



Typical thatch barn

Thatch Set Alight

At Pewsey Petty Session on Friday last, Job Maggs (an idiotic looking fellow) was charged with having on the 3rd inst, set fire to some thatch on a wall communicating with a barn, the property of Sir M. H. Beach at Fittleton, in the occupation of Mr. G. Kilmister.

Several witnesses spoke as to the fire (which was happily extinguished with very slight damage), and the prisoner was seen by two witnesses (one a policeman) to be within 300 yards of the place, a short time previous to the fire. Two witnesses (William Phillips and George Dear) deposed that they “did not see the prisoner” there. Superintendent Francis Bush, a clever officer from Marlborough, said he saw the prisoner at Netheravon, on the Monday after the fire, he said to him, come with me, the prisoner said, “you won’t hurt me, will’ee. I did not do it, I lit a match and caught the thatch, and lit my pipe, and nearly burnt my face doing it”. The prisoner did not appear to understand much that was going on, and ejaculated between the evidence of each witness, “I did not do it, and tha’s true. I did not set it on fire, but will pay for it so much every reckoning”. He having been duly warned that any statement he might make would be used against him at his trial, said, “what must I say to them”, and afterwards said, “I never set fire to anything, that’s true, sept that time in the field, (referring to a previous occasion, when he accidentally burnt some hurdles in a field.) He was fully committed to take his trial at the assizes, and nine witnesses were bound to appear against him.

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Job Maggs, the half-witted man from Fittleton, was then put up and asked whether he had any reason to show why the Court should award judgement against him.

I’ll tell ‘ee what I dreamed, Sir, last night (said Maggs, looking towards the Judge) – I dreamed last night, as how my mother was dead, and my father was crazy at home. That’s all I got to say, Sir.

The Judge: - The Jury have had their attention carefully directed to the circumstances of your case, and they have felt themselves constrained to find you guilty of an intent to injure the prosecutor by burning his barn. They have however recommended you to the merciful consideration of the court, and I shall take that recommendation into consideration.

Still I cannot shut out from my mind the fact that the crime of arson is a crime which has been much upon the increase lately; and giving what weight therefore which I can give to the recommendation of the Jury, I feel it my duty to sentence you to twelve calendar months imprisonment with hard labour.

Had you succeeded in destroying the barn the sentence which would have been passed upon you would have been a sentence of a very different nature.

The prisoner stared insensibly at his Lordship on hearing his doom, and was immediately removed from the dock.

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