

## William Gittins

(b.1858, d.1912)

9<sup>th</sup> October, 2019

Martin Davies

Gittins, William (1), pauper, was born in 1858 at Llanfair [Llanfair Caereinion] in Montgomeryshire, fifth of six children of David Gittins (c. 1820-1864), wheelwright and farmer, and his wife, Elizabeth Thomas (c. 1823-1875).

William's father died in 1864 when he was six years old (2) and the family moved to Water Gate Street, Llanfair, where Elizabeth became a Lodging House Keeper. Elizabeth died in 1875 (3) and about the same time William developed epilepsy (4). William had been working as an agricultural labourer but shortly afterwards he entered Llanfyllin Workhouse.

In 1875, the Workhouse Guardians "resolved that William Gittins be allowed to go to service with Mr Gittins of Llanodian, Llanfair, Farmer" (5). It is also recorded that this arrangement was for "a month on trial", however the outcome is not known (6).

By 1878, William was again an inmate when the Guardians resolved to take proceedings against him for committing "unnatural offences" with two pauper children (7). The term "unnatural offences" at the time of Gittins' court hearing would have been a term used to refer to sodomy or bestiality. However, it is clear from the evidence that Gittins was accused of sodomy with young boys.

At the Quarter Sessions, William Gittins was charged with "making an assault on William Jones with intent then with him feloniously to commit and perpetrate the detestable and abominable crime of buggery contrary to the statute in such case made and provided" (8).

Police Constable, David Williams, said in evidence "I received a warrant for the apprehension of the prisoner William Gittins on the charge of committing an unnatural offence. ...On the way to the lock-up he asked me to explain in Welsh what was the meaning of committing an unnatural offence. I did so..." (8).

At the hearing, three boys gave their statements against Gittins. One of the deponents, John James Davies, aged 14, said "I know William Gittins the prisoner. He had been offering to do nasty tricks with me. With the other boys he does it. I saw him do it with William Jones..." (8). Another statement was given by William Jones, aged 7, who said "I know William Gittins the prisoner. He has done nasty tricks to me. He has been courting me. This happened last week in the Schoolroom..." (8). A third testimony was given by John Lewis Samuel, aged 9, who said "I know William Gittins the prisoner. He has done nasty tricks to me..." (8).

Edward J Edwardes, the medical officer, was asked to comment on Gittins' physical and mental health, concluding that "...He is subject to epileptic fits and at present I consider him perfectly sane. I cannot say but that his mind may be affected at times from the disease to which he is subject" (8). In addition to this, Master of the Workhouse, T. Aubrey Jones, said in evidence that "the prisoner is subject to epileptic fits. His conduct always appears rational. The fits occur about once in every three weeks" (8).

The Court record is endorsed "No true Bill" (8). The North Wales Express reported that the case went to the Montgomeryshire Quarter Sessions where the Grand Jury "ignored the bill" against Gittins (9).

William was unmarried and remained an inmate until his death in 1912, aged 53 years, having spent some 35 years as an inmate, probably due to his illness (10).

## Reference List

- (1) 'William Gittins' (1858) Certified entry recording birth on the Civil Registration Index, Oct/Nov/Dec 1858 Llanfyllin 11b No 232, Available at: <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=3FXBOLnLaphANudrtTt%2B2g&scan=1> (Accessed 12 September 2019).
- (2) 'David Gittins' (1864) Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index, Jul/Aug/Sep 1864, Llanfyllin 11b No:158, Available at: [https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=37607977:5689&d=bmd\\_1568972523](https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=37607977:5689&d=bmd_1568972523) (Accessed 15 September 2019)
- (3) 'Elizabeth Gittins' (1875) Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index Jan/Feb/Mar 1875, Llanfyllin 11b No: 189, Available at: [https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=55625850:6350&d=bmd\\_1568972523](https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=55625850:6350&d=bmd_1568972523) (Accessed 15 September 2019)
- (4) 'William Gittins' (1911) Census return Llanfyllin Workhouse, Llanfyllin. Public Record Office: Institution Schedule 20, Folio 56. Available at: <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed: 06 September 2019).
- (5) The Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union, (1875). Minutes of the Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union 11 November 1875. Powys County Council ref: M/G/B/8/12/23. (accessed 18 September 2019)
- (6) The Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union, (1875). Minutes of the Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union 30 December 1875. Powys County Council ref: M/G/B/8/12/42. (accessed 18 September 2019)
- (7) The Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union, (1878). Minutes of the Guardians of Llanfyllin Poor Law Union 24 January 1878. Powys County Council ref: M/G/B/8/12/379. (accessed 18 September 2019)

- (8) Montgomeryshire Quarter Sessions (1878), 'General Quarter Sessions of the Peace at Welshpool on 9 March 1878' Bundle of Court Documents. Powys County Council ref: M/QS/1878 (accessed 13 April 2017).
- (9) North Wales Express (1878), North Wales Express 15 March 1878, p.6, col.5. Welsh Newspapers online, Available at:  
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3558066/3558072/56/William%20Gittins>  
(accessed 20 September 2019)
- (10) William Gittins (1912), Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index, Apr/May/Jun 1912, Llanfyllin 11b No 255, Available at:  
[https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=128035171:2334&d=bmd\\_1568972523](https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/districts.pl?r=128035171:2334&d=bmd_1568972523)  
(accessed 11 September 2019)