



THE SWANNINGTON STREAKERS

At Ashby Petty Sessions, in February 1866, John Wileman was charged with being "*in a state of nudity at Swannington*"; he was sentenced to one month's hard labour. For the prosecution, Inspector Ward stated that "*it was becoming quite a common practice by the lower class of colliers in and around Swannington to strip themselves almost entirely of their clothes, and run certain distances down the street, which was a great nuisance to the public. He wished the Bench to put a stop to it*".

There is no explanation as to why, among the participants, it was John Wileman who was picked out to be charged. It does seem that he could have been a bit of a tearaway who, on occasion, may have been over handy with his fists, indeed he is reputed to have been known as '*Bopper*' Wileman. It is certainly true that he was not unknown to the courts.

More intriguing perhaps is the fact that the practice involved stripping, not entirely, but almost naked. It seems unlikely that it was their caps that they kept on and one wonders whether Mr Wileman served a month's hard labour for a practice that might not, today, raise the colour of even the most bashful cheek. In any event it would be surprising if streaking was especially popular in such a chill month. A possible explanation is that a group of local youths (at this time John Wileman was about 20 years old) were becoming too rowdy to be generally acceptable and that the charge was an attempt by the authorities to address that problem obliquely and maybe rather underhandedly.

The Wilemans were a well known and respected Swannington family who lived at the very bottom of Station Hill close to the Robin Hood at what may then have been known as Wileman's Corner. By 1898, the year of the Whitwick Pit disaster in which John's younger brother Benjamin was killed, both John and Benjamin were family men and both were representatives on The Miners' Council, Benjamin also being a member of the Ashby Board of Guardians.