



Swing Riots at Fonthill Bishop - The Trial

There are nearly 300 prisoners for trial at our ensuing Special assizes. Committed to Fisherton Gaol: John Targett, Jeremiah Top, Charles Martin, Robert Obourne, and William Scott, charged with riotously breaking a thrashing-machine, on the 25th ult., the property of Mr. Self, of Down farm, Fonthill Bishop. **Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 27 December 1830**

Wilts Special Commission, Salisbury, Monday January 3.

Robert Obourne, Charles Martin, William Scott, John Penny, John Targett, Jeremiah Topp, and Thomas Topp, were indicted for destroying a thrashing-machine.

Michael Bradley. I was at work in the plantation near to Down Farm, which is occupied by Mr. Selfe. I saw a great number of persons come towards the barn, about ten in the morning of the 25th of November. They had sticks in their hands. John Penny opened the door from the inside, and the mob then went in, and began to break the machine, and afterwards threw it out in parts, and they all then beat it to pieces. Thomas Topp was chopping it with an axe. He called to me to help, and said every man who would not help should die, as they pressed every one. Jeremiah Topp was beating the machine with an iron bar; Targett was beating it with a stick; and Scott was beating it too. Martin and Obourne had an axe between them. They used it by turns in beating the machine.

Cross-examined by Mr. Williams. I told different people of it, when I went home. I know Mr. Selfe. He lives 2½ miles from me. I did not go to him, and tell him of it. I told Mr. King, my master, of it, and told him the names of the prisoners. I never saw a paper offering a reward for the apprehension of the persons who had broken the machine. I saw Charles Martin at the barn, at work breaking the machine, as well as Scott and Obourne. Scott, I think, was the first man who used the axe. I was a witness once against men for sheep-stealing; I swore positively to them; but they were acquitted.

The prisoners all said they were not there.

Mr. Williams, on the part of Martin, Scott, and Obourne, called James Cheverall. I work at a pottery. I recollect the mob going to Mr. Selfe's on the 25th November. I heard a horn blown. I knew Charles Martin. I was with him when he first joined the mob, together with Scott and Obourne. The mob forced us to go with them, by pulling me with them. Scott, Martin, and Obourne had nothing in their hands. We first went to Mr. Selfe's. Martin, Scott and Obourne were in a lot, about a quarter of a mile from the mob.

Scott and Obourne had a small walking-stick in their hands, but Martin had nothing. I was on the Down till the mob left the barn. Martin, Obourne and Scott did not go near the barn all the time. They have always been steady, industrious men. They have worked for one master for the last five years.

Cross-examined by Mr. Sergeant Wilde. I have known them ten years, and have lived within a quarter of a mile of them all that time. I have worked in the potteries five years for Mr. Dally, at Rudge. The mob compelled us to go. Although we were a quarter of a mile from the mob, we did not think of running away. The mob afterwards went to a public-house, and had something to eat. We four had something to eat also. We afterwards went on to Pythouse, where a machine was broken. We were pressed between seven and eight in the morning, and did not leave the mob till three in the afternoon. I live by myself. I am 20 years old. I have slept in the stable at Mr. Dally's for more than a twelvemonth, and have my victuals in his house. I do not know that the prisoners were ever in prison before.

Thomas Bishop. I am a baker and sheriff's officer. I know Michael Bradley. I would not believe him upon his oath.

Cross-examined. I have known him up and down for five years. When a man will take parties up for sheep-stealing, and afterwards go to their friends, and offer not to appear against them, if they would give him £10, to buy him a horse and cart, I would not believe such a man on his oath. I heard this offer made in a public-house. A person by the name of Taxwell was present. I have another reason for not believing him. When I heard this, I went and gave this evidence for the persons who had been accused of sheep-stealing, and the prosecutor then said he would not believe Bradley on his oath, notwithstanding he prosecuted the men for stealing the sheep, and desired a bill might be preferred against him for perjury. I am a bound-bailiff to the Sheriff.

Bradley recalled. Bishop was the man who made me the offer of £10. I had received a note, which I showed the Magistrates, and they recommended me to go to the public-house. I would not believe Bishop on his oath.

Mr. Dowding proved that Charles Martin and Obourne had been convicted, in 1826, of a felony, and imprisoned, one for six, and the other for two months.

Mr. Justice Alderson summed up, and the jury acquitted the prisoners.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal, Monday 10 January 1831