

BENJAMIN RICHARD SPRACKLIN

On 20th April 1865 the Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette newspaper reported:

“COMMITTED TO THE DORSET COUNTY PRISON – Benjamin Richard Spracklin, housebreaking at Stratton; COUNTY PETTY SESSIONS. – Wednesday. Before Major Sykes. – Benjamin Richard Spracklin, a lad about twelve years of age, was charged with breaking into the shop window of William Shepard, at Stratton, on the 7th inst. – Prosecutor stated that he kept a small general shop at Stratton, and about half-past eight o'clock on Friday evening last he closed his shutters. He was called by his wife about ten o'clock, and on arriving in the shop he found that a shutter had been removed and two panes of glass taken out; on examination it was found that from half to three quarters of a pound of peppermint lozenges and a few packets of baking powder had been stolen. The goods were valued at about 1s 3d. – Ann Shephard, the wife of the last witness, gave corroborative evidence, and said the prisoner had not come to her shop for anything during the day. The missing goods were safe in the shop between seven and eight o'clock in the evening. – John Allen, a smith, living at Stratton, said about nine o'clock on the evening in question the prisoner came into his shop, and shook up a bag of peppermints, at the same time inviting him to partake of some. Witness took out two, and asked the boy where he had got them, to which he replied he had bought 3d worth at Mr. Shephard's. Witness remarked that he had got a “good three pennyworth of pops.” – P.C. Foster said on Tuesday evening last he received information that the house of prosecutor had been broken into, and on examination he found the shop window had been tried in three different places; one pane of glass had been entirely removed, and another broken. Witness afterwards made enquiries in the village and found that the prisoner had been distributing a quantity of peppermints among several boys. He took the boy into custody, and as he was on his way to Dorchester he said he was sorry he had meddled with the window, but he had taken down the shutter and emptied the “pops” from the bottle, and had thrown away the powders. It was stated that the lad was employed by Mr. Davis, farmer, who gave him an excellent character. – Prisoner was committed for trial at the next sessions.”

On Wednesday 12th April 1865 – five days after the offence – Benjamin was received at Dorchester Prison. The Admission and Discharge Register lists him as a twelve-year-old labourer; 4ft 7ins tall; fair complexion; light brown hair; light hazel eyes; no distinguishing marks.

The Dorset Calendar of Prisoners shows that Benjamin was bailed on 19th April 1865 to appear at the Quarter Sessions in Dorchester in July 1865.

On 22nd June 1865 the Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette reported that Benjamin Richard Sprackin appeared at the “County Petty Sessions – Saturday: Before H. Williams and E. Saunders, Esqrs.” and was sent for trial at the Midsummer Quarter Sessions charged with housebreaking at Stratton.

Benjamin appeared at the Quarter Sessions on 28th June 1865 before H. Williams, Esq., of Stinsford House, Dorchester, and offered a guilty plea to Housebreaking and Larceny.

The Western Flying Post, Yeovil newspaper reported on Tuesday July 4th, 1865 that “MIDSUMMER QUARTER SESSIONS. SECOND COURT – Wednesday. H. Williams, Esq., in the chair. HOUSEBREAKING. – Benjamin Spracklin (on bail), was charged with breaking and entering the dwelling house of William Shephard, at Stratton, and stealing therein 1lb. of peppermint lozenges and six packets of baking powder, on 7th April last. – Prisoner pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to 14 days' hard labour, and at the expiration of that term to be sent to a Reformatory School for four years.”

Benjamin was sent to Milborne St. Andrew Reformatory School, near Blandford Forum.