

Transcript of the entry from "The Norwich Mercury" of 20 April 1839 covering the trial of Rhoda Warman at the Lent Assizes held in Norwich 6 April 1838.

Rhoda Warman was charged with the murder of her son Henry Warman, an infant aged 4 months, by refusing and neglecting to afford him sufficient sustenance.

The bill against Wm Warman, the husband of the prisoner, charged with the same offence, was ignored.

Mr Prendergast stated the case for the prosecution with great mildness and forbearance.

Leonora Burton. I am the wife of Robert Burton, at Lyng; I know the prisoner; she had a little child named Henry Warman; he was about four months old; he was a fine baby when born and continued so until about two months; I observed prisoner did not treat the child as a mother ought; she left off suckling it when it was about a month old; she had milk a long time after; I think she could have suckled it; she did not feed it regularly; when it was about two months old she neglected it by not giving it food enough or keeping it clean; she did not feed it above once a day.

By the Judge. I was not with her all day. I remember her coming to Norwich; the child had been at her own house; she went on the Sunday afternoon and returned on the Tuesday; the child was then in the care of Sarah King; after she returned I told her that I had suckled her child when she was gone; I have suckled her child eight or ten times because it was in a starving condition; I reproached her with not taking care of the child; she said she would do what she liked with her own child; I heard her say, she ought to speak it in shame, but she hated the child; the child grew thinner; I have seen it worrying at the pillow as if it were hungry; the child was not kept clean; prisoner has another child about two years old.

By the Judge. My husband is a shoemaker; I am a neighbour of hers; I am not very intimate with her; I have had no quarrel with the prisoner; her husband is a tailor; he worked out; he must have known how the child was treated.

Mary King. I remember the Sunday before Lyng Fair; the prisoner that day came to me and asked me to stop with her children, when she went to Drayton after her husband; I took them home with me on the Monday night; the child died about five weeks after; the child was very dirty; Mr Evans gave me a shilling to get some food for the children; the child appeared very hungry indeed; the prisoner told me to give it some sleeping stuff which she gave me, rather more than a teaspoonful; I gave it twice; it was Godfreys Cordial; I had the child two days and a half; prisoner came home on the Tuesday night; she asked about the child, and asked if I thought she was lost; she and her husband were very poorly off; the little child was not so well done by as the other; I cleaned it and washed it, and made it very comfortable; I did not say anything about it.

By the Judge. They were very ill off.

The Rev. Henry Evans, Rector of Lyng. My attention was directed to the child in November; a person came to me and said the children had been deserted by their parents; I went and found the children in a very miserable state of destitution; the young child was the worst. Mary King, the last witness, actually stripped herself to provide the child with necessaries; she is in a very poor state, but her conduct was beyond all praise; I sent some articles which were wanted; when I

first saw the child, it was lying in a cradle in a state of extreme filth, sucking a bit of rag with a piece of bread in it; after the child was cleaned by Sarah King I saw it again on Tuesday; There was a marked difference in the child; I told the prisoner on the Wednesday morning if any thing happened to the child I should direct an investigation to be made.

Ann Ringrose. The first month prisoner suckled the child as a mother ought to; after that it became thin and pale; the woman said she had no milk; she did not feed the child more than once or twice in the day; I told her that she ought to feed the child in the night; she said she could not warm the food; when it had cried in the night she had hit it; I remember the day the child died; it was a Thursday morning; on the Monday before I was with the prisoner at her house; she fed the child about three in the afternoon; I had been with her all the day from the morning; the child had not been fed before that day; she then gave it bread and sugar and boiled water; the child was in a very filthy state; it looked very bad. On the Tuesday I went there again about nine o'clock; I took the child, washed and dressed it; it was in a very dirty state; I should think it had not been washed for ten days; Godfreys Cordial was given to it only of a night; from nine till six the child was not fed; I then fed it, and Mr Warman and the prisoner and myself went to Reepham to a frolic; the children were locked up; we came home from Reepham at six o'clock on the following morning; I took the light and went to look at the children; we found them as we left them; Mrs Warman and her husband went and laid down; I prepared some food for the child, but it was not given to it; the child was asleep; the child was not fed till two or three in the afternoon; after we had our breakfast; prisoner and I went down to the ale-house; we remained there five minutes and then went home. On the Wednesday evening prisoner was going to see her aunt at Foulsham, seven miles off; that day Warman sold his furniture, because he had no work; Skelton what keeps the beer shop bought it; it was taken away; Henry was left at home laid on the boards; the house was fastened up; a woollen covering was laid on the child; I took it off the boards, and laid it on my bed; we did not go to Foulsham; we turned back and went to Sparham Green Man, where we had a pint of beer; the child and Mrs Warman laid in my bed that night; it cried, and she hit it and told it to go to sleep; Warman came in that morning about four o'clock; the child was lying between me and Mrs Warman; when she got up in the bed she said the child was dead; I have heard the prisoner say she hated the child; when Warman came in the morning he laid down by his wife; there were three of us in the bed; I heard prisoner say she thought the child had not its right senses; her husband said well it might not when she hit it on the head when it was not more than three weeks old; when Warman came home he was drunk; when we were at Reepham we were up all night.

By the Judge. I get my livelihood by sewing at people's houses.

Mr Owen, Surgeon at Mattishall. I opened the body the day of the inquest; the body was very much emaciated and excoriated in some parts; I would say from want of cleanliness; the stomach was very empty; the intestines extended by wind; there was no food in the stomach; am of opinion the child died from want of food and proper attention.

The prisoner on being called on for her defence said, weeping bitterly, I know I did not kill my child; I did all I could for it; my husband is very badly off; sometimes he had work and sometimes none; he has been very ailing for a year and a half; I have sold my things off my back to get victuals for my children.

His Lordship in summing up the evidence said this was a most distressing case. The prisoner was charged with a design to kill her

own infant, but in considering their verdict, the Jury must not let their indignation carry them away so as to lead them to a decision which the evidence did not warrant. In order to find the prisoner guilty of the capital charge, the Jury must be satisfied that the prisoner had a premeditated intention of killing her child. It was evident the prisoner was in a state of great distress, still there was in this country the means by which relief could have been obtained, and in a place blest with such a clergyman as had given evidence before them, the necessary sustenance might have been procured. The conduct of the prisoner and her husband had been most brutal, but unless the Jury were satisfied that the neglect of the child originated in a determination to destroy it, they must acquit the prisoner of the capital charge.

The Jury after a short deliberation returned a verdict of guilty of manslaughter. The prisoner was sentenced to 15 years transportation.