

Traitor on Trial

Mr Baron Hullock, Judge

The charges against Jonathan were of arson* and felony* of stealing.

The question for you the Jury are:

- Did Jonathan Martin set fire to York Minster?
- Was he capable of knowing right from wrong?

Once you have made your decision, then there are four possible sentences available to you.

- Setting the prisoner free
- Prison
- Sentenced to death
- Locked up in a mental health institution

Please think about this very carefully because Jonathan's fate is in your hands.

*arson – to deliberately set fire to property

*felony – a serious crime that could result in property being confiscated or capital punishment

Key Witnesses for the Trial

1. Jonathan Martin
2. Robert Swinbank
3. Job Knowles
4. Mr Newman, Yorkshire Fire Officer
5. Robert Anderson – for the defence
6. Paul Glenton – a Doctor for the defence
7. Mr Alderson – for the prosecution
8. Mrs Lawn – for the prosecution

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Jonathan Martin

The reason that I set fire to the Cathedral was on account of a dream. I dreamed that a cloud came down on the Cathedral ... and I thought it was the hand of God pointing out that I was to set fire to the Cathedral.

I took the hangings from the throne, or cathedra, or whatever you call it and tore down the curtains. I took these things with me so that no one should be blamed wrongfully.

I was quite happy and sometimes praised God because he had strengthened me to do so good a work!

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Robert Swinbank

My name is Robert Swinbank and I am one of the choristers, I sing in the choir at the Minster. Every morning I have to go and practise at the Minster early. On the 2nd of February I went, as usual just before seven o'clock in the morning. The doors weren't open (as usual!) and so I started sliding on a piece of ice in the Minster Yard because I was bored! Anyway, when I was sliding, I fell on my back and it was then that I saw smoke coming from the roof of the Minster! I scrambled to my feet and rushed to find old Job Knowles. He's the sexton with all the keys. He came with me and opened the door to the Minster and that is where they found it was all on fire!

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Job Knowles, the Sexton* at the Minster

I was the last man in the Minster on Sunday, 1st of February, as I then believed. The bells had been rung and I let the ringers out between six and seven o'clock. Looking at the prisoner, I can say that I know that man and have seen him about the Minster several times. The last time I saw him was on Sunday afternoon, the 1st of February. He was walking in the South Transept before the service.

* The Sexton took care of the cathedral building, he had many jobs including keeping all the keys and ringing the prayer bell.

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Mr Newman, Yorkshire Fire Officer

At ten minutes past nine, a portion of the burning roof fell in with a tremendous crash. For an instant the whole area was illuminated and the next moment a volume of smoke and ashes was sent forth which involved for a short time, everything in darkness and obscurity. From that time till half-past ten, portions of the roof kept falling in, till, from the lantern tower to the east window, the blue vault of heaven was the only canopy. The molten lead from the roof during this period poured down in torrents.

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Robert Anderson – for the defence

- Jonathan thought God told him to set the Minster on fire.
- He said that God gave him the velvet and tassels that he took from the Minster.
- Many witnesses stated that he was insane*, not of right mind.
- At the time Jonathan Martin was not able to tell right from wrong.

*Today we would use the term 'mentally ill' rather than 'insane'.

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Paul Glenton – a Doctor for the defence

I am a surgeon at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I have experience with insane* patients. I saw Jonathan Martin two and a half years as a patient and always looked upon him as a man of unsound mind, from first to last. I should call it delusion. Points of religion and the subject of the clergy, were those upon which he was of unsound mind. I have not the smallest doubt that on these subjects, he is incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong.

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Mr Alderson – for the prosecution

- There is clear evidence he deliberately set the Minster on fire.
- Jonathan is not sorry for his actions.
- At the time he set the Minster on fire he understood right from wrong.
- Many people gave statements to say he was not insane* and was able to think clearly and act sensibly.

*Today we would use the term 'mentally ill' rather than 'insane'.

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Mrs Lawn – for the prosecution

“I remember Jonathan Martin. He behaved very well during the time he was at my house. I thought him a very sound man, he had no appearance of insanity. He employed himself in selling the pamphlets of his life; and when in my house in reading the Bible and singing hymns. I heard him pray once”.