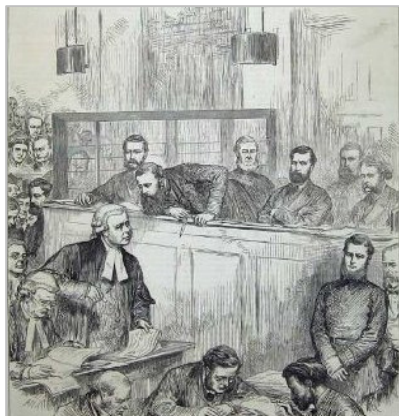


The Trial

Crown Court Salisbury



William Winter, alias Hutchins, was indicted for having feloniously set fire to a hayrick, the property of Henry Bithell, at Chute.

Mr Henry Bithell occupies a farm at Chute. Knows prisoner. Witness was overseer in that parish about a year since. Prisoner applied for relief to the vestry, and was relieved.

Previous to leaving the church, prisoner was insolent, and said something should go to rack, for which he was summoned before the Magistrate, and begged witness's pardon, who forgave him. He afterwards came again for relief to the vestry, but was refused, as he had received a sovereign of Mr Pierrepont about a week before.

On the 20th of October, about a week after, about seven o'clock in the evening, prosecutor found a rick of his on fire at a place called Lone Barn, which was full of corn. The barn was saved with difficulty.

On prisoner's coming to the fire, about one the next morning, he said, "Ah! You have got it all to yourselves, and no one knows anything about it." Prisoner lives about a quarter of a mile from the place.

Charles Fisher lives at Chute; left there in company with prisoner a twelvemonth ago last Christmas. Went with him to London; from thence to Barnet; they then returned home. Prisoner said that when he got home he would make Bithell amends for making him beg pardon. Witness, after getting home, was employed at Chute. Went to Weyhill fair; saw prisoner there enlisted for a soldier; said to him, "Ah! You have not made Bithell amends yet." Prisoner said he would burn down some of his buildings. Met prisoner after the fire. Witness said, "Well, Bill, you have made Bithell amends." He said he had.

On Sunday morning following, prisoner came to witness's house, and asked him how he came to tell people what he said at Weyhill. Prisoner went into the house and remained two hours; offered to sell witness a coat for 6s that cost 12s, if he would say no more about it. Was not at home at the time of the fire. Told his father the same as he states now, on his return home about six weeks after the fire. Was with the prisoner when he went before the Magistrates. Told witness it was not him, but it was no one out of the house. Prisoner said that his father-in-law asked him to set fire to the stack; they went for that purpose. Prisoner carried the steel and flint, Hutchins the matches, &c. His father-in-law, on getting to the premises, asked him who should do it? It was the agreed that prisoner's father-in-law should do it, as he said he was more used to it. Prisoner then said his father-in-law did it, whilst he kept watch. Where witness lived is 2½ miles from where the fire took place.

By the Judge - Never saw the prisoner; from the time he parted with him on their return home from Oxford, till he saw him at Weyhill fair. Did not come direct home from Barnet, but went round by Oxford, Reading, &c.

Cross-examined by the prisoner - The soldiers never ordered witness to go on immediately he spoke to prisoner, but did afterwards.

Thomas Fisher, father of the last witness. His son was not at Chute at the time the fire took place. On his return home some time after, told witness what he heard prisoner say at the Magistrate's, previous to his examination. That he carried the tinder and matches.

Thomas Goodall lives at Chute; saw Winter there on the 13th of September last. Heard there had been a man named Reeves taken up on suspicion of the fire. Prisoner told witness the he (prisoner) had sworn false against Reeves. Witness asked prisoner if he thought there was any God or Devil. Prisoner said "pooh!" After prisoner had said this, witness told him, if he would tell him (witness) all about it, he would endeavour to get him out of it. Was at Mr Dyke Poor's on the 15th of Dec. Did not tell prisoner, if he told all about it, it would be better for him. Heard prisoner then say that he lit the match.

On prisoner's being committed, witness was handcuffed to prisoner for security, and slept with him. After being in bed, prisoner told witness that his (prisoner's) father-in-law and mother all agreed to set Mr Bithell's rick on fire. Prisoner's father-in-law and prisoner took the matches, steel and tinder, and went to the rick. Prisoner kept watch, while his father-in-law did it. They then passed through several fields down a back lane, and home to bed.

Robert Collins lives at Chute. Knows prisoner. Saw him about seven o'clock on the night of the fire; he was going home. This was about a quarter of a mile from the rick, which was in the direction of prisoner's home. Prisoner was by himself.

John Newman lives at Chute. Knows prisoner. Was in company with last witness on the night in question; there were other persons there in company with them. Cannot tell who they were; it was rather a dark night.

The Rev. Charles Fowle is one of the magistrates who examined the prisoner; held out no threat or promise to induce prisoner to confess what he knew about it. The confession of the prisoner fully corroborates the witness Goodall's evidence. This was the case for the prosecution. The prisoner, in his defence, merely said that he was judged so hard of having caused the fire that he cared not what he said.

The learned Judge having summed up, the Jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Death. Left for execution. The prisoner, who was subject to fits, on sentence being passed, went into strong convulsions.

Salisbury & Winchester Journal Monday 16 March 1835

The Execution

On Tuesday last, George Watts (who had not attained his 17th year), found guilty, at our late Assizes, of wilfully setting fire to a barn, stable, and outhouse, at Conock, the property of Mr Thomas Attwater, on the 10th of last September; and William Winter, alias Hutchins, aged 21, convicted of having fired a hay-rick at Chute, belonging to Mr Henry Bithell, on the 20th of last October, suffered the final penalty of the law in front of the county gaol at Fisherton, in the presence of an unusually large assemblage of spectators, collected from all parts of the county.

Since the period of their condemnation, the efforts of the Rev. Mr Hodgson, the Chaplain, to bring the unhappy culprits to a due sense of the awful situation in which they were placed, had been unremitting, and in the case of Watts those efforts were, it is to be hoped, attended with the desired result, the wretched youth appearing to be truly penitent and resigned to the fate which awaited him.

With regard to Winter, although he joined with apparent earnestness in his religious exercises, it is to be feared that his heart was but little affected, there being a dogged sternness in his temperament which, to all appearance, rendered him callous to the situation in which his enormous crime had placed him - and he frequently expressed it to be his determination to protest his innocence on the scaffold - a resolution in which he unhappily persevered, contrary to the remonstrations of his spiritual adviser, who, up to the last moment, earnestly advised the headstrong young man not to shock the feelings of those present by so rash and wicked declaration - the evidence produced at the trial, and his own confession, placing his guilt beyond all doubt.

On the morning of Tuesday last, the prisoners partook of the holy sacrament, and all the requisite preparation having been completed, at half-past twelve o'clock the melancholy procession was formed, and proceeded to the condemned room, immediately adjacent to the place of execution, where the last offices of religion were impressively performed by the Rev. Chaplain, after which, their irons having been removed, at their request, they were pinioned and conducted to the platform.

Winter, who first ascended, ran up the steps with utmost alacrity and apparent unconcern. Watts followed, praying with the greatest earnestness for forgiveness at the hands of the Almighty, as he proceeded to the spot which was so soon to terminate his mortal career.

The rope having been adjusted, Watts addressed the populace at considerable length. He attributed his untimely end to bad company, frequenting beer-shops, and, more especially, to breaking the Sabbath-day, against which profanation he earnestly warned all his hearers. He lamented that he had not attended to the kind admonitions of his affectionate parent - affirmed that he entertained not the slightest animosity against Mr Attwater, who had uniformly treated him with the greatest kindness, and whose forgiveness he solicited - and called to several individuals whom he recognised in the dense multitude assembled before the gaol, requesting such of his companions as were present to take warning by his untimely end, and to warn their associates to avoid the courses which had brought him to the gallows.

He begged forgiveness of those whom he might have offended - fully confessed his guilt - acknowledged the justice of his sentence, and, having turned round and addressed the prisoners, assembled in front of the Governor's house to witness the execution, in terms of admonition, finally requested the prayers of all present, expressing his earnest and fervent hope, that, as his repentance was, he trusted, truly sincere, he might obtain forgiveness at the hands of God, through the merciful intercession of his blessed Saviour.

Wm. Winter - who throughout the awful scene preserved the utmost composure of manner - his countenance not having exhibited the slightest change, but bearing the impress of a man of the most determined character - declared his utter innocence of the crime for which he suffered - and expressed a hope that they might all hereafter meet together in heaven.

It was near one o'clock, when, the fatal signal being given, the drop fell, and, a few convulsive struggles over, the unhappy convicts were launched into eternity - a fearful example to our agricultural population, who will, it is fervently hoped, be warned by the fate of these wretched individuals from the commission of the grievous offence which cut short their existence in the very bloom of their youth.

Salisbury & Winchester Journal Monday 30 March 1835