

## **Warwickshire Quarter Sessions: Sentences of Prisoners**

### **QS39/29, Epiphany 1898 (The Queen v William Lacey + William Warner)**

December's Document of the Month highlights an interesting incident which occurred on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1897, and involves the theft of cuttings from two holly trees!<sup>1</sup>

Whether the accused had intended to profit from selling on the holly or simply wanted a sprig each for the festive season is unclear from reviewing this document.

Additional review of the Calendar of Prisoners provides an insight into each individual's previous convictions. William Lacey had previously been fined for stealing growing fruit. William Warner had been fined for obscene language and served hard labour for stealing growing pears.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately the sentence of two months hard labour for their pre-Christmas crime may have seemed like a harsh price to pay for their holly!

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<sup>1</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, document reference QS39/29. Epiphany 1898, The Queen vs William Lacey + William Warner.

<sup>2</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, document reference QS 26/2/bundle 10. Epiphany 1898

*Orders of  
Prisoners* } Ordered that all Sentences pronounced by the Court  
 at these Adjourned Sessions shall take effect from the  
 first day of these Adjourned Sessions.

*The Queen v  
William Lacey &  
William Warner* } On an Indictment for that they on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of  
 December 1897 at the City of Coventry did feloniously  
 cut parts of two holly trees the property of Walter  
 Turrall then growing in a certain garden of the said Walter  
 Turrall situate in the Parish of St. Michael in the said City  
 with intent the same feloniously to steal thereby doing  
 injury to the said Walter Turrall to an amount  
 exceeding the sum of £1. to wit to the amount of £5 -  
 2nd Count. Feloniously stealing same.

Warwickshire County Record Office, document reference QS39/29. Epiphany 1898, The Queen vs William Lacey + William Warner. p.60.

61

*R v Lacey &  
Warner cont.* } Pleas: Each of them Not Guilty  
 Verdict: Both Guilty  
 Sentence: Each of them to be imprisoned two  
 Calendar months in Her Majesty's Prison  
 and kept to hard labour.

Warwickshire County Record Office, document reference QS39/29. Epiphany 1898, The Queen vs William Lacey + William Warner. p.61.

## Quarter Sessions

These were sessions of a court, primarily in England and Wales, and were first introduced during the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Edward III appointed individuals in each county to keep the peace and preside over criminal proceedings and appeals.<sup>3</sup> The sessions were traditionally held four times per year and named after the quarter days on which they met - Epiphany, Easter, Midsummer and Michaelmas.<sup>4</sup>

Quarter Session documents can provide a rich source of information. For example, the judicial records often include sentences of prisoners, bastardy orders, and coroners' reports on inquests. The sessions also cover administrative records, such as, alehouse licenses, apprenticeship indentures, local militia lists and even hair powder certificates!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Quarter Sessions*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/quarter-sessions> : accessed 16 November 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, Sir John. (1990) *An Introduction to English Legal History*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Butterworths. p. 30

<sup>5</sup> The Family History Partnership. *An Introduction to Quarter Session records*.

<http://www.thefamilyhistorypartnership.com/hints-tips/introduction-to-quarter-sessions-records.php> : accessed 16 November 2018.