

John Wallen of Shelton, Conn.
hanged for Arson at Cambridge 1833

On Monday night last, about ten minutes past nine o'clock, an alarming fire occurred. The flames were observed to issue from a haulm stack in the rick-yard of Mr Stacey, and communicated to a barn, containing about 30 loads of wheat, which together with some spires in the yard, were consumed. The Shelford engine being promptly on the spot, was highly serviceable; whilst the Hertford, Norwich, Royal Exchange, Phoenix, and Sun engines, were dispatched from Cambridge without loss of time and prevented the further extension of the destructive element. The damage, we understand, amounts to about £200: The property was insured with the Sun office. We regret to state that there is every reason to believe the fire was occasioned by an incendiary. It being a very dark night, the flames were seen at a considerable distance; at St. Neots, full 20 miles from Shelford, it was supposed the fire was only a few miles off; at March it was also very perceptible; and many of the inhabitants of this place presumed it was at the entrance of the town, consequently the Trumpington road was speedily lined with hundreds of spectators. The wheel of the Royal Exchange engine broke down during its progress in Trinity Street, owing to the number of persons riding on the engine, by which a man named Holmes had his leg severely fractured. He was immediately conveyed to the hospital, and is going on well.

1st May



1831

EXTENSIVE FIRE - yesterday morning, between six and seven o'clock, a fire was discovered in the farm-yard of Mr Headly. The farm being near the river there was an abundant supply of water, and the inhabitants of the village, as well as those who arrived from adjacent places, exerted themselves with great alacrity in assisting to extinguish the flames. By about eleven o'clock all immediate danger appeared to be over, but the fire continued burning during the greater part of the day. The damage sustained amounts to £3000.

16th December

FIRE AT GREAT SHELFORD - EIGHT HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD AND PARDON.

Whitehall December 22nd 1831 - Whereas it hath been humbly represented unto the King, that the fire discovered upon the property of Mr. Henry Headly, on the fifteenth day of December, and that it is strongly suspected the above premises were wilfully and maliciously set on fire by some evil-disposed person or persons unknown. His Majesty, for the better apprehending and bringing to justice the offender before mentioned, is hereby pleased to promise His most gracious PARDON and a reward of FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS to anyone of them (except the person who actually set fire to the said premises) giving such information as shall lead to the apprehension and conviction of the said offender or offenders. And as further encouragement an additional REWARD of FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS is hereby offered. Such last mentioned reward to be paid upon application to Messrs. Nash and Wedd, Solicitors, Royston.

30th December

1832

On Monday last a man named Joseph Ellerm, labourer, was apprehended by Mr. Taunton, of the public-office, Bow Street, on a charge of wilfully setting fire to the premises of Mr. Henry Headly, on the 15th ult. he was examined on Monday and again on Wednesday, when he was committed to the county gaol for further examination on Saturday next. 6th January

JOSEPH ELLERM - was again examined yesterday morning on the charge of arson and further remanded for examination on Saturday next. Another labourer named John Ostler, was also remanded for further examination on the same charge. 27th January

JOSEPH ELLERM - on Saturday last was fully committed to the castle for trial, on the charge of wilfully setting fire to the premises of Mr Headly, on Thursday morning of the 15th of December last:- John Ostler, who was detained upon the same charge, was set at liberty, sufficient evidence not being adduced to implicate him in the transaction. February 10th

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ASSIZES - The Grand Jury returned no true bill against Joseph Ellerm

16th March

1833

FIRE - Yesterday evening a fire was discovered on the premises of Mr. Henry Headly, but which providentially was prevented extending beyond the haulm stack, in which it commenced; there is no doubt but that it was the act of an incendiary. A large quantity of property was consumed upon the same premises about fourteen months since. February 8th

FIRES AT SHELFORD - Mr Wilkinson's Farm, January 26th and Mr. Headly's Stacks. a reward of Three Hundred pounds is offered for such information as shall lead to the Conviction of the incendiaries. AND HIS MAJESTY'S PARDON will be granted to any Accomplice who having himself set fire to any of the above property, shall be the means of the Principal Offender or Offenders being brought to Justice. 15th February

On Monday afternoon last, between two and three o'clock, another fire was discovered upon the premises of Mr. Henry Headly. The flames were, however, confined to a cartshed (where they were first observed), but which was destroyed. We sincerely regret to state that this is the fourth or fifth incendiary fire that thus taken place in that neighbourhood, without any

satisfactory clue having been obtained to lead to the detection of the offender.

1st March

FIRES AT GREAT SHELFORD - Last Saturday evening, about six o'clock, a haulm stack, on Mr. Wm. Headly's premises was discovered to be on fire and was speedily consumed. - And yesterday, about 11 o'clock in the forenoon, a fire broke out in a barn occupied by a small farmer by the name of Joseph Payne. The parish engine was speedily on the spot and to its powerful effects may be attributed to the safety of a considerable range of buildings.

19th April

ANOTHER FIRE AT SHELFORD - Yesterday afternoon, between four and five o'clock, a barn and two stacks of straw, situate on the premises of Mr. Kirby, were wilfully destroyed by fire: the barn had only been erected last summer.

24th May

ANOTHER FIRE AT SHELFORD - On Wednesday morning last, about five o'clock, a fire broke out in the sheep-yard upon the farm of Mr. Grain, on the green.

7th June

FIRE - On Wednesday afternoon last, about three o'clock, attempted on the premises of Mr. William Dean issuing from a stack; he immediately threw some water upon it and thus prevented further damage. From suspicious circumstances a man named John Stallion has been apprehended; several long examinations have taken place, and the man is committed for further examination.

14th June

CHARGE OF ARSON - It will be seen on reference to the commitments to the Castle that John Stallion has been fully committed on a charge of arson at Shelford. 2nd August

CASE OF ARSON - John Stallion, aged 32, was indicted for having at Great Shelford on 12th of June last, maliciously and wilfully set fire to an outhouse with intent to injure William Deans, poulterer. Mr Andrews briefly stated the case and called for the following witnesses;

William Deans the prosecutor deposed as follows; I am a poulterer and labourer, on Wednesday 12th of June last, I was in the close adjoining my house with my son. About half past two I saw some smoke coming from the end of the out-building where I put my cart and cows of a night, it is built of posts and wood laid across covered with straw. I saw the smoke coming from about a foot from the bottom of the roof and the corner next to the road. I and my son went up to the place and directly began to pull the straw out which was all of a smoke and there was some fire and sparks. I also saw a ball of linen. Some of it was blue. This outbuilding is about three and a half poles from my house. When I saw the smoke I called for some water and my wife and son brought 3 or 4 pails full. I threw some on the straw and some on the roof; the next day I found two matches amongst the straw which I pulled from the roof.

Cross examined by the judge: the ball of linen was burnt through but the matches were not, the straw was all on fire when it fell to the ground, but I did not see any flame; the pieces of wood on the roof and the posts were not burnt; I did not see any sparks on the roof before I pulled the straw out, because the ball was not on the outside; as soon as I pulled the straw out my boy stamped upon it to put the sparks out; it was nearly seven feet from the ground where

I pulled the straw out, that I could reach it - re-examined: I was about three yards off when I saw the smoke which I think must have come from the straw and ball too, because the ball could not have made so much smoke; there was some smoke upon the roof after the ball came out; it was a gloomy and very windy day. - Mr. Cummings, surveyor, of Trumpington, made a plan of part of the parish of Shelford, and of Deans homestead.

John Deans son of the prosecutor, I remember being on the high road on the 12th June, about 10 o'clock in the morning; I saw John Stallion, the prisoner, next the outbuildings of my fathers..... I saw smoke coming from the roof of the cartshed; there was a good deal of smoke; my father pulled the straw out.

Sarah Deans, examined; I am the wife of the prosecutor; I remember hearing an alarm of fire; I saw my husband pull a ball out of the building; he gave it to me; and I gave it to Mr. William Headley. Mr. Peter Grain. - record. - I received a bundle from Mr. Headley, it has never been out of my possession since except for a few minutes while the magistrates looked at it; it is composed of pieces of rag; as a consequence of some information I went to Mrs. Cambridge's house; she lives opposite the prisoner, she produced her work basket and showed me two pieces in the bundle; I took the two pieces from Mrs. Cambridge's and after that I went to the prisoner's house and searched it, I found two aprons which were of different patterns and corresponded to two pieces in the bundle.

Sarah Cambridge lives near the prisoner; - I showed Mr. Grain my work basket; he took away two pieces of cotton; I gave the prisoner's wife an old blue gown like one of the pieces Mr. Grain took away; I had also once given her an old stripped piece of blue cotton like the other piece.

Samuel Holder, constable, received two pieces of cotton from Mrs. Cambridge, where before the magistrates they corresponded to some of the pieces found at the prisoner's house.

The Reverend Mr. Musgrave; and a magistrate of this county; the prisoner was brought before me on the 12th of June; I cautioned him as to say anything, and no promise or threat was heldout to him to do so; he was also examined twice on the 13th. On the second examination the prisoner stated that on the day of the fire he went home to dinner at about one-o clock, his wife said she did not expect him home so soon; when she said that she expected that he would have been stopped on the road for she had made up a ball of rags, matches and tinder and put it into Dean's place. She thought it would have broken out by then; he told her that she had made a pretty thing of it, but did not say anything more about it to her.

Robert Orridge: I am governor of the county gaol; have seen the wife of the prisoner; I saw her when she was before the magistrates, she is rather short and deformed; I measured her; she was about four feet high; I measured how high she could reach, she could not reach more than five feet seven inches. - I went to where the fire took place, and saw where the ball came out of it; it was seven feet high, within two inches. - The prisoner being called upon for his defence merely declared in strong terms that he was innocent of the charge. He had no witnesses, to call either for character or for any other purpose. - The learned judge having recapitulated the evidence, the jury, after a quarter of an hour's deliberation, returned a verdict of guilty.

Note: John Stallan was also found guilty of feloniously setting on fire a barn, in the occupation of William Kirby and Harry Tunwell, farmers of Great Shelford.

The usual proclamation being made for silence the learned Judge addressed the Prisoner to the following effect:- Prisoner at the bar - John Stallan - you have been convicted, after a fair and impartial trial, of having unlawfully, maliciously, feloniously set on fire an out building belonging to William Deans. The jury in my mind have come to a very proper conclusion; and upon that verdict I shall pass sentence upon you; for although you have also been convicted of a second similar offence, I shall make no remark upon that. The legislature has very properly fixed the punishment of death upon such offences as yours, for not only is property destroyed, and on some occasions to a great extent, but the lives of individuals placed in imminent peril; it is also a species of crime against which there is scarcely any protection. If a person is attacked by robbers he may find means to defend himself, but in such cases as the present there is hardly any escape, any persons committing them must be actuated, by feelings of the very worst description. In the offences of robbery or personal attacks parties may plead necessity or previous injury as a reason for their commission; but in such instances as the present there can be no such excuse, the motives that would instigate the perpetration of these crimes of which you have been convicted, from pure diabolical revenge, and sentence, and therefore it is that the legislature is always slow to remit any part of the sentence, and most certainly, on the present occasion, I cannot hold out any hopes of mitigation. I am afraid that your mind is ill prepared for that awful change that awaits you; take therefore, I earnestly intreat you, that will be afforded you in the gaol, and further more seek that mercy at the hands of your almighty redeemer, which cannot be afforded you in this world. It also remains for me to order that you be taken hence to the place from whence you came, that you be there hanged by the neck until you are dead, and the Lord have mercy on your soul.

2nd August

JOHN STALLAN - the man left for execution for arson, has refused to make any confession or statement, except, he says, that his wife whom in the first instance he accused, has nothing to do with the rags or the fires. he appears naturally to be of a very still and close disposition, and observes, that as the parish and the world believe him to be guilty, and he is to suffer for it, it is unnecessary for him to say anything. We are glad to learn that he is attentive to the exhortations of the chaplain.

9th August

CONFESSION - On Tuesday last John Stallan, the convict under sentence of death in the County Gaol, retracted his former strong protestations of innocence, and confessed that he had wilfully occasioned fires(12 in number) at Great Shelford, with the exception of Mr. Stacey; in 9 of whom the premises were burnt. The culprit states that he had no malice or ill will against any of the persons whose property he set on fire, and that his only object was to occasion the necessity for working the engine, for which, as one of the assistants, he received 6 shillings and 6 pence each time. He fired the premises of his master (Mr. Henry Headley) four times and attempted a fifth; he ascribes his selection of these to the facilities he possessed from working on the spot. He describes Mr. Headley as the best of masters. The first fire was at Mr. William Headley's with whom he also worked at the time, and of whom he speaks in the highest terms. He says that no other person was accessory to any of the fires,

and he always most successfully concealed them from his wife, although on his first apprehension he had shamefully attempted to exculpate himself by laying the guilt on her. He made a full and unreserved confession to the chaplain on Wednesday evening, and since then he says he felt his mind much relieved. From some strange and unexplained cause on Wednesday Mr. Orridge received a respite for the convict, staying the execution until Saturday the seventh day of December next. Since his confession the prisoner has anxiously and assiduously given himself up to the preparation for his death on Saturday next, to which he was beginning to look with so much resignation that the respite which postpones the event for 16 weeks, without much hope of any further remission, is not likely to afford him much gratification.

16th August

We are authorised to state that the execution of John Stallan, convicted at the last assizes of setting fire to premises at Great Shelford, and was respited until the 7th of December next, will take place, on that day at 12 O'clock.

22nd November

EXECUTION OF JOHN STALLAN - the incendiary. - Saturday last being the day fixed for the execution of the above culprit, a large concourse of persons assembled in the neighbourhood of the county gaol: and as usual there were a great number of females. The conduct of the culprit for a length of time had been uniformly becoming. He ate heartily on the previous day and rested well throughout the night. At 9 O'clock on Saturday morning he received the sacrament, and attended the usual service at the chapel, where all the prisoners were assembled. On other similar occasions the culprits have generally at the termination of the service, shaken hands and taken farewell of all the other prisoners; Stallan, however, begged to decline doing so thinking he should not have nerve sufficient, but said he would endeavour to say a few words to them: This he did in very appropriate terms, strongly urging them to quit their evil courses, and take warning of his own fate, which furnished them with proof of what a simple life may lead them to, and concluded by intreating them to seek the Lord whilst he may be found; the address appeared to move deeply many of the prisoners. A few minutes before twelve o'clock, the necessary arrangements having been completed the culprit was led from his cell, the procession moved towards the scaffold, the criminal walking with a tolerable firm step. Shortly before he was launched, however, into eternity, he became so much exhausted as to require the support of Mr. Orridge. After continuing in prayer for few minutes the drop fell, and the culprit died almost instantaneously. With the exception of repeating the prayers and thanking the chaplain for his kind attention, the wretched man did not attempt to speak a single word after he left his cell. Shortly after one o'clock the body was removed from the castle in a tilted cart to Shelford, the village in which the culprit had long lived, and where he occasioned so much alarm and destruction, having, our readers will recollect, confessed to have been the perpetrator of twelve fires. It has been stated in several London newspapers that the culprits hands were at perfect liberty, and that the arrangements were not well conducted. These assertions are altogether contrary to the fact, that the execution was well managed, the culprits arms were confined at the elbows, and he died almost without a struggle. In consequence of the wind being very high and strong, and the castle standing in an open situation, the body when suspended was moved about by the wind,

which might have led some persons to have imagined that the culprit was struggling. 13th December

Note: The execution was carried out by William Calcraft who was appointed Executioner to the City of London and the County of Middlesex in 1829 at a salary of £1.05d a week. In addition he was paid fees for executions elsewhere in the country, the official fee being £10. he carried out several executions in Cambridge between 1833 and 1864 when the last public execution was held at the County Gaol.

John Stallan the son of James and Ann Stallan was baptised in St. Mary's on the 14th of December 1800. The family had lived in Great Shelford since 1728 but had been in Duxford from 1660. On 25th January 1820 John married Elizabeth Portman and between then and 1832 had a daughter and two sons who survived infancy. Descendants still live in the area. In judging John Stallan remember that he was an uneducated farm labourer whose weekly wage was about seven shillings.

1834

GREAT SHELFORD TITHE COMMUTATION BILL - The Great Shelford Tithe Commutation Bill, and the Cambridge Gas Bill, were read a third time, in the House of Commons, on Tuesday last.

28th March

INQUEST - Mr. G. J. Twiss, coroner held an inquest to inquire into the cause of death of John Poulter, a child of 5 years old, who the day before died suddenly in the gravel pits of that Parish, when the jury being satisfied that he died in a natural way, found a verdict accordingly.

30th May

GREAT SHELFORD INCLOSURE - We, the Commissioners named and appointed in and by an act of Parliament entitled an Act for inclosing land in the parish of Great Shelford and for commuting the tithes hereby give notice that we shall hold our first meeting at the Eagle Inn in Cambridge, Wednesday the 18th June next at ten o'clock in the forenoon; and we do give notice that at the same meeting some banker as shall be approved by a majority of proprietors then present will be appointed to receive monies raised by virtue of the powers of the said Act. And we do give further notice and require persons and all bodies corporate having any right or interest in the lands by the said Act directed to be allotted and inclosed to be delivered to us at the same meeting and accompanied by a schedule, in writing, signed by them of such their rights and claims and therein to describe the messuages, cottages and lands belonging to them with the quantity of freehold, copyhold and leasehold parts thereof and the manor or manors such copyhold parts are holden and also a just account of their claims and interests. And we do also give notice that no claim will be received by us after the said meeting except for some special cause to be allowed by us.

Dated this 28th day of May 1834

Thos Utton

Edward Gibbons

Pemberton and Hayward Solicitors

13th June

GREAT SHELFORD INCLOSURE - We, the Commissioners named and appointed in and acting under, and by virtue of, an Act of Parliament passed in the fourth year of his present

Majesty, entitled "an Act for inclosing lands in the parish of Great Shelford, "commuting the Tithes of the said parish". do hereby give notice that we have set out the following additional public carriage road and highway, within the said parish. One public carriage road or highway of the width of thirty feet, being a continuation of the Hollow Willow Back Road* already set out, commencing at the south west corner of Granhams Inclosure and proceeding in a northwardly direction in its present course over the Sheep Common and between the Common Fields called Nine Wells Field and Bean's End Field, and thence in the same direction over other part of the Nine Wells Field until it enters the Red Cross turnpike Road. Meeting at the Eagle Inn 3rd Sept to discuss it.

19th July

Note: Now Granham's Road.

NINE WELLS - WATERCOURSE - It having been ascertained that the expense of preserving the water-course from the Nine Wells, on Shelford Common to this town, (i.e. Cambridge) would amount to about £200, and the University having agreed to pay £150 towards that sum, the Corporation having passed an order to pay the remaining £50.

28th November

1835

ELECTION TO THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS - Peter Grain, Esq., of Great Shelford, was yesterday elected Chairman of the Board of Guardians of the Chesterton Union, and Mr. W. Witt, of Waterbeach, Vice Chairman.

23rd September



"The Black Swan."

D.S. Ward.

1837

SALE OF THE BLACK SWAN - The old-established and extensive Brewery of Messrs. Steward, Cotton & Co. Cambridge together with Forty-eight Public Houses, in the Town and Neighbourhood, To be Sold by Auction, By Elliot Smith & Son, and Joseph Wentworth (who are jointly employed upon this occasion) at the Eagle Inn, Cambridge, on Friday the 25th of August, 1837 at Ten o'clock in the forenoon.
