

His real name is William Durrant

Sussex County Sessions, 5 January 1846:

William Durrant, a soldier aged 20, pleaded guilty to an indictment charging him with stealing, at Willingdon, on 19 November 1845, two bottles of port wine, ½ gallon of British brandy, one pair of shears and one apron, the property of Matthew Mocket. Sentenced to six months hard labour. East Sussex Epiphany Quarter Sessions at Lewes, January 1846.¹

Then in October 1846, at the Lambeth Police Court, William Durrant, who held a subordinate situation at Addington Park, was charged with robbing the Lord Primate.

Inspector Roger deposed that about ten o'clock the preceding night, the prisoner and a woman named Sarah Wall came the station-house in Tower-street, Westminster-road, and the prisoner said he had been robbed of 5s at a house kept the Sarah Wall, Buckle's buildings, Waterloo-road. The woman expressed her doubt of his having been robbed, but said that on searching the room in which had been, she found seven duplicates, which she accordingly delivered to him. On examining the items he observed, they referred to property similar to some that had been stolen from Addington Park. On making this discovery, he told Durrant should detain him on a charge of stealing the property; upon which the prisoner, after a few moments hesitation, exclaimed, "Well, I did it, and I don't care a damn ; I may as well be transported or not."

Mr W Humphrey, house steward to the Archbishop, deposed, that on Monday morning last it was discovered that in the course of the preceding night, the house had been broken open, and various articles of property carried off. Humphrey could identify the workbox and other articles as part of the missing property.

Mr Matthews, pawnbroker, Prince's road, Lambeth, produced two taper candlesticks and a bronze image, which the prisoner pawned on Monday, representing them to be his own property. The prisoner also pawned his coat on the same day.

A woman named Keys, who keeps a coffee-house in Lambeth walk, deposed that the prisoner had slept at her house on Monday night, and left there a bundle, containing pair of silver candlesticks and other articles, a workbox, and other things then produced. The prisoner, who declined saying anything, was remanded.²

At the Surrey Assizes, Kingston, 30 March 1847:

William Durrant, aged 23, was indicted for a burglary in the dwelling-house of his Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury and stealing two candlesticks, a workbox and other articles. Mr Clarkson and Mr Wilmot conducted the prosecution.

It appeared that the robbery in question was committed in October last at the residence of the Reverend Prelate at Addington. The prisoner had been employed about the establishment but was discharged for misconduct, but during the period of his service, he had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the premises, and it would appear that he took advantage of this circumstance to commit the offence now imputed to him. It appeared that very shortly after the robbery, he was taken into custody in London upon some other charge, and the duplicates relating to the stolen articles were found in his possession, and on his being questioned, he admitted the offence and said he supposed he should be transported.

¹ Brighton Gazette, 08 January 1846, p8

² South Eastern Gazette, 27 October 1846, p6

The Jury found the prisoner Guilty, and a certificate was put in to show that he had been before convicted of the offence of burglary. The sentence was deferred.³

The following day, 1 April 1847, at the Kingston Assizes, William Durrant was sentenced to ten years transportation for stealing some property from the palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury, at Addington. He was taken back to Kingston Gaol with other prisoners and placed in one of the yards of the prison; and shortly afterwards, it was discovered that he had contrived by some means to scale the prison wall and make his escape. He was observed to drop from the wall at the back of the prison, but before an alarm could be raised, he was out of sight. The prisoner was tried at Lewes about two years ago for a robbery at Willingdon, and sentenced to six months hard labour; and this conviction was sent to Surrey by Captain Mackay, of the East Sussex Constabulary.⁴

About 18 months later, on Tuesday, 9 January 1849, at Lambeth: Henry Wilson, *alias* William Durrant, a young fellow who had been stopped on Wednesday last by two officers Cannon and Woodard, Nos. 59 and 157 P., in the Brixton-road, with a surplice, pulpit-cushion, and other articles, which had evidently been stolen from some church chapel, in his possession, was placed at the bar before Mr Seeker, who sat for Mr Elliott, for the final examination.

The prisoner has attained considerable notoriety from his having broken into the mansion the late Archbishop of Canterbury at Addington, in the autumn of 1846 and stealing therefrom a large quantity of massive silver plate. At the assizes at Kingston, in April 1847, found guilty and sentenced to 10 years transportation. On his removal from the Court House to the prison, the prisoner, at noon-day, and though seen several persons traversing the roof of the gaol at Kingston and the buildings adjoining, effected his escape. Although reward was offered for his apprehension at that time, he had managed to escape justice.

It was a melancholy fact that the escape of the prisoner and his being at large had accelerated the death of the venerated and venerable Archbishop of Canterbury.⁵ It was very well known that his Grace had continued to live in the greatest possible dread that Durrant, who had been thoroughly acquainted with the premises (from visiting and occasionally stopping with his uncle, who had been steward to his Grace), would visit the mansion some night, and lay violent hands on him. Every possible means had been made to capture the prisoner. Last Wednesday, the constables above mentioned stopped the prisoner in Brixton-road, with the property they produced on his person for which he could give no satisfactory account.

William Halliday deposed that he was the clerk to the district church of St Andrew's, Kingswood, Surrey, situated in the parish of Etwell, of which Rev James A Donage is the incumbent. On Wednesday, about 10 o'clock in the morning, from what he heard, he went to the church and found part of the casement of the window over the altar had been taken away, leaving a hole large enough for a man to enter, and a ladder lying in the churchyard, which had evidently been used for the purpose of getting to the window. On entering the church, he discovered the cover of the Communion table, a surplice and three cushions missing. He also missed a set of irons, a piece of drugget, three window blinds and a Palmer's candle-lamp. All these things he saw safe on Sunday 31st of last month. All were produced by the constables.

Thomas Cooper Bryons, a Chatham constable, stated that the parish church at Sutton near Maidstone had been broken into on 8 November last, and plundered of a variety of property. Amongst the valuables carried away were 29 pieces of silver coin of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, which were highly prized by the Rector and inhabitants of the parish. They had been dug up in the formation of a grave in a part of the churchyard, which had not been disturbed for many years, and were placed in the Vestry-room as a great curiosity. On the 8 November, the day of the robbery, 22 coins were sold to a person named Solomons at Chatham; and Mrs Cleff, the wife of a pawnbroker, at the same place, purchased two silver coins from a

³ Morning Post, 31 March 1847, p7

⁴ Brighton Gazette, 08 April 1847, p2

⁵ Archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley, died 11 February 1848, aged 82.

man whose description answered in every detail that of the prisoner, and whose identity could be proved by Solomons and Mrs Cleff.

George Gill, clerk of Trinity District Church, Bromley-common, Kent, deposed that on Sunday 17 December last, after the morning prayers, the prisoner came into the church and requested a light a cigar. After much difficulty in procured a light from the flue and went away; but the same evening or night, the church was broken into and every article of value which it contained carried away. The entrance had been effected as in the last instance by removing a portion of the window.

Mr Keene, the gaoler at Horsemonger-lane Prison, said that on the prisoner brought in his prison on Wednesday evening, he was recognised as the person who had escaped Kingston Prison in April 1846, after his trial, conviction and sentence of transportation for ten years, for an extensive robbery of plate at the country residence of the late Archbishop of Canterbury, and he was, therefore, liable to be tried for the escape, and to be transported for life.

The prisoner here said he felt it to be but justice to state he had been recognised by Cook, the gaoler of this Court, after his last examination and before he had been sent to Horsemonger-lane Gaol, and that, if any merit was due for the discovery, it was this officer.

Cook, the gaoler, said the prisoner's assertion was perfectly true, and he could appeal to the chief clerk and other gentlemen connected with the Court, to corroborate the fact.

Mr Secker observed he could not understand what the fact of the identity could have to do with the case; but was informed by the chief-clerk that a reward had been offered for The prisoner's apprehension, and Cook, the gaoler, having recognised him, thought himself entitled to a portion of it.

Mr Keene said it was true he had offered a reward for the prisoner's apprehension but now had no intention of paying it.

This last expression created a strong feeling in the Court; but Mr Secker said he had nothing whatever to do with the question of reward and committed the prisoner to take his trial at the next assizes for the county of Surrey, on the charge of stealing articles found in his possession from Kingswood church, observing at the same time, that he might, if necessary, be put upon his trial for escaping from prison.

The prisoner, whose escape on the last occasion has astonished all who were acquainted with the daring manner in which he effected it, has frequently declared since his apprehension that the country will not be put to the trouble of a second trial, was then committed, and the witnesses bound over to prosecute.⁶

Spring Assizes, Kingston, 26 March 1849:

Henry Wilson, alias Darrant, 23, was indicted for breaking into the parish church at Etwell, and stealing a surplice, and other articles, the property of the Rev. James Arthur Dunneyer. The prisoner was also indicted for being feloniously at large before the expiration of a period of transportation to which he had been sentenced in 1847. It will be remembered that at the Spring Assizes at this place, in 1847, the prisoner was tried for a robbery at the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury at Addington and, upon his conviction, was sentenced to be transported for ten years. After his sentence, he was taken back to the gaol at Kingston, and he contrived, during the temporary absence of the turnkey, to scale the wall and make his escape; and nothing was heard of him until he was recommitted to take his trial upon the first-mentioned charge. The prisoner pleaded guilty to both indictments. The sentence was deferred.⁷

On 29 March 1849, William Durrant, who had pleaded guilty to the charge of sacrilege and being feloniously at large before the expiration of a sentence of transportation that had been passed upon him, was then brought up, and ordered to be transported for 14 years.⁸

⁶ Morning Advertiser, 10 January 1849, p4

⁷ London Evening Standard, 27 March 1849, p1

⁸ London Evening Standard, 30 March 1849, p4

Henry Wilson alias William Durrant, was received at Pentonville Prison on 24 August 1849 from Horsemonger lane Gaol. He was 23, single, can read and write, a gentleman's servant, was convicted of sacrilidge on 24 March 1849 at Kingston upon Thames and sentenced to 14 years transportation. According to the prison register, he had made three attempts to escape from Horsemonger lane Gaol. Henry was transferred to Portland Prison on 1 July 1850. This prison register says he is a labourer and had previous convictions for: desertion from the marines, burglarly, and a felony with 10 years transportation. He had escaped from the house of correction at Kingston on 1 April 1847. Henry embarked on the *Mermaid* on 28 December 1850 for the voyage to Western Australia.⁹

On arrival at Fremantle in May 1851, he was described as:

279. Henry Wilson, 25, 5'8", light brown hair, grey eyes, long face, fresh complexion, dark whiskers, no scars or marks, a domestic servant and single.¹⁰

Henry received a ticket of leave on 26 August 1852. He worked for C Von Bibra from 3 September 1852 until 25 May 1854, and then for W Mends until 21 May 1855. He received a conditional pardon on 26 April 1856.

The Convicts of Western Australia, 1850-1887, mentions:

Henry Wilson left Fremantle per *Fergus* on 21 March 1855. The brig *Fergus*, arrived at Adelaide on 9 April from Fremantle, and a passenger was called H Wilson. The ship has been 19 days on the passage, having been delayed in rounding Cape Leeuwin, by a strong S.E. wind. The *Fergus* carried about 60 passengers, some of whom proceeded to Melbourne.¹¹

At the Quarter Sessions, Perth, on 1 October 1856, James Johnson was charged with stealing seven £1 notes and silver coins from the person of John Neary, in the Port Gregory district, in July. One of the witnesses was Henry Wilson, a servant to Mr Von Bibra.¹² Henry Wilson seems to be convict 279.

⁹ HO24/16; PCOM2/283

¹⁰ SROWA Acc 128/1-32

¹¹ South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), 10 April 1855, p2

¹² The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA : 1855 - 1901), 8 October 1856, p3