

WAC 574

Photograph of a newspaper
cutting, probably from a
National daily.

Dated in us. 1851.

THE BURGLARY AT THE ORDNANCE POWDER-WORKS AT WALTHAM.

The investigation into this robbery was resumed on Tuesday. The prisoners were G. Rowe, a tall respectable-looking man, described as an inn-keeper, J. Cornish and C. Eves, two men in the service of the Ordnance, and Jesse Griffiths, an itinerant fishdealer. The second and third prisoners were charged with breaking into the storekeeper's office at the Waltham Abbey Powderworks and stealing a sum in Bank of England notes and gold, amounting to 500*l.*, the prisoner Rowe with receiving the same well knowing it to have been stolen, and Griffiths with being an accessory before the fact.—Mr Topping, the deputy-storekeeper, proved that on the morning of the 8th inst. he deposited eighteen 20*l.* Bank of England notes, and 96*l.* 18*s.* 2*d.* in other money, the property of the Government, together with about 12*l.* more, his own property, in an iron safe enclosed in a closet in his office, which he locked up and secured when he left the premises, and that the next morning he was aroused by one of the office messengers with the information that it had been broken open during the night. On proceeding to the works he found that the door of the room had been forced with a chisel, the marks of which were visible, and that the lock of the iron chest, which had been removed from its place, had been blown to pieces by gunpowder, and the contents of the chest carried off. The gold consisted of sovereigns and half-sovereigns, in nearly equal portions, and was intended for the payment of the workmen's wages, weekly, though the witness received it from the Ordnance Board each month. Cornish and Eves were employed on the works as "mill-men," but on Sundays, holidays, and when not so engaged, performed the duties of watchmen, who had to make a circuit of the premises, but no one was exclusively left in charge of the building where the money was usually deposited. There were always night watchmen on duty, and some persons must have been so on the night when the robbery was committed. Cornish and Eves received about 15*s.* per week, and it was very probable they had each week received a half-sovereign in their wages, as that was the usual method of payment.—J. Parker, the office messenger referred to, deposed to locking the outer door of the building at half-past five on the evening in question, keeping the key in his pocket, and that on going there the next morning and attempting to open it, he found that it

had been already opened by a false key. On entering the lobby he found the shutter open, and the window-sash thrown up, and that part of the first inner door was in splinters as if prised open with a chisel. On advancing further to the second inner door, leading to the place where the iron chest was kept, he found that that also had been splintered in a similar manner, upon which he became so convinced that the building had been entered by burglars that he left the office precipitately, and informed the last witness of the state in which he had found it.—W. Lane, a gunsmith, employed at the Ordnance small armoury at Enfield, and in the service of which department he had been for eleven years, deposed that he had been for a long time acquainted with all the prisoners, whom he had been in the habit of meeting, except Eves, at the house of the prisoner Rowe, the Three Compasses, at Sewardstone, but had not seen them together before the time of the robbery. While there, on the night of the 8th, Griffiths, who was in the taproom, called him out into the yard, and said, "Bill, I suppose you have heard of the robbery last night at the powder-mills?" Witness replied that he had; upon which Griffiths told him that Cornish and Eves had perpetrated it, that he (Griffiths) fetched the tools from a field adjoining Rowe's inn, and gave them to Cornish, and added, "I was to have been in it myself, but they shoved me out of it." He then went inside, but as soon as he had got in Rowe accosted him, and demanded to know what he and Griffiths had been saying to each other, and on finding him reluctant to tell, exclaimed, "D— you, I'll make you as right as I am myself, if I can only get hold of the notes." On the following Thursday Rowe followed him out and said, "Cornish wants me to go up to London to see what I can get for the notes, and I shall go there in the morning with King the horsekeeper." The notes, he said, were eighteen in number, for 20*l.* each. On the following Friday he called there again, when Rowe told him, "I have been to London, and can get 15*l.* for each of the notes, which will make 270*l.*, but I have not got the notes yet, though I expect Cornish down with them." He stopped till late in the evening, when Rowe told him Cornish had been there, but did not like to hand him the notes, "for fear he should

had been there, but did not like to hand him the notes, "for fear he should stick to the whole lot." Cornish, who was present, said that would be a pretty thing if he did so, and Rowe then asked him to trust him with half of them, and take the remainder elsewhere. At ten at night Rowe called at his house and told him he had got the notes, and on the Saturday he called again, saying, "Here's a pretty thing; I can only get rid of two of the notes out of the eighteen, as the others have not got a banker's signature on them." He added, that he had received 30*l.* for the two which he had changed, and that he was inclined to stick to that and return the other notes to Cornish. Eves's brother threatened witness for saying he was mixed up in the robbery, and on mentioning it to Rowe he told him not to mind what he said, to know nothing about it, and gave him some brandy to keep silent. On the Sunday he went again, and found a stranger in the room, upon which Rowe led him to the door, and told him to be very careful of what he said, as the stranger, he thought, was a detective officer. On the following Wednesday he found that the Government had offered a reward of 50*l.* for the apprehension of the thieves, and he therefore mentioned what he knew to the superintendent of the works at Enfield, the result of which was that the Ordnance officials were communicated with, and all the prisoners taken into custody. (The witness gave his evidence with great clearness and distinctness, but without the slightest attempt at exaggeration; and, though subjected to a severe cross-examination, his evidence was not at all shaken.)—T. King, the horsekeeper referred to by Lane, was next examined, and deposed to driving Rowe to town on the Friday after the robbery, when he got out in the Kingsland road, and that before six o'clock the next morning he was roused out of bed by Rowe to drive him at once to town, which he did, the prisoner desiring to be set down at the same place as before.—Mr Christie, brewer at Hoddesdon, and Rowe's landlord, was called to prove that he was not likely to be in possession of so much money as was afterwards found secreted on his premises by the police, and stated that on his taking the house about twelve months ago he had not enough money to pay for the fixtures, and was obliged to give a bill for 20*l.* of the value, which he afterwards took up. The average of his business was about 20*l.* per month; the business had not increased since he had possession of the premises, and he had not paid any rent from the day he had entered.—Mr H. Johnston, an Ordnance clerk, deposed to the prisoner Cornish, whose wages were 2*s.* 6*d.* per day, having followed him out when he left the works only four days before the storekeeper's office was broken into, to borrow 5*s.* of him, of which he afterwards repaid 2*s.*, and engaged to return the remainder at 1*s.* per week.—Lund, an inspector of the detective force, stated that he went to the prisoner Rowe's house on Thursday week, and, not finding him in the house or yard, ascended a ladder in the stable, and there found Rowe either lying or kneeling down in such a position that he could just see his head. The loft was filled with old lumber and rubbish, and on removing him to the house and searching him he found on his person 20*l.* in gold, one 10*l.* and one 5*l.* Bank of England note, together with a 5*l.* note of the Essex County Bank, 7*s.* 10*d.* in silver, a check for 3*l.* 7*s.* on a banker, and several private memoranda. He said he had had the 10*l.* note ten months, and on asking him if he had any more money than some loose silver and copper which he pointed out to him in a drawer in his bedroom, but which witness did not touch, as it was evidently trade proceeds, he denied that he had. On returning to the loft, however, and searching a basket filled with old metal, a tin canister was discovered, and upon shaking out its contents, it was found to contain exactly 100*l.* in gold. On pointing this out to the prisoner, Rowe said that he had hid it there for safety, as his house had more than once been attempted to be broken into a short time before, and he was thereupon taken into custody. Eves was taken while at work in the powder-mills, and on searching his house 10*l.* was found in gold, fourteen of the pieces consisting of half-sovereigns; 7*l.* 10*s.* in a box in one room, which was opened and claimed by that prisoner's brother, and 2*l.* 10*s.* in a purse at the bottom of a box in another room. Cornish was also taken while at work, and on asking him if the prisoner Griffiths had given him anything on the night of the robbery, he replied, "Yes, a chisel wrapped up in a handkerchief, to take care of for him; but that, on hearing of the powder-works having been plundered, he threw the chisel into the river for fear he should be suspected." On searching his place also after his apprehension he found 3*l.* 10*s.* in gold, three of the pieces here too consisting of half-sovereigns, and 12*s.* in silver, which were given up by his wife.—Serjeant Whicher, another detective officer, confirmed the last witness in all essential par-

3*l*. 10*s*. in gold, three of the pieces here too consisting of half-sovereigns, and 12*s*. in silver, which were given up by his wife.—Serjeant Whicher, another detective officer, confirmed the last witness in all essential particulars, and Mr Parnell addressed the bench on behalf of his client, Eves, to prove that a portion of the money, two of the half-sovereigns, had been paid him as wages, and that the second sum of 7*l*. 10*s*. was the property of that prisoner's brother. The counsel for the prosecution called Mr E. Hutton, the acting inspector of the police of the district, to prove that the prisoner would not be likely to have possessed the money by honest means, and that witness stated he had known the brother many years, and that he was a common labouring man to a market-gardener named King in that locality, and that his average earnings did not exceed 2*s*. or 2*s*. 6*d*. a-day.—Mr Prentis then asked for a remand, as the detective officers were in possession of important information which would conclusively fix the offence upon the whole of the prisoners.—The Court assented to the request, and the four prisoners were transferred to Ilford Gaol.

65 / Wages 4-
per day