

RIOTS IN RAMSGATE

(Dover Telegraph 13 July 1838)

"This town was on Monday thrown into a considerable state of excitement, in consequence of the conviction of several fishermen for hawking fish about the streets. John BUCKLEY, Henry RIGDEN, William SOLLY, William NAIRNE, James BUZZY, William GOLDSMITH, Charles KENDALL and two others (some of whom had been before convicted) were brought before the sitting Magistrates charged by Sergeant CLARK and Police Constables BILLINGS, BRADSHAW and JENKINS, with hawking fish within the streets within the parish. Each defendant admitted the charge, was convicted in the mitigated penalty of 1s. and costs or imprisonment, varying from 8 to 16 days.

After the public business was disposed of, and while the commitments for the prisoners were being made out, large numbers of persons, principally consisting of Torbay fishermen and women continued to assemble before Hubbard's room, the building appropriated for the use of the Magistrates and the commissioners during the erection of the new town-hall where the prisoners were confined. Every minute brought an accession of the numbers, until at about 3 o'clock the mob had increased to nearly 1,000.

At this time a pair-horse fish van had arrived for conveying the prisoners to Sandwich gaol, when a rush was made at the vehicle, and its progress immediately arrested. The prisoners then made their appearance at the windows, and called upon the mob to rescue them, to which they were energetically urged by the concourse of women assembled. This was the signal for action. The mob surrounded the van, and literally carried it some yards from the building. This was followed by uproarious huzzas, and cheering with the destruction of every window in the building. The police, comprising 7 or 8 men in all, now made their appearance outside and endeavoured to disperse the mob, when they were assailed with showers of stones and other missiles and were soon compelled to retreat within the building. A simultaneous rush then took place at the doors, which soon gave way to the superior force arrayed against them, and the above prisoners, accompanied with three others names BUCKLEY, BISHOP and SIMMONDS (committed for an assault on Maria ATKINS) made their escape amid the most deafening cheers of the mob. They then proceeded, followed by an immense concourse of persons, through Harbor Street, towards the Pier, and in their route, halted at several of the commissioners houses and commenced groaning, hissing, etc. and using the most opprobrious epithets towards them.

A sad destruction of window glass has been made at Ellis's in High Street and Karn's house in King Street has been nearly demolished. How far this violent conduct will go cannot be surmised, as the mob increases, and several of the new "popularly elected" commissioners are dreading their threatened visit.

As yet the rioters are not in custody, nor does it appear that any steps are taken by the Justices, with the exception of one, for haranguing the populace, from several corners of the streets this evening, which has caused considerable excitement and alarm. The shops in Queen Street are closed and great is the fear that some very serious affray may occur. The police, with the special constables, are on duty without intermission, assisted by the police from the Royal Harbour and the Coast Guard Force.

On Thursday, a detachment of the 11th Dragoons arrived from Canterbury. A meeting of the inhabitants was held at Hubbard's Rooms when it was agreed to request the commissioners under the Ramsgate Act not to lay any further information, and a majority of the commissioners being present, who concurred in this resolution, a requisition for a special meeting was signed to forward such object, which it is to be hoped will prevent a recurrence of such disgraceful proceedings."

The Times also reported this incident on 10 July 1839

(Summarised) After several fishermen were arrested at Ramsgate for hawking fish in the streets, a mob, consisting of around 1000 men and women surrounded and carried away the vans in which the prisoners were being taken off to Sandwich gaol. They also broke windows and did general damage to the building where the magistrates had committed the prisoners to gaol. The small force of police (only 7 or 8) were stoned by the mob, and when no reinforcements arrived for the police, the mob started dismantling the windows and doors of the vans and the prisoners made their escape. They then progressed down Harbour Street toward the pier, stopping at the homes of the magistrates and hissing, groaning and "using the most opprobrious epithets towards them". A police officer named Ellis was beaten severely until able to hide in the yard of a Mr. Austin. In the evening the magistrates swore in a number of special constables and the Coast Guard under Lieutenant Loveless were put on orders to be ready to assist if there was any further trouble, and in catching the escapees. Next day it was reported that the prisoners had been re-captured at the Yew Tree, a beer shop in Clumpton, about a mile and a half from Ramsgate after a little resistance, by the police and the Coast Guard. They were then taken to Sandwich gaol. However, another mob of around 700 or 800 gathered in the evening in the market place at Ramsgate. They marched to the home of Mr. Ellis, a commissioner for array, and broke all the windows, then moved on to the home of Mr. Karn, another commissioner, in King Street, and did the same, and then to Mr. Box's house similarly. By 12 o'clock, there being no sign of the mob dispersing, the magistrates called out the Coast Guard, who marched, armed, through the town and dispersed the rioters. There was some criticism of the magistrates within the town for not calling in the Coast Guard earlier. According to the report the rioters were incited by two men named Breckenshir and Magnus who were shareholders in a fishing smack and objected to a law prohibiting the hawking of fish in the street.