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NATIONAL
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The National Archives



archive
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campaign

For immediate release

Monday 8 February 2010

A CRIME OF LOVE AT HUNTINGDONSHIRE ARCHIVES

Spending Valentine's Day in prison may not be your ideal way of celebrating lover's day however, a file held at the Huntingdon branch of Cambridgeshire Archives, highlighted as part of the Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com, reveals how a stolen Valentine's card turned a man from Huntingdonshire into a habitual criminal.

On February 6th 1875 William Coles, a labourer from Leighton Bromswold in Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire was convicted of "stealing a Valentine."

Valentine cards first appeared in Britain at the beginning of the 19th century. By the 1870's many Valentine cards had become ornate and valuable items, printed on expensive paper and decorated with satin or lace. Coles clearly considered it worthwhile to steal one.

Given the date of his summary conviction, it is possible that Coles had stolen the Valentine in order to post it later to the woman of his dreams. Sadly, he spent 14th February 1875 in prison.

Coles was sentenced to three calendar months hard labour in Huntingdon County Gaol, and was released in May. He gave his age as "twenty," but he was in fact almost 22, having been baptised on 14 May 1853 in Leighton Bromswold.

Coles was something of a persistent offender. In 1870 he had been found guilty of assault, and in 1872 he had been caught stealing money from a house.

The Coles family had lived in Leighton Bromswold for many years, and were fairly poor. William's mother, Lucy Coles, gave birth to at least eight children; his father William worked as an agricultural labourer.

Alan Akeroyd, Archives and Local Studies Manager said:

This is exactly the kind of archive document which brings history to life. Cambridgeshire County Council holds millions of unique archive documents within its archives and local studies service, which we make freely available to the public for research into the histories of their families or their communities.”

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said:

“This record is an example of love gone wrong in the archives. The severe punishment certainly would not fit the crime now! The Archive Awareness Campaign aims to bring history to life through documents, photographs, maps and treasures. Archives across the UK are opening their doors to the public so that people can search for fascinating stories such as this”.

- Ends -

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email

Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

For further information about Cambridgeshire Archives and Local Studies please contact Alan Akeroyd on 01223 718556 or email alan.akeroyd@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

- The original document has the reference number 4440/368/89, and can be seen by visiting Huntingdonshire Archives, Princes Street, Huntingdon PE29 3PA, Tuesday to Fridays 9.00-5.30, or telephone 01480 372738
- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.

HUNTINGDON COUNTY GAOL,

17th April 1875

PARTICULARS of a Person convicted of a Crime specified in the 20th Section of the Prevention of Crimes Act, 1871.

Name *William Coles*
and
Aliases.....

Age (on discharge).....*21*
Height.....*5 feet 6*
Hair.....*Dark Brown*
Eyes.....*Grey*
Complexion.....*Fair*
Where born.....*Lighton Hunt*
Married or single.....*Single*
Trade or occupation.....*Labourer*
Any other distinguishing mark.....*Yes*
Wool on left side of nose

Photograph of Prisoner.



Address at time of apprehension.....*Lighton Hunt*

Whether summarily disposed of or tried by a Jury.....*Summarily*

Place and date of conviction.....*Huntingdon Jail 17th 1875*

Offence for which convicted.....*Stealing & Vandalism*

Indicted by Sentence.....*3 Calendar H. L.*
Police Report
Name, Date to be made.

If liberated on Licence, date when sentence will expire.....

Date to be liberated.....*5th May 1875*

Intended residence after liberation.....*Lighton Hunt*

Summary Convictions.—Dates, nature of offences, and places where convicted.
1870—9th November Assault—1 Cal. Mo. or pay £1. 4s. 0

* State whether each conviction was, or was not, proved to the satisfaction of a Jury.

Trial by Jury.—Dates, nature of offences, and places where convicted.
*1871—First March Assizes Breaking into a dwelling house & stealing various articles 9. Cal. Mo. H. L.
1872—Hunt December Quarter Sessions Stealing money from a dwelling house 18. Cal. Mo. H. L.*

Names of police officers, prison warders, or others who can identify and prove convictions.

Any other particulars as to antecedents, associates, &c.

Governor.