

January 14 1871

City Police Court Summary

AN EFFEMINATE BOATMAN **Thomas Edwards**, described as a miner, of Tipton, was charged with committing a breach of the peace. The defendant, whose appearance created much amusement, was dressed in a gown and a shawl, and his head was covered with a hood, usually worn by the wives of boatmen, in which was inserted a small, coloured paper flag. At eleven o'clock that morning the defendant was arrested by D S Wallace whilst parading in Eastgate Street in female clothing, leaning on another man's arm. There were a lot of boatmen with him at the time, who appeared to greatly enjoy the fun that was caused by the defendant. Sir T G Frost: Was he or she drunk? D S Wallace: Quite sober, sir. The defendant, whose mien would lead one to suppose that he was not very "sharp", and had evidently been the subject of a joke of his fellow boatmen, said he had only been one voyage as a boatman, and in consequence of the boats being frozen up, his companions urged him to don his unfitting apparel, alleging that they had the privilege of doing so, and that they had previously been round the streets in such a guise several times. By order of the Bench the defendant was taken down to the cells and stripped of his feminine clothing, when he was brought back into the dock. He promised not to repeat the offence, and begged their worships' pardon, whereupon he was discharged. Sir Thomas Frost: Mind you don't be "soft" in future. Mr Sharpe: And stick to your own sex! [Laughter]

April 1 1871

Cheshire Spring Assizes

MANSLAUGHTER AT RUNCORN **Ellen Bridge**, aged 30, a married woman, of Runcorn, was charged with having killed her infant son, Thomas Bridge, at Runcorn, on the 10th January 1871. She pleaded not guilty. Mr Horatio Lloyd was for the prosecution and Mr Dunn for the defence. Mr Lloyd having opened the case, and detailed the circumstances of the case – the neglect of a drunken mother for her offspring – called the following witnesses in proof of the offence of manslaughter alleged. He reminded the jury that neglect, ending in loss of life, rendered the person so neglecting guilty of the charge. **Sarah Roberts, wife of John Roberts**, said that on Monday, the 9th January, she was at the office on the canal lock at Runcorn, when she saw the prisoner and heard her ask for £1, to enable her to get victuals. The master lends them money when boatmen like her husband were frozen up. Prisoner said that her husband was at Dover Lock, near Wigan. Mr Giles, the manager, gave her 15s, and told her to make the best of her way back to Wigan, which she said she would do. She then left the office. Witness saw her in the Bridgewater Arms, Runcorn, in the evening. Prisoner was in the tap room. She (prisoner) was seated with her baby on her knees, but was asleep. Witness woke her. The prisoner was then far gone in drink. Witness asked her for the baby, but prisoner said she could take care of it for herself, using vile language at the time. She said she could take care of the "little beggar". Witness asked her to go to her boat, where there was a fire, but prisoner refused, upon which the witness left. She saw prisoner later, between nine and ten o'clock, when she was seated outside the Bridgewater Arms asleep, with the baby on her knees. Witness woke her up, and was again met with vile language. Witness told her that she would starve the baby to death. Prisoner swore at her, told her to mind her own business, and drove her away. In cross-examination witness said she did not go to the Bridgewater Arms with the prisoner. She did not know a person called Hill and had never been to prison. His Lordship said that the attorney who suggested these questions should be well advised. In continuation witness owned that she was fined in Manchester for using bad language. She was fined £2. Prisoner stated in her presence that she had had no food for two days. **David Baxter**, boatman, in the employ of the Bridgewater Trustees, said that on Monday, the 9th January, he was in the Bridgewater Arms about six o'clock, when he heard the prisoner call for a glass of whisky, which she drank. She sat by him in the taproom. She was then a little intoxicated and fell asleep. She had the baby on her knee. It rolled off and witness caught it. He then put the babe on her knee and twisted the corners of the apron under the strings to keep the infant on her knee. Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour afterwards she stretched her legs out, and the child fell again. She woke up and went to the bar, where she asked for another glass, which was refused her. Nobody said anything to her about the child in his presence. Cross-examined: The canal had been frozen up for some time. There were many people in the house – ten or twelve or more. **John Street**, a flatman, living at Runcorn, said he was in the Bridgewater Arms on the day in question shortly before nine o'clock. The prisoner was then in the taproom dozing. She afterwards went out, and he subsequently saw her sitting on the step dozing. The baby was on her knee. It was a frosty night. He spoke to her outside and shook her. She said she had got her money and wanted to go to Wigan, but it was too late. He put his hand on her shoulder again, and she said she had nowhere to go. He told her the baby would be starved to death. He offered her his bed on board his flat, and to lie on the locker himself. She went to his bed. She was neither drunk nor sober. She carried her baby to the boat and went to the cabin. He undid her boots and unpinning her shawl. She was dozing and he pulled her things off. He asked her for the child while she got in bed. The child was lapped in her apron and a shawl. When prisoner got to bed he gave her the child and lay down on the locker. She gave the child the breast when in the cabin. When he had been some time on the locker, he heard the baby cry. It cried several times. About five in the morning he woke her up. She "reared" herself up, and he left the cabin. When she was dressed he went back and she went away – he walking with her to the main street in Runcorn. He woke her so early that she might go by an early train to Wigan. She did not tell him that the child was dead. By Mr Dunn: The baby was wrapped up, so he could not see how it was

dressed. The baby might not have cried oftener than babies generally do. It was a small cry, but it was a small child. By the Judge: It was a weakly cry. Ann New, wife of John New, said that on the Sunday morning she saw the prisoner about nine or ten o'clock in Runcorn. She spoke to her and asked where the baby was that she had in her arms on the previous night. She said it was dead and laid out at the Lord Nelson. Prisoner was sucking an orange, and said that she was as glad the child was gone as if anybody had given her "a coal freight". Ann Low, wife of Peter Low of Runcorn, said she saw the prisoner in December in Runcorn. It was on a Wednesday, but she did not know the date. Prisoner was sitting on a step near the Top Locks – in drink and asleep. Mr Dunn objected to the evidence, but his Lordship said it was admissible to prove habitual neglect. Examination continued: There was a crowd round prisoner at the time and the child was on her knee. Three sailors bought the child a pint of milk. A person took the child from prisoner's knee and gave it to witness. The prisoner was then asleep. Witness took the child to her home and put it by the fire; she was afraid the baby would get cold. It was a cold morning, and she warmed the child about half an hour. It appeared to be a fine baby, but she could not give its age. Prisoner came to look for the child about the next door, and said she wanted the baby, as it had "come down" somewhere about there. Witness gave her the child, which was in a pillow in the house. She asked the prisoner the baby's age, and the latter said it was a fortnight old. She then advised the prisoner that it was early of her to be out, and recommended her to take the child away – which prisoner did. [Here one of the jurors was taken ill, and a medical gentleman having examined him said that he was unfit to continue in the box. A fresh juryman was then sworn in, and a considerable time was wasted in consequence of the whole of the evidence having to be repeated]. Sergeant Peter Buckley, of Runcorn, said that on the Tuesday he went to the police station, having been sent for. The prisoner was there with a child. He asked what was the matter, and she said that it was dead. He asked her where she came from and what she was doing in the town, and she told him. She said that she came for the money, as they were in distress, and that she had obtained 15s. He asked her how much she had left, and after some demur she showed half a sovereign, saying it was all. He questioned her as to the time she left the office, and she said nine o'clock at night. He took her and the child to the Lord Nelson Inn. When the child had been laid out, an hour and a half afterwards, she was drunk and asleep in the Lord Nelson Inn. He saw her drunk every day afterwards for three or four days. An inquest was held and adjourned, and prisoner was apprehended on a coroner's warrant. Cross-examined: Witness said that the prisoner made no reply when apprehended. She did not then say that she had not starved the child. He woke her up at the Nelson Inn and found she was drunk. Cross-examined: After she was committed by the coroner he charged her, but she made no reply at the moment. Dr Kenlay Macdougall, surgeon, of Runcorn, said he made the *post mortem* examination. The child weighed 5lb 7oz, and the body was much shrivelled and emaciated. The eyes and cheeks were sunk. It was dressed in a night gown when he saw it – it was laid out. Both lungs were congested with the exception of a small piece. The heart appeared healthy. The stomach was distended with gas and contained slime. The intestines were empty. He could not discover a single atom of food. In his opinion the child died from congestion of the lungs, caused by exposure to cold, and accelerated by want of food. The congestion might be formed within a few hours of death, but the weakness of the child might be contributory to bringing on the congestion. Cross-examined: The congestion might have lasted several days. The heart was healthy, but there was some blood about it. That might or might not have been the case if the child died of starvation. There was a slight scratch on the body which might have accelerated the congestion, but he did not think so. If the mother had been without food for two days she might have been able to suckle the child. Excessive thirst is one of the attributes of starvation, but whether the child would cry much would depend upon its strength and temper. Re-examined: He was not able to discover any other cause of death than that he had stated. This concluded the case for the prosecution, and Mr Dunn replied, admitting that it was a sad and serious case. There was considerable difficulty in the case, but he trusted that the poor woman would not be found guilty. Simple negligence was not sufficient to establish the offence, but it was necessary that it should be reckless negligence. He held that there was no proof that there was such extreme negligence but admitted that she had been foolish and neglectful in a less degree. The frost had caused loss of wages and the prisoner and her family were without food for two days. If she had not wanted to nourish the child, she would not have gone for the money. Having the money, she foolishly resorted to drink, which took effect in consequence of her previous abstinence from food. Even in her drunken state she clung to the child, and thus showed maternal affection. Giving the child the breast in the boat was a proof that she did not want to neglect the child. The learned Judge at considerable length laid down the legal distinctions between murder and manslaughter. In France children of a very early age were not allowed to be taken out, and there was no doubt as to the danger of such early exposure. The jury must be satisfied that the prisoner had the opportunity of protecting the child better than she did, and also of giving it more food. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty with a recommendation to mercy. His Lordship said he could not accept the recommendation, as two of her children had died previously in a similar manner. She was sentenced to twelve months hard labour.