

GREAT SHELFORD ARSONIST

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WEDNESDAY. CASE ARSON. John Stallan, aged 32, was indicted for having at Great Shelford, in this county, on the 12th June last, maliciously and unlawfully set fire to an out house, with intent to injure William Deans, poulterer. Mr. Andrews briefly stated the case, and called the following witnesses; — William Deans, the prosecutor, deposed as follows: I am a poulterer and labourer of Great Shelford, in this county on Wednesday the 12th of last June I was in the close adjoining my house, with my son, about half-past two in the afternoon; I saw some smoke coming from the end of the outbuilding, where I put my cart and cows of a night; it is built of posts & wood laid across and covered with straw; I saw the smoke coming from about foot from the bottom of the roof and from the corner next the road; I and son went up to the place, and I directly began to pull the straw out, which was all of a smoke and there were 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 three or four pails full; I threw some on the straw and some the roof. The next day I found two matches amongst the straw which I had 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 upon the roof before I pulled the straw out, because the ball was not 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, but I could reach it. — Re-examined; I was about three yards off when 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 gloomy and a very windy day. — Mr. Cuming, surveyor, of Trumpington, made a plan of part of the parish of Shelford and Deans' homestead. — John Deans, son of the prosecutor, said: I remember being on the high road on the 12th of June, about ten o'clock in the morning; I saw John Stallan, the prisoner, next the outbuilding of my father's; he asked me the nearest way to his work, he was standing still and said he was at work up one of the closes; I told him the nearest way was up one of the closes; I then went on to the green against the pound, and in about five or ten minutes after he came past me walking on the road; that was not the nearest way to his work nor the way I told him to go; about half-past two in the afternoon I was standing against my father's pales looking into the road; the prisoner came up and asked if I had had dinner, I said I was

getting it; I then went into the house and left him standing against the pales about two or three rods from the end the shed; I stopped in the house about five minutes or ten minutes at the furthest; and then went out at the back door with my father to look at some hay, and then we then came from the orchard round the barn through the yard on to the footpath; the yard gate is about a rod from the corner of the shed; we were ten minutes at the farthest going out of the door to look at the hay and coming round the footpath by the shed ; as soon as we got to the gate I saw smoke coming from the straw on the roof of the cart shed; there was a good deal of smoke; my father pulled the straw out, I also saw the ball come down and then some sparks flew about; I put it out; the smoke came from the ball; the prisoner was working in Mr. Headly's closes; I could see him there when father pulled the straw out; there is a nearer way from the prisoner's house to his work than that where I saw him when he spoke to the afternoon; the water was fetched after the ball was pulled out. — By the Judge; I did not see any flame, but some sparks, they flew about when the ball went to the ground; I did not see any sparks on the roof; my father pulled some straw on the ground as well as the ball; I did not see any sparks but what came from the ball. — By the Prisoner: I remember you (prisoner) going back from breakfast; you was standing against Maris's gate; & I had a basket, going to the dove-house; when I left you, you were standing still; I went to the pound and

ten minutes after you went past me. — Mr. Peter Grain: I live at Great Shelford, and am a farmer I know the building on Deans' premises, it is used to put his cart in and his cows; he uses the cart in his business; the building is in the yard and in the same fence as the other buildings; this shed is between three and four poles from the house. — These questions were put for the purpose of proving that the building formed part of the premises, which his Lordship decided was the case. — Sarah Deans examined: I am 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 Headly; about a quarter of hour before I heard the alarm I was feeding turkeys in my orchard; whilst I was doing so I saw the prisoner pass along by the side of the high road; he was walking along to his work by Maris's grove; he nodded to me, but I did not see him do anything; I could not see him because of the building where the fire was; I thought he looked rather confused; I then went into the house at the back-door; I was washing and could see the road from the door and window, but I did not observe any one pass on the road, if any one had done so between the time of seeing the prisoner and hearing the alarm of fire I must have seen them; there was about a quarter of an hour between the times — By the Judge; I could hear people walk on the road; I had not my eye upon the road the whole time; while I was going round into the back of the house I could neither see or hear any one.

—Re-examined : No person standing in Maris's close could have reached the hole in which the ball was found.—Mr. Wm. Headly: On the afternoon of the fire I went into my close nearly opposite Deans' premises; I saw some persons looking at a ball of rags; I did not then see any smoke issuing from the building: the next day I examined the straw upon the roof of the building, it had been burnt; I examined it minutely; I pulled some handfulls out and there was burnt straw in several of them; I examined the straw also which was lying on the ground, and saw some burnt ashes upon the path; the straw was dark in colour, and appeared much smoked, some the ends of it dropped off and blacked hand. After I went up the first-day Mrs. Deans gave a ball, and after some time I gave it to Mr. Grain; after I had the hall, I saw the prisoner working in Mr. H. Headly's close adjoining Maris's grove; Richard Jeffery was with him; I called the prisoner from his companion to me, and asked him whom he saw between Tom Kefford's house and Mr. Maris's close gate he returned from dinner; at first he said he did not recollect seeing any one, but then said he saw Tom Kefford's boy and young John Deans; he several times said not any one else; I sure I did not ask or tell him anything else.— Richard Jeffery: remembers the fire, and was at work with the prisoner in Mr. Headly's closes; Mr. Headly came to him about half-past two, they had conversation together, after that prisoner came back to me; I had heard no alarm of fire; prisoner said he thought there

was something amiss, for Headly had been asking him who he had seen coming back from dinner; I told him, said prisoner, I did not recollect seeing anybody but Tom Kefford's boy; prisoner said he thought somebody had been robbing William Deans. By the Prisoner: You (prisoner) was back from breakfast before ten; a very little after nine; you went dinner at one, and came back twenty minutes after two—Mr. Peter Grain recalled: I received a bundle from Mr. Headly, it has never been out of my possession since; except a few minutes that the magistrates were looking at it; it is composed of pieces of rag ; in consequence of some information I went to Mrs. Cambridge's house ; she lives nearly opposite the prisoner's; she produced her work basket and showed me two pieces of printed cotton, those corresponded with two of the pieces in the bundle; I took the two pieces from Mrs. Cambridge's; after that I went to the prisoner's house and searched it, I found two aprons which were of different patterns and corresponded with two of the pieces in the bundle; one piece in the bundle corresponding with one apron which is whole, and another piece in the bundle corresponding with a piece which was used to patch the other apron.—Sarah Cambridge lives near the prisoner; 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 look away; I had also once given her an old piece of blue striped cotton like the other piece. —Samuel

Holder, constable, received two pieces of cotton from Mrs. Cambridge, when before the magistrates, they corresponded with some of the pieces found at the prisoner's house.—The Rev. Mr. Musgrave : Am a magistrate of this county ; the prisoner was brought before on the 12th of June; I cautioned him as to saying anything, and no promise or threat was held out to him to do so; he was also examined at two different times on the 13th. At the first examination on the latter day he stated that one evening the latter end of the week before the fire he saw Foxey Deans in Mr. Grain's closes getting a piece of rag from his (the prisoner's) dunghill; the rag was of a bluish cast, and prisoner offered to give him another piece, but asked what it was for, when Deans said he would hear over a day or two. At the next examination the prisoner stated that on the day of the fire he went home to dinner about one o'clock, his wife said she did not expect him home so soon; he asked why, when he said she told him she expected he would have been stopped on the road for she had made a ball with rags, matches, and tinder and put it into Deans' place, and that she thought it would have broken out before then; he told her she had made a pretty thing of it, but did not say anything more about it to her.—William (called Foxey) Deans remembers Mr. W. Deans' fire; saw the prisoner on Monday before the fire the sheep-wash, had not seen him for a fortnight or three weeks before, and then he was going home to dinner; I had not been in Mr. Grain's

closes for at least three months before the fire; never took a piece of rag from Stallan's dunghill, nor was I ever his yard; the prisoner never offered me a piece rag, nor had I the conversation with him which he states. — John Turner assisted at sheep-washing; Foxey Deans was there on the day of the fire; I saw him there about half-past twelve, and I left him there at half-past four; he had been there the whole of that time. — Robert Orridge ; Am governor of the county gaol; has seen the wife of the prisoner; I saw her when before the magistrates, she very short and rather 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 where the fire took place, and saw the hole that the ball came out of; it was seven feet high, within two inches. — The prisoner then requested that several of the witnesses might be recalled, to ask them one or two questions; but the questions put were of no material importance. — The prisoner being called upon for his defence, merely declared in strong terms that he was perfectly innocent of the charge; he had witnesses, said, to call either for character or 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.

Second Indictment

SECOND INDICTMENT, The above prisoner was again indicted on suspicion having, on the 23d of May last, feloniously set on fire a barn, in the said parish of Great Shelford, in the occupation of William Kirby and Henry Tunwell, farmers. — Mr. Kirby proved that on Thursday the 23rd of May there was a quantity of straw and utensils in the bam; on the morning of the fire he locked and fastened the doors, so that no one could get in without the keys which were in his own house; after breakfast he went into the fields, and did not return home until five o'clock in the afternoon, when the barn and its contents were entirely consumed. Allen Kifford examined: I am a labourer of Shelford; I remember seeing Mr. Kirby's barn on the day of the fire, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon; I was going back from dinner to work in Mr. Grain's field; I waited in Maria's grove, because my dog which was with me started a hare or rabbit; I saw the prisoner coming down Hagger's lane; he was coming towards the barn ; I saw him peep round the corner of the barn; there was a woman coming through the grove, the footpath, so as to meet the prisoner, and he then went back some distance; the woman went up another lane away from the barn; the prisoner then came back to the barn and looked round the corner again; he then went into Kirby's close; I was between three and four poles from him; I heard him strike as if with a piece of iron or steel, I could at that time just see his head; he then came out of the close with one hand in his jacket

pocket; he went to the back of the barn, and I saw him run his hand through the clay wall, but whether he put anything in I don't know; I threw either a stone or a piece of dirt at him; I don't know whether he saw me, but I think he might; I went to work and left the prisoner going from the barn through the grove, I saw some smoke coming from the barn about half an hour afterwards; I went to the fire, and saw the prisoner there with the engine; jogged me on the elbow, and said it is all right, don't you speak, or something of that sort; I told Tom Cambridge, my brother Thomas, and Mr. Wm. Headly, about it, but it was a good bit after the fire; no one has said or promised anything to induce me to tell. — Joseph Robinson saw the smoke and ran up to the barn, but could not get in as the doors were fastened; he looked through a hole in one of the doors and could see that the fire was at the back part of the barn, near the middle there is footpath goes at the back of the barn. — Three other witnesses were called, to one of them the prisoner had said that he was against the barn about half an hour before the fire broke out; another stated that the prisoner left his house about two o'clock and returned again a little before four, when he said he had been taking a walk, and requested to have tea directly. The third witness, the constable, produced a knife taken from the person of the prisoner, and which he acknowledged to be his; the back of it appeared to have been frequently struck with a stone or some other hard substance. — The prisoner protested that

he was innocent, and declared that all Kifford's statement was false.—The jury, after a short consultation, returned a verdict of guilty.

The usual proclamation having been made for silence, the learned judge addressed the prisoner the following effect:—Prisoner at the bar, John Stallan, you have been convicted, after a fair and impartial trial, of having unlawfully, and feloniously set fire an outbuilding belonging to William Deans. The jury in mind have come to a very proper conclusion ; and upon that verdict I shall proceed to pass sentence upon you for although you have also been convicted of a second similar offence, I shall now make remark upon that. The Legislature has very properly fixed the punishment of death upon such offences as your's, for not only property destroyed, and some occasions to a great extent, but the lives of individuals frequently 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, and persons committing them must be actuated by feelings of the very worst description. In offences of robbery or personal attacks parties may plead necessity or previous injury as a reason for their commission; in such instances as the present there can be no such excuse, the motives which would instigate the perpetration of those crimes of which you have been

convicted, must arise from pure diabolical revenge, 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 to you the slightest hopes of any mitigation. I am afraid that your mind is but ill prepared for that awful change which awaits you; take therefore, I earnestly entreat you, that spiritual advice which will be afforded you in the gaol, and fervently seek that mercy at the hands of your Almighty Redeemer, which cannot be afforded you in this world. It only remains for me to order that you be taken hence to the place from whence you came, that you there be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul.

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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: as usual there were great number of females. The conduct of the culprit for a length of time has been uniformly becoming. He ate heartily on the previous day and rested well throughout the night. At nine o'clock on Saturday morning he received the sacrament, and then attended the usual service in the chapel, where all the other prisoners were assembled. On other similar occasions the culprits have generally, after the

termination of the service, shaken hands and taken a farewell of all the other prisoners; Stallan, however, begged to decline doing so, thinking that he should not have nerve sufficient, but said he would endeavour to address a few words to them; this he did in very appropriate terms, strongly urging them to quit their evil courses, and take warning by his own fate, which furnished them with a proof of what sinful life may lead them to, and concluded by entreating them to seek the Lord whilst he may be found; the address appeared deeply to affect many of the prisoners. A few minutes before twelve o'clock, the necessary arrangements having been completed, the culprit was led from his cell, and the procession moved towards the scaffold the criminal walking with a tolerable firm step. Shortly, however, before he was launched into eternity, he became so much exhausted as to require the support of Mr. Orridge. After continuing in prayer a 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 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 has occasioned much alarm and destruction, having, our readers will recollect, confessed have been the perpetrator of twelve fires. It has been stated in several London papers that the culprit's hands were

at perfect liberty, and that the arrangements were not well conducted. These assertions are altogether contrary to the fact, for the execution was well managed, the culprit's 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 imagine that the culprit was struggling.