

THE CASE OF THE MISSING TWO SHILLINGS

An 1841 commercial directory lists David Mitchell and Co as woollen drapers at 40 Cloth Fair. Mitchell was clearly well established by then, for on 5 September 1833, one of his employees, William Freemantle, appeared at the Old Bailey, accused of stealing 2s from Mitchell and his partner. Mitchell told the jury: ‘On the night of 16th of August, I marked a quantity of silver money, and placed it in a till in the shop – I had sent the prisoner home previously. He returned about 7 o’clock the next morning, and I saw him go round to the side where there was a till, and heard the till drawn out. I ran down the stairs and charged him with having robbed me. He at first denied it; I said I was certain of it. I asked him what he had done with all the money he had taken from us at different times; he said he had spent it. I went to the till to see what was missing, and then he pulled 2s out of his pocket, laid them on the counter, and said that was all. I examined them, and found my mark, which I had put on the night before..’

Jury Q: Are you in the habit of keeping your till unlocked? **A:** Yes.

Henry Davis: I am an officer. I came in and took the 2s off the counter; the prisoner said he was very sorry for taking the money out; he was crying – there was 18s in the till, marked No. 7.

Jury Q: Did you hear him deny it at first? **A:** He never denied having it. I was sent for by Mr Mitchell after it occurred. This happened after he was given into my custody – I was fetched from my house, which is about fifty yards off.

William Thacker, of Coleman Street; James Slack, 29 St John Street; Thomas Freemantle (the prisoner’s uncle), and Henry Cross, 23 St John Street, gave the prisoner a good character.

Sentence: Guilty. Aged 14. Confined 7 days. Recommended to mercy on account of the till being left open.



'The deaf judge, or mutual misunderstanding', a scene at the Old Bailey by George Moutard Woodward, engraved by Isaac Cruikshank, 1796. An aged judge leans forward to listen to a barrister, who points at a shouting witness on the right. An usher leans back asleep.

William Freemantle appeared at the Old Bailey in 1833, accused of stealing two shillings from his employer, David Mitchell of 40 Cloth Fair