

Rubys at The Old Bailey

While examining records to help construct family trees, it is always interesting to see details that give an insight into the lives of the people involved. Usually this includes some details of their residence and occupation, sometimes the history of their military service, or more uncommon information relating to for example, their possessions, illness, disability or pastimes. The Ruby families being researched are no exception and some of these details are their brushes with the law including appearances in London's most well-known court, The Old Bailey.



About 200 yards from St Paul's Cathedral and 200 foot above the roads of London, stands the immediately recognisable bronze statue of the Figure of Justice on the dome of The Central Criminal Court, which has been London's principal court for centuries. It is known as The Old Bailey because it is named after the street in which it was located, next to Newgate Prison just outside the former western wall of the City of London. Over the centuries, it has been rebuilt and remodelled. In 1834, it was renamed as the Central Criminal Court

and its jurisdiction extended beyond that of London and Middlesex to all of England for trials of major cases [1,2,3,4]

Records of the proceedings of the Old Bailey are available from 1674 to 1913 and of these, 23 records refer to a person with the surname Ruby, relating to 18 trials, as some cases had more than one record associated with them. The trials occurred between the years 1719 and 1895. [1]

The records of the proceedings of The Old Bailey give information about a particular trial but there are other records that add to the story of the crime and the life of the people involved.

Not all were defendants, several were witnesses or even the victim.

On the 20th of August 1841, Elizabeth Ruby, of Arthur Street, Chelsea, noticed that her husband George's boots, worth 9 shillings, were missing from their shop. Three days later, Elizabeth gave evidence at The Old Bailey, at the trial of William Wellham, who was found guilty of stealing them. He had been convicted of a felony previously and was transported for 7 years.

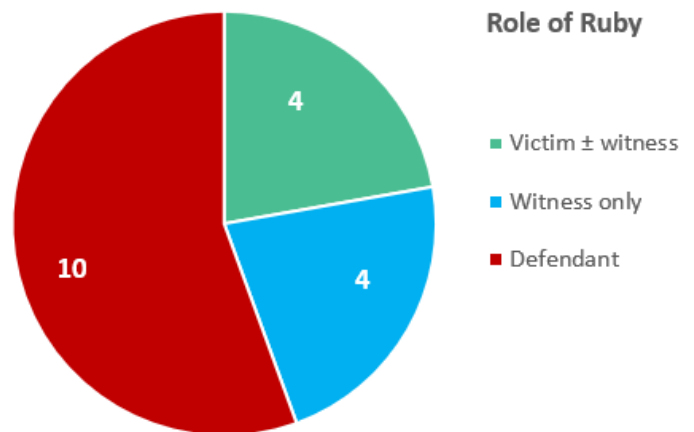
George can be found on the 1841 census with his wife and son George.

Another victim of crime was [Richard Ruby](#). He was a hay dealer from Langley, who, on the 22nd of August 1842, gave evidence at The Old Bailey against 19-year-old Noah Hunt, a man whom he had given a lift to on the 12th of July of that year. The man stole meat tied in his handkerchief, from his cart and was arrested in the Green Man in Hillingdon. For stealing 4lbs of lamb (value 2s.), 2lbs of beef (value 1s) and the 6-penny handkerchief, Noah Hunt was confined for 3 months.

Details of Richard Ruby can be found on ruby.one-name.net.

12 years later, on the 8th May 1854, Richard's brother [James Ruby](#), also a hay dealer, was giving evidence at The Old Bailey. James's servant David Dicks was indicted for stealing half of the load of hay, that he was supposed to have delivered to Chelsea. He was also convicted of embezzlement, as he had also spent some of the money he had received for the other half. For this he was sentenced to 3 months.

The final Ruby victim to be involved in a trial at The Old Bailey was young Isabella Ruby. There are, perhaps understandably, few details of the crime given. But on the 21st of October 1895, 58-year-old Augustus Edwards was sentenced to 12 month's hard labour after being convicted of "Carnally



knowing Isabella Ruby, a girl under 13". As yet we are unable to find any details about Isabella. Perhaps she was really a Roby or Raby.

Four Rubys gave evidence in a trail, where they were neither defendant or victim.

Coal porter, Charles Ruby lived with Mary Brown, wife of George Brown, on the first floor of Greenwood's Court, Nightingale Lane, in St. Botolph without, Aldgate, which was the house of the victim of the crime, Elizabeth Horncastle. On 15th February 1827, he was called as a witness as 5 days earlier, he had pursued and caught Jeremiah Connor, a 21-year-old man who had rushed out of the house, when he and Mary returned home. Jeremiah Connor was found guilty of stealing various items of clothing and sentenced to death.

Later the same year, on 13th September, Edward Ruby gave evidence at the trial of Ann Moseley, a 57-year-old nurse in the home of Daniel Gardiner, a brush maker in Spitalfields, from whom she stole a number of items, mainly bedding. Edward Ruby was pawnbroker in Whitechapel, where some of the items were taken. The prisoner was confined for one month.

It is sometime before a Ruby appears again as a witness. Samuel Ruby lived at 17, Hambrook Street, Homerton and was a fish curer with a stall in Well Street, Hackney. On Saturday evening, October 8th, 1892, Louisa Trew asked him for change of a shilling, which he did not have. Later she tried to buy two penny haddock with the same shilling. Samuel bent the shilling in half with his teeth. He picked her out from a line up 9 days later and gave evidence at the Old Bailey on November 14th. Louisa Trew was found not Guilty of Unlawfully uttering counterfeit coin.

There is a [Samuel Ruby](#) in the area but in 1891, he is a labourer and 1911 a manager of a lodging house. However, in 1891, his father was a fish hawker, so it may be the same man.

The last case in which a Ruby is a witness, is a rather distressing one.

Henry Charles Ruby was an engineer, who lived in North Place, Western Street, Haggerston, which was not far from Acton lock on the Regents Canal. Mid-morning on the 15th May 1896, he was sitting on the tow path against that lock, when he heard a woman scream. He saw a lady in the water, about 150 yards away and ran to help. However, when he got to her, he saw a baby in the canal as well, but not with the woman. He threw of his coat and went into the water and rescued the baby, before going back for the woman. He left the baby and unconscious woman on the shore, in the care of other passers-by, while he ran for the police.

This however was not an accident. Clara Chevalier, was the woman in the canal and just before the incident, had been seen walking along the tow path carrying her baby, William. She was then seen running into the water. She was apparently a respectable (married) woman, who had been suffering from depression and headaches, for which she was seeing a doctor from Broadway Hospital. At her trial on 18th May 1895, she and her doctor gave the

defence that day after the incident she had said "Yesterday, I was suffering so bad from my head, I did not know what I was doing" She was found not guilty of attempted murder and suicide by drowning.

Unfortunately, despite the details here, more about Henry Charles Ruby has not been found (at present).

However, more Rubys found themselves on trial at The Old Bailey. Of the 11 trials, where the defendant was named Ruby, one person was on trial twice for separate offences and another was re-indicted the same day for the same crime (with a different outcome). 60 % were on trial for stealing, including shoplifting. (The offence of "privately stealing" 5 shillings or more worth of goods from a shop was defined separately as a capital offence in 1699. In 1823, it ceased to be a capital offence).^[1] Half that number were indicted for assault, including as part of another crime and there was one case of breaking and entering, in which the theft failed but the punishment was severe.



Less than half were found guilty (5 out of 11), including the young girl tried twice and another individual, whose records, sometimes in other parts of the country, show him to be a persistent offender.

For the guilty, the sentences ranged from death to 7 days confinement. With one exception, the severity of the sentences declined over time.

The first of these defendants was Thomas Ruby, of St Giles in the Fields, who had been the servant of John Tucker who kept The Angel Inn in St Giles, In the early hours of 28th of April 1741, Thomas with others attempted to break into the cellar of The Angel Inn but were noticed to be doing so by Mr Tucker's watchman. A little later, Thomas broke into the kitchen of the same place but was seen by John Tucker running (although he had a limp and was described a lame on later prison records) along the yard. Although Thomas got away, he had left some of his belongings behind, which incriminated him. When he was caught, Thomas begged forgiveness from his previous master, but he was tried at The Old Bailey on the 14th of May the same year and was found guilty of breaking and entering the dwelling house of John Tucker, with the intent to steal. Despite Thomas pleading that he was almost starved with hunger and went to Mr. Tucker's with a view of getting some victuals, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. Some mercy was shown later when, on the 14th of October, the sentence was changed to transportation for 14 years.

Moving forward to 1798, we have a case of animal theft, as on the night of the 28th of October, Robert Ruby, aged 29, stole 3 geese and a gander from Ralph Rolfe of Harrow. When the dead geese were presented to Robert he initially said a dog had got them but in court on the 5th of December 1798, he claimed he had been drunk and found the geese. He was confined for two years in the House of Correction, and fined 1shilling.

From the category of the crime, one might think that Nicholas Ruby was a highwayman, but the evidence give in court suggests it was more of a drunken street brawl. About half past one in the morning, on the 16th April 1811, Henry Lane, was returning from Tothill fair, walking with his friend Robert Newman in Great George Street. Their wives were walking ahead, with Sarah Lane carrying her 5-year-old child. Nicholas Ruby and Humphrey Hughes allegedly crossed the street and insulted the women. A scuffle ensued between the men and Sarah Lane accused Nicholas and Humphrey of stealing her husband's watch, worth 40 shillings. Alcohol had been consumed but all parties said they were not drunk. On the 29th May 1811, Nicholas Ruby and Humphrey Hughes were found not guilty of feloniously assaulting Henry Lane, in the King's high-way, putting him in fear, and taking from his watch.

Although it was 15 years after Robert Ruby had been found guilty of animal theft, the punishment of 15-year-old (later recorded at 14) Mary Ruby after her trail on 27th October 1813 seems far harsher.



She and another unnamed person on the 23rd of September, had gone to a haberdashers on Princes-street, Drury-lane owned by Jonathan Orme. His daughter, Sarah, showed Mary Ruby some ribbons she had asked to see and when she gave her evidence said she saw Mary take a ribbon from the box. Mary stated that the person with her had taken the ribbon but still she was found guilty of feloniously stealing, six yards of ribbon to the value of 3 shillings and six pence. Her sentence was transportation for seven years. It is possible that this was not her first offence. Other records show that the following January/February, she was transported with 121 others on the

Broxbournebury to a colony in New South Wales, Australia. 2 died on the journey but Mary arrived at Port Jackson on the 28 July 1814.^[6,7,8,9]

Considering the fate of Mary Ruby the previous year, it was lucky that Catherine Ruby was found not guilty both times she appeared at The Old Bailey. Catherine was 16 years old at her first trial on 12th January 1814, she was one of three defendants accused of stealing eighty yards of ribbon worth £5 from haberdasher Charles Bluck in Bishopsgate on 7th December 1813. It was unclear which, if any

of them may have taken the ribbon and they all denied knowledge of each other. The second time Catherine was at The Old Bailey, on the 2nd of April the same year, she was again accused of stealing ribbon. This time she was on trial with one other girl. The amount of ribbon was large but as eleven pieces of remnant, so the 170 yards was worth £3. Mary Walker, the shop woman to Messrs. Thomas Flint and John Ray in Grafton-street, Soho was not the only person to give evidence against the two girls. However, the ribbon was not found on them but hidden in an umbrella. Catherine again denied knowing the other prisoner and claimed she had gone to the shop with someone else she knew who wanted to buy some ribbons. Again, all were found not guilty.

It is possible that Catherine was baptised Catherina at St Anselm & St Cecilia in Westminster on 17th June 1798, 11 days after her birth. If so she would be the daughter of Thomas and Eleanor. ^[10]

Ten years later another Ruby was on trial at The Old Bailey. Labourer Michael Ruby, 38, on bonfire night in 1824, had taken 8lbs of bacon, worth 2 shillings, from a window in Whitechapel Road. It belonged to cheesemonger Thomas Pearce and the theft had been witnessed by Mary Bryan, who raised the alarm. Michael said he had taken the bacon to Mr Pearce's door to ask the price, but several witnesses said he had gone further away and the officer who took him into custody stated he had no money on him. Based on this evidence he was found guilty and sentenced to three months imprisonment.

The only other information we have found on Michael Ruby is that he may have been buried at St John, Horselydown, Southwark on 25 Sep 1853. ^[11]

Two years later in 1826, on the 14th September another Thomas Ruby was on trial with Edward Spencer for allegedly stealing broker Samuel Moore's looking glass, worth 15 shillings, on the 29th of August. A witness had seen three men including Thomas Ruby acting suspiciously and later Thomas and Edward giving the third man a looking glass. No-one had seen them take it from Mr Moore's shop in the Covent Garden area and they were therefore found not guilty.

[Elias Ruby](#) only appeared once at The Old Bailey on the 14th of June 1852 and was found not guilty but other records show him to be a persistent offender. Interestingly, his brothers Richard and James, had been victims of crime (see above). The only details of the proceedings at The Old Bailey are "unlawfully assaulting Louisa Burton, with intent, &c." Intent of what and what the etc. were, will have to be left to one's imagination! But Elias was found not guilty.

Like his brothers, Elias was a hay dealer and it was 16 years before he was in court again. Then aged 40, on the 9th of March 1868, he was convicted of the manslaughter, of William Darling at Wrexham on 30th August 1867 and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, which he served mostly at Portland prison. He was paroled and released on 3rd June 1876. A year later he was back in court and over the next 9 years was charged with 10 crimes and in court at least 5 times for larceny and possession. He was found guilty of at least six of the offences and spent more than another year in jail.

The final Ruby recorded as appearing at The Old Bailey was John Ruby, who was just 16 years old when he stood as defendant on the 24th October 1859. He had been charged with attempting to discharge a loaded gun at John Pott, with intent to prevent his lawful apprehension and detention and thereby perverting justice. One month before the trial in West Bedford, John Pott saw John Ruby in his field and when he tried to run away Mr Pott chased him. John Ruby pointed the gun at him and then ran away again. When he was caught again he tried to fire the gun, John Potts said he clearly heard the hammer go down. The gun was wrestled off John Ruby and he was almost taken to the magistrate but managed to escape. The gun was taken to the Magistrate and examined by a policeman who said it was half cocked, but the gun went off narrowly missing the magistrate and "cut the cornice of the room all to pieces and charred it" John Ruby was taken into custody two or three days later. John Ruby claimed he did not intend to shoot John Pott. He was found not guilty.

However, a second court record for the same day records only that John Ruby was again indicted for unlawfully assaulting John Pott and that "The evidence, as given in the last case, having been read over, the Jury found the prisoner guilty". They did recommend mercy on account of his youth and he was confined for seven days.

There might be other Rubys who appeared at The Old Bailey, as there is evidence in other records that some used aliases. Certainly in other courts across England and Wales, there were far more Rubys who had had a brush with the law, were victims of crime or indeed helped bring criminals to justice.

Sources:

1. [The Old Bailey on line](#)
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5. [Wikipedia](#)
6. National Library of Australia: Joint Copying Project
7. State Library of Queensland
8. The Free Settler or Felon database
9. New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents
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