



Typical Farm Buildings Fire

## Arson by a Boy

William Coster, alias Spaish (15), was charged, on several indictments, with setting fire to farm buildings, the property of Mrs. Ann Bedford, at Wroughton. Mr. Cole and Mr. Edlin prosecuted, and Mr. Prideaux defended.

The particulars of this case have been very recently recorded, and it will be remembered that between the 31st of January and the 15th of February no less than 9 fires broke out on Mrs. Bedford's premises; that the premises were in consequence watched by the police, and suspicions led to the apprehension of the boy Spaish, who was in Mrs. Bedford's employ.

The only indictment proceeded with against the prisoner was as to setting fire to the waggon-house, on the 14th February. It appeared in evidence that a young man named Stanley, who was employed by Mrs. Bedford as a baker, saw the prisoner come from the wagon-house; within 10 minutes afterwards it burst into flames, and the prisoner mounted a horse, and rode into Swindon to give notice to Supt. Haynes to bring the fire-engines; on his return, he got into company with a lad named Rawlings, and while walking with him he threw away some matches which he had in his pocket, observing that if the police found them on him they would say that he did it; on being subsequently apprehended and searched by the police, he said that he did not set fire to the building, and had nothing on him whereby he could have done it; subsequently, however, on Mrs. Bedford saying it would be better for him to tell the truth, he made a full confession of being the author of all the fires, and described the manner in which he had accomplished the mischief.

Mr. Prideaux objected to the reception of this confession as evidence, on the authority of several decisions which he quoted from Archibold, on the ground that what the prosecutrix said must be considered as an inducement to confess by the offer of some temporal benefit for doing so; but his Lordship held it to be perfectly admissible, as the words referred to did not amount to an inducement, and he declined to reserve the point. There being, therefore, practically no defence, the Jury immediately found the prisoner guilty.

It was not attempted to be shown that there was any motive for the crime, or malice in the case; and the prisoner's father, on being called, stated that he believed an attack of typhus fever, which the boy had some time ago, had affected his intellect slightly.

The learned Judge sentenced him to be imprisoned for one month, and after that to be kept in the Wilts Reformatory, at Warminster, for 5 years.

**Wiltshire Independent, Thursday, 17 March 1859**