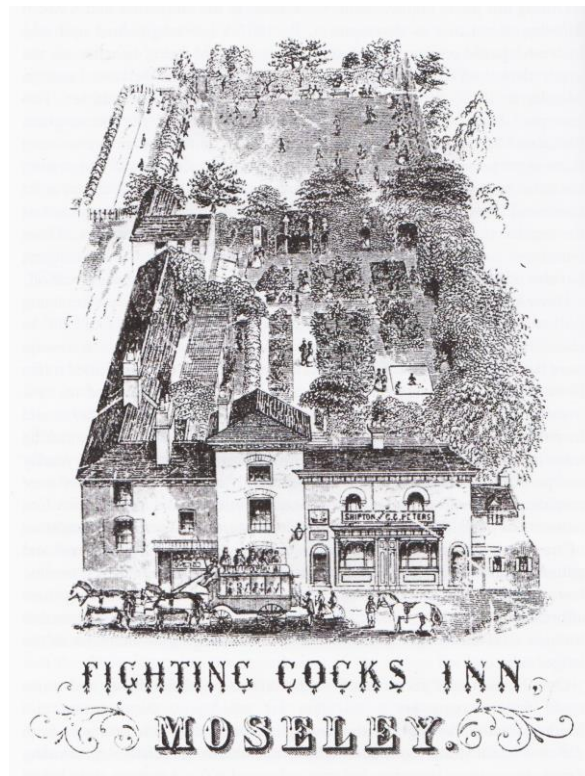


## Highway Robbery in Moseley: The year - 1846

On Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1846, an aggravated robbery took place in the immediate vicinity of Moseley. The victim was Mr Richard Briscoe, a gentleman around eighty years old, who resided near his son and family at Greet Mill Hill Farm on the Stratford Turnpike Road in Hall Green. Mr Briscoe had been spending the day with a relation, Mr Joseph Kemp, the licensee of the Fighting Cocks.



Between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, Richard Briscoe left the inn to return home. Arriving at the corner of the road at Wake Green, leading to his home half a mile away, he was attacked by two young men, one of whom pulled him upon his back, and rifled one of his pockets containing seven or eight shillings, while the other held a pistol to Mr Briscoe's head, demanding, on pain of death, his money. Having secured the gentleman's purse, the villains decamped, but in

the confusion of the moment the direction of their escape was not clear. Fortunately, being daylight, the thieves in their haste omitted to search more of Mr Briscoe's pockets, otherwise they would have discovered a considerable amount of cash to the amount of forty pounds or more.<sup>i</sup>



**1834 map showing the route from Moseley to Greet Hill via Wake Green shown as being on the corner of Stoney Lane**

Arriving at the home of his son Joseph, it became evident that the description Richard gave of the two villains met with that of two fellows that had passed by the house a short time before. An alarm was immediately given, and men set off in all directions in pursuit of the robbers. In the course of an hour, the two miscreants were apprehended at Golden Hillock, about two and a half miles from Birmingham. They were named as Garratt and Billingham. On their person 7s 8½d in money, nine skeleton keys and a crow bar was found but no pistol. The prisoners were shown to Richard Briscoe, who confirmed that they were the men who attacked and robbed him and whom he had seen at the Fighting Cocks. The prisoners were delivered over to the county police, and for the night conveyed to the station at Kings Heath.

Subsequent evidence proved the correctness of Richard Briscoe's statement. The prisoners had been seen by Mr Bird, the postmaster at Moseley, leaving the inn after Mr Briscoe left, and were seen to follow him in the direction of Wake Green.

The following morning, Superintendent Potter and Constable Clewer, returned to the scene of the robbery and discovered a pistol loaded with powder and two pebble stones. It was believed that the original intention of the two robbers was to plunder the Fighting Cocks.

**(Right) A Birmingham policeman in the 1840s**



The prisoners were taken before Mr Lawrence at the Public Office, Birmingham and committed to trial at Worcester Assizes.

At the Assizes, the prisoners were identified. The first was John Bellingham, aged nineteen, married with one child and a tube maker by trade. His accomplice was Benjamin Garratt, age twenty-one, also married and a chair maker by trade. He had two previous convictions for felony. They were both charged with 'robbery in the company of violence' and convicted on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1846.

They were given a fifteen-year transportation sentence to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania). They set sail on 8<sup>th</sup> October in the 3-masted wooden barque, the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (see right).<sup>ii</sup>



The voyage was documented in the medical journal of Dr Colin Arrott Browning. He wrote:

Two hundred prisoners were received on board the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* at Woolwich on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1846 from Millbank prison.

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, Dr Browning reported 'a painful case' brought before him; a lad convicted of using improper language. Three or four youths seemed to be very hardened and reckless with no disposition to reform. He did not wish to commence with flogging or putting the prisoners in irons as the glory of the voyage vanishes when punishment commences. Most of the prisoners behaved well and deplored the conduct of the 'youngsters'.

Reaching Tenerife in the Canary Islands on 25<sup>th</sup> October he wrote:

A very infectious disease prevailed in the Island; therefore we immediately weighed anchor and shaped our course for Simon's Bay, Cape of Good Hope

The Cape of Good Hope was reached on the 7th December 1846. The ship sailed from there on 3rd January 1847 after picking up water and fresh provisions

Our voyage from the Cape to Hobart Town partook of the character of the previous part of our voyage. The total number of men who appeared to have received Christ, and openly avowed before all their fellowship, amounted on Feb. 15, to one hundred and thirty-two. Not a lash was inflicted, - not an iron was seen on the prisoners' decks. The behaviour of my men, after they had been a few weeks under scriptural instruction, prayer, and discipline, exceeded in correctness and superiority of character that of any other body of men ever committed to my care.

On board was a guard that consisted of Captain Hume of the 58th regiment, Ensign Williams, Private James Heaton, 65th regiment and 50 rank and file, 27 women and 27 children. The Guard were en route to New Zealand. He wrote unfavourably of them:

The total number of patients in the sick book amounted to 47, of whom 14 were prisoners and the remaining 33 belonged to the Guard. Seven were soldier's wives. Respecting the soldiers themselves he observed that several of them were in a state of health that ought to have excluded them altogether from the Guard of a convict ship. He thought that the most trying portion of his duties was to the soldiers' wives, nearly the whole of whom were the most



self-willed, disobedient and unruly body of women that ever came under my immediate observation. Nine of them were brought to confinement on the voyage.<sup>iii</sup>

The *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, arrived at Hobart on 16<sup>th</sup> February the following year and from there to Maria Island the day after, where Bellingham and Garratt served out their term.

Mr Richard Briscoe, late of Greet Mill Hill Farm, died on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1849 in his eighty-fifth year.<sup>iv</sup>

After the death of Richard's son Joseph, on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1880, aged seventy-three, the dairy farm at Greet Mill Hill Farm was put up for sale by auction in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1880.

**GREET MILL HILL FARM, HALL GREEN.**  
**M**ESSRS. ENDALL and KING will SELL  
by AUCTION, as above, on FRIDAY NEXT, Oct. 22nd  
(by direction of the Executors of the late Mr. Joseph Briscoe)  
—the whole of the valuable FARMING STOCK, comprising 30  
head of Horned Stock, Team of Horses, Ricks of Grain, Hay,  
and Clover; also the FARMING IMPLEMENTS,  
Sale at Eleven prompt.  
N.B.—A SALE of the Substantial HOUSEHOLD FURNI-  
TURE and Effects will take place on WEDNESDAY, October-  
27th.

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Written and researched by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group

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## End Notes

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- i *Coventry Standard*, 5.6.1846,
- ii Criminal Records, Worcester Assizes, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1846, Ancestry
- iii Medical Journal of Colin Arrot Browning on the voyage of the Pestonjee Bomanjee from London to Van Diemen's Land Ancestry.com.  
UK Royal Navy Medical Journals, 1817-1857
- iv Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1849

## Illustrations

Fighting Cocks trading card, 1864

Baxter, Miriam & Drake, Peter, 1996, The Archive Photographs Series, *Moseley, Balsal Heath and Highgate*, p 83, Chalford Publishing Company, Stroud

A Birmingham policeman in the 1840's - From the archive of the West Midlands Police Museum

<https://museum.west-midlands.police.uk/general/diary-of-a-heritage-manager-the-evolution-of-operations/>

*Pestonjee Bomanjee*, oil painting and map of voyage from the website:

<https://www.rumbelow.net/encounterbay/Pestonjee>

Web manager Matt James Rumbelow (B.Arch)