



The National Archives

Press release

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CHRISTMAS 'CRIMES' IN EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE!

Christmas, a time of peace and goodwill to all men. At least, this is what it is meant to be, but in a time of festive celebration, of fun and frivolity, it comes as no surprise that some get caught misbehaving.

East Yorkshire's court archives, held at the Treasure House in Beverley, reveal a colourful past in the *Christmas Quarter Sessions*, from mischievous couples to cowardly constables. As part of the Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com records from the *Christmas Quarter Sessions* for the East Riding of Yorkshire, from 1709 to 1826, are brought to light to illustrate a variety of interesting misdemeanours at this time of year.

Amongst these include the case of William and Martha Gibson of Sculcoates who, on New Year's Day 1808 were accused of "drinking, tipling, whoring and misbehaving themselves unlawfully" in their house with other men and women of "evil name and fame".

Also, described is the case of a cowardly constable, who refused to tackle a rabble of ten men rioting in Driffield Market Place during December 1808. Again in Sculcoates, there was an incident involving James Hews who, on Boxing Day 1825, was found "wandering about in the streets...in an indecent state of nakedness, although having decent cloths in his possession and

begging about from door to door and demanding alms with threats and intimidation from those who refused to relieve him.”

Collections Officer Sam Bartle said:

“It is fascinating to be able to look back at past Christmases to see what sort of mischief people got up to.”

However, not all of the court’s business at Christmas time was filled with miscreants, rogues, and vagabonds – take James Bacchus’ case for example during Christmas 1709. He was a war veteran who had served under Charles II and later settled in Howden, but “by reason of his children leaving of him he is fallen into Extream Poverty and utterly unable to maintaine himself.” It was pleaded that Bacchus be given “a yearly pension towards his support for the short tyme he has to live.”

And, in the true spirit of Christmas, the justices of the peace granted him 40 shillings, equivalent to around £150 in today’s money and 3 weeks wages for a craftsman at the time.

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said:

“These files are a fantastic example of the fabulous richness of local archives. They really show how human life exists amongst records. Readers can see that archives are not just official records, but include the records of the millions of people and make up the histories and stories of a region and its community”.

– Ends –

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email

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Notes to Editors

For more information about the Quarter Sessions records, please visit the Research Room of the Treasure House, Champney Road, Beverley.

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www.eastriding.gov.uk
- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.