

Shopkeepers in Thornes Lane fined (in 1864) for using false weights and scales.

The records of the 19 century Courts Baron (which dealt primarily with the transfer of land and buildings) of the Wakefield Manor Court are preserved at the Yorkshire Archaeological Society's archives in Leeds. But by the 19th century the events at the Courts Leet were, it seems, no longer formally recorded. By then the sole activities there were the registering of the township officers for the coming year – constables, bye-law men, pinders, and jurymen – and the fining of retailers who used false weights and measures. It is thus something of a matter of chance that accounts of these courts survive at all in the columns of contemporary newspapers.

A reporter from *The Wakefield Express* attended a meeting of the court in April 1864 and, perhaps supposing that the paper's readers were unfamiliar with what took place, chose to explain something of the procedure. He noted that the Deputy Steward of the Manor, Robert Lumb, presided at the court. The Bailiff, William Senior, brought the charges against the fraudulent shopkeepers and the Deputy Steward then determined the amount of the 'amercement' or fine. It was then up to the jury to revise the fine straightaway. This, the reporter said, was called 'affeering'. The term meant 'reducing'. It was the 'affeer' that became the actual fine.

Two of the many malefactors accused on this occasion were from Thornes Lane. William Mitchell was charged with using a 2 pound, half pound and quarter pound weight that all fell short of the standard and were unstamped. Mrs Mitchell said that they had opened the shop only five days before the Bailiff had called to check their weights and scales. They only sold 'very small matters' anyway. Mr Lumb decreed a fine of twenty shillings. The jury 'affeered' seven shillings and sixpence.

The other malefactor was John Ellis. His flour scales were out of balance. Mr Senior said that he would have liked Mrs Ellis to give evidence or someone to appear on her behalf. He noted that a good deal had been said already about those scales and she had had every opportunity to put them right. The Ellises had a large shop and did a great deal of business and this was not the first time that they had been invited to attend the court. In due course a Mr Wraith appeared on behalf of Mrs Ellis. She had, he said, been ill in bed for eight or nine weeks and could not find anyone to attend to the shop except for a very aged mother and it was while she was in charge that the scales had become faulty. Mr Horsfield, a Wakefield surgeon, confirmed that Mrs Ellis was ill. Nonetheless Robert Lumb decreed that she should be 'amerced' 75 shillings. The jury then reduced this to £3.

The Manor continued to exercise weights and measures jurisdiction until the 1890s when the Lord of the Manor was compensated for losing the steady source of income and the West Riding County Council and the municipal councils took over the role.

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