



Incendiarism

The following is a more particular account of an event which is shortly narrated in the preceding:- On Friday afternoon Stevens, the officer reported to Mr. Halls, at Bow Street, that he had, in consequence of the order he had received, been down to Wroughton, near Swindon, Wilts, to endeavour to detect the perpetrators of one of the most daring acts of incendiarism ever committed. On Sunday evening, the 3rd instant, a corn rick, two hayricks, two barns filled with corn, and several outhouses well stored, mounting in value altogether to nearly £2000, were discovered to be on fire. The whole of the structures commenced burning at one time, a circumstance which afforded a convincing proof that the calamity was the work of an incendiary.

The ricks, barns, &c., were the property of Samuel Ballard Pigott, Esq., of Wroughton. The local Magistrates had sent a special messenger to Bow Street, to request the assistance of one of the most experienced officers. Stevens was sent down, and on making inquiries, ascertained that a young man, named Richard Jefferies, the son of a tenant of Mr. Smith, was confined in the gaol at Marlborough, on a charge of being a deserter from the 10th regiment of foot - that he was a young man of loose habits, and had been seen under very suspicious circumstances near the premises of Mr. Pigott, on the night of the fire. Stevens made inquiries and testimony was adduced to prove that the prisoner went into a chandler's shop close to the premises of Mr. Pigott, and purchased several bundles of matches, and some tobacco, with which he filled his pipe and lit it, and then was seen to leap a five-barred gate leading to the enclosures in which the barns and ricks were situated.

In a very few minutes after, the prisoner went into a cottage, in which were two elderly women, and begged to be allowed to remain for a short time, as officers were in pursuit of him on account of a bastard child. They consented to shelter him, and placed him in the back part of the cottage; but he had not been many moments there before an alarm of fire was given; and the whole of the property already mentioned was in a blaze. The prisoner ran out to assist in extinguishing the flames, and left part of the matches he had bought behind him at the cottage. It was further proved that on the same evening he had called upon his brother-in-law, who lives close to Mr. Pigott's estate, and said in the course of conversation, "there will be mischief tonight, or I am deceived."

Stevens upon ascertaining these facts, went to the prisoner at the gaol, who admitted having been in the cottage occupied by the two females, but said that he merely went in there to assist them in removing their furniture after the fire had broken out. Upon these facts being ascertained, the prisoner was taken by Stevens before the bench of Magistrates at Swindon, when upon the above and other evidence of a corroborative nature, the prisoner, who seemed much depressed, and said nothing before the Magistrates, was fully committed to Fisherton gaol for trial at the next assizes for the county.

The loss sustained by Mr. Pigott is immense. Report from London Paper.

Salisbury & Winchester Journal, 2 December 1833

OPC Notes

£2000 in value as of 2022 equates to about £259,112.

The dotted line insert reported in the conversation between Richard Jefferies and his brother-in-law, replaces what we presume is an expletive unpublishable in the newspaper of the time.