



Fire at Mr. Jenner's Farm

A fire took place on Monday afternoon on the Farm of Mr. John Jenner, at Wanborough Plain, near Swindon, which resulted in the total destruction of the dwelling house and the whole of the farm buildings and everything about the homestead, except three wheat ricks and some straw. A hog was burnt to death, besides nine pigs, 75 head of poultry, 36 quarters of barley, 120 sacks of wheat, all the farm implements and machinery. The fire is supposed to have been occasioned by accident, or through carelessness. Mr. Jenner is insured. **Reading Mercury, 11 June 1870**

At the SWINDON Petty Sessions, on Thursday last, before D. Archer, esq., H. N. Goddard esq., and W. W. Codrington, esq., eleven persons (principally labourers) were charged with having behaved in a very disgraceful manner at the fire which took place on the farm of Mr. Jenner at Wanborough, on the 6th of this month, as mentioned in our paper on the following Thursday.

They appear to have stolen brandy, gin, and port and sherry wine from the premises during the time the fire was raging, and to have got so drunk with the liquor that some of them almost paid the penalty of their misconduct with their lives.

The first witness called was Mr. Robert Bennett, who said he was left in charge of Mr. Jenner's house during his absence. On Monday the 6th instant a fire broke out, at which a number of persons were present. Witness positively denied that there was any drink whatever served out to the men, saying the wine and spirits were kept in a cupboard under the staircase, which said cupboard was always locked. Henry Mace, of Bishopstone, said he was present at the fire. He saw a number of men in the garden with a jar. They asked him to drink, which he did – he did not know whether it was gin or whiskey, but it was of a light color. This witness gave evidence in a very reluctant manner, but was told by the Chairman that if he stayed there for a week, he would have to give proper answers. He then said he was requested by the police to stay and assist in minding the premises during the night, when he saw the whole of the prisoners lying in the field helplessly drunk, and he left them there.

Martha Lee was also at the fire, and sore that she saw Mark Smith and David Bourton drinking from a bottle. She also saw men drinking from jars similar to those produced. This witness was corroborated by Joseph Bathe. Alluding to Mrs. Harris, he said he saw her sitting down, but whether she was drunk or not he did not know,

Mary Ann Nash, a servant in the employ of Mr. Bennett, said the men seized the jars and began to drink from them, but she took the jars away. She saw Mrs. Harris lying down, but was so busy herself that she could not attend to her.

William E. Morris said he was at the fire. On the road to the conflagration he saw two men drunk, and afterwards met three more men taking Mrs. Harris home in a wheelbarrow. A little farther on he met two more men on a donkey, both of whom were intoxicated. On arriving at the fire there were 14 or 15 men lying down helplessly drunk. Two or three were so black in the face that he cut their shirt collars with his knife.

P. C. Hancock gave evidence as to the "scene" which presented itself at the fire. He said on reaching the house he saw men lying down helplessly drunk, and if he had not removed them, the roof, which shortly afterwards fell in, must have fallen on them. The policeman added that during the night he himself and others bathed the faces of the drunkards because they were black and sullen.

Mr. John Jenner said he was from home at the time of the fire, but he positively swore that he left a quantity of brandy and gin, and also wine and sherry, in the cupboard when he left home – it was in a cupboard locked up, of which he had the key.

After the evidence of Sergeant Smith, who produced the jars.

The Bench retired, and were absent for a quarter of an hour. On their return into Court, the Chairman, addressing the defendants, said the magistrates would convict the whole of the defendants for being drunk. They had had a very narrow escape of being sent to trial for stealing the spirits. A more disgraceful proceeding scarcely ever happened in the County of Wilts. They went to assist in endeavouring to put out a fire, and because they discovered a quantity of spirits they fell to and got in a beastly state of drunkenness. Such conduct was a thorough disgrace to this side of the County. He, for his part, and he felt he was speaking the opinion of his brother Magistrates, regretted that their powers were not more extensive. Each would be fined 5s and 11s. 6d. costs.

Mr. H. N. Goddard, addressing Bourton and Povey, said from their appearance they ought to have known better than to have taken part in such proceedings.

A warrant was immediately issued for the apprehension of Edwin Ross and Edward Wall.

A young man named Thomas Taylor, was then placed before the Magistrates charged with stealing a vase, a bonnet, and cap, a straw hat, and slippers, and three quarters of a pound of bacon, the vase and bacon the property of Mr. Jenner; the straw hat and slippers the property of Mr. Bennett; and the bonnet and cap the property of Sarah Ann Nash. P.C. Taylor said he was on duty at the fire at Wanborough, on Monday, the 6th instant. He saw the prisoner looking over the furniture and other goods which were covered with a piece of carpet. He saw the prisoner take up the vase produced, and put it in his pocket. On seeing that he was observed prisoner put the vase down. Having a bundle under his arm he (witness) searched it and found a bonnet and a cap and a pair of slippers. He charged him with stealing the property, when he said "it's all right, there will be nothing said about it". As he resisted having the handcuffs on, witness called Sergeant Smith, and the prisoner was secured. On searching him the piece of bacon was found. The prisoner said it was all through the liquor and pleaded guilty to the charge. The Chairman, addressing the prisoner, said he not only, behaved as the others did who were present at the fire, namely, got drunk, but according to his own confession he stole the property. He would have to go to gaol for three months with hard labour. **Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, 23 June 1870**