

December 22 1884

Bath

WESTON PETTY SESSIONS, SATURDAY **William Bowler, John Pope, William Gregory, John Bowsher, Thomas Dunn and James Oakley**, boatmen in the employment of Messrs Gerrish and Co (Limited) were summoned for endeavouring to prevent **Thomas Davis**, another boatman in the employ of the same company from working, and also with having used violence, at Weston, on the 16th. Mr Titley appeared for Messrs Gerrish and Co, and said he would withdraw the summons against Thomas Dunn, which was accordingly done. The Magistrates Clerk (Mr Williams) informed the defendants that they could demand to be sent for trial if they so desired, but the defendants preferred being dealt with summarily. Mr Titley said he brought the case under the "Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875" under which act the defendants were liable to a penalty of £20 or three months imprisonment. The prosecutors had determined to reduce the wages of some of their men, and they accordingly caused a notice to be read to that effect. On the Saturday following a meeting of the workmen was called by Messrs Gerrish, and on the following Monday there was a strike among the men. The prosecutors employed a captain and a second mate to each boat. The reduction of wages affected the "second" man, among whom could be classed William Bowler, John Pope, Thomas Dunn and James (sic) Bowsher. These men seemed very much annoyed because some of the other second men chose to accept the abatement of wages and remain in Messrs Gerrish's employment. Among three men who accepted the reduction was Thomas Davis. The barge *Enterprise*, on the day in question making a journey to Bristol, met some of the men who were on strike. **William Short** was the captain of the boat, and Thomas Davis was the second man. At the Weston lock the defendant named Bowler sprang into the boat and called on Thomas Davis to come out. Some of the other defendants followed, and Davis took an axe to defend himself with, and, in self defence, threatened to kill the first man who came near him. All the defendants made an attack on him, and threatened injury to Davis if they got near him. That was his case for the prosecution. After some evidence, William Short, captain of the *Enterprise*, one of the barges belonging to the prosecutors, said he was in his boat with Davis, and when he reached the Weston lock the men jumped on the boat and began to use bad language and to beat the cabin about with sticks. They threatened Davis and used abusive language. One of them picked up a heavy stone and threatened to send it down the cabin. The stone weighed about 150lb, and would have killed anyone if it had fallen on him. Jas Mitchell, in the employ of the GWR Co, who said he was employed to look after the lock at Weston, corroborated the last witness as to seeing the defendant, near his lock, on the boat *Enterprise*. Thomas Davis said he was second on board the *Enterprise*. On Tuesday morning he was threatened by a gang of men among whom were all the defendants except Oakley. He was told he had to be killed in the morning. Between four and five they had reached the Weston lock in the *Enterprise*, and he saw William Bowler, who threatened to "have him out of it". Prosecutor then seized a hatchet and threatened to chop the legs off the first man who came near him. Bowler tried to reach him with a stick, and Gregory threw a tack pin – a large bar of iron (produced) – into the cabin at him. He produced a large stone and piece of timber which were also thrown at him in the cabin. The defendants said they went to see Davis. They denied doing damage to the boat. The Bench discharged Bowsher with a caution; William Gregory and James Oakley were sent to prison for one month, the chairman remarking they might have caused the death of Davis; and William Bowler and John Pope were both fined £1 and costs, or one months imprisonment. There were three other cases against some of the same defendants, but these were withdrawn. The case created a great deal of interest in court.