

Jabez Copsey: a Glemsford fire-raiser

In March 2010, Eric Drake provided some fascinating material about an "incendiary" from Glemsford, Jabez Copsey, who was transported to Australlia for his crimes.

Eric has now got back in touch with even more detail, gleaned from the British Library.

This is taken from the Essex Standard of 2 February 1844:

In our account of the two incendiary fires last week, at Glemsford, we mentioned that a man was in custody on suspicion of being concerned in them: he underwent a second examination on Tuesday last, at the Bell Inn, Melford, before the Rev. Dr. Colville and Robert Mapletoft, Esq, when he made a full confession of his guilt, and on his information his accomplice, Stephen Boreham, was also arrested.

Javis Copsey, the man first taken, is a bricklayer's labourer, aged 22, and Stephen Boreham, a farming labourer, only 18 years of age. Copsey said that he and Boreham set fire to Mr. Shepherd's premises about six weeks ago; he was in his own house when Boreham came and gave a signal whistle; Copsey's mother and sister objected to his going, and said he was after no good, but he came out and went up Shepherd's Lane to the back of the barn, where Boreham set fire to the thatch in two or three places; they then ran off in the direction of Fair Green.

Three or four days after Boreham asked him "to have another flare up," and they then planned to set fire to Mr. Mann's premises, but something occurred to prevent their meeting on the night proposed. They subsequently agreed to set fire to Mr Bigg's stacks. Boreham went in first and called him (Copsey) to assist; they had seven lucifer matches, and tried six without being able to obtain a light; the seventh ignited, and they fired the stack. The matches were stolen from Mr. Albin's blacksmith's shop; Mr. Albin's apprentice missed the matches, and mentioned it to his master the next morning.

Copsey then proceeded to state that after Boreham had fired Mr. Bigg's stack they got over the wall and ran across "Grescroft," where Boreham's grandfather lived, and where he stopped till he heard the cry of fire, when they went and assisted; they afterwards repaired to the Crown Inn, and and took the beer which was allowed them for helping at the fire. They then went to the Cock public-house, where he gave

Boreham a halfpenny to get a pipe of tobacco; after he had lighted his pipe they walked to Mr Allen's barn, when Boreham asked him to have "another flare up." He then tore a piece of the lining out of Boreham's coat, into which they emptied the burning tobacco, and wrapped it up, put it into the barn through a hole in the wall, and pulling some straw over it, ran away; as they were running they met two men, and after that another, named Thomas Chatter, who said to them "There's another fire yonder," and they went back with him and helped to extinguish it.

Copsey further stated that Boreham was always after him, and persuading him to join him in firing these premises; he did not know that they had any animosity against any of the parties; he did not know why they did it. It appears that some time back Copsey had obtained some beer by means of a forged order in Mr Shepherd's name, and was discharged from his work in consequence of it; Boreham had also been out of employ about ten days.

They were both committed to the County Gaol to take their trial at the ensuing assize. Great credit is due to Mr. Freestone, of Glemsford, for his indefatigable exertions in causing the apprehension of these incendiaries. The frequent fires which have taken place in that parish have filled the whole village with alarm, and the satisfaction of the inhabitants at discovering the perpetrators of these diabolical deeds may be easily conceived. Boreham conducted himself at the examination with the greatest effrontery, and when about starting for gaol called out, "Good bye, gentlemen."

Fascinating material,

Other info

<http://www.convictrecords.com.au/convicts/copsey/jabez/52697>