"The Kemptown Windfall"

It was 50 years ago, or maybe a little more, when these events I am about to tell you took place.
Nowadays, should you visit the Kemptown area of Brighton, you might enjoy a drink in one of the cafes, or view pictures in one of the art galleries, or wonder how anyone can afford to buy a house there. But, 50 years ago, when I was a student at Brightton Polytechnic, Kemptown was one of the poor areas of Brighton. People were struggling, jobs were hard to come by, and often paid poorly, and so families scrimpted and saved just to get by.
Some in Brighton turned to crime, they were so desperate, and to robbing banks, in particular.
Something you don't hear so much of today, other than when someone wearing a suit does it.
But in those days, it was ski masks and sawn off shotguns, baseball bats and violence.
The aftermath of one such bank robbery became folklore, songs and stories were written about it, and so I will try and recount to you what happened half a century ago.
I should point out, that I was not one of the bank robbers, just to make that clear.
It was a Thursday afternoon, when the bank was raided, and due to the rather stupid have-a-go actions of one of the customers, the shotgun was fired, into the air. A bank teller, pressed the newly-installed panic button, and the police station alerted.
So the robbers left somewhat in a hurry, and sped off in a stolen Jag, with the police in pursuit. As they entered the narrow streets of Kemptown, with the cars skidding this way and that, it wasn't long before the Jag crashed, and the robbers fled, leaving most of the money behind in the boot of the car, which had sprung open.
Despite the best efforts of the chasing policemen, all the robbers escaped, only to be caught the following week on another bank raid.
In the mayhem, no one took any notice of the chap who was out on his bicycle to do the weekly shop, or what he could afford, anyway.
There they were, all these bags of money, in the trunk of the crashed car. No one around, as the police were still giving chase to the robbers, on foot.
So he looked around a bit, and then stuffed his saddle bags full of as much cash as they could hold, before peddling off down the road.
As darkness, the cyclist, lets call him John Smith. I have been told his name, but let's just call him John Smith. So John, instead of going off shopping, he cycled around Kemptown, and every now and then he would stop, take a bundle of bank notes from his saddlebags, take off the wrapper, and fling the notes up into the air, before remounting his bike and peddling on. It wasn't long before the residents came across these notes, fluttering about, and they collected them up. In the cafes and pubs, the word spread, so by the time that John Smith had emptied all the notes from his saddlebags, the community of Kemptown was out on the scour for some lolly.
Some of the money was handed into the police, about £200 or so, but most of the estimated £20,000 that John Smith flung into the evening sky, went into the hands of the needy in Kemptown.
Everyone in Kemptown, and many of us in the wider area of Brighton, got to know the real name of John Smith, and he became a local hereo for his actions.
He was questioned by the police, but as he had indeed cycled off to do his weekly shop, paid for using his own money, there was insufficient evidence to charge him.
But the people of Kemptown knew the truth, and so songs and stories were written about John Smith and the Kemptown Windfall.

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