

## **Thomas Searle (814), John Searle and Joshua Giffin (489)**

### **CONVICTION OF THE STORTFORD GANG**

Thomas Searle, 32, John Searle, 27, and Joshua Giffin, 32, labourers were indicted for breaking into a warehouse upon the premises of Messrs Green and Marsh, grocers, of Stansted Mountfitchet, and stealing a quantity of currants, cheese, and soap, the property of the prosecutors.

Mr Hawkins conducted the prosecution, and Mr Thos. Chambers appeared in defence of the prisoners.

Mr Hawkins, in stating the case to the jury, said the three prisoners before them were charged with an extensive robbery on the premises of Messrs Green and Marsh, who were large grocers at Stansted Mountfitchet; and the facts by which it was proposed to bring home the charge must convince them, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the prisoners committed the offence under circumstances which proved that they were not at all new to such practices. He must tell them that, previous to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, the prosecutors had reason to suspect, from time to time, that their premises were robbed; and they, in consequence, posted two police-constables in one of their warehouses to watch for the suspected depredators. They watched for several nights without success; but about midnight on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November they heard the noise of some persons approaching the building in which they were stationed; it proved to be a man, who put his hand over the window and tried the door, after which he appeared to go back to the gates, and immediately the policemen saw four men go to the door of the other warehouse, which they opened with a skeleton key, and three of them went in, while some other remained to keep watch. A light was struck, and in a short time all three came out with a quantity of goods, which they placed near the candle cellar, and appeared to do something to the lock. At this moment the police, who had obtained the assistance of Mr Green and an apprentice named Woodhead, rushed from their hiding place into the yard; the man who was watching contrived to make his escape, and Thomas Searle and Giffin ran forward with bludgeons in their hands, but were knocked down by the police and secured. The party then commenced a search for the fourth man, whom they were certain must still be on the premises; and ultimately the prisoner John Searle was found in a soap chest and secured on the spot. When these facts had been proved before them in evidence he thought the jury could come to no other conclusion than that the prisoners had broken and entered the warehouse in question and plundered it of the goods which were afterwards found and removed into the yard. Their object was in visiting the candle cellar would appear from the fact that upon one of them was found a soap impression of the new lock which had been placed upon the door a few days previously. The prisoners were disguised in various ways; and upon them were found a number of skeleton keys.

Several witnesses were examined in support of the facts above stated; but as we published the evidence upon the committal of the prisoners it is unnecessary to repeat it here.

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The jury returned a verdict of Guilty against all the prisoners, and the Chairman (Mr Round) said, after a very serious charge which had been proved against them, on the clearest evidence, the Court would fail in its duty to the public if he did not put it out of their power to commit these serious depredations upon the property of others at least for some years to come. The sentence of the Court upon them was that they be transported for the term of 7 years.

### **Second Case**

Three other prisoners of the same gang, viz., Benjamin SAPSFORD, Benjamin SEARLE, and Wm PERRY, were then charged under the recent statute with stealing or receiving a quantity of grocery goods, the property of the same prosecutors. In this case Messrs Green and Marsh had missed goods from their warehouse at different times previous to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, and from the circumstances of a tape placed across the door being broken they were convinced of the building having been entered, although the door was locked. After the capture of the prisoners above mentioned, the search was extended to several of their known associates, and in the houses of Benjamin Sapsford and William Searle (with the former of whom Perry lodged), a quantity of soap and cheeses was found, and subsequently identified by the prosecutors. The prisoners were found guilty under the count charging them with having received the property knowing it to have been stolen.

Third Case.

A similar indictment was then produced against Sapsford and Perry, respecting a quantity of peas found in the house of the former, and sworn to be the property of Mr John Storry, of Stansted Mountfitchet – Supt. Barnes, of Bishop's Stortford, with Supt. Clarke, of Newport, and several of the members of both Essex and Herts police, were engaged on the detection of the above offenders, and gave evidence in the respective cases. The jury found Sapsford guilty of stealing, and Perry of receiving peas.

The Chairman sentenced Sapsford, on two charges, to six months' and Searles to three months hard labour. He added, in consequence of doubts entertained by the Court, no sentence would be passed upon Perry, but he would be respited.

Thomas Searle arrived on the *Minden* in 1851.

Joshua Giffin arrived on the *Pyrenees* in 1851.

Benjamin Sapsford is possibly the convict who was convicted in 1850 and arrived on the *Minden* in 1851. He had a previous conviction. His WA number was 1034.

The Essex Standard, 5 January 1849

\*\* The Essex Standard, 8 December 1848