

COURT REPORT: R. v. THEOBALD

Mervyn Heard

THE OLD BAILEY ONLINE WEBSITE has featured in our Journal before ('Bits and pieces', Vol. 10 No. 3, Autumn 2007) as a rich source of incidental references to the magic lantern (and, indeed, everything else) in the records of London's main criminal court from 1674 to 1913.

I recently discovered a transcript of a very interesting trial from 1910, which sheds detailed light on the practices of one of the main British manufacturers of transfer slides, J. Theobald & Co. Theobald were responsible for making most of the still-common 12-slide transfer sets, and together with W. Butcher & Sons ('Primus') dominated the market for children's slides in the two decades around 1900.

The trial took place from 15 to 25 November 1910, including several adjournments, and was a prosecution of John Dazeley Theobald (b. 1859), the proprietor of the firm. The gist of the case was that home workers had been engaged to make slides, but the terms of their engagement amounted to fraud since many of their slides were rejected as defective and they could not achieve the levels of income promised in Theobald's advertisements.

The summary of the trial is very detailed and a little hard to follow. The transcript only reports the witnesses' evidence, but it is usually possible to guess the barristers' questions from the witnesses' replies. I have edited some of the evidence to make it a little clearer, but the full transcript is available at www.oldbaileyonline.org, reference number t19101115-42.

THEOBALD John Dazeley (53, optician), obtaining: by false pretences from Thomas Bartholomew Smith 5s., from Benjamin William Rogers 5s., from John Cuthbert Palk 5s., from Leonard Johannsen Van Tiffelen 5s., from Mary Harrington 5s. and 2s. 3d., and from James Chick 5s. and 2s. 3d., in each case with intent to defraud.¹

The trial opened with witnesses called by the prosecution:

THOMAS BARTHOLOMEW SMITH, Sirdar Road, Wood Green
I was at one time a bookbinder, have been 25 years a draper's assistant and am now out of employment.

In July, 1910, I answered advertisement in the 'Daily Mail': '£2 weekly and upwards easily earned at home by transferring pictures. All materials provided. Full particulars from the Nathomas Company, 10 Staines Road, Hounslow', and received circular produced from 'The National Home Employment Association, Albemarle Works, 10 Staines Road, Hounslow', stating that 30s. to £5 per week could be earned by making magic lantern slides by pasting transfers on to glass binding the glasses together etc.; that 5s. was to be sent for the value of the materials, which would be returned on the work being done, stating that young ladies of 18 to 19 were earning 20s. to 30s. a week, that old people of 60 to 70 and children of 14 to 15 and other persons were doing it in their spare time; that others were making the slides and selling them at a good profit; that the Association had a very large trade and had been in the business for 35 years; that the work was perfectly simple and could be done by anyone using ordinary care; and that a payment of 2d. per dozen slides would be made.²

I then called at 10 Staines Road, asked for the managing director and saw Miss Woods, signed the circular, paid 5s., and received box containing three dozen glass plates, binding, glue, and three dozen transfers together with six additional glass plates for experiment and one finished slide, also circular giving instructions how the work was to be done. I then completed the three dozen slides; it took me about a week, working three or four hours a day. On July 15 I sent the slides by Pickford's to Staines Road, paying the carriage, 4d., and wrote asking for the return of my 5s. and to be supplied with materials for making 100 dozen slides. I then received printed imitation typewritten letter stating that 19 of my 36 slides were defective, that they would be charged for at 1d. each; or by paying 2s. 3d. I could have 36 more transfers and try

again. I wrote protesting that the slides were not defective, although the work might be a little rough and that the circular had stated they would not be rejected on that ground. Plates were afterwards returned to me (produced); they are not defective.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. Having received the green circular I went to the works to ask if I could have plenty of work and to confirm the whole thing. I saw the box of materials and paid my 5s. I did not expect to be paid if the transfers were torn. Some of my slides (produced) have no film on the glass in the white places; they are slightly imperfect, but not torn. [...]

Two further witnesses (Mary Harrington, domestic servant, and Leonard Johannsen van Tiffelen, decorative painter, outlined similar complaints to that made by Smith.

The prosecution called evidence of Theobald's healthy bank account:

EDWARD BERNARD ASHBY, accountant at Barclay's Bank, Hounslow

Prisoner has an account at my bank in the name of J. Theobald and Co., which he alone draws on. I produce certified extract showing total credits from October 1, 1909, to October 13, 1910, of £6,143 0s. 8d., of which £1,028 2s. 2d. was paid in postal and money orders.

Cross-examined. The postal orders were for 20s., 10s., 5s., and as low as 6d. The account has been a substantial one and extends back ten or 11 years.

Three more witnesses (Benjamin William Rogers, a colporteur of bibles and Christian literature; John Cuthbert Palk, a clerk; and James Alfred Chick, a grocer's assistant) made similar complaints about rejection of slides and having lost money.

The prosecution called three members of Theobald's own staff:

ETHEL FRANCIS WOODS

I have been employed by prisoner for the last three years; he carries on business under the name of J. Theobald and Co. I am head of the wholesale department where about 20 girls are employed. Lantern slides were made on the premises and by home workers.

I used to examine the lots of three dozen that were sent in and kept a record in the slide-book (produced) which is complete except that when three dozen were brought in by hand they might not be entered. The green circular and the white paper of instructions have been in use since March, 1908. They were printed by Page and Thomas. About May, 1908, the type-written circular was introduced. The latter was sent out by a typist.

I cannot give the names of any young ladies of 18 or 19 who earned 20s. to 30s. a week doing slides in their spare time. Miss York has done them for about a year. I know no one 60 or 70 years old or girls of 14 or 15 who do it. Mrs Hirons and Miss Newton do the work at home.

Prisoner instructed me to examine the slides. He told me I was not to accept any with holes in them. (Similar slides made by Smith and bought from Gamages were put to the witness, who stated that she would reject both as having holes.)

I have made one and a half dozen slides; I found the work simple and my slides were perfect except that one had a small hole in it. Thousands of people sent in defective slides. I went through slide-book with Inspector Knell and pointed out only six persons whose slides had been accepted. They were 'Miss York, Granville Terrace, Turnham Green'; 'Mr. Rickson, East Moors, Cardiff, sent in two dozen right'; 'Gillam, 55, Burnside Crescent, Jamestown, Dumbartonshire – kept as good' – that is what the prisoner told me – to keep them as good.

I always had prisoner's instructions before the slides were accepted; 'Major, Lordship Lane, Tottenham, good'; 'Miss Ireland, 17 Grosvenor Road, Twickenham, three dozen right'; '3rd August,

NOTES

1. For those unfamiliar with pre-decimal British currency, the references are: 'd' indicates pence (12 to a shilling); 's' is shillings (20 to a pound). As a rough guide, at this period the annual income of a skilled worker would have been around £100–120, and for a professional person about £200–300.

2. The slide quantities are mainly given in dozens, since Theobald's slides were published in sets of twelve. A 'gross', mentioned later, is a quantity of twelve dozen, i.e. 144.

1910: Watson, 42 Dimmsdale Road, West Hill Park, Blackheath, 36 right'; 'August 12, Russell, 4 King's Road, Kingston 36 slides, two sets right'; 'Mrs Harvey, Cromwell Road, Hounslow, 36 right'; 'Miss Harris, Cedar Road, Teddington, right'. Those are all the names I could point out to Inspector Knell as right.

The rejected slides were kept for about a fortnight. The typewritten circular was forwarded so that the maker of the slides could have them back if he wished. Those not returned were brought down, the transfers washed off the defective ones and the sets completed with well-made slides. There is a list covering two pages showing the people to whom the slides were returned.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. The 20 girls are employed making many other articles besides slides, such as photographic apparatus. Prisoner supplies Gamages, Benettink, the Army and Navy Stores, Whiteleys, and many other firms with goods. The price charged for slides made by the home workers is a shilling a set; job lots are sold at 6d. a set. Four girls were employed in making slides.

About 60 persons had their slides returned from September 1909, to October 1910; others having paid the 5s. kept the slides for themselves. The slide book does not contain the names of all the people who did the work satisfactorily; it is only a record of the bad slides. A book was kept showing the deliveries of carriers which I have not got.

AGNES PATTEN

I have been employed by prisoner for five months as typist. A copy of the green circular was sent by me to anyone who answered the advertisement for home employment. About a hundred were sent daily. They were prepared to be addressed in large quantities.

After the slides had been returned I sent the printed typed circular, filling up the blank with the number of defective slides – about 20 a day were sent out. I posted the ledger from the day book.

I also kept a record of all those to whom materials were sent and entered in a red book the names – of those to whom the deposit was returned. I do not know where that is; I last saw it two months ago. I do not know where the ledger is. The day book is in the office at Hounslow.

LILLIE SMITH

I have been employed by prisoner for ten or eleven years in the factory at Hounslow making magic lantern slides. There were sometimes 18 to 20 girls, and there are now 12. I made mostly square slides, 3¼ by 3¼, such as are forwarded for home employment.

I was paid 1½d. a dozen and have earned about 15s. a week. I also did stereoscopic slides and black plate slides for political purposes. It took me about a week to learn how to make slides properly.

The returned slides were brought down about twice a month and the defective ones made good by me and other girls. Wages book (produced) shows accurately the wages paid.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. There are about 20 people employed at the factory altogether; prisoner has a large business outside the home employment. I have always been employed in the shed. I have made 68 dozen slides in two days, for which I get 8s. 6d.

Three of Theobald's suppliers were also called:

JOHN JAMES SMITH, Finsbury Park, glass cutter

Since August, 1910, I have supplied prisoner with glasses 3¼ by 3¼ to the amount of 20 gross. I was to supply him with 100 gross a week, at the price of 6d. per gross.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. For a single gross or a small quantity I should charge 9d. per gross.

RUSSELL SMART, Chancery Lane, advertising agent

In March, 1909, prisoner applied to me to undertake his advertising, and I inserted a number of advertisements for the National Home Employment Association in the 'English Mechanic', 'Lloyd's', 'The People', 'Daily Mirror', 'Liverpool Weekly Post', 'Glasgow Mail', 'Western Gazette', and other magazines for about two months at an entire cost of £22 15s. I inserted them in about 100 different papers (town and country) at my discretion.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. Before advertising for the prisoner I asked for letters of recommendation, and he handed me a number of letters (produced) from persons who had done the work and expressed satisfaction with it. They are dated in April or May, 1909.

ARTHUR CONRAD COOMBS, clerk to H. A. Coombs, wholesale stationer, Farrington Avenue

I have supplied prisoner with brushes such as are sent out in the box of materials at 6s. per gross since February, 1907. I have supplied about 40 gross altogether.

Two police officers gave accounts of a search of the Theobald factory:

Detective Inspector FRANK KNELL, T Division

On October 10 I went to 10 Staines Road, Hounslow, and saw the defendant. I read the warrant to him, which was for conspiracy. He said, 'Will you read the warrant again? I do not quite know the names of the persons complaining'. I said, 'There is only one complainant in the warrant – Smith'. Prisoner said, 'Oh, I understand. Can I have bail?' He was afterwards charged, and made no reply.

With the assistance of Sergeant Hall and other officers I searched the premises and found slide book (produced), which I went through with Miss Woods to try to identify the cases in which the slides were entered as all three dozen being correct. She mentioned six – York, Major, Ireland, Watson, Russell, and Harris. [...]

Detective Sergeant THOMAS HALL, T Division

I assisted in searching premises at 10, Staines Road. I found 2,233 green circulars with names and addresses filled in showing that 5s. had been paid on each, which would amount to £558 5s. I found 400 imitation typewritten and 1,200 green circulars unused. [...]

I found 12 copies of the four-page circular of directions in prisoner's desk, also nine postal orders of 5s., four of 2s. 3d., and a cheque for 10s. drawn on William Taylor. I also found order book; invoice book for goods sent out showing the price of slides to be 1s. per dozen, also containing invoices for other goods.

Slide book – from September 30, 1909, to September 30, 1910; it contains 2,543 names and addresses of persons to whom box of materials had been sent and entries showing whether the slides were returned properly made, and where they were wrong, the number of slides defective. There are only seven cases in which they are stated to be correct.

There were two books called ledgers, one was dated 1880 and was in the name of another firm; the other had been used for shorthand writing. On the first floor I found a tin box with 74 typewritten circulars filled up showing that 2s. 3d. had been sent with each, dated July, August, and September; also 69 letters ordering materials for various amounts; also the book produced containing 2,326 names and addresses of persons to whom apparently boxes of materials had been sent. [...]

On the top floor I found 400 boxes each containing three dozen slides, and each having attached a piece of paper with a number and a name; they were in a dirty and untidy state. All the rooms had something in; but there was plenty of spare room.

I found the wages book showing the wages paid from November, 1908. Miss Smith's weekly wages are shown as £1 6s., 13s. 7½d., 13s. 2d., 14s. 7d., 15s., etc.; Miss Goodyear 9s., and a number of others 3s. 6d., 4s. 4d., 3s., 2s. 6d., 6s.; Brinkwaite 18s.

With the exception of the seven entries in the slide book pointed out by Woods I have found nowhere entries of people who had made their slides properly.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. The 400 boxes of slides looked as if they had been there some time. The 2,233 green circulars extend over six months from April to the end of September; the 74 typewritten circulars are all in August and September, 1910, except two in July.

The invoice book shows considerable business with a number of firms. There are invoices of £20 to Gamages. Business was done in cameras, bellows, boxes, glass jars, and tubes and other articles. I also found some catalogues of Theobald and Co. containing a great number of articles.

Further employees and trading partners were then called:

GRACE LILIAN COX, 16, Cronshaw Road, West Ealing

From June, 1909, to September, 1910, I was employed by prisoner as a shorthand typist and book-keeper. I used to help to address the green circulars. We sent out upwards of 20 a day.

When the slides were returned we formerly sent out a printed circular stating the number of defective slides. This was afterwards altered into a printed typed circular. Prisoner stated that it was

altered because people complained of the printed form as showing that it was made up beforehand.

I kept the invoice book for goods sold, the ledger and day book, also a book showing people who had slides for home employment in quantities of 60 dozen. There are about 60 names, amongst which I remember Rowe, Miss York, Mrs Hyrons, Russell, and Gillam as having had their deposit back. Other people who called personally received their deposit from Miss Woods.

The letters that came from people who paid the 5s. deposit were counted up into hundreds and sold to Winduss and Co., of Hamburg. The letter I wrote to prisoner was included with those; I afterwards received a circular about a lottery.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. There was considerable business done in photographic implements, mechanical toys, etc. The names of people who called at the works and received their 5s. were not entered. I do not remember anyone except those I have mentioned who received payment for work. Some who returned the materials had other goods to the value of 4s. in exchange. Receipts were taken by Miss Woods, and myself of moneys paid.

CHRISTOPHER GARNER, buyer to W. Butcher and Son, Farringdon Avenue, photographic manufacturers

We have supplied rollers like that produced to J. Theobald and Co., at 4s. per doz. up to April, 1910, when owing to the rise in rubber the price was increased to 5s. per doz.

We manufacture slides like that produced. The transfers are mostly made in Germany; original cost of drawing, copyright, and putting on the stone 30s. to £2 per picture and for printing £37 for 1,000 sheets of 88 pictures each. The average cost of such transfers as are used by prisoner for home employment would be 1½ d. per sheet of 12 pictures.

We employ girls to make lantern slides; they take three or four weeks to learn and then working from nine to six earn 9s. to 11s. per week; we have never paid over 12s.; the work is paid for at 1s. 2d. per gross.

Smith's slides (produced) are very well executed for a beginner. In places where the 'high lights' occur, i.e., where the colour is white, owing to their being only one printing, the film is torn away, the pigment being very thin. They are very good indeed for a worker of no previous experience.

The finished slide produced is made from a superior transfer. The better the transfer the easier to make the slide perfect. The slides made by Smith would not be sent out by my factory because they are not perfect. We do not sell job lots.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. The retail price of the roller would be 7d. I have had no practical experience in making slides. Our sheets contain 88 pictures, the cost of which at £2 each would be £176; for a thousand we should pay £37 for printing; you may have to pay 5s. or 10s. each for a copyright picture; the drawing might be 2s. additional per picture; for the first thousand sheets that would amount to £223. For Cruickshank's pictures of Bardell and Pickwick we should not pay anything.

At £223 for the first thousand sheets of 88 pictures each it would work out at about 7d. per set of a dozen transfers; for further orders it would be 1½ d. per cent. I estimate the cost of the box of materials supplied at 1s. 6d. On your calculation it would be 3s.

HENRY GEORGE, manager, photographic department, Gamage's, High Holborn

I have had 13 years' experience and am now buyer for the photographic department. We sell slides such as are produced by Home Employment by prisoner at 1s. 4½d. a doz. or job lots at 9½d. a doz. We buy them from the prisoner at 1s. a doz. or 6d. for job lots. The series of 'Handy And', 'Swiss Family Robinson', and 'The Comic Set' (produced) have been on sale as long as I can remember – for 10 or 12 years.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. I cannot swear to the identical pictures as being the same; similar pictures have been sold for a great many years. We are always buying lantern slides in October and November for the Christmas trade.

We have bought large quantities from prisoner; he has not been able to supply us with as many as we wanted; we have also bought other photographic articles from him for a great many years.

Re-examined [by the prosecution]. We bought 300 or 400 dozen slides from prisoner as job lots at the beginning of 1910.

ARTHUR EDWARD STONE, clerk to Calder and Co., 83, St. Paul's Churchyard, transfer dealers

In 1903 and 1904 we sold transfers to prisoner at 6½d. per sheet of 72 pictures with an additional charge for the litho of in one case 28s. and in another case 34s. per picture. We supplied about 9,000 dozen.

On October 5, 1903, we supplied 150 sheets of 72 pictures at 6½d. per sheet with an additional charge of £13 for reducing the size of the picture; that works out to 5d. a dozen pictures.

Cross-examined [by the defence]. On June 27, 1910, my firm wrote letter produced quoting for pictures 2¾in. by 2¾in. at 1s. 1d. for two dozen.

Finally, just to rub the point home, three more individuals were called to make similar complaints of deception to those at the start of the prosecution.

Theobald's defence consisted mainly of his own evidence, given over two days, with some supporting accounts by satisfied home workers, employees and trade partners.

JOHN DAZELEY THEOBALD (prisoner, on oath)

I carry on business at 10, Staines Road, Hounslow, as J. Theobald and Co., manufacturers and importers of photographic apparatus. I deal also in magic lantern slides of various kinds. I have been for 11 years at that address and had previously been for six years at Farringdon Road.

I have a turnover of from £5,000 to £6,000 a year, apart from the Home Employment, and have been for 20 years supplying Gamages, Spiers and Pond, the Army and Navy Stores, and other large firms.

For some years I have made magic lantern slides; I found the demand greater than I could do on my premises, and about three years ago I started a system of Home Employment, at first without charging a deposit. I found many people took the boxes and did not return them and in consequence made it a rule to charge 5s. deposit.

The box of materials sent out costs: glass, 5d.; three and a half dozen transfers at 7d. – 2s. 0½d.; brush, ½d., roller, 5d.; glue and binding, 1d., postage in London, 3d., or outside London, 7d.; leaving a profit of about 5d. on the box without the cost of advertisement.

I at first spent about 10s. to 15s. a month in advertisements, which gradually increased to about £10 per month and reached about £40 a month in June, July, and August, 1910.

I found a great many people used to make the slides and sell them privately at a good profit for themselves.

We received upwards of 2,500 applications during the last 12 months; about 500 persons worked on the slides during the year. We employed a number of girls to do it at the works who did them quite successfully, and there was no reason why persons outside should not be able to do them also.

We have sold 6,000 sets during the year, about a thousand of which were sold as job sets. When people brought the three dozen back properly done, they were immediately paid 4s. 3d., being the return of their deposit less 9d. for the roller which they kept, and 6d. for three dozen slides. Those payments were not generally entered in a book but receipts were taken by Miss Woods.

A large number of persons having made the slides kept them for themselves. We kept about 20 girls, who were largely employed on other work, but many of whom did the slides.

Many of the postal orders paid into the bank were sums of 20s. and 10s. received from country orders; a customer named Hackett of Liverpool has paid me at one time as much as £40 in postal orders.

I do not keep an account of cash sales.

I first used the green circular in 1908. The early advertisements were in the name of 'Nathomas', which is an abbreviation of 'National Home Employment Association'.

I am quite sure it is possible for a person to earn more than 30s. a week at this work, and with children who could do the binding two or three times as much could be earned.

I am certain the work is simple to people who are reasonably careful to carry out the instructions given, and that the statements in the circulars are true. I have workers who can put on nine dozen transfers in an hour. It is correct to say that 5s. covers the value of the materials.

I do not know that at present we have persons of 60 or 70 doing the work, but Laing of Teddington and Smith of Uxbridge were upwards of 70 and were doing it. Girls of 14 and 15 are doing the work in my factory. Miss Goodyear and Miss Smith had been doing it for nine or ten years.

A number of people visited the works and the process was fully explained to them before they took the box of materials.

Smith of Uxbridge frequently bought slides ready made which he sold, besides those which he made himself.

In the four-page circular of directions a complete explanation is given of the process. Two thousand of the printed typewritten circular were ordered, as it explained the defects in the majority of the cases and it was simpler to write a special letter in each case, the blank with the number of defective slides being filled in. The book showing the rejected slides was kept by Miss Woods under my instructions. Miss Patten sent out the green circulars to the names and addresses entered in the book.

We are obliged to make a charge of 1d. each for defective slides, as in order to make up the sets a fresh sheet of transfers had to be cut into; the sheet costing 7d., a 1d. a slide did not pay the cost. I have 19 rooms at Staines Road which are fully occupied.

Cross-examined [by the prosecution]. I have been trading under the name of J. Theobald and Co. at Staines Road for 11 years. I used the name of the National Home Employment Association in order to keep that part of the business distinct. I commenced it in September, 1907.

Seeing Page and Thomas's bill (produced) for home employment circulars in September, 1906, I must have commenced at that time.

Sergeant Hailstone has called on me during the four years, perhaps a dozen times, and informed me the police had complaints from people for not having received the goods – not that they wanted their deposit back. I continued to carry the system on.

My object in doing it was to supply a demand. I have sold in one year 6,000 or 7,000 dozen slides. About 4,000 dozen were made at the factory and about 2,000 by home workers; I could have sold 10,000 or 12,000.

My advertising expenses in the third quarter of 1910 increased enormously.

I had about 22 permanent home workers; only two or three gave their whole time to it – they earned 30s. to 32s. a week for good slides at 2d. a dozen, paying 1d. each for defective ones.

During the first half of 1910 I permanently employed Miss York, Mrs Newton, Rowe, and Newman; they earned 30s. to 32s. for a full week's work – their actual earnings were about 8s., 10s., or 12s.; that would result in 250 to 300 dozen a week.

I had an average of about 30 or 40 home workers – I could not say how many because Miss Woods had the management of it; she could tell you how much they earned; I never knew and never inquired.

I have had as many as 20 girls making slides of 14 different kinds; later I could not employ so many as the roof of the shed was defective.

I account for the fact that, out of 2,543 persons sending in lots of three dozen slides, all but seven were failures, by their being wilfully careless. Miss Watson must have been wilfully careless. In my opinion a person of ordinary intelligence could complete four dozen slides in an hour after a week or ten days' practise.

In saying, 'We have some people who began it eight years ago', I did not mean home work. Smith and Goodyear have worked at the factory for that time. Smith earns about 15s. a week and Goodyear about 9s.

I consider the statements in the green circular to be true. Several workers earn 20s. a week all the year round – Miss Rowe, Miss York, and Miss Howe; those three on that calculation would do 18,000 dozen a year.

My entire output is 6,000 dozen a year; we can and do sell as many as we can get; we have never had enough for our orders.

In saying that a quick person 'can put on' eight or nine dozen an hour, I do not mean complete the slide; that would be for the one person 17,600 a year: I am sure we could get them.

I do not keep a cash book; the only record of payments made is the receipts. The bank pass-book will show the amount sent to home workers. (The whole of the cheques paid for home work were pointed out.)

If I return the deposit the first three dozen costs 3s. 7d.; I sell them to Gamages for 3s. – a loss of 7d. It is out of the quantities of 60 dozen and upwards from people regularly working that I get a profit.

I can produce no invoices since July, 1893, showing the payments I have made for transfers.

Four satisfied home workers (Mrs Victoria Elizabeth Newton of Chelmsford; Mrs Harriet Hiron of Hounslow; Walter Rowe, a stonemason of Croydon; and Miss Louisa Augusta York of West Hampstead) gave evidence for the defence, explaining that though they made defective slides at first, they learned to do the work correctly and make various levels of income. Mrs Hiron's evidence is typical:

HARRIET HIRONS, 1, Rectory Villas, Bath Road, Hounslow

I am a married woman with seven children. In June, 1910, I answered prisoner's advertisement, paid 5s., completed three dozen, and was informed that some were defective; I saw Miss Woods, who gave me a further three dozen transfers without payment, which I did correctly, and I received 4s. 9d. back. I have since done 10 or 12 lots of 12 dozen each, which I have completed and have been paid for.

Cross-examined [by the prosecution]. I first began in July. Most of my first three dozen were defective. I can now do three dozen in an hour. I have earned altogether £1 7s.

Finally four of Theobald's trading partners gave accounts of their dealings that amounted to character references:

PERCY MOENISH, Billiter House, E.C., London agents for Jules Franc, Limited, glass manufacturers

I have supplied J. Theobald and Co. with large quantities of glasses, 3¼in. by 3¼in., for several years at 8d. a gross; during the past 12 months the price has risen to 10d. a gross.

AUGUST THOSPANN, 9, Fore Street Avenue, E.C., photo-mount manufacturer

I have done business with prisoner for two and a half years; in 1909 amounting to £900, from January to October, 1910, about £1,200. My dealings with him have been of a satisfactory character. [...]

HARRY EASDOWN HUTCHINS, assistant secretary to Benetfink and Son, Cheapside

During the last two years prisoner has supplied my firm with goods – in 1909 amounting to £113; from January to October, 1910, £118 8s. 4d.

JOHN PIGGOTT, Jun., Cheapside, athletic outfitter

I have been in business for 40 years and during the past 25 years have bought goods from prisoner to an amount in all of about £400 to £500. I have always found him an honourable man.

In spite of Theobald's defence the jury delivered a verdict of Guilty. There was a little additional evidence after the verdict, presumably presented to influence the judge's decision on sentencing.

Prisoner was stated to have been repeatedly warned by the police since 1906; over 300 complaints had been received with regard to non-delivery of materials and of being defrauded.

Miss Cox (recalled) stated that she had been 18 months in the prisoner's employment as typist and left because the letters from poor people who had starving children complaining of losing their money upset her.

The sentence handed down was of 'six months' imprisonment, second division', which suggests that Theobald was not regarded as the most serious category of hardened criminal. However the episode proved disastrous for his business, which was placed in administration at the end of December 1910 – presumably while he was in prison – and wound up in October 1911, at which time it disappeared from the London telephone directory.³ What became of Theobald after his release is not known.

Mervyn HEARD is the outgoing Chairman of the Magic Lantern Society, and a well-known performer, researcher and writer on all aspects of the magic lantern.

3. London Gazette 28,534 (26 September 1911), 7044. London telephone directory archive at www.ancestry.co.uk. Thanks to Richard Crangle for this additional information.