

# Edwin Rose of Cheltenham

The many books on the history of Cheltenham tell us about the fashionable town and its notable 19th century residents. Enough has been written about them; I am going to tell you the sad story of someone at the very bottom of the heap!

Edwin Rose, born in 1826, was the youngest of the six children of Edward and Esther Rose. He had two brothers, Moses and Simeon. Both Edwin and Simeon were baptised in Prestbury parish which, as now, extended across the north of Cheltenham. Esther and three daughters do not appear in this account (I could find out nothing about them).

This account starts in 1834. Edward Rose was then a hawker, and the family almost certainly lived near the gas works, then new (where Tesco now stands). In November the eldest boy, Moses, was "committed for three months for spoiling the cloak of a young woman by throwing gas tar on it". Then in April 1835 he was sent to Gloucester jail for 3 months for stealing 8 trays.

Edwin very soon followed. In 1836, still only 9 years old, he stole two haddocks and was brought before the County Court which imprisoned him in Gloucester Jail for four weeks! Then in March 1837 he was charged with stealing 6 lb. of cheese, but there was no indictment. In July he was charged, together with his father, Edward, with stealing a silver watch; his penalty was one week in prison, and to be well whipped. And in August he stole a loaf of bread, leading to another week in prison and a whipping.

## ***What a start in life for a ten-year-old child in our genteel town!***

It was much the same for both Simeon and Moses in the same year. Moses, then 14, stole butter and was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment, with solitary confinement, hard labour, and whipping twice. Simeon stole a sheep's heart and lights, earning him 10 days imprisonment and whipping once.

Surprisingly, all three boys were out of the news for the next year. Perhaps they just weren't caught! It didn't last. In December 1838 Edwin stole two loaves. He was sentenced to six months hard labour and to be thrice well whipped. He was said to be young in years but old in crime. In April 1839, while Edwin was in prison, Moses and Simeon burgled a house. And that was the end for them. They were sentenced to transportation. Edward, their father, was sentenced to two years hard labour in Gloucester Jail for receiving. The judge had no doubt that Edward's example and encouragement had brought his children to their present situation.

So when Edwin emerged from Gloucester Jail, aged 12 in mid-1839, his father, and both brothers, had been incarcerated. He may then have lived with his mother, Esther; we do not know. In February 1840 he stole two loaves. He was said to be "the son of the notorious old Rose, well known in the vicinity of the Gas Green" ("Old Rose" was Edward, of course). Edwin told the Magistrate that "he had not tasted anything that day, and had only had four potatoes on the previous day". He was sentenced to seven years' transportation.

However in 1839, the government had introduced the "Parkhurst Boy" scheme under which juveniles sentenced to transportation would be sent to a reformatory in Parkhurst Jail for training in a useful trade. Then they would still be exiled, but instead of being imprisoned in the convict jails, they would be usefully employed. Most Parkhurst Boys went to Australia and many established a successful new life. One such was William Henry Groom, a Plymouth boy who rose to become an Australian Member of Parliament.

Things were very different in New Zealand where there was a similar well-intended scheme. Two ships, the "St George" and the "Mandarin" took Parkhurst Boys to Auckland in 1842/3. But the New Zealanders were outraged. New Zealand had never received "convicts" before and the inhabitants of Auckland were "in dread of thefts and robberies perpetrated by the delinquent boys". So there was little tolerance.

Edwin Rose was on the "Mandarin". In 1845 he was convicted in Auckland of stealing, and received a harsh 7-year sentence - transportation to the grim penal colony in van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) (where both Moses and Simeon had also been sent). He was released in 1851 and intended to put his old life behind him, changing his name to William Williams. That nearly worked. But in 1863 he was fatally shot by police in an affray at Lockwood, near Bendigo in Victoria State. In his dying statement he admitted that he was Edwin Rose from Cheltenham.

***As a small hungry child Edwin Rose had stolen two haddocks, bread and cheese in Cheltenham. What a tragic outcome! He never had a chance.***

DAVID CAWSEY