

Introduction

The aim of this report is to consider the 'crimes' committed during a time of extraordinary stress on the lives of the inhabitants of Great Ayton during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. It is based on the entries in the Police Charge Book, Stokesley District, 1940-1947.

Entries in the Police Charge Book include:

- a) Name, age, address of the accused
- b) The charge, whether arrested or summoned, and the date
- c) Names of police and witnesses involved
- d) Magistrates
- e) Punishment

Officials

The officials named in the Police Charge Book are:

Magistrates : Sir B Dorman; Colonel H E Kitching; Miss Harkes; A Hendry Esq; J W Hebron Esq
 Police: Sergeant (later Superintendent) G Simpson; Police Constables John B Frazer; Harold Shepherd; A Rayson; J W Rowe; T B Chapman

This is not a complete list of local magistrates and police officers during the period 1940 to 1947, rather only the names that are recorded in the Police Charge Book for the years that the book was in use.

Charges

No individuals have been identified in this report. The charges have been put into seven categories for ease of identifying the various types. Adults and children are listed separately. The number in brackets after each charge shows the number of individuals charged separately for that offence. Where several individuals acted in unison, this noted in the text.

Theft

- Fencing stolen goods (1)
- Stealing a vehicle (2)
- Theft during a raid on Ryehill Farm by three men (3)
- Poaching (1)

Assault

- Violent, physical and verbal assault. These mainly occurred at the end of the war, and including two on soldiers. Either £5 fine or prison. (12)

Vehicular (motor and bicycles)

- Failing to immobilise a vehicle (1)
- Misuse of motor fuel (1)
- Unlawfully driving motors and motor cycles (5)
- Drunk and incapable in charge of a vehicle (1)
- Speeding with lack of care and attention (lorries) (2)
- Two people on one pedal cycle (2)
- Riding a cycle furiously endangering others, fined 17s/6d (1)

Blackout Regulations

- Showing lights during blackout (21)

- Riding cycles without lights (19)
- Driving a vehicle without lights (2)

Various non-payment etc.

- Failing to pay Tax (rates) (42)
- Failure to pay War Damage Contributions (3)
- Farmers with no dog licences (2)

Other

- Non-attendance at school (1)
- Husband desertion of wife (1)
- Straying animals during October 1944 in Foot & Mouth outbreak (6)
- Home Guard absent from duty (the same person on two occasions) (2)

Children Charged

- Two schoolgirls and a young shop assistant entered an old lady's house where they stole 3s/0d in cash and goods worth 7s/6d
All three were put on probation for 2 years (3)
- Two schoolboys aged twelve and thirteen vandalised a cemetery gravestone (2)
- A schoolboy stole from a neighbour's house (1)
- In September 1945 a group of twelve schoolboys vandalised a crop being grown for animal feed (12)

Between 1940 and 1947 there were 148 individuals charged, including children.

Comments

There would be little fear of crime during the war years. The total of 148 individuals charged with an offence over the seven year period is only equivalent to 21 per year. If they were all criminal offences that caused people to be apprehensive, it would still be very few. However, not all those 148 fall into what would generally be viewed as a crime. The highest number recorded for one type of offence is 42 for non-payment or arrears of tax, generally the rates. This, and some other offences, fell into the "known only to the offender" category; 82 of the 148 individuals were in this category and would not cause any concern in the village. Only 66 individuals would have been known to have been charged with an offence.

Of these offences, it is only incidents of theft, assault and vandalism which would be more widely known about and may have caused some local apprehension. There were only 18 such incidents, fewer than three per year. The assaults, including the two on soldiers, mainly took place in 1945 to 1947, when soldiers were returning from the war.

Regarding punishments, for the majority these were fines of five shillings (25p). By the end of the war these had risen to ten shillings (50p). Some offences did not attract a penalty, for instance those in tax arrears were discharged without fine if they paid what they owed there and then.

Those found guilty of assault were fined £5 or given a prison sentence. Another that attracted a £5 fine on two occasions was the Home Guard soldier who failed to attend parades and duties. He was also on being charged the second time, recommended to be dismissed from the Home Guard.

The only time in which anyone was given imprisoned, was when three men were found guilty of a raid on Mr T F Cumbor's farm at Ryehill, with intent to steal. They were sent to Northallerton Gaol for three months with hard labour.

One could ask, were these the only 'crimes' to take place in Ayton during these years? Surely there must have been low level disturbing the peace, such as minor assault or vandalism, not deemed as chargeable. The local policemen must have played a major role in keeping the peace. Certainly Sergeant Simpson had a fearsome reputation. Living in the community, knowing practically every inhabitant, he would have been a force for law and order. Respected by the majority or feared by a few his style of long gone policing relied on the force of his personality and authority.

It was also a time of mutual trust and support between neighbours. Anyone who has lived through those times will remember that hardly anyone locked their doors when they went out, something not found in today's society!

As for juvenile 'crime', only 18 children were charged with an offence during those years, four for theft and fourteen for vandalism. These were the only misdemeanours deemed serious enough to be taken to court. Again, those old enough to have been children at that time will no doubt remember the times having been caught by the local 'bobby' for some naughtiness, been frightened to death by what he threatened if it happened again. Then being escorted home to be punished by embarrassed parents. An excellent deterrent!

All in all Great Ayton even in times of war with all its austerity, fears and apprehensions must have been a very peaceful and pleasant place to live.

Reference

Police Charge Book

North Yorkshire County Record Office, Nortallerton

See Guide Book 1, page 76, Police QS, QP. MIC 1926