



Swindon Police Court

Charge of Arson

At the Swindon Police Court on Thursday, Walter Henry Jukes, farmer, the assistant overseer of the parish of Stratton St. Margaret, near Swindon, was charged with setting fire to Pigeon House Farm on Tuesday night. After formal evidence of the outbreak of fire and the nature of the damage had been given, Superintendent Robinson asked for and obtained a remand until Monday, pending investigations.

Gloucester Citizen, Friday, 16 March 1906

Arson and Embezzlement

Charges Against A Farmer Near Swindon

Sentence of Penal Servitude

At the Wilts Assizes at Salisbury on Friday, before the Lord Chief Justice, Walter Henry Jukes, farmer, of Stratton St. Margaret, near Swindon, was indicted for embezzling three sums of money received by him in his capacity of assistant overseer of the parish. He was further charged with having, in a similar manner, embezzled a sum of £590 16s 5d., and with having obtained cheques of the value of £250 from Joseph Russell, at Stratton St. Margaret. A further indictment charged him with having set fire to his dwelling-house and barn with intent to defraud. Mr. Holman Gregory and Mr. Rayner Goddard appeared for the prosecution, and prisoner, who pleaded not guilty to all the charges, was represented by Mr. T. H. Parr.

The charge of embezzling sums received by prisoner in his capacity as assistant overseer was first gone into, and evidence was called to prove that three separate cheques, paid to prisoner by ratepayers of the parish, were paid into his own private account instead of to the account of the overseers. With regard to the arson charge, Mr. Holman Gregory said the submission of the prosecution was that the accused, having got into default with his rates, set fire to his house for the purpose of destroying the rate-books. It appeared that on the night before the audit of the Union accounts, fixed on March 14th, the barn in Juke's farmyard were discovered to be on fire. Accused was a member of the local fire brigade, and the fire engine was, in fact, kept in the barn which had caught alight. The fire here was soon extinguished, but an examination of the house by the police disclosed the existence of four separate outbreaks within, three of which had been caused by folded newspapers having been placed beneath the rafters and ignited. The safe, which should have contained the rate-books and a quantity of cash, was found to be empty, and charred fragments were subsequently identified as the ashes of the burnt rate-books. Mr. H. McCalmont Rich, district auditor from the Local Government Board, said so far as could be at present ascertained, the total amount of prisoner's defalcations was £850.

Prisoner was found guilty on two charges, and Mr. Gregory did not press the others.

The Lord Chief Justice said it had been a very painful case for him, as prisoner was a man of some position and education. He must inflict a very severe sentence. On the charge of arson the sentence would be ten years' penal servitude, and in the case of embezzlement five years, the sentences to run concurrently.

Gloucester Citizen, Saturday, 9 June 1906