

History:	
Topic:	Courageous Conduct of PC Boutell
Date of Record:	April 2022
Author:	Nicholas Newman
Notes:	Courageous Conduct of PC Boutell seals the fate of Abraham Sergeant - 1854  <i>For the author of this article (Nicholas Newman) there is a notable family connection, with Abraham Sergeant being one of his 4th great uncles.</i>

## Courageous Conduct of PC Boutell seals the fate of Abraham Sergeant – 1854

PC John Arthur Boutell (1828-1901) was born in Lindsey, Suffolk the son of Robert Boutell (1800-1850) an Inn Keeper and his wife Susan (Arthey) (1803-1882). In the 1851 census he is recorded as a farm labourer but by 1854 he had become a policeman covering an area including the parish of Hargrave. By 1864 he had risen to the rank of Sergeant and by 1868 he was Inspector of Police at Wickhambrook. With these promotions came a much increased standing in the local community. He remained in the police force until retirement.

He married Ellen Bellamy Clarke (1834-1927) and moved from his home village to Horringer in 1861. He later moved around the local area being recorded as living in Wickhambrook, Bury St Edmunds and Great Saxham. The couple had six children; John William (1860-1861), John Charles (1862-1944), Frank (1864-1959), Alice Amelia (1865-1867), Ellene Jane (1867-18\*\*) and Alfred Edward (1873-1937).

It is the events of one night in the summer of 1854 which make PC Boutell of interest to the Hargrave reader and in particular the author of this article.

Whilst out on his beat (a term actually introduced in the late 19th century) in the early hours of 7th June he came across Abraham Sergeant a local resident transporting a suspicious sack on his donkey cart. Sergeant refused a request to inspect the contents and a struggle ensued during which PC Boutell used his staff to subdue and handcuff Sergeant. Found in the sack was a freshly killed stolen lamb. The future for Abraham Sergeant was then in the hands of courts although his punishment was likely to be severe as he had a previous conviction for the same offence.

The other interesting aspect of the altercation was that PC Boutell during the course of subduing Sergeant called out in the Queen's name for the local villagers in the vicinity to assist him, which they appear to have ignored. Three of them were subsequently jailed and tried for this refusal to help. The full details are outlined in the press reports below.

Interestingly the lamb was probably a 'Suffolk' a breed which had evolved in the 18th century from the mating of Norfolk Horn ewes with Southdown rams in the Bury St Edmunds area, these sheep were known as Southdown Norfolks, or locally, as "Black faces." The breed is renowned for its rapid growth rate, allowing early presentation at market and ultimately producing a heavier carcass weight.



**The following item was reported in the Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald on 7th June 1854.**

*Courageous Conduct of a Policeman.*

*—On Friday morning, about three o'clock, p.c. Boutell, of the West Suffolk force, being on duty in Hargrave parish, met a man, named Abraham Sergeant, with a donkey-cart, containing something in a sack. His suspicions being excited, and Serjeant refusing to state what he had got, Boutell proceeded to search, when Sergeant resisted, and calling out for help, the inmates of some cottages close by came out, when Sergeant called upon them not to see him taken, but to take the sack out of the cart.*

*Boutell charged them in the Queen's name to render him assistance; but they answered only oaths and threats, for which they will no doubt be called upon to answer in another way. After a severe struggle, in which he was obliged to use his staff freely, Boutell succeeded in handcuffing his prisoner, and on searching the sack found in it a fat lamb, fresh killed, which proved to have been stolen from the executors of the late Mr. Finch, of Southwood Park.*

*On Saturday the prisoner was brought before Dr. Probart, when the lamb was identified by the steward, and the prisoner was fully committed for trial. The conduct of the police-officer in securing the prisoner, in spite of the lawless set by whom he was surrounded, deserves the highest commendation.*

**The following item was reported in The Suffolk Chronicle; or Weekly General Advertiser & County Express 10 June 1854.**

*COMMITMENTS TO BURY GAOL*

*Abraham Sargeant, with stealing a lamb at Southwood Park*

**The following item was reported in The Ipswich Journal on the 8 July 1854**

*SUFFOLK TRINITY SESSIONS 4th July*

*The County Quarter Sessions, held at the Shire Hall, Bury St. Edmund's before J.H.Heigham, Esq., Chairman and a bench of Magistrates, terminated on Wednesday evening last. The following are the sentences of the several prisoners:-*

*Abraham Sargeant, 24, for stealing a lamb, at Southwood Park, the property of Mr. A. H. Hall: 14 years' transportation.*

*Sargeant's sentence was probably so severe because of that conviction for a similar offence, having been imprisoned at Springfield Goal, Essex. Sheep stealing had always been considered a serious offence, and if it had been committed a hundred years previously it could well have resulted in a sentence of death by hanging.*

*As for those Hargrave neighbours who allegedly ignored PC Boutell's cries for assistance, and attempted to intimidate him, they also had their day in court.*

**The following item was printed in the Suffolk Chronicle on the 1st July 1854**

*COMMITMENTS TO BURY GAOL*

*George Newman, James King and William Newman, for refusing to assist in the arrest of Abraham Sargeant on a charge of felony.*

**The following item was reported in The Suffolk Chronicle on the 8th July 1854**

*BURY QUARTER SESSIONS 26 June*

*John King, William Newman, and George Newman, charged with refusing to assist John Boutell, P.C. in arresting one Abraham Sargeant, on a charge of felony. John King and George Newman, 21 days; William Newman, acquitted,*

Returning to Abraham Sargeant, his prison records provide a few personal details, with him noted as being unmarried, in good health but illiterate. From Bury Gaol he went to a holding gaol at Millbank, Westminster, London on 21st December 1854. He remained there for 11 months, and then on to Portsmouth on 17th November 1855. He was finally sent to Western Australia on the ship "Runnymede" departing on the 11th June 1856, arriving on the 7th September later that year.

On arrival in Australia further personal information is recorded. He is said to have been 5ft 4½ inches tall with light brown hair, grey eyes an oval face with sallow expression and of middling stout stature. In April 1862 he transferred from prison to carry out general works.

There are no clear evidence of any marriages, but there is a final entry linked to his prison record indicating that he passed away on the 2nd August 1896, at Mount Eliza, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

## Family Connections

Abraham's next of kin listed in his prison records was his father Samuel Sargeant (1798-1888). He was a farm Labourer living on the The Green, Hargrave, and was married in Hargrave in 1818 to Maria (Fenton) (1798-1835).

They had 11 children Eliza (1818-1901), Sarah (1820-1840), Maria (1822-1893), Samuel (1823-1904), John (1824-1914), David (1826-1904), Abraham (1827-1896), Mary Ann (1828-1909), Elizabeth (Betsey) (1830-1925), Frederick (1831-1911) and Louisa (1833-1883).

Following Maria's death Samuel married Sabina Frost (Paine) (1816-1880) in 1854 and they had two children George (1854-1856) who died as a baby and George (1858-1905).

When tracking the family it was important to note that the surname came with several variations, namely Sargent / Sergent / Serjeant / Sargeant.

For the author of this article there is a notable family connection, with Abraham Sargeant being one of my 4th great uncles following my paternal line.

## Footnote



In the Victorian period, policing in Suffolk was originally delivered by separate independent police forces. The West Suffolk Police Force was formed in 1844, based around Bury St Edmunds. The East Suffolk Force included Divisions from Beccles, Woodbridge and Ipswich. West and East Suffolk were merged in 1869, split in 1899 and subsequently merged again in 1967.

Illustration showing typical Suffolk Constabulary uniform from 150 years ago. Police helmets were introduced in the mid 1860's, and frock coats subsequently replaced by tunics.

This photograph captures the colleagues of PC Ebenezer Tye paying tribute at his graveside at Halesworth. PC Tye was murdered in November 1862 attempting to apprehend the burglar John Ducker who cudgelled him to death. Ducker was subsequently convicted and subject to a public hanging at Ipswich in April 1863.

**Nicholas Newman**  
**April 2022**