



## **News from the History Group Research Team .....**

Last month I mentioned my “Unsolved Crimes Department”, and a young Gypsy woman. Her name was Mary Jane Allen, who had been reported on in the West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser in September 1915. The heading was “Young Woman Sentenced to One Months Imprisonment”. Unfortunately, I found this was not her first offence, and I had to investigate further as she said she lived in St. Tudy.

I traced Mary’s birth to St. Mabyn in 1892, and this confirmed William Henry and Annie Allen were her parents. Various relatives of the Allen family had worked at Tregarrick over the years and one of William and Annie’s children were born in St. Tudy. Her father, when Mary was previously in trouble, told the police that he wanted nothing more to do with her, but then relented and took her back, but said she had always been an untruthful and troublesome girl.

Mary told the Police a very detailed elaborate story about her younger brother being operated on for appendicitis at Truro Hospital, and other misfortunes in the family. Her statement that her father was a farmer of 300 acres at Tregarrick was found to be untrue, her father was a farm labourer, not the owner of the Farm. The Chief Constable said her statements were a tissue of lies. During the hearing Mary “fell from the dock into a dead faint, and it was some time before matters were resumed”. The Deputy-Mayor stated the bench deeply regretted to see a young woman of her appearance before them on such a charge, but had to protect the public against frauds. Mary was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment with hard labour for obtaining food and lodging on false pretences.

I then tried to find what happened to Mary after her imprisonment, and was stumped, as there was no trace of her getting married, having children or re-offending. By now I was wanting her to do well. I followed up on various leads including one of her possibly travelling to Detroit in America and checked ships lists, births, deaths, the 1921 Census, 1939 Register and many more sources. Checking the newspapers in Cornwall for further offences, there were no more reports of her. By this time, I was pleased to think she had gone straight, perhaps married and found happiness in life – but, oh dear, perhaps not! Widening my newspaper searches to Devon, I found Mary again in 1918 in Plymouth. The heading was “Millbrook Woman and Three Officers” – oh dear – I will spare you the details! She had been working as a domestic servant and fell on hard times, as the refreshment house where she worked in Millbrook had closed, and she was, in her own words, “thrown on her beam ends”. Mary said that up to that time she had been a respectable girl - hmmm! She was saved from prison by a Police Court missionary who found her work helping with the war effort in the Women’s Army.

So what happened to Mary? The answer is that I just don’t know, she may have changed her name and moved away. Sometimes I just have to try to admit defeat – perhaps! However, via an ancestry site I use, I now have Mary’s relatives in Canada and Cornwall joining in on the search, and they are intrigued, and have become as attached to her story as I have. They want to find out what happened to Mary who had been ignored by them in the past, as they also found it was difficult to find information on her. Maybe someday we will get answers and tell her story, hopefully with a happy ending – in the meantime, her very complex and large case file definitely remains open!

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