

28th September 1735

Bloody Riot Ends In Deaths

On the orders of Justice Skip the townsmen of Ledbury today crushed a terrifying riot by ax-wielding mobsters, which left several dead, dozens injured and eleven arrested.

Furious fighting on the streets lasted until late into the night. The rioters were met by the Justice's men, who, armed with guns, pistols and swords, defended the turnpikes and attempted to make arrests. After hours of fighting the remaining rioters were chased away into the surrounding countryside.

Unrest over the introduction of turnpikes has been increasing throughout the year across Gloucestershire and the Ledbury area. Local people have been complaining about the deadness of trade, the greatness of taxes and the burdens of the poor and have described the Ledbury Turnpike Trust as an unnecessary and unjust tax collector. The trust has insisted that the opposers to turnpikes are ignorant men with a dull understanding of the necessity of raising taxes to repair the roads.

Despite the fury of the mob the Ledbury riot took on a somewhat bizarre quality as many of the rioters were dressed as women and had blackened their faces in an effort to disguise themselves.

The authorities are saying the mob consisted mainly of local farmers and their servants and was bolstered by the criminally-minded and unemployed. They successfully managed to cut down and destroy the Ledbury turnpike, and then, at about 9 o'clock, they made an attack on the Justice's house. Several of the rioters were shot down but they refused to give up and responded with equal force injuring several of the townsmen protecting the Justice.

The rioters had threatened to burn the Justice's house down in order to liberate two of their own. These two men have now been identified as locals Thomas Reynolds and James Bayliss. Both men were arrested earlier in the day on suspicion of breaching the peace and the levying

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Written by John Eager

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of arms. They were both secured at the Justice's house.

It transpires that Justice Skip has been fortunate as the conspirators had forewarned him of their criminal intent days earlier in a letter setting out their aims and objectives, which had even named the day of their intended attack. This allowed the Justice time to form a local militia of townsmen, his own servants and others to put down the rioters.

The manner of the arrest of Reynolds and Bayliss had particularly offended the mob. Eye witnesses claim that a gang of the Justice's men had approached

Reynolds

at the End of the Town knocked him to the ground and seriously wounded his head. Bayliss then staggered out of a town pub bearing an ax and the two men were arrested together.

Reynolds

could be heard protesting his innocence saying he had only come to town to buy a pair of stockings, shoes and hat.

Thomas Reynolds, 28, of Ledbury Parish, is well known in the area as a God-fearing, sober and well-behaved man. He is educated and has been employed by various farmers in the county. He has been described as a man of good character, honest and industrious. His arrest has surprised some locals who are assuming that he must have been misled by cunning and factious opposers of the turnpikes.

Authorities have already stated that the arrested men will be taken to Hereford Gaol in the morning. They can expect a lengthy detention before trial. The men are expected to be charged with Rioting, Insurrection and violations under the Black Act - all offences punishable by death.

The authorities would also like to question one Francis Rolland, the millar at Dimmock. Rolland is suspected of riding about the county encouraging and persuading other people to demolish the county's turnpikes. The authorities would like to interview Rolland about his possible involvement in the Ledbury Turnpike Riot.

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The Turnpike Act of 1766 was passed in the United Kingdom, which allowed the government to build turnpike roads. The turnpike roads were built by private companies, which were granted the right to collect tolls from the users of the roads. The turnpike roads were built to improve the transport of goods and people, and to reduce the cost of transport. The turnpike roads were built in the 18th and 19th centuries, and they played a major role in the development of the British economy.

Widemarsh Street Toll Gate, Hereford c1860 shortly before its removal.