WE'RE CLOSING IN: TARGETING BENEFIT FRAUDSTERS 1901 STYLE

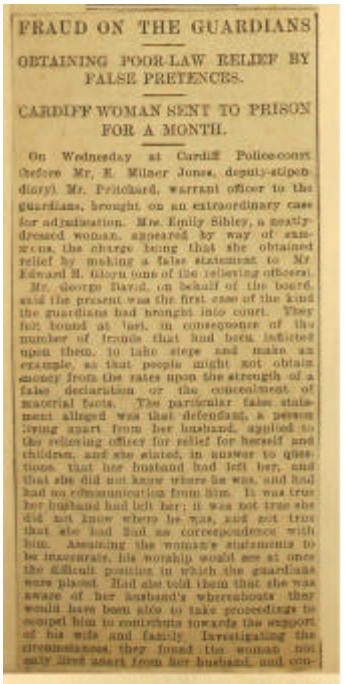
The current 'We're closing in' campaign targeting benefit theft has a familiar ring to staff at Glamorgan Record Office. The campaign's hundred year old roots were revealed during a family history search for a Canadian family which was investigating Welsh ancestors, Emily and John Sibley.

Research into the mysterious Sibley family of Cardiff revealed that both Emily and John had spent time in prison; the full story was found in the newscuttings books compiled by the Cardiff Constabulary.

Emily Sibley, mother of six, was tried at the Cardiff Police Court on 6 November 1901. Described as 'a neatly-dressed woman' wearing 'kid gloves', Emily was charged with obtaining poor relief totalling £26 from the Cardiff Board of Guardians by claiming that her husband had left her, that she did not know where he was and that she had had no communication with him. Investigations proved this was far from the truth for she knew not only her husband's whereabouts, but had also received money from him for the upkeep of her children. It was revealed in court that she had visited him in Ynysybwl and had stayed with him there, on one occasion for a week. When faced with this evidence she was reported to have said 'The game is up. I had the money from him, and spent it on my children, and I am sorry for it'.

The case was the first of its kind to be brought by the Board of Guardians who, faced with losing large sums of money through false claims, hoped that her sentence of one month in prison, with hard labour, would act as a deterrent to others. On receiving her sentence Emily Sibley 'wept copiously'.

In the previous month, her husband John, 36, a collier's labourer, who was living under the false name of John Davies, was sentenced to 2 months, with hard labour for neglecting to maintain his wife and 6 children.



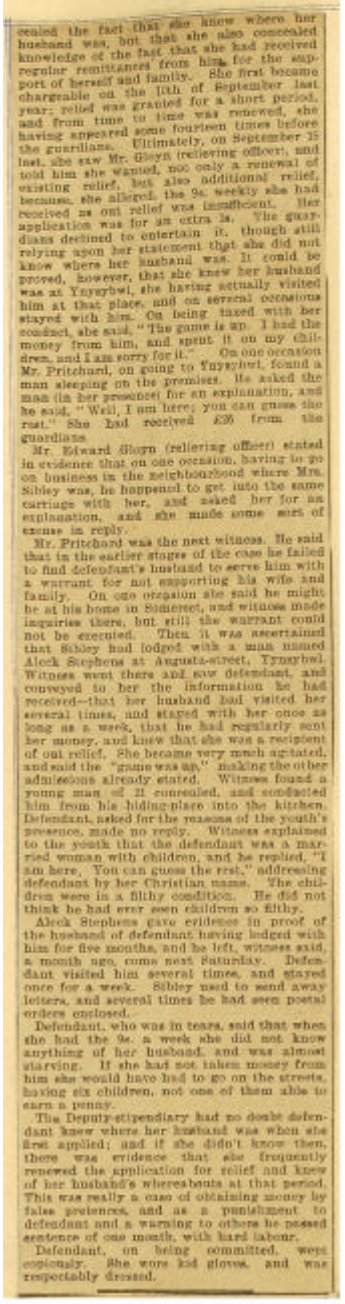
FRAUD ON THE GUARDIANS

OBTAINING POOR-LAW RELIEF BY FALSE PRETENCES.

CARDIFF WOMAN SENT TO PRISON FOR A MONTH.

On Wednesday at Cardiff Police-court (before Mr. E. Milner Jones, deputy-stipendiary) Mr. Pritchard, warrant officer to the guardians, brought on an extraordinary case for adjudication. Mrs. Emily Sibley, a neatly-dressed woman, appeared by way of summons, the charge being that she obtained relief by making a false statement to Mr. Edward M. Gloyn one of the relieving officers.

Mr. George Hurd, on behalf of the board, said the present was the first case of the kind the guardians had brought into court. They felt bound at last, in consequence of the number of frauds that had been inflicted upon them, to take steps and make an example, so that people might not obtain money from the rates upon the strength of a false declaration or the concealment of material facts. The particular false statement alleged was that defendant, a person living apart from her husband, applied to the relieving officer for relief for herself and children, and she stated, in answer to questions, that her husband had left her, and that she did not know where he was, and had had no communication from him. It was true her husband had left her; it was not true she did not know where he was, and not true that she had had no correspondence with him. Assuming the woman's statements to be inaccurate, his worship would see at once the difficult position in which the guardians were placed. Had she told them that she was aware of her husband's whereabouts they would have been able to take proceedings to compel him to contribute towards the support of his wife and family. Investigating the circumstances, they found the woman not only lived apart from her husband, and con-



cealed the fact that she knew where her husband was, but that she also concealed knowledge of the fact that she had received irregular remittances from him for the support of herself and family. She first became chargeable on the 15th of September last year; relief was granted for a short period, and from time to time was renewed, she having appeared some fourteen times before the guardians. Ultimately, on September 25 last, she saw Mr. Gloyn (relieving officer), and told him she wanted, not only a renewal of existing relief, but also additional relief, because, she alleged, the 9s. weekly she had received as out relief was insufficient. Her application was for an extra 5s. The guardians declined to entertain it, though still relying upon her statement that she did not know where her husband was. It could be proved, however, that she knew her husband was at Ynysybwl, she having actually visited him at that place, and on several occasions stayed with him. On being taxed with her conduct, she said, "The game is up. I had the money from him, and spent it on my children, and I am sorry for it." On one occasion Mr. Pritchard, on going to Ynysybwl, found a man sleeping on the premises. He asked the man (in her presence) for an explanation, and he said, "Well, I am here; you can guess the rest." She had received £26 from the guardians.

Mr. Edward Gloyn (relieving officer) stated in evidence that on one occasion, having to go on business in the neighbourhood where Mrs. Sibley was, he happened to get into the same carriage with her, and asked her for an explanation, and she made some sort of excuse in reply.

Mr. Pritchard was the next witness. He said that in the earlier stages of the case he failed to find defendant's husband to serve him with a warrant for not supporting his wife and family. On one occasion she said he might be at his home in Somerset, and witness made inquiries there, but still the warrant could not be executed. Then it was ascertained that Sibley had lodged with a man named Alcck Stephens at Augusta-street, Ynysybwl. Witness went there and saw defendant, and conveyed to her the information he had received—that her husband had visited her several times, and stayed with her once as long as a week, that he had regularly sent her money, and knew that she was a recipient of out relief. She became very much agitated, and said the "game was up," making the other admissions already stated. Witness found a young man of 21 concealed, and conducted him from his hiding-place into the kitchen. Defendant, asked for the reasons of the youth's presence, made no reply. Witness explained to the youth that the defendant was a married woman with children, and he replied, "I am here. You can guess the rest," addressing defendant by her Christian name. The children were in a filthy condition. He did not think he had ever seen children so filthy.

Alcck Stephens gave evidence in proof of the husband of defendant having lodged with him for five months, and he left, witness said, a month ago, come next Saturday. Defendant visited him several times, and stayed once for a week. Sibley used to send away letters, and several times he had seen postal orders enclosed.

Defendant, who was in tears, said that when she had the 9s. a week she did not know anything of her husband, and was almost starving. If she had not taken money from him she would have had to go on the streets, having six children, not one of them able to earn a penny.

The Deputy-stipendiary had no doubt defendant knew where her husband was when she first applied; and if she didn't know then, there was evidence that she frequently renewed the application for relief and knew of her husband's whereabouts at that period. This was really a case of obtaining money by false pretences, and as a punishment to defendant and a warning to others he passed sentence of one month, with hard labour.

Defendant, on being committed, wept copiously. She wore kid gloves, and was respectably dressed.