

Shipping and Mercantile Gazette, 22 March 1844

ASSIZE INTELLIGENCE.

NORFOLK CIRCUIT.—HUNTINGDON, March 20.

(Before Lord Abinger.)

SEVERE SENTENCE.—**Gifford White, aged 18, was indicted for unlawfully, knowingly, and maliciously sending to one Isaac Ilett a letter, threatening to burn him and the other farmers of the parish of Bluntisham in their beds, and also to burn their property.—The prisoner pleaded guilty.—The prosecutor is a farmer living in the parish of Bluntisham, in this county, and the prisoner in December last was a labourer in husbandry in the same place. On the morning of the 28th of that month one of the female servants of the prosecutor found a sealed letter inside his farm-yard, directed—“To the Farmers of Bluntisham, Hunts.” She took it to her master, who opened and read it; it was in these words:—“Bluntisham, Hunts.

“To THE FARMERS.—We are determined to set fire to the whole of this place if you don’t set us to work, and burn you in your beds if there is not an alteration. What do you think the young men are to do if you don’t set them to work? They must do something. The fact is, we cannot go any longer. We must commit robbery and everything that is contrary to your wish.

“I am,

“AN ENEMY.”

Lord Abinger, having ordered that the plea of the prisoner should be recorded, proceeded to pass sentence upon him. The prisoner, his lordship observed, had pleaded guilty to the commission of a crime of the greatest magnitude and enormity, and one of which the legislature had most properly marked its sense by the severity of punishment it had annexed to it. Of what use was it that men should join together in the bonds of civil society, if there was no security for life and property—if men could not sleep in peace and a sense of security, but were to live in a state of constant terror and alarm? The conduct of the prisoner was calculated to hold the district in which he lived in continual terror, and it was not to be endured in a country in which law prevailed that men should endeavour to compel

others to do that which might be against their interest or their duty by threats of suffering from loss of property or of submitting to death by the most horrible torments. The offence was of a most atrocious character, and it might indeed, almost be said, that the sending of letters threatening to burn the property of the parties to whom they were addressed was worse than the putting the threat itself into execution, for when a man lost his property by fire he at least knew the worst; but he to whom such threats were made, was made to live in a state of continual terror and alarm. Such a state of society was intolerable, and in order that the well-disposed part of society might sleep not only in security, but in a sense of security under a well-founded trust in the laws, and others be deterred from a repetition of the offence of which the prisoner had admitted his guilt, he must receive the extreme measure of punishment which the law had annexed to his crime, which was that he be transported beyond the seas for the remainder of his life.