

# CRIMINAL APPEAL REPORTS 1981

**EDITOR** 

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### LINDLEY v. RUTTER

### [DIVISIONAL COURT]

### BEFORE

### LORD JUSTICE DONALDSON AND MR. JUSTICE MUSTILL

### LINDLEY v. RUTTER

July 23, 24, 31, 1980

Police—Right of Search—Arrested Person—Female Defendant Arrested for Disorderly Conduct While Drunk—Search of Defendant and Forcible Removal of her Brassiere by Women Police Officers—Defendant Assaulting Women Police Officers—Whether Officers Acting in Execution of Duty—Police Act 1964 (c. 48), s. 51 (1).

Section 51 (1) of the Police Act 1964 provides: "Any person who assaults a constable in the execution of his duty...shall be guilty of an offence..."

The defendant was arrested for disorderly conduct while drunk and taken to a police station where she was placed in a cell. She refused to be searched by a woman police constable, a second woman police constable was summoned and they forcibly removed the defendant's brassiere. The constables in so doing believed they were acting in accordance with the chief constable's standing orders, which they understood to mean the removal of female prisoners' brassieres for their own protection. The defendant was charged, *inter alia*, with assaulting a police constable in the execution of her duty contrary to section 51 (1) of the Police Act 1964. She appealed on the ground that the constable was not acting in the execution of her duty when she removed her brassiere.

Held, that it was the duty of a police constable to ensure that prisoners in his charge did not injure themselves or others, or escape or assist others to do so, or destroy evidence or commit further crime; but that duty had to be exercised with regard to the disposition of each individual prisoner in all the circumstances of each particular case; and in the instant case the conduct of the woman police officer would require considerable justification; for although she was acting on the chief constable's standing orders it was impossible to justify such a standing instruction or the constable's conduct based upon it; accordingly, the woman police officer was not acting in the execution of her duty and the defendant was entitled to use reasonable force to resist; thus, the appeal would be allowed and the conviction quashed.

Leigh  $\nu$ . Cole (1853) 6 Cox C.C. 329 and Bessell  $\nu$ . Wilson (1853) 17 J.P. 52 considered.

Case stated by Exeter Justices.

1. On August 1, 1978, the defendant was charged by the prosecutor (i) that she on July 31, 1978, at Exeter, whilst in a highway called Belmont Road was guilty of disorderly behaviour whilst drunk, contrary to section 91 of the Criminal

Justice Act 1967, and (ii) that she on July 31, 1978, at Exeter unlawfully did assault Irene Fry, a constable of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in the execution of her duty, contrary to section 51 (1) of the Police Act 1964.

- 2. The justices heard the said charges on November 13, 1978, and found the following facts:
- (a) At about 11.25 p.m. on July 31, 1978, Police Constable Rutter saw the defendant staggering in the street. She slumped over a garden gate and began to shout, scream and swear at Constable Rutter when he asked for her name and address in order to take her home. She smelt of liquor and Constable Rutter formed the opinion that she was drunk. She continued her disorderly conduct so Constable Rutter arrested her for being drunk and disorderly. At that time there was no question of her having committed any other offence.
- (b) The defendant refused to enter the police car so it was necessary for Constable Rutter and another police officer to use reasonable force to put her into the car and to remove her from it when they arrived at the police station. The defendant continued to shout, scream and swear and she was put into a cell.
- (c) W.P.C. Fry asked the defendant if she would allow herself to be searched but she refused. When Police Woman Fry attempted to search the defendant and to remove her brassiere for her own protection the defendant resisted and there was a struggle during which the defendant scratched the police woman's hand and kicked her knee, causing her to fall to the floor. The search was then carried out with the assistance of a second police woman, and the defendant's brassiere was removed. No other persons were present during the search.
- (d) The removal of the defendant's brassiere was in accordance with the standing orders of the chief constable which applied to any female person arrested and placed in a cell.
  - (e) The defendant had not threatened to injure herself or any other person.
- (f) The defendant used more force than was reasonably necessary to resist W.P.C. Fry's attempt to search her and to remove her brassiere.
- 3. It was contended by the defendant that W.P.C. Fry was not acting in the execution of her duty in removing or attempting to remove an article of the defendant's clothing.
- 4. It was contended by the defendant that W.P.C. Fry was following standing orders from the chief constable to search all prisoners and to remove the brassiere from every female prisoner for her own protection lest she use the brassiere to hang herself.
- 5. The justices were referred to the commentary on section 51 of the Police Act 1964 in *Stone's Justices' Manual* (112th ed., 1979) pp. 110–1112, and to paragraphs 1410, 1411 in *Archbold's Criminal Pleadings Evidence and Practice* (40th ed., 1979) entitled "Police Powers of Search and Seizure."
- 6. The justices were of the opinion that the defendant was guilty of disorderly behaviour whilst drunk in Belmont Road, and that W.P.C. Fry was acting in the execution of her duty when she was assaulted by the defendant. The justices accordingly convicted the defendant of both charges, and she was fined £25 and £50 respectively, and ordered to pay £20 towards the prosecution costs.

The defendant appealed, and the appeal was argued on July 23 and 24, 1980, when the following case was cited in argument in addition to those referred to in the judgment of Donaldson L.J.: Ghani v. Jones [1970] 1 Q.B. 693.

The question for the opinion of the Court is whether on the facts found W.P.C.

Fry was acting in the execution of her duty when she was assaulted by the defendant.

Gayle Hallon for the defendant. A. D. Hope for the prosecutor.

Cur. adv. vult.

July 31. Donaldson L.J. read the following judgment: Late at night on July 31, 1978, Miss Lindley, the defendant, was seen by a police officer staggering in an Exeter street. She draped herself over a garden gate and shouted, swore and screamed at the officer when he asked for her name and address. The purpose of the inquiry was eminently reasonable. He thought that she ought to be escorted home. She smelt of liquor and the officer rightly concluded that she was drunk. Her conduct and attitude left him no alternative but to arrest her and in due course she was convicted of disorderly behaviour whilst drunk. No complaint is or could be made of the arrest and conviction. We were told by Miss Hallon, who has appeared for the defendant, that before this night the defendant was a young lady of unblemished reputation and this offence was wholly out of character. However that may be, her reputation was certainly blemished that night, but it is fair to say that it was a relatively minor blemish and will quickly fade if not repeated.

This appeal concerns a more serious matter which arose out of subsequent events. After the arrest the defendant was invited to enter a police car in order that she might be taken to the police station. She refused and force had to be used to make her do so. On arrival at the police station force had again to be used to get her to leave the police car. The defendant continued to shout, scream and swear and quite properly was lodged in a cell. No more than reasonable force was used at any time and again no complaint is or could be made by or on behalf of the defendant in respect of these matters.

What happened next is best described in the words of the case stated by the Exeter City justices: "(c) W.P.C. Fry asked the defendant if she would allow herself to be searched but she refused. When W.P.C. Fry attempted to search the defendant and to remove her brassiere for her own protection the defendant scratched the police woman's hand and kicked her knee, causing her to fall to the floor. The search was then carried out with the assistance of a second police woman, and the defendant's brassiere was removed. No other persons were present during the search." This last finding is important as showing that no male police officers were present.

- "(d) The removal of the defendant's brassiere was in accordance with the standing orders of the chief constable which applied to any female person arrested and placed in a cell.
  - (e) The defendant had not threatened to injure herself or any other person.
- (f) The defendant used more force than was reasonably necessary to resist W.P.C. Fry's attempt to search her and to remove her brassiere."

So much for the facts. As a result of this incident, the defendant was further charged with unlawfully assaulting Irene Fry, a constable of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, in the execution of her duty contrary to section 51 (1) of the Police Act 1964. She was convicted and she now appeals by case stated by the Exeter City Justices. The only matter in issue is whether W.P.C. Fry was acting in the execution of her duty.

The wording of this offence is liable to be misunderstood by the public, but it is difficult to suggest an alternative form of words. However, I must make it

clear that there is no suggestion that W.P.C. Fry was acting otherwise than in accordance with what she believed to be her duty. The issue is whether what she did was justifiable in law. Police constables of all ranks derive their authority from the law and only from the law. If they exceed that authority, however slightly, technically they cease to be acting in the execution of their duty and have no more rights than any other citizen. This is a most salutary principle upon which all our liberties depend and it is not to be eroded merely because, as in this case, the limits of the constable's authority may not have been clearly defined and W.P.C. Fry was acting in the bona fide belief that she was authorised to act as she did. These considerations may well provide an answer to criticism of the officer concerned. They do not deprive the aggrieved citizen of any of her rights.

What then are the limits of the authority of a constable to search a person who is in custody and to remove parts of their clothing for their own safety?

In Leigh v. Cole (1853) 6 Cox C.C. 329, 332, Vaughan Williams J. directed the jury as follows: "With respect to searching a prisoner, there is no doubt that a man when in custody may so conduct himself, by reason of violence of language or conduct, that a police officer may reasonably think it prudent and right to search him, in order to ascertain whether he has any weapon with which he might do mischief to the person or commit a breach of the peace; but at the same time it is quite wrong to suppose that any general rule can be applied to such a case. Even when a man is confined for being drunk and disorderly, it is not correct to say that he must submit to the degradation of being searched, as the search of such a person must depend upon all the circumstances of the case."

In the same year in Bessell v. Wilson (1853) 17 J.P. 52, Lord Campbell C.J. was trying a case in which the plaintiff was suing an alderman of the City of London for trespass and false imprisonment. It appears that the alderman had exceeded his authority by issuing a warrant for the arrest of the plaintiff in circumstances in which the alderman was not entitled to require his personal attendance at court and the plaintiff had in fact been represented by counsel. In the course of the proceedings the Chief Justice made some remarks which were misunderstood and he sought to correct this, saying (ibid.): "At the conclusion of the trial of this case, I expressed my disapprobation of the manner in which the plaintiff had been searched when taken to the station house. I repeat the disapprobation which I then expressed, for there is no right in a case of this kind to inflict the indignity to which the plaintiff had been subjected. But I have been informed that an erroneous impression of what I said has gone abroad. It was supposed that I had said that there was no right in anyone to search a prisoner at any time. I have not said so. It is often the duty of an officer to search a prisoner. If, for instance, a man is taken in the commission of a felony, he may be searched to see whether the stolen articles are in his possession, or whether he has any instruments of violence about him, and, in like manner, if he be taken on a charge of arson, he may be searched to see whether he has any fire-boxes or matches about his person. I take this opportunity of correcting the error, because I have received from that most useful officer Sir Richard Mayne, to whom the country is much indebted for a most excellent discharge of his public duties, a communication stating that an idea has gone abroad that to search any person charged with an offence is forbidden by law. No such doctrine has been stated by me, nor would it be stated by anyone who has