

December 1816

My name is Sarah Brown, my husband Samuel is the canal agent at Pewsham. We live at the lock house.

A few months back, during the summer, Sam had just closed up for the night and we were off to bed, when there was a tremendous commotion and a hammering on the door. Sam called out "who's there" and a voice from the dark shouted "let us in or we'll smash the door in and kill you".

Then the door was smashed to pieces and two dark men¹ burst in, one had a knife the other a club. They attacked Sam and kept saying "where do you keep the valuables, we know you have them hidden".

A third man came in and filled his sack with my plate and wearing apparel he even took my blankets². Then he turned on Sam and said he would kill him if he didn't give him the money. I was so frightened, while the men weren't looking I climbed out of the back room window but I fell and hurt my leg. My leg was so painful I was only able to crawl under a bush to hide.

I lay under the bush all night, I wanted to call out to Sam, but didn't dare. I saw the three men walk away towards Laycock, at daybreak. Then I saw Sam, I called him and he said he was alright, but he had to carry me back to the house. He tended to my leg, he said it was broke. I'll never walk without a stick again, I am crippled.

Sam said the thieves thought that Canal Company money was kept in the house, but when they found that wasn't right, he said they'd still beaten him hard, it has quite unsettled him. We don't want to live here any longer; Sam is a feared they'll come back³.

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¹ A few days later John Slie, "a gipsy", William Herbert and John Collison Peer were apprehended in Bath. Slie and Herbert were committed to Salisbury for trial and Peer to Marlborough. Peer later turned Kings evidence

² A woman called Hester Baker was also committed for handling stolen goods

³ At the Salisbury Assizes of 5 August 1816 Slie and Herbert were found guilty and sentenced to death.