Samuel Fudge

A Life Far from Sweet…

Milborne Port can be proud of many of its people, but Samuel Fudge is not one of them! However, as with many other (much more) infamous criminal characters from history, this does not preclude him from being worth investigation. However, prepare to be surprised, sometimes shocked at what you learn about this fascinating character. Sit tight, it's going to be a bumpy ride.

Firstly, a bit of family background… Our Samuel's father, Samuel Fudge senior, was born in Milborne Port in 1818. He married Matilda Smith and lived in Brunswick Street, Yeovil working as a postman/letter carrier. They registered the birth of their son Samuel junior in the September quarter of 1848 and baptised young Samuel and his brother William (born 1853) at Holy Trinity Church, Yeovil on 31st August 1853. There were three other children: Henry John (b.1840), Mary Ann (b.1843) and Emma (b.1846). By 1861 the family had moved to Cold Harbour, Milborne Port where Samuel senior was working as a glover and Samuel junior and most of his siblings were at school. Samuel senior and his family were very much part of the Methodist community in the village, and Samuel senior was even involved in the building of the new Chapel on Cold Harbour in the 1860s.

Samuel senior was still living in Cold Harbour when he died on the 26 September 1904. His will was proved on 14 November 1904. A retired glover, he left effects to the value of £1263 to his son William Clayton Fudge, congregational minister.

Our Samuel decided (or was it decided for him?) to join the Royal Navy in June 1866 as a volunteer, due to begin adult Continuous Service in 1869. The Royal Navy Continuous Services Books tell us:

Name: **Fudge, Samuel**
Place of Birth: **Yeovil, Somerset**
Continuous Service Number: **37595A**
Date of Volunteering: **29 June 1866**
Date of Birth: **10 July 1851**
Description: **height 5', complexion dark, hair brown, eyes brown, marks/scar on forehead**
Ship on which he volunteered: **Boscawen**[1]
Rating: **Boy second class**
Commencement of Engagement: **10th July 1866**
Period of Engagement: **10 years**

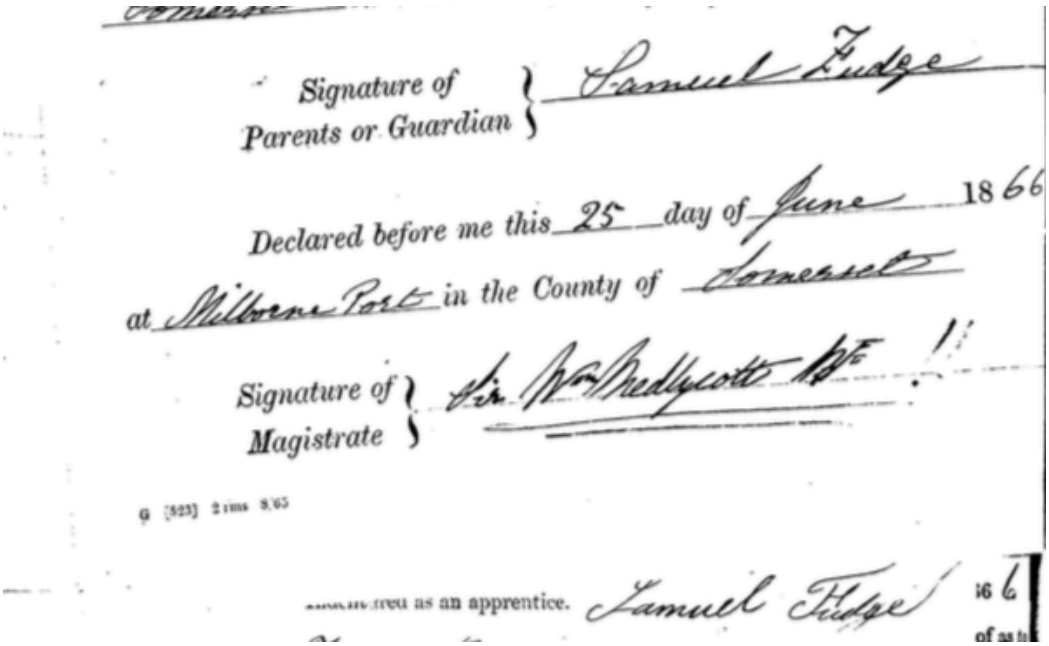
[1] A naval training ship for boys based at Portland at the time. Much of the training of the boys reflected life under sail and activities ashore and on board prepared them for life at sea. They were trained in all aspects of naval work and life. For this the 520 boys in 1872 received 3d per week pocket money. On some occasions the boys were prevented from going ashore by bad weather, and there were times when the ship was quarantined due to scarlet fever and other infectious diseases.

Declaration

I Samuel Fudge do hereby solemnly declare that my son Samuel Fudge was born in the parish of Yeovil, in the county of Somerset on the 10th day of July 1851

The observant reader will note a discrepancy here! Was it Sam's first deliberate 'fudge'? His year of birth is given as 1851, making him 15 for the purposes of this document; we know that he was in fact nearly 18. Why claim to be younger than he actually was? What could be the reason for pretending to be three years younger? Perhaps the conditions of service for a volunteer boy of his age were better? Did he want to get onto a training ship rather than enter into the world of adult service? It is also notable that the date of Commencement of Engagement was supposedly his 15th birthday, suggesting that he had been waiting in particular to be '15'…

Samuel senior appears to have signed his name to the lie. Perhaps the parents were desperate to get the boy off their hands, if his ensuing history of misdemeanours is a reflection of what he was like as a teenager… If Sam forged his father's signature, which is what is implied by the correspondence below, his parents in fact knew nothing about it! However, the fact that the signing magistrate was William Medlycott would suggest that the initial stages of the application were completed in Milborne Port… It seems unlikely that Sam junior could organise a member of the local gentry to sign a form without his father's involvement. Yet it is hard to believe that a pillar of the community such as Samuel senior would have been complicit in this plot. One can only assume that William Medlycott would not have known the family well enough to know that he was party to this fraud. And what do the exclamation marks after Medlycott's signature mean? Was it a tongue-in-cheek expression of surprise or relief that a perhaps already troublesome Sam was about to leave the village?



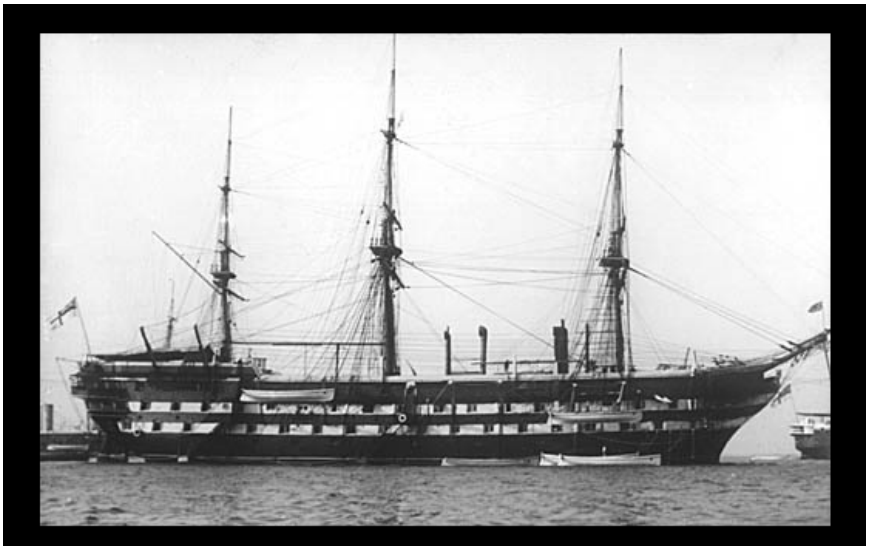
Signature of Parents or Guardian } Samuel Fudge

Declared before me this 25 day of June 1866

at Milborne Port in the County of Somerset

Signature of Magistrate } Sir Wm Medlycott Bt !!

[illegible] as an apprentice. Samuel Fudge 1866



H.M.S Boscawen

Not even two weeks into Sam's service, someone in the Royal Navy had smelt a rat…

Electric Telegraph 27th July 1866
Query: Will you send me the parents consents annexed to the C S[2] engagement of Samuel Judge boy of Boscawen No 37595. It is believed to be a forgery.

Reply: The 'parents' consent' to the entry of Samuel Fudge not Judge C S number 37595 will be forwarded by this evening mail together with the engagement.

Victory in Portsmouth Harbour 11th August 1866
With reference to your letter of 27th ultimo, forwarding, at my request, the continuous service agreement and other papers of Samuel Fudge boy 2nd class of the Boscawen and which you requested might be returned to me… with a report[3] of the circumstances under which the certificates annexed to this Continuous Service Agreement were forged.

Commander in Chief[4]

It is intriguing to wonder what it was that gave the game away… Perhaps Sam was careless in conversation with the other boys. Perhaps it was observed that his physique was just too manly for a fifteen-year-old, despite the fact that he was only 5 feet tall (a factor that would have initially supported the fraud!) Or perhaps he regretted his actions almost immediately and was looking for a way out already! Two crucial pieces of information certainly would support the suggestion that he wanted 'out' at soon as possible:

1) On 26th July 1866, the Dorset County Chronicle and Somerset Gazette reported that cholera had broken out amongst the boys on HMS Boscawen, off Portsmouth, *'and one has died'*. There were 450 boys on board at the time. The coincidence is extraordinary; this news was reported one day before the telegram requesting

[2] Continuous Service.
[3] Unfortunately not included in the extant documents at the National Archives.
[4] Francis Egerton, 1824-1895.

information about the parents' consent. The boys must have been terrified of contracting this highly infectious disease themselves.

2) Conditions for the boys on board were harsh and punishment could be severe. In 1866, for example, two boys each received 24 'cuts' of the birch. Another bizarre coincidence that it was the very year that Sam joined up that this took place. Did he learn about this event from the other boys. Is it even possible that he was one of these boys?

We do not know what took place next or whether a report was provided; one imagines so. Whatever happened, Sam certainly did not serve the ten years that he had signed up for because the 1871 census tells us that he was back in Milborne Port by then, working as a glover. It seems likely that he would have been discharged; he might even have been prosecuted and if his father had been part of this fraud, perhaps he might have faced some sort of proceedings also. No records exist of any legal proceedings against either.

On 16th October 1871, Sam enlisted as a private soldier into the Dorset Militia[5] for six years, giving his age as 18; he was 23. His mother, Matilda, died in 1872. Could this have been the trigger for some sort of crisis which led to what was to come, including his deserting in 1873? Any punishment and how long he was missing for has not been recorded. He transferred to the Hereford Militia[6] on 2nd Feb 1876, then discharged on 15th October 1877, having served his five years.[7] Given what we learn of Sam's later crimes, it is no surprise to know that he deserted, and there is a later Hereford connection… What work he did during this time was probably in the gloving industry in Milborne Port, with regular attendance expected for training and duties in Dorchester during that time. There were no military campaigns in this period which would have required him to be called into action.

The 1866 forgery was either a reflection of his 15-year-old character (perhaps his long-suffering parents were indeed part of the fraud out of desperation to get him off their hands!), as well as the start of a career of crime, because on 27th September 1872, this report appeared in the Western Gazette:

[5] The 1852 Act introduced militia artillery units whose role was to man coastal defences and fortifications, relieving the Royal Artillery for active service.
[6] Pictured above, Hereford Militia barracks were in Harold Street, now the Records Office.
[7] This information came from the enlistment and discharge books of the Dorset Militia, based in West Fordington near Dorchester at the time. No detailed information was found about his time in the Militia, but during this period there was not much going on that would put the men in a campaign. The Militia soon became the Territorial Army and is now the Army Reserve.

CRUELTY TO A HORSE.—*Samuel Fudge*, glover, of Milborne Port, was charged with cruelty to a horse belonging to Mr. Enos Denis, of the Greyhound Inn, in Sherborne. Mr. Davies, who conducted the prosecution, stated that, on the 8th Sept., the defendant engaged a horse and trap, as he said, for a Mr. Read to go to Longburton to a funeral; but instead of doing so, he went to Dorchester, and on his return, broke the shaft of the trap, and injured the horse. Frederick Stour, a lad in the employ of Mr. Denis, said that on the 8th Sept. defendant came to the Greyhound, and said that he wanted a horse for Mr. Read to go to a funeral at Longburton. Defendant took the trap away at eight a.m., saying he would be back by four p.m. He saw the defendant about eight p.m. The horse was going at a full gallop, and the defendant was beating it at the same time. The whip had a new thong, which was broken when the horse and trap were brought back. When the horse was brought back he saw that it had been thrown down and its knees cut; one of the shafts had been broken and the bit was bent. Two or three pieces of the skin of the horse were taken out of its mouth. Defendant asked witness, at Mr. Dalwood's, to have the horse and trap up to Mr. Denis. He afterwards said he would have it up himself. There was a young woman in the trap. Defendant was very drunk at the time. Enos Denis deposed that, on 8th September, at about eight o'clock, defendant came and asked to have a horse for Mr. Read to go to Long Burton. He asked the price and witness told him 5s. He also said the horse and trap would be back at four p.m. He saw defendant a week after, when he admitted that he had been to Dorchester and had broken the shafts. Defendant asked him to have it mended, and he said he would pay for it. The horse had been down, but complainant could not say if it had been beaten. He should not have let the horse to the defendant at all if he had thought it was for himself, not even for £5; and would certainly have charged more if he had known that it it was going to Dorchester.—The first witness, on being recalled, said there were weales on the horse's back when it was brought back, and it was not worked for a week afterwards. Mr. Davies submitted that, according to 12 and 13 Vic., cap. 92, sec. 9, prosecutor was entitled to damages for the injury to the horse, and also to the vehicle.—The Chairman said there was but little doubt but that the defendant might have been proceeded against for false pretences. Addressing the defendant the Chairman said it was a very bad case; he had obtained the horse under false pretences, and had acted very badly. The fine would be £2 for cruelty to the horse, 10s 6d for damage to the carriage, and 9s costs; in default of payment in 24 hours, two months' imprisonment. Half of the penalty and the amount charged for the damage done were ordered to be handed over to complainant.

This report leaves rather an unpleasant taste in the mouth. He is 26 years old at this time, so past the teenage monkey business stage and, unlike the navy fraud, it feels like a reflection of something rather more sinister going on. A modern reader might be a bit more sensitive to stories of animal cruelty than a Victorian one, but even so, it was clearly regarded as a criminal act to be so cruel to a horse, for which he was fined £2 (about £300 in today's money), with a possible two months in prison if not, with the other fines, paid promptly; the reader will have noted that the sub-heading for this article is 'CRUELTY TO A HORSE' rather than anything about acting under false pretences… There is no prison record for Sam at this point, so it is likely that the fines were paid. Prison time **is** going to feature in this story, though… As is being unpleasantly drunk… It is also worth noting that Enos Denis said that he would not have let Sam rent the horse and trap, even for £5, if he had known that it was for his personal use. Surely this implies that Sam's reputation preceded him and that he was already known for drunkenness, dishonesty or for animal cruelty, or for all three… Whichever it was, it seems unlikely that this was his first brush with the law.

The building that was the Greyhound Inn in Cheap Street, Sherborne, until 1997.

On 22nd May 1876 he was in Shepton Mallet Gaol, awaiting trial for a charge under a warrant by police at Yeovil for obtaining a pair of boots worth £1 and 7 shillings *'by false pretences'* from John and Harriet Dade, shoemakers and shopkeepers on 25th July, 1875. Sam is described as being 24 years old (we know that he was 28!) and being able to read and write, and a Methodist.

In the Bridgewater Mercury, July 5th 1876, it was reported that Samuel entered the shoe shop and said that he wanted to buy some boots for his brother but didn't know what size, so he was allowed to take them away for half an hour so that his brother, a cabinet maker, could try them on at his address in Middle Street... He did not return. (Henry Fudge told Harriet Dade that he had not seen Sam for three weeks.) Instead, he sold them to a William Crease, a leather dresser, in The Globe Inn for 5 shillings per pair, claiming that he needed the money to go to Worcester because he was out of work. '*Henry Fudge, brother of the prisoner, was called as a witness, and denied having authorised his brother to obtain the boots for him, adding,*

however, that his brother some time ago met with an accident, and that he occasionally did not know what he was about. The prisoner's father made a similar statement, adding that the prisoner was often led away and induced to drink, and that this soon upset him. Prisoner himself stated that he did not know what he was about at the time, but the Chairman said he was afraid that a similar defence could be urged in many cases.' One can just imagine the muffled titters from the court at this last statement…

However, on a serious note, we must take note of Henry's reference to an accident that had affected his behaviour… And his father saying the same… And Sam himself saying the same… Could 'led away' also mean 'led astray'? In other words, could an accident from his childhood have affected his brain (remember that he has scar on his forehead) to the extent that he has lost his judgement? Made him uninhibited? Risk-averse, unable to think ahead and consider the possible consequences of his actions? Made him '*not know what he was about*' at times? Was he a heavy drinker or even an alcoholic as a result of, or a reaction to, the personal difficulties created by his accident? Had the accident made him more susceptible and vulnerable to those who might seek to take advantage of him? This is certainly a picture that his brother and father are painting. If the accident preceded 1866, it could be that Sam's behaviour was already strange and he or the family believed that a career in the navy might 'sort him out' in some way; it would have been well known that there were strict regimes on these training ships, that they served a type of reformatory or corrective purpose for boys, some sent from workhouses.

In the deposition for this case, it was recorded that Sam said, despite the weight of evidence against him, *"I am not guilty and reserve my defence."* Predictably, on 27th June 1876, Sam was sentenced to one month of hard labour[8]. He served this sentence whilst still a serving member of the Dorset Militia…

It cannot be said that Sam left prison a reformed and better man and the reader need not hold out any hope of redemption; however, the reader also needs to bear in mind – especially considering that there will follow further evidence regarding Sam's deficiencies – that it is probably wholly inappropriate to think of Sam as a man who is capable of self-reflection and self-control. If it was indeed true that he had suffered brain-affecting damage in an accident, we must accept that there is a limit to which he can be held fully responsible for his actions, not that the Victorian penal system would necessarily have made allowances for this (although you will interpret later that there seems to be some understanding of his condition). If a childhood head injury had caused damage to his frontal lobe, then much of what we know so far about Sam would make sense: *poor planning or organization; persistence with one behaviour, way of thinking, or set of rules; difficulties with higher order functions like reasoning, problem-solving, and judgment; problems with maintaining attention or concentration; mood swings; drastic changes in personality or behaviour, which can include apathy, irritability, and inappropriate social behaviour; poor impulse control or lack of inhibition.* These effects certainly seem like a recipe for a potential life of crime.

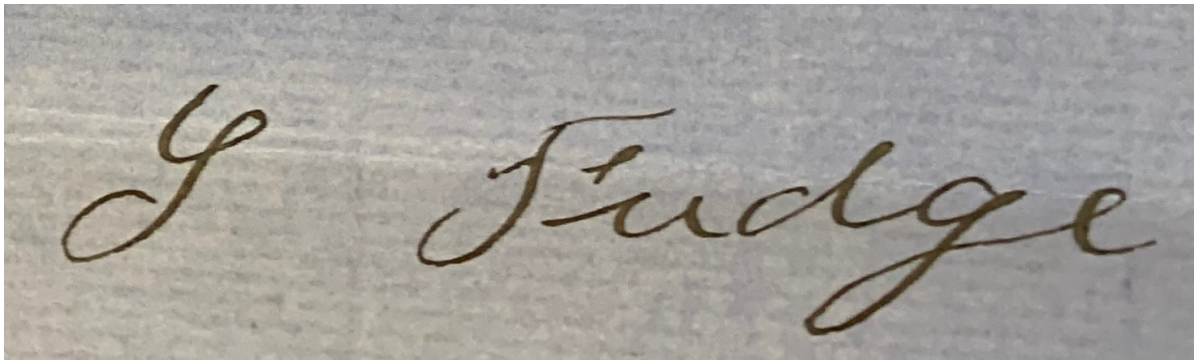
[8] Oakum picking, the crank, stone breaking and treadwheel were features of prison punishment throughout the country in the 19th century. For Sam Fudge, hard labour would have meant stone breaking and working on the treadwheel at Shepton Mallet prison. As well as being one of the largest constructed, the Shepton Mallet treadwheel was one of the few to serve a purpose as it powered a mill just outside the prison (the blocked-up arches seen in the photograph on p.18 once housed the wheels). However, forms of hard labour did not need to serve a purpose, as their aim was the punish the prisoner. There was much debate in newspapers at the time on the use of such punishments in the penal system.

If we needed proof that Sam made poor judgements about his crimes, it would be in the lack of wisdom in choosing a target so close to home. In November 1877, he faced suspicion in two further thefts, this time of gloves. These crimes were traced back to him and in January 1878, he was facing the Taunton Epiphany Sessions for breaking and entering the warehouse of Silas Dyke and Sons (where he had probably worked as a glove parer) in Milborne Port the previous October and November and stealing 'thirteen dozen' (156!) pairs of gloves worth about £20 and 'twenty-one dozen pairs' (252!) of gloves, value about £29.

And in for a penny, in for a pound… Or should I be talking a sheep and a lamb? Charges also included crimes from earlier that year, whilst still serving in the Dorset of Militia, of *'stealing from and out of a certain warehouse, one Bricklayer's Trowel, under the value of five shillings, property of Walter Parsons, at Milborne Port, on 2nd October 1877'* and *'stealing from and out of a certain warehouse, one Bricklayer's Trowel, under the value of 5 shillings, property of Herbert Mead, at Milborne Port on 2nd October 1877'*.

Sam's behaviour around the opportunist theft of the trowels is peculiar. At the same time as this theft from Herbert Mead, he also stole other items, amongst them a pig whip, a light tweed jacket and a rush basket. He was found in the morning of 3rd October by Richard Dyke, hiding in loft of his stable building, saying that he had lost his way from Milborne Port to Templecombe; as Dyke has no reasons to be suspicious of him, he allowed him to go on his way. Off to Wincanton he went and sold the trowels for a shilling a piece to two masons working on the site of the Town Hall that had been destroyed by fire the previous August.

In the deposition for this case, it was recorded that Sam said, despite the weight of evidence against him, *"I bought the trowel."*



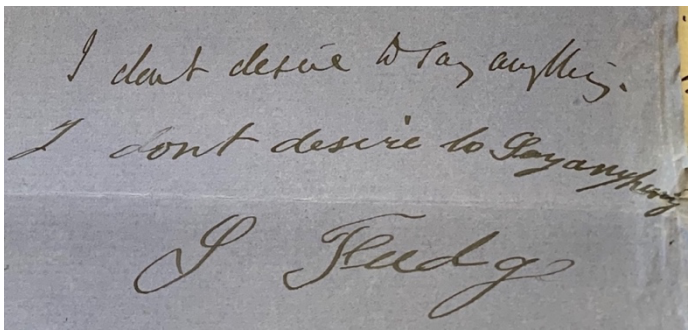
Sam's behaviour around the theft of the gloves was similarly strange. He was found by a carter's boy in a cow shed on a farm on the road between Milborne Port and Sherborne on the day after the theft; he was kneeling over the boxes of gloves and wrapping the gloves up in white cloths to make bundles. After he left, the boy found three empty boxes. That same day, 16th October, he was in Dorchester with his bundles, seeking a bed for the night at the Duke of Wellington pub where he had been billeted when on service with the Dorset Militia, thanking his hostess the following morning with a gift of two pairs of black gloves; the

landlady insisted on paying something for them, and he sold them to her for 18d. When she commented on the large number of pairs of gloves that he had in his bundles, he told her that he had made them himself.

Sam then went to Bruton and just knocked on doors to flog his booty – a farmhouse in Dropping Lane, the signal box at Bruton Railway Station. He did the same in Bedminster in Bristol and travelled as far as Wales in an attempt to make some money from his ill-gotten gains. In Newport, he told one 'customer' that had had been working for a woman in Yeovil who had gone bankrupt and could not pay him, so he was to pay himself out of the gloves. He told a butcher in Bedminster that he was very hard up and the butcher bought six pairs for five shillings, Sam having said, *"Give me what you like for them*," which is an interesting if not desperate sales strategy!

After the final sale (before being caught) to Mr Cromwell, a draper in Newport in Wales (Sam claimed that his sister had made the gloves), a police detective arrived only four hours later with Sam in tow to be identified by the buyer after he had been spotted behaving suspiciously at Newport Railway Station; the detective wrote in his deposition: *"I handed my umbrella to Mr Cromwell, took hold of the prisoner who was making towards the door. I was taking him to the police office when he suddenly tried to escape by giving a sudden jump. I held him firm and with the assistance of another officer who came up, I conveyed him to the office. I then searched him and found upon him six half sovereigns, two shillings in silver and 11 pence in copper."*

There is a desperation about the way that he was operating. Thefts that were probably poorly thought through – or not thought through at all – followed by random attempts to sell on the goods as quickly as possible, without much consideration of how easy it might be to follow his tracks; the police were always close on his heels. The need to get the goods off his hands as quickly as possible made him a poor salesman; he was all too quick to reduce his price if he thought that the buyer might not bite… He went by the name of 'Jones' or 'Brown' but these pseudonyms failed dismally to protect him, and neither did his claims of living in Shepton Mallet or Bristol.



One newspaper reported that 'The cases excited considerable interest , and lasted upwards of five hours.' Unsurprisingly, the judge passed down a sentence of twelve months hard labour in Shepton Mallet Gaol and seven years police supervision (probation). He was admitted on 21st November, 1877.

But rarely a dull moment with our Sam… It is as a prison escape artist that we hear of him next. On 6th April 1878, the West Somerset Free Press, printed this report on the next court appearance of Samuel Fudge:

PRISON BREAKING.

Samuel Fudge, 27, glover, was indicted for that he being lawfully imprisoned in Shepton Mallet gaol, did break out and escape from the said prison on the 12th January. Mr. Hooper prosecuted; prisoner was undefended. Mr. Wm. Carter, the governor of Shepton Mallet prison, said prisoner was given into his custody on the 4th January last, on a sentence of twelve months' imprisonment for robbery. On the 12th January prisoner was working on the tread-mill, and on the afternoon of that day he was missed. On the 19th of the same month he was brought back again. John Richards, engineer of the Shepton Mallet gaol, said he examined the tread-wheel on the evening of the day named, and found that two boards of the casing of the wheel had been torn up and replaced. The aperture thus made would be big enough for a man to get through. Witness got through, and found the prisoner's jacket placed over a small cog wheel, and found that the prisoner must have dropped from the mill-house into a yard by means of a sheet, and thence out of the prison by scaling a wall some seven or eight feet high. The jury found the prisoner guilty, and his Lordship, in sentencing him, said it was apparent that it was very easy for the prisoner to escape, and it being such a great temptation to him he did not consider it an offence that deserved a very severe punishment. The sentence would be an additional three weeks' imprisonment with hard labour.[9]

We know that Sam was short (only about 5 feet tall when he was 15) but he must also have been very slim and athletic! Another report described the manner of escape showing '*premeditation and daring… having secreted about his person the bed sheets from his cell, he managed to elude the vigilance of the guards on duty in the stone breaking yard, where he was employed*[10]*, under the pretence of going to the closet and got to the treadwheel, the shaft of which passes through the gaol wall and across a yard to the mill, which has a separate entrance to the street. The aperture in the wall through which the shaft passes is about ten inches high and about twice as wide. Through this aperture the prisoner managed to get, where he found himself over the yard, about 30 feet below him. Here he utilised the bedsheets by tearing them in strips, which he tied together and fastened to the shaft and let himself into the yard below, from which his escape was easy.*[11] *He left his jacket and vest on the treadwheel.'*

Another report tells us that Sam told the court that he had fallen through the wheel on a previous occasion and had seen some loose bricks, working out that this was a possible escape route. He also said to the jury, *"If your sons were put into a cage, and the door was left open, they would be sure to get out."* One is left with the impression that Sam rather enjoyed performing in court; perhaps being aware of the notoriety that he had earnt gave his confidence quite a boost.

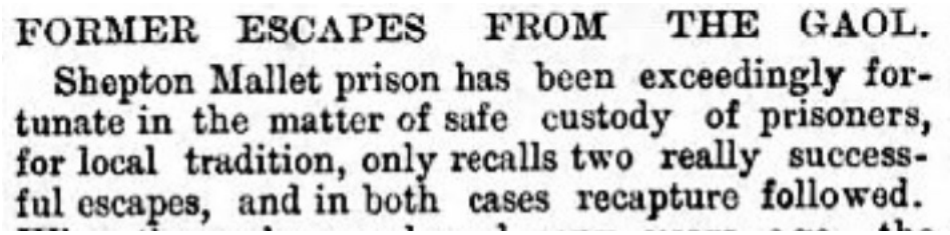
[9] Another report tells us that he tore up two boards and then replaced them.

[10] Some reports tell us that he was working in the treadwheel and others in the stone breaking yard.

[11] Another report claims that he had even found a key one of the locks on his way out of the prison complex!

He was quite the joker, it seems: *'…great amusement was caused by the prisoner's defence. He said that the surgeon had told him to walk about, and there was no-one to look after him. He spoke to a prisoner, who said his name was Tichborne. He asked, "Are you a King, Rodger?"* The joke here is that Rodger Tichborne was the name of a famous aristocrat who was lost at sea in 1855; a man claiming to be him many years later was convicted of perjury in 1874 and was in prison at the same time as Sam Fudge (but not at Shepton Mallet!) Sam's comment is an allusion to this case, no doubt, prompted by learning that the man's name was Tichborne. The image conjured up of a member of the aristocracy, or even of a king, wandering around the stone breaking yard of Shepton Mallet prison would no doubt have been the source of this amusement.

So famous was Sam's 1878 prison break that it featured in an article in the Shepton Mallet Journal and City of Wells Report twelve years later in a piece about Shepton Mallet prison escapes!



FORMER ESCAPES FROM THE GAOL.

Shepton Mallet prison has been exceedingly fortunate in the matter of safe custody of prisoners, for local tradition, only recalls two really successful escapes, and in both cases recapture followed.

This ability to plan, to think ahead – as he must have done with the theft of the gloves – seems to belie the list of descriptions of a man suffering from damage of the frontal lobe. However, it seems likely that Sam was no 'simpleton' or 'village idiot'. He might well have behaved in a peculiar manner but he had sufficient intelligence to allow him to function in society, albeit on the fringes – to serve in the militia, to perhaps hold down a job for a while, to navigate the rail network, to plan a prison escape...[12] The West Somerset Free Press reported this same incident with the headline *A Genius in the Dock,* so it seems that there was even some admiration for Sam at the time! Another journalist couldn't resist a joke linked to Sam's name (probably better than my own 'A Life Far from Sweet'!) when he wrote, *'and having made up his mind… to enjoy the sweets of liberty..'* It seems that Sam's escape was proving rather good entertainment!

After escaping from the prison grounds, reports came in that Sam had been spotted in a field close behind the prison - *without a coat and vest, and wearing prison trousers and cap* – and the alarm was raised but he managed to get away. Police officer were despatched in all directions, including towards Milborne Port, the belief being that he would be homeward bound. He was seen at Cannard's Grave[13], just a mile or so south of Shepton Mallet, running across some fields, but by the time night fell he had not been apprehended. He might have

[12] When I was at secondary school, there was a boy who had a large scar on his forehead from a bicycle accident; he had suffered some brain damage and whilst he was certainly 'strange', he was able to attend mainstream school and to learn. I do remember him struggling with friendships though, and he tried to compensate by playing the class clown in an attempt to try to attract the admiration of his peers; unfortunately he was laughed 'at' rather than 'with'. I believe that this boy could have had much in common with Sam.

[13] According to legend, the ghost of 17th century publican Giles Cannard still walks at Cannard's Grave. Tom Kennard, often called either Giles, or Tom the Taverner, was the landlord of a public house which stood on the crossroads between the Fosse Way and many other roads to the West Country. Some accounts say that he committed suicide when facing sheep stealing charges, others that he was hanged for sheep stealing. Opposite the inn stood a grim reminder of the relative lawlessness of those times, a gibbet, on which smugglers, highwaymen, bandits and other miscreants met their end…

remained free for more than two days if he could have resisted his urges, but he was arrested in Shaftesbury for stealing sixty-one cigars valued at 10 shillings from Charles Martin, landlord of the King's Arms (pictured above) at East Stour; he gave the false name of 'Brown' but was recognised and returned to Shepton Mallet a week later. The Central Somerset Gazette reported on 26th January 1878 that '*A large concourse of people had assembled at the gaol door to get a glimpse of the prisoner on his return, the manner of his escape having incited no little curiosity.'* This certainly was Sam's fifteen minutes of infamy.

On 3rd April 1878, the Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser reported that '*Samuel Fudge 27, glover, who appeared in the dock wearing the black and yellow zebra striped prison garb, took his trial for escaping from Shepton Mallet prison by breaking out on 12th January, apprehended 14th January in Shaftesbury.'*

Fortunately for Samuel, the judge seems to have taken a dimmer view of the prison's failings than of Sam's escape!

We assume that Sam served his time and was then immediately back on remand; he was in Dorset County Gaol and House of Correction in January 1879 and then in court again in May for the theft of the cigars in East Stour: '*Fudge was seen by a witness to take the cigars. He was brought back to the house* [the King's Arms], *when a portion of the cigars fell out from under his waistcoat and the remainder were found in his pockets. When in custody he told the policeman he supposed he should 'not get much for it' as he did not carry the cigars away from the house. He was cautioned as to making any statement, when he said he was going to Liverpool, and he thought a few cigars would do to smoke on the way. The prisoner had not been brought to trial before because he had been in prison ever since on other charges. The prisoner said that the guards at Shepton Mallet forgot to lock the gates, for which he bade them goodbye. (Laughter). He was taken back, and they took care not to let him go anymore. He gave further particulars of his detention at other places of confinement, and said he had earned a good character whilst in prison… He pleaded guilty to a former conviction in Somersetshire in 1878. The Judge said the good character given him by his father would be of service to him, and, as he had been kept in prison several months before being brought to trial through a mistake of the authorities with respect to the trials, the sentence of the Court would be he should be detained in custody only two days longer.'*

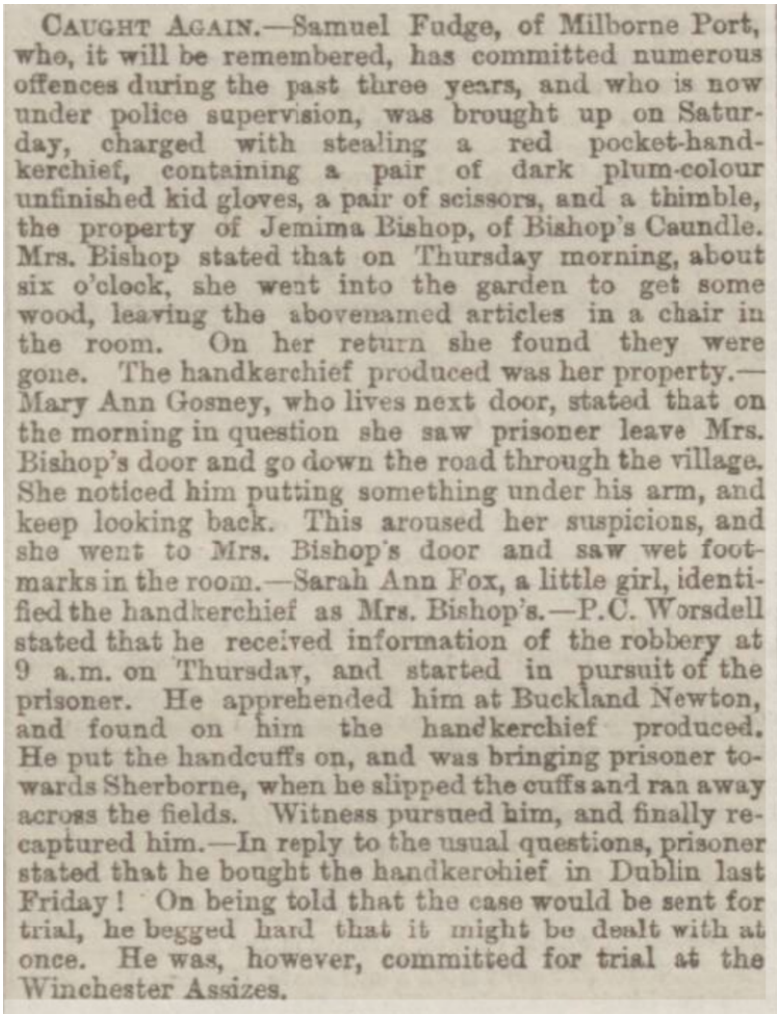
Much more can be learnt and commented on from this report of 17th May 1879 in the Southern Times of his appearance at the Winchester Assizes on 6th May:

- He **did** take 'the cigars away'; they were only returned because he was caught. Was this comment a deliberate joke or does it reveal some sort of self-delusional aspect to Sam's character? The same question could be asked about the comment about bidding goodbye to the guards.

- - ‘good character’… Well, yes! When he was in Shepton Mallet prison he had a clean behaviour record sheet! (see below). Perhaps he was actually rather likeable.
- Poor Mr Fudge, senior… He was probably desperate to support his wayward son.
- Liverpool? The link with this city will become clear later.
- The judge acknowledged that the justice system had made a mistake in the timeliness of dealing with Sam as he had been on remand since January; it seems to be a nod to his difficulties that the judge was so lenient with this sentence of just two more days.
- What springs to mind in this whole description of Sam’s behaviour at the scene of the crime is some sort of drunken comic character from a ‘Carry On’ film… But, of course, it’s not funny.
- Just two words in the report from The Telegram of the same court appearance confirm Sam’s difficulties: *‘imperfect education’*. The report goes on to tell us that he offered Charles Martin for his horde of cigars, and that *‘He made a feeling appeal to the judge not to send him back to prison’*. It also tells us that before his escape from Shepton Mallet prison, his prison record sheet gave him a good character, in other words, he behaved himself well while he was there; it was on the outside that he couldn’t be trusted.

What next? Just a few months later, Sam was charged with stealing at Bishops Caundle on 21st August 1879: pocket handkerchief, pair of unfinished plum-coloured kid gloves, one pair of scissors and one thimble, of the value of four shillings, the property of Jemima Bishop[14], a 63 year-old servant at Coombe Farm Cottages. The Western Gazette described him as ‘An Old Hand’ in its report of this theft. He might well have been ‘an old hand’, but he wasn’t very good at not getting caught, was he? ‘Caught Again’ is the heading for this report… And Dublin? This might fit with the Liverpool connection later.

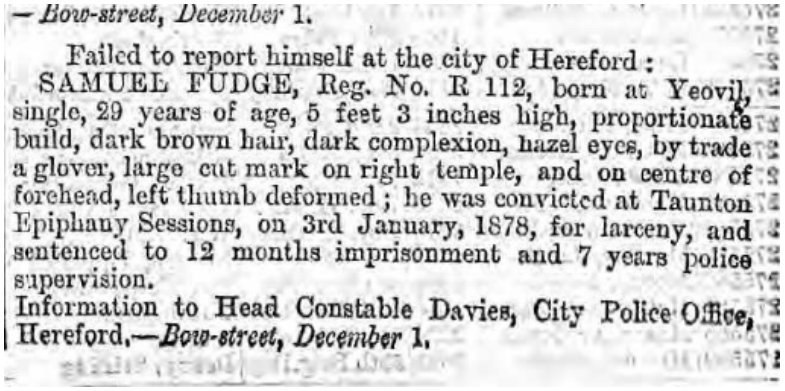
[14] Probably earning extra money making gloves from home, as was common.



CAUGHT AGAIN.—Samuel Fudge, of Milborne Port, who, it will be remembered, has committed numerous offences during the past three years, and who is now under police supervision, was brought up on Saturday, charged with stealing a red pocket-handkerchief, containing a pair of dark plum-colour unfinished kid gloves, a pair of scissors, and a thimble, the property of Jemima Bishop, of Bishop's Caundle. Mrs. Bishop stated that on Thursday morning, about six o'clock, she went into the garden to get some wood, leaving the abovenamed articles in a chair in the room. On her return she found they were gone. The handkerchief produced was her property.—Mary Ann Gosney, who lives next door, stated that on the morning in question she saw prisoner leave Mrs. Bishop's door and go down the road through the village. She noticed him putting something under his arm, and keep looking back. This aroused her suspicions, and she went to Mrs. Bishop's door and saw wet footmarks in the room.—Sarah Ann Fox, a little girl, identified the handkerchief as Mrs. Bishop's.—P.C. Worsdell stated that he received information of the robbery at 9 a.m. on Thursday, and started in pursuit of the prisoner. He apprehended him at Buckland Newton, and found on him the handkerchief produced. He put the handcuffs on, and was bringing prisoner towards Sherborne, when he slipped the cuffs and ran away across the fields. Witness pursued him, and finally recaptured him.—In reply to the usual questions, prisoner stated that he bought the handkerchief in Dublin last Friday! On being told that the case would be sent for trial, he begged hard that it might be dealt with at once. He was, however, committed for trial at the Winchester Assizes.

As we would expect from Sam Houdini by now, he eluded capture for a while! He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour with seven years of police supervision. He did not serve all this sentence, though, as we know that he was in another part of the country at the end of 1879. Time off for good behaviour?

And so to this intriguing trip well out of the area… What could have taken him to Hereford? Well, we know that he was transferred in 1876 to Hereford when he was in the Dorset Militia, so it is reasonable to assume that he made connections with people there at this time, perhaps with whom he was billeted, as when he was in Dorchester. Also, he had mentioned wanting to go to nearby Worcester to find work before, so he must have known this part of the world. Perhaps there was work in the glove-making industry there, perhaps, supported by a Methodist community? A fresh start? It is clear from this news article from 3rd December 1879 that he was either staying there or had moved to the area and had failed to report to the police station, as a condition of his seven years police supervision order. This article provides an interesting physical portrait of our man, doesn't it? We knew from his naval details that he had marks or a scar on his forehead but now he has a deformed thumb too. The wear and tear of an eventful life, no doubt!



— *Bow-street, December* 1.

Failed to report himself at the city of Hereford :
SAMUEL FUDGE, Reg. No. R 112, born at Yeovil, single, 29 years of age, 5 feet 3 inches high, proportionate build, dark brown hair, dark complexion, hazel eyes, by trade a glover, large cut mark on right temple, and on centre of forehead, left thumb deformed ; he was convicted at Taunton Epiphany Sessions, on 3rd January, 1878, for larceny, and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and 7 years police supervision.
Information to Head Constable Davies, City Police Office, Hereford.—*Bow-street, December* 1.

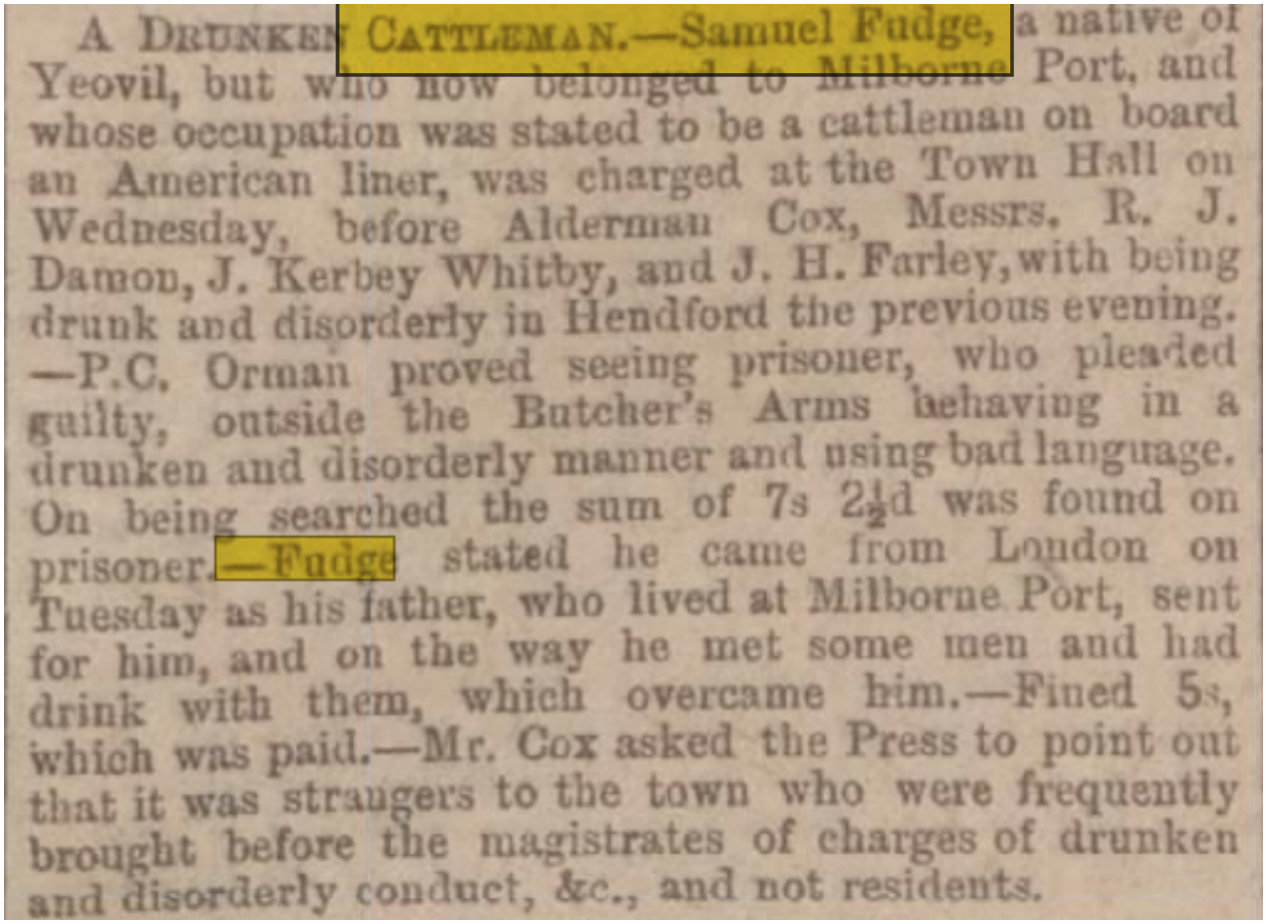
If he had moved to Hereford for work, he didn't stay long and was soon back home and up to his usual tricks. On 15th October 1880, the Western Gazette reported that *'Samuel Fudge, aged 27, was charged with stealing a number of Indian sheep skins, the property of Mr Minchinton*[15] *of Milborne Port.'* 27 years old he certainly wasn't… More like 32. Perhaps he genuinely didn't know how old he was… The report tells us that the skins were stolen 14 months previously but that he had only just been released from a prison sentence in Dorchester prison. It mentions the theft of gloves, plus the prison break – '*his course had been a sad one. Prisoner pleaded guilty, but most earnestly promised amendment, and his father begged piteously that the Bench would give his son one more chance. The magistrates expressed their desire for defendant's reformation, and in consideration of his having spent so much time in gaol and of his having promised to amend, they would deal leniently with him. They sentenced him to two months' hard labour.'*

So it is a similar story. The court clearly saw that Sam's condition had imposed its own 'sad' sentence on him; Samuel senior - no doubt strengthened by his faith in God and in family bonds - had not given up on him; the magistrates saw the bigger picture and wanted to show kindness, although no doubt their hands were still somewhat tied by the law.

And that is where I thought that the story had ended, that Sam had completed the ultimate escape trick and disappeared from the records. There are no plausible census, marriage or death records, no hospital or workhouse records, and there are no further prison records. Is this good or bad news? Did he change his name? Perhaps he emigrated - he would certainly have known of local families where members had emigrated or were planning to do so – for a fresh start and a better life? What had happened to Samuel Fudge?

Well, the discovery of a news report from October 1901 provides a substantial clue as to where life took Sam after serving time for the theft of the sheepskins in Milborne Port.

[15] A glover living at Gainsborough.



A DRUNKEN CATTLEMAN.—Samuel Fudge, a native of Yeovil, but who now belonged to Milborne Port, and whose occupation was stated to be a cattleman on board an American liner, was charged at the Town Hall on Wednesday, before Alderman Cox, Messrs. R. J. Damon, J. Kerbey Whitby, and J. H. Farley, with being drunk and disorderly in Hendford the previous evening. —P.C. Orman proved seeing prisoner, who pleaded guilty, outside the Butcher's Arms behaving in a drunken and disorderly manner and using bad language. On being searched the sum of 7s 2½d was found on prisoner.—Fudge stated he came from London on Tuesday as his father, who lived at Milborne Port, sent for him, and on the way he met some men and had drink with them, which overcame him.—Fined 5s, which was paid.—Mr. Cox asked the Press to point out that it was strangers to the town who were frequently brought before the magistrates of charges of drunken and disorderly conduct, &c., and not residents.

At some point after leaving prison, he took on the employment of being a cattleman on ships crossing the Atlantic; the transportation of live cattle from the USA at this time was big business.[16] This could explain why, when he was arrested for stealing the cigars in 1879, he said that he was on his way to Liverpool, whose ports were very busy at that time with transatlantic cattle vessels. He also mentioned having been to Dublin when arrested again later that year. Could he have gone to Ireland in search of work on transatlantic liners docking there?

Whether he emigrated or not, he must have spent some of his time in the United States, thus making him hard to pin down in the 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses. On this trip home in 1901, it was sadly business as usual where his behaviour was concerned.

After this, the trail really does go cold…

[16] Men like Sam who were employed under foremen to tend to the cattle while traveling across the Atlantic were generally unskilled and, in many instances, totally unable physically to endure the exertion, privations and natural hardships of a rough voyage from America to England. These 'cattlemen' (also called 'stiffs' if they were not mentally or physically up to the job), who performed the difficult and dangerous duties of attending cattle in shipment to Europe, were badly paid and fed, being frequently compelled to work for nothing.

'Cufic', the type of transatlantic liner on which Sam would have worked

So, in summary… At some point before 1876, Sam suffered a head injury in an accident, possibly even before 1866 when he forged some aspect of the application papers to 'run away to sea' as a naval volunteer 'boy'; he took a horse and trap under false pretences and abused the horse; he joined, deserted, returned and served the rest of his term in the Dorset Militia; he stole the boots in Yeovil and was imprisoned; he stole the builders' trowels and the gloves from Dyke's in Milborne Port and was imprisoned; he escaped from prison and whilst on the run, stole cigars from a pub in East Stour, was arrested in Shaftsbury and returned to prison; on release from prison, he was tried for stealing the cigars and served two more days; he stole Jemima Bishop's possessions in Bishop Caundle and ran off to Buckland Newton; he failed to meet the conditions of his police supervision when staying or living in Hereford; and he stole the sheep skins in Milborne Port and became a cattleman working on American liners. He might well have carried out more crimes and not been caught, or these crimes might not have been reported.

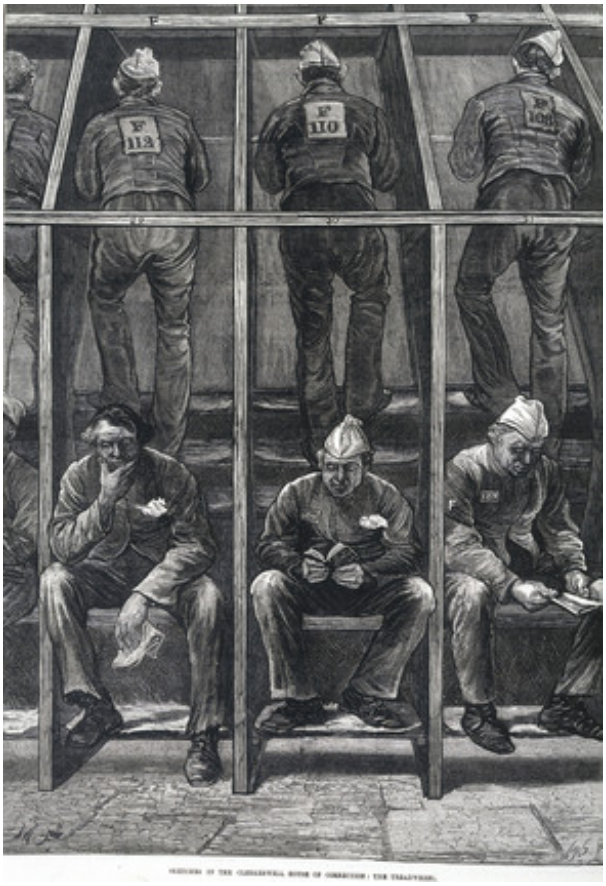
His story is a mass of contradictions. Some thefts were planned (probably the gloves), some opportunist; he was a liar. He stole indiscriminately from people of all classes. Was he a kleptomaniac? A Jekyll and Hyde? Did he turn to a life of crime because he was work-shy? Reluctant to join the Victorian gloving rat-race? An opportunist? A chancer? Was it that the more immersed in life of crime he became, the harder it was to find honest work? Was he simply just a liar, a Jack-the-Lad, a rogue, fit in later life only to be a 'stiff' on a cattle ship? And as for his long-suffering family… Did his father leave him nothing in his will because he was abroad or dead by 1904, or because by that time Sam had burnt any remaining bridges…?

Too many questions and not enough answers. As with much historical research that recreates a life from just a few sources, we are left with our imaginations to fill in the blanks. When I first started researching Sam, I thought that he was an almost comical character, a buffoon, a fool, an idler, a man who could not be bothered to earn an honest living so chose a dishonest one. Now I am not so sure. He was, no doubt, all of these things at different points in his life, but there was also a darkness surrounding him. Now that my research is as complete as I think it can be, I am left simply with a sense of real sadness about him. His was not a life lived well.

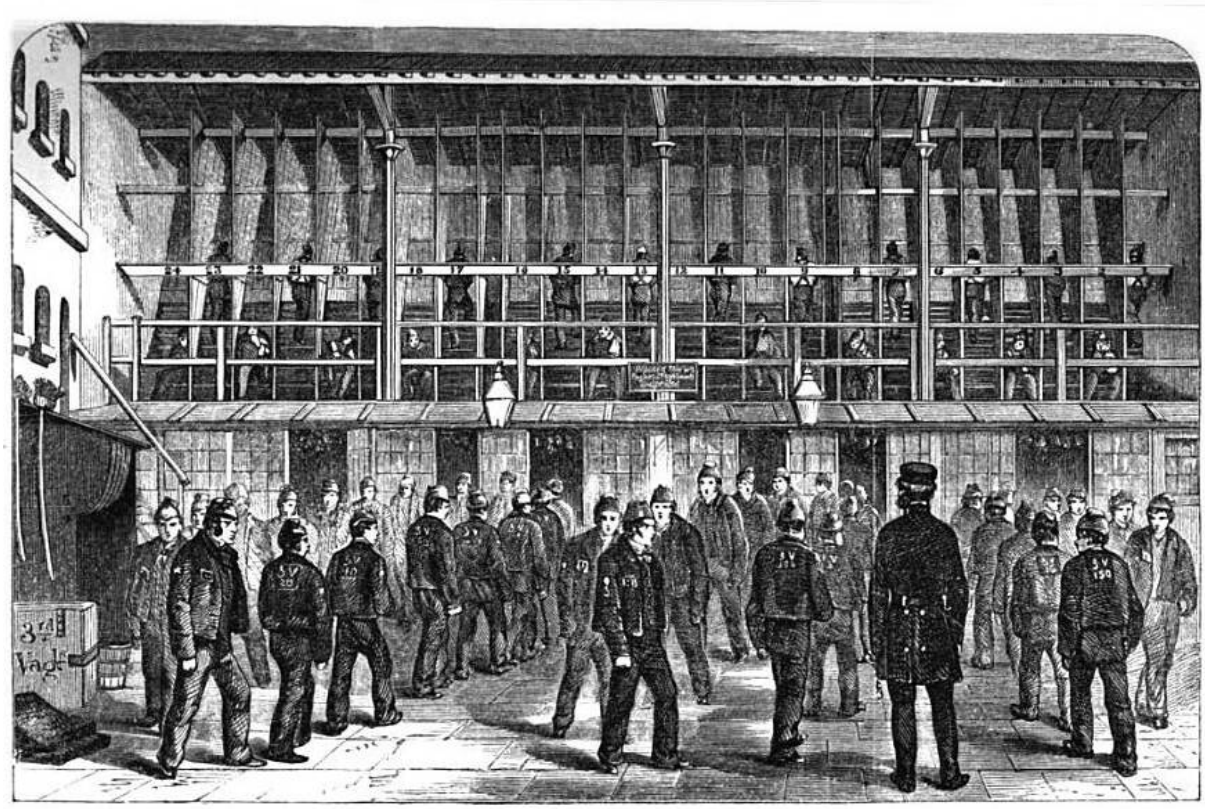
The thing about Sam Fudge is that he *occasionally did not know what he was about…*

Shepton Mallet prison

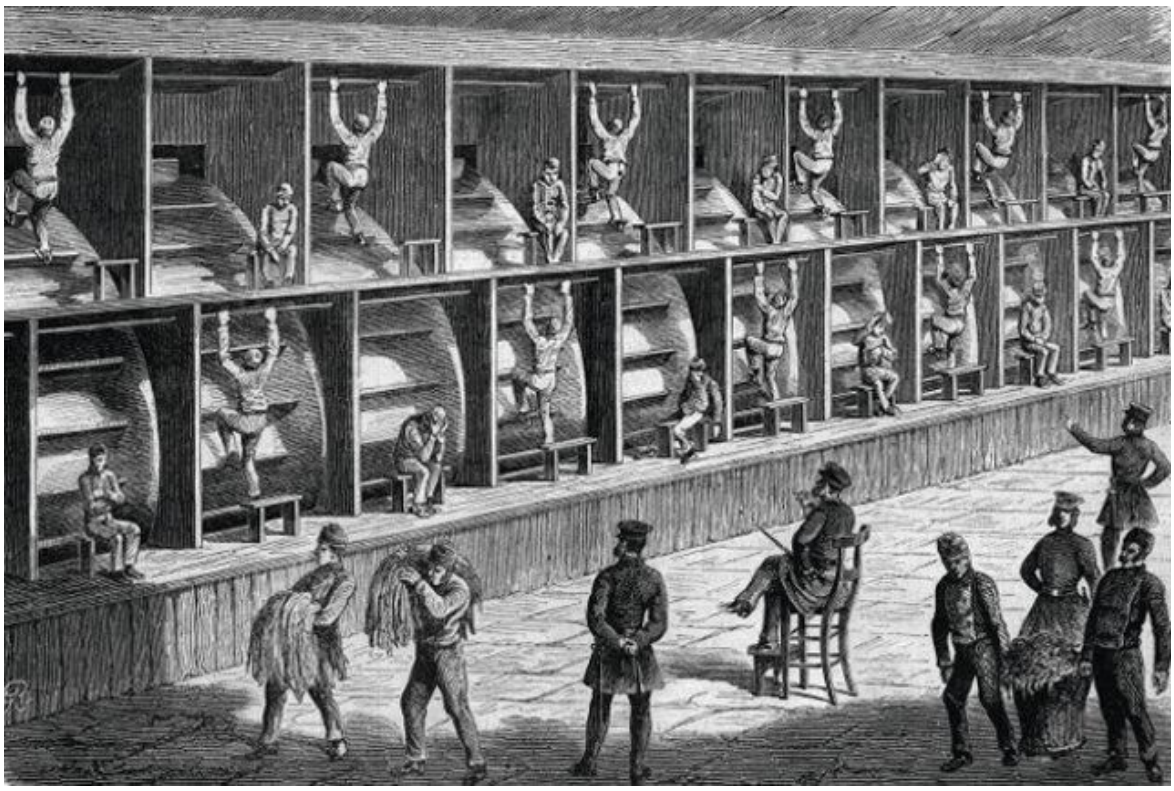
Shepton Mallet prison: oakum picking, the crank and treadwheel were introduced in prisons throughout the country. As well as being one of the largest constructed, the Shepton Mallet treadwheel was one of the few to serve a purpose as it powered a mill just outside the prison (the blocked-up arches seen in this photograph once housed the wheels). However, forms of hard labour did not need to serve a purpose, as their aim was the punish the prisoner. There was much debate in newspapers at the time on the use of such punishments in the penal system.



The treadmill at Clerkenwell House of Correction (also known as Coldbath Fields) 1874



PRISONERS WORKING AT THE TREAD-WHEEL, AND OTHERS EXERCISING, IN THE 3RD YARD OF THE VAGRANTS' PRISON, COLDBATH FIELDS.
(From a Photograph by Herbert Watkins, 179, Regent Street.)



The treadmill at Clerkenwell House of Correction

The Kray twins served time in Shepton Mallet prison in 1951.

Nathalie Hetherington
March 2023