

The Sixpenny Handley Swing Riot of 1830 and my family history

By Mark Wareham

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This 'riot' was one of a number of similar uprisings of agricultural labourers which took place in late 1830 and which were attributed to 'Captain Swing'. The riots were a response to extreme poverty and to a lack of work in rural areas and they took hold particularly in southern counties of the UK like Dorset.

The Handley Riot



A contemporary etching of a swing riot

From "Wiltshire Machine Breakers, Volume 1, by Jill Chambers, 1993" page 72

Thursday 25th November 1830

"A mob of 50 to 60 people gathered in the parish of Handley and from there went to the parish of Berwick St John. Mr Woolridge, occupier of the farm, had taken down his thrashing machine before the mob arrived When the mob arrived they demanded victuals and then went out to the field where they used sledge hammers and large sticks to destroy iron parts of the thrashing machine. From Bridmore Farm they moved to Tollard Royal and a farm of Lord Rivers where they destroyed the iron parts of a thrashing machine, a winnowing machine and chaff cutting machine. From there they went to the farm of Charles Lane, Tollard Royal. When Mr Lane remonstrated one, Joseph Chubb, came up to him with a large piece of iron and threatened to beat out his brains if he interfered with them further. The mob then broke Mr Lane's thrashing machine and chaff cutting machine and burnt the pieces. They then went to one of Charles Lane's barns, half a mile away, threw out and destroyed a winnowing machine that Mr Lane had borrowed from a neighbouring farmer. The last farm the mob visited was Ashgrove Farm, Donhead St Mary, that of Mr. Jasper Cox. They broke a thrashing machine and between 6 and 7 in the evening went to Mr Cox's house and demanded money, saying they would have it by fair means or foul. He handed over 5 shillings."

From "Captain Swing, by Hobsbawn and Rule, 1969"

"A far more serious outbreak occurred at Handley, described by the local justices as "a singular place" with "a wild dissolute population of poachers, smugglers and deer stealers" and "one from whence our principle rioters have issued. At Handley the rioters [from Salisbury] were increased by the junction of almost all the labourers of that village and thrashing machines and the machines of the neighbouring farmers were all destroyed."

The response and capture

From "Rebels of the Fields, Jill Chambers, 1995"

"Early evening on Friday 26th November 1830 Mr's Portman, Farquharson and Smith led a party of mounted men out of Blandford ... 250 men ... gentlemen, farmers and tradesmen.

In each village the Kings Proclamation was read out and distributed by magistrates. Labourers were assured that their wages would be increased. Mr Portman and his party succeeded in capturing several ringleaders that had been so active in the Cranborne and Handley area.

From "Captain Swing, by Hobsbawn and Rule, 1969"

8-10 Handley rioters were committed for trial.

"but a certain discrimination appears to have been shown in their selection for as the magistrate concerned in the Handley affair wrote to the Home Office "had we committed for participating in and aiding the burning of machinery we might have committed two-thirds of the labouring population of the district".

The trial and sentence

Trial at Salisbury

Trials of local Swing rioters opened in the Council House, New Sarum (Salisbury, Wiltshire) from 27th December 1830. The trials of the Handley rioters started on 6th January 1831 and on 10th January 1831 sentencing took place and amongst the sentences were -

- Supposed 'ringleader' Joseph Chubb of Sixpenny Handley was sentenced to transportation for 14 years on the ship Proteus to Van Diemens Land in Tasmania
- Samuel Rymond (or Riman) of Sixpenny Handley was sentenced to 12 months hard labour in Devizes New Prison, Wiltshire (he was back in Handley come the 1841 census).
- Thomas New (husband of Ann Riman) was also sentenced to the same punishment as Samuel.

Trial at Dorchester (this riot happened the day before the one in Handley)

James Rymond of Tollard Royal "... charged on the oath of Stephen Welsh and another for willfully and maliciously on 24th of November last, breaking and destroying chaff cutting machine ... warrant issued 3rd December 1830". Sentenced to 2 years hard labour.

The link to my ancestors

Samuel and Ann Riman (or Rymond) were both cousins of my great (x4) grandfather Edward Riman who lived in the same hamlet of Woodcutts in Sixpenny Handley. Edward was also an agricultural labourer and was aged 21 in 1830. Given the reference from "*Captain Swing by Hobsbawn and Rule*", that most local labourers of the parish were involved in the riot and the family connections, it is quite possible that Edward and other Rimans were in the 'mob' of 50-60 people who gathered at Handley. My ancestor, Edward Riman would appear to have luckily escaped capture and trial, if he was one of the rioters. Sadly though both he and his wife Sarah ended their lives in the Workhouse in Wimborne. Whilst they may have escaped the reach of the law with the riot, they could not escape the grip of Victorian working class poverty.

Picture of the Riman family of Woodcutts, Sixpenny Handley, Dorset c 1870 –



In the picture above are -

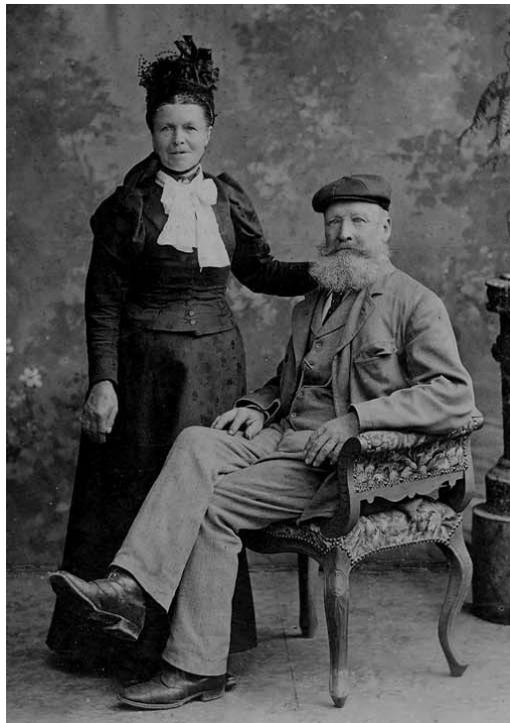
Back row – James Riman (farm labourer), Eliza Riman, Emily Riman*

Middle row – Edwin Riman, Sarah Riman (nee Chown), Edward Riman (labourer), Sarah Riman (nee Whitmarsh)

Front row – Fanny Riman, John Riman, Ellen Riman

Other branches of my family in the area, and into which Emily Riman was to marry in 1871, were the Hiscocks and Grays. They were tenant farmers from East Stour in 1830 and Francis Rogers Hiscock, Emily's husband, was eventually to farm in Farnham near Handley. There was a major riot in the Stour area subsequent to the one in Handley above. However there is no indication that the Swing rioters in East Stour attacked the Hiscock or Gray farms. According to sources many Swing riots were aimed at certain farmers or landowners with whom the labourers had grievances or who were particularly over-zealous at introducing machinery onto their farms at the time to the detriment of the workforce and their well being.

My great x 2 grandparents Francis and Emily Hiscock are pictured below in about 1900. Emily married well, she was the daughter of a farm labourer and probably the granddaughter of a former 'Swing Rioter' whilst Francis was a yeoman tenant farmer and son of a prosperous farmer from Stour Provost. Francis and Emily held Rookery Farm at Farnham in Dorset, near Handley, as tenants to General Pitt Rivers, from about 1880 to 1903.



Interesting weblinks about the Swing Riots –

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swing_riot

http://www.thedorsetpage.com/history/captain_swing/captain_swing.htm

<http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/ruralife/swing.htm>

My family line from my grandmother Violet Hiscock –

