

FRANCIS PACKE 1840-1903

THE STRANGE CAREER OF A CLERGYMAN'S SON

by Eileen M. Bowlt

The Reverend Christopher Packe was the Vicar of Ruislip from 1834-78. It is extraordinary that he should have had a son, Francis Packe, who became an international criminal. The career of his son cannot have added any comfort to his declining years. Six months before his father's death in June 1878, Francis had been found guilty of feloniously forging and uttering a bond of the Chicago and North-Western Railway for \$1000 with intent to defraud at the Old Bailey and was sentenced to ten years penal servitude, two previous offences for which he had been convicted, presumably in his absence, in 1867 and 1868, were taken into account. The present offence had occurred in July 1876 and he was charged in the name of Frederick Randolph, one of many aliases that he adopted over the course of his life. He had been living in Hammersmith under the name of Wright at the time of his arrest.ⁱ Francis was born on the 19 July 1840 and baptised at St Martin's the following May. At the start of his ten-year sentence he was 37 years of age.

This was neither the first nor last of his criminal activities. He had been convicted in 1863, for swindling tailors, hoteliers and others, and he died in Hamburg in June 1903 whilst awaiting trial for attempting to negotiate a Swiss railway bond, part of the haul from an attack upon a diligence near Geneva the previous September.ⁱⁱ

His activities, were reported widely in such organs of the press as *The Western Flying Post*, Nov 1862; *The Sheffield Independent*, Jan 1863; *The Leeds Intelligencer*, Jan 1863; *Lloyds Weekly*, Oct 1877; *The Western Daily Press*, Jan 1878; *The Evening Telegraph*, Jan 1878; *The Times*, Jan 1878; *The Huddersfield Chronicle*, May 1895 and *The Shields Daily Gazette*, July 1903: but there was not a squeak of them in the pages of the local newspaper (now *The Gazette*) published locally from 1860 onwards. Was this discretion on the part of the editors

due to a desire to avoid embarrassing the higher clergy? It could hardly have been lack of knowledge because as early as 1862, *The Western Flying Post* was referring to the miscreant as, 'Francis Packe who gave his address as The Cloisters, Windsor', where the Packe family happened to be residing at the time. At the 1878 trial there were references to the prisoner being highly connected and *The Times* mentioned that he was the son of a Canon of St Paul's and of the Vicar of Ruislip. Elsewhere he is referred to as the son of the Dean of Windsor. The press, then as now, were prone to minor inaccuracies in their reporting. Christopher Packe was actually a Minor Canon of St Paul's Cathedral from 1817 until his death and a Minor Canon of St George's, Windsor from 1821-67, but never Dean of either institution. The archivist at Windsor says that his resignation letter of 1867 does not suggest that there were any untoward circumstances behind it.

Francis Packe's early life

Christopher and Mary Packe, who married in 1821, suffered the tragic loss of many of their children at a young age.ⁱⁱⁱ Five had already died before they moved to Ruislip in 1834 and there were two more deaths in Francis's childhood, of a three-year-old sister when he was about 18 months old, and of an older brother, 27-year-old Christopher, in 1851. By that time, Francis himself was at the Marsh Royal Free Grammar School at Marlborough, where at ten, he was the youngest of the 11 scholars mentioned in the Census Returns for that year.^{iv} He did not proceed to university, but entered the Bombay Native Infantry as a Lieutenant in April 1859, when he was still 18.^v His elder brother, Charles Lewis Packe (1837-1882) had become an ensign in the Royal Lanarkshire Militia in 1857.^{vi} Nothing is known of the careers of the other two brothers who survived into adulthood.

Beginning of his criminal career

Whether this move far from home heralded the beginning of Francis's moral decline, or whether he went to distant shores to escape the consequences of earlier troubles is unknown, but it was while back in England on furlough in 1861 that he first fell foul of the law. He failed to rejoin his regiment at the proper time, and while he was staying at The Hen and Chickens Hotel in Birmingham in November 1862 he presented cheques drawn on Grindlay & Co of Parliament Street, East India Commission Agents, at the hotel and in payment for a suit of clothes. When inquiry was made by telegraph, the reply came that it was 'a dead swindle',^{vii} so Packe, who had elevated his status from Lieutenant to Captain while in Birmingham, was arrested at the railway station as he was about to step onto a train for Bristol. He was convicted at the end of December 1862 and sentenced to 18 months hard labour. It was noted that he was wanted for similar offences in Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool. *The Leeds Intelligencer* reported 'The prisoner who is of very respectable parentage, had been carrying on a regular system of swindling tradesmen.'^{viii}

That brought his military career to an end. *The London Gazette* of the 24 Feb 1863 contained the following:

'MEMORANDA

Lieutenant Francis Packe of the late 30th Regiment of Bombay Native Infantry, has been removed from the list of the Army, Her Majesty having no further need of his services. Dated the 6 February 1863.'^{ix}

Did this period of imprisonment also bring a rupture with his family? When charged with offences he reserved his defence. At the trial, he was defended by the Hon. E.C. Leigh. In view of his apparent lack of means, one wonders who paid the bill.

Presumably Francis Packe was released sometime in 1864. The offences that were taken into account by the judge at the 1878 trial may have been committed under assumed names – William James and Henry Jones were mentioned during the 1878 trial.^x

The judge gave him a ten year sentence in January 1878 because he said that the prisoner had already undergone a sentence of seven years, perhaps again under one of his many aliases and of which no record has been found. There seem to be hints that he may have spent time in America and is referred to by one paper as an American lawyer.

The trial in 1878 from the Old Bailey Proceedings^{xi}

The case that came to trial in January 1878 illustrates the complicated methods employed in the money markets in the City of London in the 19th century and the dependence that was placed upon introductions and connections.

Francis Packe's offence was raising money on counterfeit bonds, purporting to belong to the Chicago Railway Company. He had called upon a solicitor, James Chapman, in Basinghall Street somewhere about March 1876, giving his name as F.R. Randolph and suggesting that he had come from America. He was seeking a writ in the Court of Common Pleas against a man who had lent him money to purchase furniture and had subsequently removed a portion of it. When asked by the solicitor for some payment on account he had mentioned valuable securities in the form of bonds that he needed to realise.

Mr Chapman's managing clerk, who was in prison himself by the time that Francis's case came to trial, introduced him to a moneychanger, Alfred Young Chick of Old Broad Street, who subsequently gave Francis a crossed cheque for £326 for one of the bonds. Mr Chick sold the bond on to a Mr Bishop, but it was returned a few days later marked 'counterfeit' and Mr Chick had to reimburse Mr Bishop. Under cross-examination at the trial, Mr Chick said that he was not a member of the Stock Exchange, but had assumed the bonds, which were 7% bonds for \$1000, which was about £200 at the time, were genuine.

Meanwhile Francis Packe alias Frederick Randolph, took the £326 cheque which was post dated, to his solicitor, Mr Chapman, and asked him to cash it for him. Mr Chapman paid it into his private account at Woolwich and the next morning sent his manager to get a draft on Glyns for £300 in notes, which he handed over to Francis, retaining the other £26 for his own costs. Francis Packe then left Claydon's Terrace, Clapham, where he had been living and ceased to be Mr Chapman's client.

At the trial, Mr Chapman said that he had later discovered that 'Mr Randolph' was highly connected, being son of a Canon of St Paul's and the Vicar of Ruislip and that his real name was Francis Pack (*sic*). One of Christopher Packe's many clerical appointments was as a Canon of St Paul's.

'Frederick Randolph' also had dealings with an exchange dealer of Coleman Street, called Otto Rossett between May and August 1876, selling him five railway coupons, which were turned down as counterfeit. In the witness box, Mr Rossett explained that Chicago Railway Bonds were not negotiable on the London Stock Exchange and had to be dealt with in America. Their prices were quoted in the New York list, not in the London list and the New York prices governed those in London, where exchange-dealers allowed a small profit and for the risk. He knew the company to be one of the first in America.

It came out in the trial that prior to these events, in February 1875, Francis Packe, using his real name, had asked Charles Austen Allen, a stock-broker of Copthall Court, to sell some Chicago and North-Western Railway bonds for him. Mr Payne, a member of the Stock Exchange, had introduced Francis Pack to Mr Allen, although he did not know him, but because a cousin of his own had married someone living in the Rev Christopher Packe's parish. Mr Allen said in evidence that from this introduction he believed Mr Packe to be a thoroughly respectable person with whom he was justified in doing business. He agreed to loan £900 on the security of the bonds and handed him two cheques, one for £300 and the other

for £600 drawn on the bank of England, dated the 26 February 1875. Francis Packe signed the receipt 'February 26, Received from Allen and Wiley £900.' The bonds were returned stamped 'counterfeit'.

Francis Packe paid the £300 cheque to his credit at the Cheque Bank, Cockspur Street about the 26 or 27 February. All the money but £7 15s was drawn out by the 1 March in five sums of varying amounts. A friend of his called Webster took the £600 cheque to a coach-builder in Upper St Martin's Lane, and asked him to cash it, saying that Mr Packe would like to buy a carriage and would want to pay for it with the cash. Mr Kingwell, the coach builder, cashed the cheque on the 2 March and within a minute or two of returning with the money (five one hundred pound notes and some tens and fives) to his premises, Mr Webster arrived with Mr Packe, whom Mr Kingwell had never seen before. Mr Packe did no business because he said that he was going abroad that afternoon, but would call again when he returned. So Mr Kingwell handed over the notes. He said that he understood that Mr Packe was the son of the Dean of Windsor and that the carriage when bought would be going to The Cloisters, Windsor.

A warrant was issued for Packe's arrest in September 1876, and for whatever reason was not executed until October 1877 when he was living in Hammersmith under the name of Wright. It led to the trial in January 1878. The key witness at the trial was Martin Luther Sykes of West Chester, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary of the Chicago and North-Western Railway Company, who attended at the invitation of the City Solicitor, to prove the forgeries and without whose evidence a conviction would not have been possible.

Defence Counsel, Mr Besley, stated "that the prisoner was the chosen dupe of others more clever than himself. It was unfortunately true that he was a man of education and high connections, but having at an early age become an inmate of a prison, he was thrown among men who made him their victims".

The judge did not mince matters and said that as the prisoner had already undergone a seven year term, he must now serve ten years.

Released on licence 1885

Francis Packe served at least some of his long sentence at Her Majesty's Convict Prison, Princetown, Dartmoor, where he was listed as an inmate on the night of the 1881 census. He was said to be married, and his occupation was given as a ship's steward. Indeed when he rented 56 Overstone Road, Hammersmith in 1876 he called himself Ryder and was accompanied by a lady assumed to be his wife, who remained for a little while after he had been taken into custody.^{xii}

After serving eight years he was released on the 9 October 1885 on licence and reported to the Police Office at Great Scotland Yard the same day and stated his intention of proceeding to New York.^{xiii} The police seem to have accepted his leaving the country, but later discovered that he was still in their district and apprehended him at an address in Walworth on the 22 November 1885, charged him at Lambeth Police Station with failing to report and remanded him until the 26 November when he was discharged because he produced a passage to New York on a boat that was due to sail from Harwich the next day. Taking no chances an Inspector Randall accompanied him to Harwich and saw him on board the SS Norfolk, that was bound for New York via Antwerp.^{xiv} At the time the fastest steamship crossing was seven days.

Francis Packe reported to Great Scotland Yard on the 18 December, saying that he had returned from New York that day and intended to reside in Walworth under the name of Butler. He reported again on the 24 December and a police constable accompanied him back home to verify the address.^{xv} The short trip across the Atlantic and back – 21 days – suggests that he might have worked his passage, but the police report does not say so and there is another possibility; he could have jumped ship at

Antwerp and busied himself on the Continent for a fortnight or so, before returning to London.

On the 28 December he was arrested and charged the next day with living by dishonest means, 'he being a convict on licence', and was remanded in custody until the 5 January 1886. Upon discharge he reported to Carter Street Police, intending to return to his Walworth address and was not seen again in that police district.^{xvi}

Although the police seem to have been keeping him under surveillance, there had been a period of nearly six weeks when he had duped them into believing him to be in the United States and another three weeks when they thought that he was *en route* to or from America. Where had he actually been between the 9 October and 22 November, and the 27 November and 18 December 1885? Apparently he had been engaged in nefarious activities in Switzerland and France during the first gap, and as was eventually found to be up to no good in Vienna where he carried out a successful raid upon the Court jewellers, in the second period. He began pulling the wool over the police's eyes on the very day of his release from prison on licence. Almost certainly much of his subsequent activity had been planned whilst still under lock and key?

France and Switzerland October 1885 - May 1888^{xvii}

During the period that was unaccounted for a businessman, Albert Vischer at Basle, was a victim of a break-in during the night of the 20-21 October 1885, losing goods to the value of 16,841 francs 25 cents, the greater part of which had been recovered in February 1886 in possession of 'Francis Packe de Ruislip (Angleterre)', who was living in Paris under the name of Georges Duncan. Being unable to justify the origin of these goods, Packe was extradited to Basle. There he was tried found guilty of house breaking and sentenced to 8 years solitary confinement and 10 years of loss of rights in October 1886.

Two months later in December 1886 the prisoner sought a new judgment on the grounds that he could provide an alibi showing that he had been in England on the night of the burglary in Basle.

The Swiss Agent and Consul General in Berne, wrote to the Foreign Office in February 1887, 'relative to one Francis Packe alias Bartlett, Randolph, Duncan etc sentenced to eight years at Basle for house-breaking who is desirous of proving an alibi'^{xviii}, as a result of which the police started to interview witnesses in London. They had four photographs of Francis Packe (unfortunately not yet traced), which they showed to his landlord and 'wife' to ensure correct identification. His landlord at Munton Road, Walworth said that 'Mr Butler' and his wife had taken possession of the premises on the 17 October 1885 and produced a book showing that Mr Butler had purchased bottles of beer and other goods on the 19, 21 and 30 October, covering the date of the house-breaking at Basle.^{xix} 'Mrs Butler', now known as Miss Arford was living in St Gabriel Street, Newington Butts. She stated that excepting the time she knew him to be in custody he had slept with her every night until the day he was discharged from Lambeth Police Station when he went to France, since when she had only seen him once early in February 1886 when he stayed with her for two hours.^{xx}

An endorsement on her statement says 'it is quite compatible with his having committed a burglary at Basle on the night of the 20-21 October that he should have bought a bottle of beer in London on the evening of the 21st.' It is amazing how quickly trains and ferries could transport passengers across Europe in late Victorian times! His alibi was upheld, however, and he was acquitted on the 28 July 1887 and seems to have remained in Switzerland. By September the French ambassador was seeking his extradition to France on the grounds that the stolen goods had been found on him in France. He was handed over to the French police at Delle on the 2 November 1887.^{xxi} He appealed on the grounds that the receiving of stolen goods

knowingly was not included in the French-Swiss treaty of extradition. After moving between various courts in Paris, the matter was finally settled in May 1888 with Francis Packe of Ruislip (Angleterre) – how long was it since he had lived in or visited Ruislip? – being set at liberty because as a foreigner (as Lord Lytton explained in a note to Lord Salisbury) he could not be tried in a French court for a theft committed abroad even though he received the stolen goods in France.^{xxii}

Was there a hint of scepticism in Lord Lytton's tone? Back in London, Mr Munro, Assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard, who was also being kept informed of the extradition case, wrote roundly 'The man is a dangerous criminal.'^{xxiii}

Free in France

He was now free, but any hopes that his years spent in prison (at least 20 by my reckoning) might have made him determined to retain his liberty, were not fulfilled. A desire, perhaps a need for money, international travel, thrills and excitement seem to have driven him to continue his reckless and increasingly serious criminal career. He had started as a swindler and confidence trickster, became involved in forgery (until 1853, a hanging matter), then house-breaking.

In the 15 years of life remaining to him, he appears only rarely in the British press, probably because he was spending much time abroad. In 1895 he appeared at Bow Street Police Court as Francis Packe *alias* Beaumont, along with Walter A. Pleydell *alias* Walter Bond *alias* Alf Richardson, Johnny Carr *alias* Scott, Robert Humphreys and Louis Martin Pfeiffer. They were charged with conspiring to defraud by means of forged circular notes on Messrs Coutts & Co, bankers.^{xxiv} The result of this case is not known.

He seems to have been peculiarly adept at obscuring his true person. One feels that he must have lived in a fantasy world juggling his various aliases.

When he was arrested in Hamburg in 1903^{xxv}, having tried to negotiate a railway bond, part of the contents of a mail bag, valued at £3000, the authorities were mystified as to the true identity of the 'elderly' and presumably respectable-looking gentleman, whom they had arrested. He had first given his name as Harold Brown and later as Francis Beaumont. When he died before trial it seemed that all attempts to trace him were doomed to failure. The Vienna police came to the rescue and recognised him as 'the notorious Francis Packe, son of Christopher Packe, a former Vicar of St Paul's, Windsor' (*sic*), who had got clean away with £20,000 of jewellery when he and others had plundered the Court Jewellers on The Graben, Vienna on the 6 December 1885. So he was in Vienna at the time that Scotland Yard believed him to be *en route* either to or from New York. This seems to have been his most successful crime and may account for his ability to appeal against his sentence in Basle and against extradition in the higher French Courts 1886-8.

The plundering of the Court Jewellers had caused the greatest upset and excitement in Vienna in 1885 and had been reported widely at the time, including in *The Times* on the 8 December. The Viennese Police believed

that Englishmen had been responsible because the tools used to open secure iron safes, were of the finest English make and one had the name J. Buck, London on the blade and another More Brothers. Telegrams were sent to all the principal Continental cities and to Scotland Yard.

The authorities seem to have been content to accept that the corpse at Hamburg in 1903 was indeed that of Francis Packe. By the time of his death Francis Packe's exploits seem to have acquired a romantic tinge. The English reporter writing from Vienna on the 5 June 1903 for the *Shields Gazette*, writes almost admiringly about Packe's criminal career. 'His alibis were legion and his robberies legion also. London knew him as Bartlett of New York, New York as Duncan of London, Paris as Beaumont of Vienna and Buda Pesth as Marens of Paris.' He finishes 'Packe deserves a place in the romance of crime as one of the most daring burglars and forgers of the last century.'

Whether he was a dupe of others cleverer than himself or the brains behind several criminal groups, I leave to my readers to decide.

Acknowledgements

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Sources

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Bowl, Eileen M. *The Goodliest Place in Middlesex*, 1989, pp 19-21
- ^{iv} 1851 Census transcription details for Marsh Royal School, Findmypast.co.uk
- ^v Feb 24 1863, *The London Gazette*, p948
- ^{vi} Dec 4 1857, *The London Gazette*, p4281
- ^{vii} 1 Jan 1863, *Sheffield Independent*

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- ix Feb 24 1863, *The London Gazette*, p948
- x Old Bailey Proceedings Online *op cit*
- xi All the following information comes from Old Bailey Proceedings Online
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- xiii The National Archives: HO 144 470 X13336/2
- xiv *ibid*
- xv *ibid*
- xvi TNA: HO 144 470 X13336/2
- xvii Much of the following comes from a series of communications between the Foreign Office and the Home Office and the *Charge d'Affaire* at Berne between February 1887 and May 1888 relating to 'Francis Packe alias Bartlett, Randolph, Duncan etc' at The National Archives : HO 470 144 X13336/1-13
- xviii TNA HO 144 470 X13336/1
- xix *ibid*/2
- xx *ibid*
- xxi *ibid* 470 X13336/11
- xxii *ibid* X13336/12
- xxiii *ibid*
- xxiv 9 May 1895 *Huddersfield Chronicle*
- xxv 6 July 1903 *Shields Gazette*

Extracts from the RNUDC Minute Books (held at Uxbridge Library)

- 12 July 1906.** Attention has been drawn to the obstruction caused by placing of carts and other obstructions upon part of the roadside waste at Eastcote, and your committee recommend that Mr Tapping be called upon to remove and cease such obstruction.
(*Mr Tapping kept the smithy in Eastcote High Road.*)
- 16 July 1906.** It was resolved that the attention of the Postmaster General be drawn to the inadequacy of the postal arrangements in Northwood particularly to the following points:
- a) There being no dispatch until 10.35 am.
 - b) The length of time occupied by letters in transit specially to and from London.
 - c) The inadequate provision for the public at the Northwood Post Office.
 - d) The clearing of the pillar boxes should be more systematic.
- 8 August 1906.** At the request of the Vicar of Ruislip and by direction of the Medical Officer of Health, the Council's men have carried out the cleaning and whitewashing of one of the old Alms Houses at Ruislip which was in an unsanitary condition; no expense will fall on this Council in respect of this work.
- 17 December 1906.** The Highways Committee recommend that the speed limit be reduced from 20mph to 15mph.
- 14 October 1907.** A wooden motor house at Ruislip vicarage, not in accordance with the bye-laws, has been removed.