

THEFT AT PRIORY SCHOOL.

Two Boys Charged.

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The story of a series of thefts by two boys, aged 16, were told at Christchurch Juvenile Court on Tuesday, when the defendants were summoned for the offences. They both pleaded guilty to jointly stealing 3½ gross of pencils, 1½ boxes of chalk, 2 packets of pen nibs, 1 packet of drawing pins, 1 camera, 1 clock, one chromium propelling pencil, 6 erasers, 3 tennis balls, 8 skeins of cotton, 4 pairs of knitting needles, a quantity of darning needles, 1 roll of adhesive tape, 5 keys, 7 thimbles, 7 pen holders, and £1 6s. 8d. in money, total value £5 15s. the property of the Hampshire County Council. They also admitted stealing a file and a quantity of apples, together valued at 1/6, and breaking and entering a store at the Church of England School, Wick Lane, with intent to commit a felony therein.

Det.-Con. Mann said that at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24th, the caretaker at the Priory Church School, Wick Lane, left the premises after having securely fastened and locked all windows and doors. Returning at 7.15 a.m. the following day she commenced her duties and her attention was attracted to cupboards open and ink, chalk and papers lying on the floors of the class rooms. She pointed this out to a friend, who in turn, informed the police.

At about 9 a.m. on Wednesday, October 25th, witness received a report of this case, and made enquiries. Visiting the scene and finding the class rooms in a state of disorder, he noticed that two cupboards had been forced open with an instrument and others had been opened presumably with keys. Ink had been spilled and white chalk and papers were strewn on the floors. Entrance had been effected by placing a ladder against the wall of the building, forcing an upper window and climbing through.

He took possession of the two Red Cross Penny-a-Week boxes and the Oxo tin which had been rifled of their contents. Witness stated that he continued his enquiries and in consequence of what came to his knowledge, at about 11.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 31st October; saw the two accused at their place of employment in Christchurch. He cautioned them, and told them he was making enquiries respecting this case, and that he had reason to believe they knew something about it. At first, the defendants denied this, but one of them later said, "Yes, we did it. I will show you where the pencils are. We also broke into a shed in the Fairmile gravel pit; and stole some apples and a file, and also broke into the builders' shed at the school the same night, but did not take anything." The other accused said, "All right, we did it, and threw the stuff in the river."

Accompanied by Det.-Con. Winspear and the two accused, witness later recovered the pencils and pen nibs from bushes growing on the waste' land adjoining Flambard Avenue and Fairmile Road. The remaining property was recovered from a manhole in an air raid shelter situated in the Recreation Ground at Christchurch.

The accused were conveyed to Christchurch Police Station, where in the presence of Inspector Thomas, witness charged them with this offence. One replied, "That is right," and the other, "I understand."

Later, with the two accused, he made a thorough search of the land adjoining the railway approach, Christchurch, where the lads stated they had hidden the clock and propelling pencil, but without success, and up to the present they had not been recovered.

The boys later made a voluntary statement in which they said that about 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday last on October 24th, they went to the gravel pit, forced the lock off the door, and took about a dozen apples and a file. Intending to visit a relation's house, the defendants went through the town. Finding no-one at home they walked past the Priory School. Noticing an upper window slightly ajar, and a ladder resting against the wall, they climbed in, stole the articles mentioned in the charge and left by unbolting the back door.

The magistrates, hearing that both boys were keen to join the services, decided, so as not to interrupt their career, to bind them over for one year. On the Bench were Councillor E.J. Slinn (chairman), Mr. A.S. Astbury and Mrs. Norman Barnes.