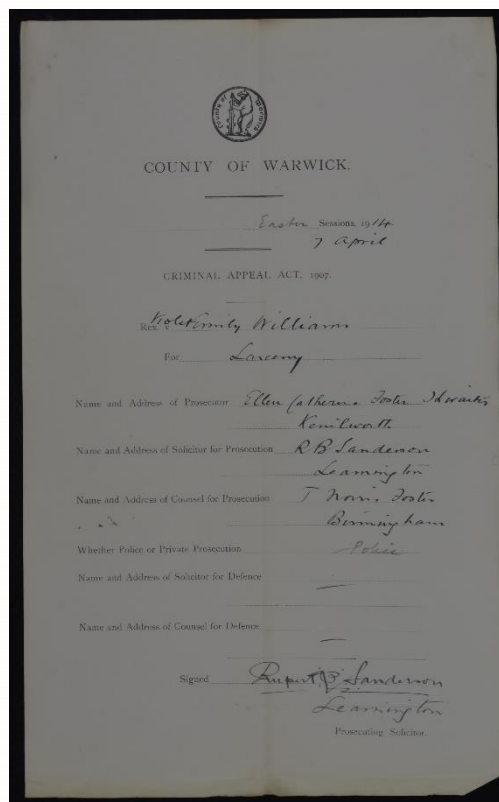


The Trial and Confession of Larceny by Violet Emily Williams, 1914

QS30/91/3/5

January's Document of the Month is a confession of theft by schoolgirl Violet Emily Williams. Found in the Quarter Session deposition papers for Easter 1914, this confession is a little unusual as it was found on the back of a piece of paper with a self-written 'Laughing Song' by the defendant herself. The document was found while being digitised for the WOVeN project, which is a remote volunteer project set up by the Record Office to transcribe and index the Quarter Session depositions.



First page of deposition, QS30/91/3/5

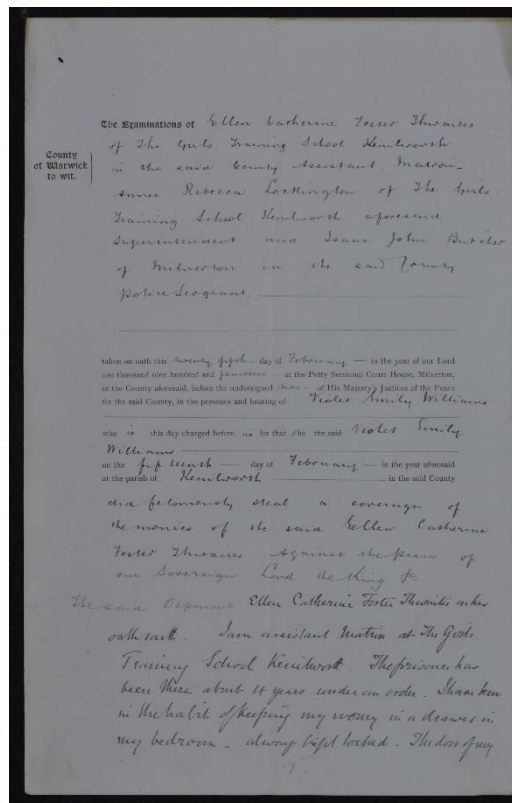
The trial of Violet Emily Williams took place in 1914, however the Quarter Sessions have been taking place since as early as 1371¹. Men in each county were appointed as Justices of the Peace and they would hear and determine serious crimes which

¹ Information gathered from Anne Langley, Warwickshire Quarter Sessions, Our Warwickshire <https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/article/warwickshire-quarter-sessions-introduction> (Accessed 22/12/2021)

did not require capital punishments², such as theft, assault, and damage to property. The Quarter Sessions court met four times a year at Epiphany, Easter, Midsummer and Michaelmas. They were overseen by the Justices of the Peace for the county and were replaced in 1972 by the Crown Courts³, which still take place today.

The case against Violet Emily Williams took place in the County of Warwick in the Easter Sessions, 1914. In the deposition, there are witness statements from:

- Ellen Catherine Foster Thwaites, Assistant Matron of Kenilworth Girls Training School;
- Annie Rebecca Lockington, Superintendent of Kenilworth Girls Training School;
- Isaac John Butcher, Police Sargent.



List of examinations, QS30/91/3/5

Violet Emily Williams, a pupil of Kenilworth Girls Training School, was accused of 'feloniously' stealing a sovereign of Ellen Catherine Foster Thwaites, who was an

² Information gathered from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/quarter-sessions> (Accessed 22/12/2021)

³ Information gathered from <https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/history-of-the-judiciary/> (Accessed 22/12/2021)

Assistant Matron at the school. The witness statement details the money being missing from a drawer in Ellen Catherine Foster Thwaites' bedroom, which was locked except for when being cleaned early in the morning.

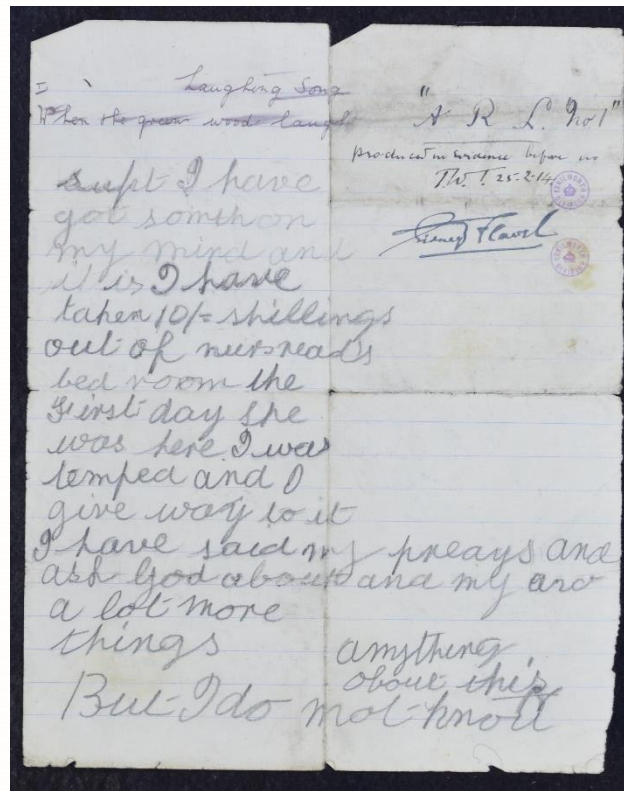
Williams was under trial for 'Larceny', which is the crime of taking something that does not belong to you, without illegally entering a building to do so⁴. All the witness statements given would point to Williams being guilty of the crime. Ellen Catherine Foster Thwaites states that she was 'quite sure' the sovereign was in her drawer on Friday 13th night, and it was gone by Sunday 15th. Annie Rebecca Lockington, second witness, stated that Williams looked 'as if she had something on her mind which should be confessed', after she had spoken to the girls regarding the accusations from Thwaites⁵. The note from Williams came to Lockington just half an hour later, according to the witness statement and this sealed her fate.

The confession, listed under the Exhibits List as 'A confession written in pencil', is included in the deposition. The hand-written note details the crime that was committed, admitting that she had taken 10/- from the bedroom. Below is a transcript of the confession:

"Supt I have got somth on my mind and it is I have taken 10/- shillings out of nurs reads bed room the first day she was here I was temped and I give way to it I have said my preays and ask God about and my and a lot more things But I do not know anything about this"

⁴ Definition taken from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/larceny> (Accessed 22/12/2021)

⁵ Detailed taken from Quarter Session Depositions, QS30/91/3/5



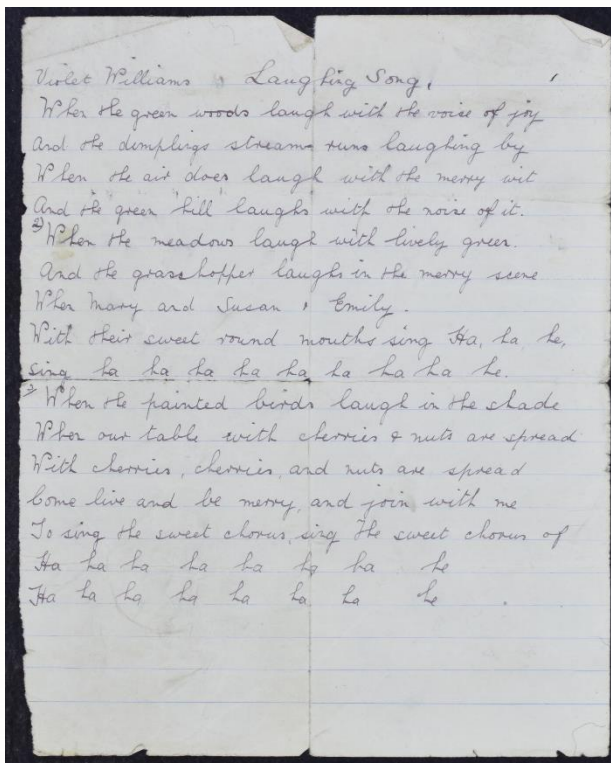
Confession of Violet Emily Williams, QS30/91/3/5

This confession was not just written on a piece of paper. It was found on the reverse of a piece of paper with a hand-written song on it. The song, called 'The Laughing Song', was written by Violet Williams and while the name is the same as the convicted, the handwriting seems quite different – who knows whether it is the same person or not!

The song reads:

“Violet Williams Laughing Song

When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy
And the dumplings stream runs laughing by
When the air does laugh with the merry wit
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it.
When the meadows laugh with lively green
And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene
When Mary and Susan and Emily
With their sweet mouths sing Ha, La, Le
Sing La La La La La La La La Le.
When the painted birds laugh in the shade
When our table with cherries and nuts are spread
With cherries, cherries and nuts are spread
Come live and be merry and join with me
To sing the sweet chorus, sing the sweet chorus of
Ha La La La La La Le
Ha La La La La La Le.”⁶



Laughing song, Violet Williams,
QS30/91/3/5

⁶ Details taken from Quarter Session Depositions, QS30/91/3/5

To end Violet Emily Williams' story, I found her name in the Calendar of Prisoners of cases heard at the Easter Sessions at Shire Hall, Warwick. She pleaded guilty to her crime and was sentenced to 3 years at a Borstal Institution⁷.

Borstal Institutions were an early Juvenile Detention Centre, where it was hoped to separate the younger offenders from the influence of older criminals and to provide help, education, and training in an attempt to stop them from re-committing offences⁸.

⁷ Information gathered from Ancestry, Ancestry.com (Accessed 22/12/2021)

⁸ Information gathered from https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives_online/digital/prison/borstal/ (Accessed 22/12/2021)