

**ARSON – READING LENT ASSIZES** – John Carter was indicted for setting fire to a malt house of Henry and James Spicer, at Lambourn: and other two persons, Winkworth and Rider, as accessories before the fact.

**James Spicer.** – Occupied the premises at Lambourn jointly with Henry Spicer, and a person named Child. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November last, in the evening, being alarmed by a cry of fire, he went out and found a light under his thatch. He tried to extinguish it, but in vain. The fire spread, and his stable, out-house, coach-house, and malt house were burnt. Many persons assisted in putting it out; among others the prisoner Carter. – John Belcher saw Carter and Chivers together on the day of the fire, about 12 or 1 o'clock, two miles from Lambourn: walked with them to Lambourn, they being sometimes ahead and sometimes behind. Left them at the Crowell stone. – John Povey remembered the night of the fire. About six in the evening, met Robert Chivers and Carter. They asked if I had seen the lights in the air. I said, "Yes." They went away down toward the Lion. I had seen the lights. They were northern lights. - Thomas Bowsher. – Was at Francis-gate in the evening. Saw Carter and Chivers there at a quarter before six. Chivers asked if I saw any light in the air; I said "No".

They went to the Lion. – Richard Smith, carrier from Lambourn to Newbury. - Returned that evening to Lambourn; arrived at a quarter before six; saw Robert Chivers opposite the Lion; he accompanied me towards Walker's -lane, where he lived. He did not clean my horses that night. – John Honey, was at the Red Lion and saw Chivers there; he went away about seven, - Phoebe Wall. – On Tuesday after the fire I was going down the street toward the Red Lion, at a quarter before eight. I saw some-thing on the ground like a poultice from a thumb. I picked it up, and gave it to Mr. James Spicer. – James Spicer recalled. - Received it from Phoebe Wall; delivered it to the Rev. Mr Hippisley. The packet was then traced through several witnesses to the hands of Ruthven, the police-officer. Ruthven produced the packet, and described its contents.

**Robert Chivers** (the accomplice) is a labourer at Chipping Lambourn. Had lived there fourteen or fifteen years before the fires. Had known John Carter three or four years. Had been working on the parish since Michaelmas. Went to the workhouse on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November. Met Carter and several more: we went out for our billets. We were to go for work to Mr Clarke, of the Rook's Nest. John Carter was

billeted with me to work there. We went together about nine o'clock in the morning. Carter said to me he did not think there would be any good times at Lambourn till there had been a good fire. I said, "I did not think there would." He said if I would set fire to one end of the place, he would to the other. No place was mention then. He said he should like a good fire at the Red Lion, at Lambourn. He said it would be a good place to have a fire, because there was plenty of straw. I said I knew there was, because I had helped to put it there. He said it would be a good chance when the gentlefolks were gone in to dinner, as so many people would not be about. He said it would be a good plan to set fire to Mr. Crouch's barley rick, while I set fire to the pigeon-house (Mr. Giles's); it would draw people's attention there, while I set fire to the pigeon-house. We were not set to work there. I and Carter went to the Hare and Hounds, and started for Lambourn about twelve o'clock. Carter afterwards asked me, at Crowell's stone, what I meant to do about what he was talking in the morning; I told him I did not know, I had never done such a thing. He said if I would meet him about five or six he would get some matches made, and he would send his wife away that she should not see him make

them. I told him I would meet him. We parted at Crowell-corner opposite the malt-house. He went towards his house. I went home and afterwards went to the Red Lion: I left it about six o'clock. I went up the street and met Carter opposite Paulin's, next door to Spicer's, at Crowell-corner. Carter said, "Then thou be'st come?" He had got it ready for me. Gave me a bundle of some-thing done up in a bit of rag. I put it in my pocket. He told me the best plan was to get a bit of dry touchwood, and light it at one end; it was like this, (the packet produced). I returned down the street; Carter went home. Met Povey afterwards near Lawrence's yard. I saw some lights in the air, and told him I had seen it. I could not think what it meant. I went on a little below Willis's and threw away the packet, and went on towards Francis's gate. Carter met me again. Saw Bowsher, I asked him about the light. I and Carter parted at the Lion corner about six o'clock. Richard Smith, the carrier, came by, and I left again to the Red Lion. I had undone some of my things for bed. I heard the bells hit out. I went out, and saw the fire at the Red Lion public-house first; heard the cry of "fire" at the top of the town. I went there, and helped John Palmer to get his things out. I also helped Mr. Spicer; saw his

premises burning. I was nearly four hours there. I saw Carter there once; not again till the morning. I met him on the Wednesday (21<sup>st</sup>) at the Sheep Coops. I went with him to the Rook's Nest to our work. He asked me how I got on at the fire? I told him I worked hard. He said it was a good one, was it not. I told him it was a large one. He said it would have been a good one, if the wind had not sacked it round, I said it was a bad job on burning the horses. I had heard of horses being burnt. He said it was a bad job, but it did not signify much, as they, who owned the horses, did not belong to Lambourn. He asked me what I had done with the thing he had given me; I told him I had thrown it away. He said "Ha! I thought you had not heart." He said, as soon as the fire broke out, he ran home and cleared his house of all the rest on't. I told him he had better not say too much of it for fear it should be found out. He said he could take his oath there was but one who had a hand in it. A day or two afterwards, he asked me, if I thought the wages would be raised or not? I told him, I thought they would; because he said, if he thought not, he would not mind having another good fire. He said he would not mind taking a sheep or two to be transported, if it was not for his wife and family. I was

apprehended on this charge, and told this before the Magistrate. I have been examined twice at Lambourn. I have always given the same account. I said I knew nothing about it. I had heard of the reward, before I told of it. There were four of us taken together.

**George Green**, labourer. – Lives near Carter's house. I was going home about half-past seven o'clock. I passed by Crowell-corner, and met John Carter coming towards the malt-house. I said, "Good night." He gave no answer. He went into a shambling run in the same direction. I followed him a little distance along the lane, as far as Mrs Wilken's gate. I saw him reach his had up to the thatch, seeming to put something to the thatch of Mr. Spicer's machine-house, which was burnt that night. Carter returned to Crowell-corner, running down the street. I heard the alarm of "fire" and saw Carter half an hour after. I said, "John, this is a bad job" He said, "It is a bad job; bit I did not think it would break out for two hours." I said, "For God's sake should your tongue," He said, "So I will," – Cross-examined, - I did not deny it to Mr. Hippisley, but I said to him I would have nothing to do with it; I would not know any-thing about it; I was not taken up for the fire, but on suspicion. I heard of the reward

before I told this. I have been in prison about a wood.

**William Beale**, special constable. – Carter was in my custody just after the fires. He said the Robert Chivers asked him if he knew how to make combustible matches, and that he was to make these matches, and they were to meet near the Crowell-stone; that he gave Chivers on match, and kept two himself.

**William Hopkins**, a special constable. – I saw Carter in the Red Lion. I said, “Jack, I am very sorry you did not know better than do such a thing as this.” He said he was afraid it was too late to be sorry. He said he had made the matches and given Chivers part of them.

**William May**. – Carter was in custody in the same room with me on the 1<sup>st</sup> December. I heard him say, Chivers never saw him do it. Someone said, “How have you settled it?” He said, “It’s a bad job; Chivers has been told it. It’s no use to tell lies.” Did not mind being transported, if he was not hanged. He said he made the matches.

Ruthven recalled. – Took Carter to gaol. Chivers was a-head in custody; he said, speaking of Chivers, “He holped me into this; if it had not been for him, I should not have done it.”

**James Walker**. – I was in Abingdon gaol with Carter, in the same ward. I read the Bible to him. I was walking with him in the yard last Thursday week. He asked me what I thought of his case; he thought he should be hanged. I said I did not know anything about it. He said he should like to hang Chivers because he split. He said Chivers and he were at work breast-ploughing the day the fire happened. They worked till night. They agreed for Chivers to set the Lion on Fire, and Carter to set the malt-house on fire, because it was handiest to his own house. Chivers said he would have had a fire at the malt-house before, if he had lived so near it as Carter did. He said, he made three matches the day it was set on fire; he told how they were made, but he should not have known, if he had not been told by a man who lived at Lambourn. They would set fire to anything. I asked him how he carried them a-light? He said he lit one and put it into his breeches pocket, and carried it down to the Lion; and he put it up into the tallet, or loft, full of straw; then he went and lit the other at his own candle at home, and put it into the thatch of the malt-house. That, on the people crying, he said he had 1s. 6d. and a blow-out for helping at the fire. He said he set them both a-fire

because he found Chivers would not do it.

This was the case against the principal. Against the others two witnesses proved that they were all at work together on the morning of the fire, and the examination of the two prisoners before the magistrates was put in and read. – Rider acknowledged he was present at a conversation about fires between Carter and Winkworth; and he said, that if Carter made a good fire, as soon as he saw the light, Carter might come and claim a pot of

beer from him and there were some other expressions used by him generally with reference to fires, but nothing specifically applicable to the actual fires, - Winkworth stated, that he had had a conversation with Carter before that time, and he found matches in Carter's pocket, but nothing of importance to implicate him. – The Jury found Carter *Guilty*, and he was sentenced to be hanged. The two others were acquitted.