to help themselves, but did not believe it. At this point Mr Whitehouse submitted that the prosecution could not be carried on, as it was clear that the transaction partook more of the nature of a trespass than a felony. Mr Saint intimated that he should still proceed. A lad named Thomas Taylor was next called, and he deposed to having seen the majority of defendants standing about outside the tommy-shop and ironworks. Saw a sack of flour carried off by defendant Hughes. Mr Inspector Adams was sworn. He said on the morning of Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, about one o'clock, he was at Dudley Port, and saw a man named Whitehouse wheeling some goods away in a barrow. He said he had them given to him by Wainwright for wages. Went to the tommy-shop, saw Wainwright, and told him, and Wainwright said he had heard a woman saying that they were robbing the tommy shop. Saw two men carrying half a sack of flour each come out of the works, and when he spoke to them they dropped it. Went into the warehouse and saw three sacks of flour and other stores placed ready for removal. Mr George Haden Hickman sworn, deposed that Wainwright was manager of the works at Grovelands; Pitt having charge of the shop under him. There was not anyone over Wainwright. He had the full confidence of the firm, and it was preposterous to suggest he had committed a robbery. All the defendants were good workmen, and bore good characters, so far as he knew. Orders had been given to Wainwright to sell some scrap iron, and pay the men their wages. This completed the case against defendants. Mr Whitehouse made a vigorous speech for the defence, condemning as improper the prosecution. His client Mr Wainwright had been used most shamefully. Mr Hickman said that from the tone of Mr Whitehouse's speech it seemed to be imputed to his firm that had the matter been left to them they would not have prosecuted. He would only say, in justice to himself, that he should consider himself deserving of the reprobation of all honest men if he allowed himself to be robbed, and let the culprits escape with impunity. He did not make these remarks to prejudice the cases against the men at the bar, for they were highly respectable. The Magistrates having elicited from Mr Hickman that in his opinion the goods would never have been removed but for the non-payment of the men's wages, returned to consult. After an absence of about 15 minutes, they returned to court, and stated that whilst they thought the law had been broken, there was no felonious intent ; all the defendants would therefore be dismissed. An attempt at applause, when the decision was given, was speedily suppressed, but there was an evident expression of satisfaction in the Court, which was crowded to excess during an enquiry extending over upwards of four hours.