

Jonathan Martin

Early Life

Jonathan Martin was born in 1782 in Hexham. He had three brothers and one sister although his sister was killed as a child. Jonathan had a speech disability and didn't talk until he was around 6 years old. He didn't go to school, but he liked to draw and paint. He taught himself to read and write but never learnt to spell correctly!

His mother taught him from a young age that if he sinned or lied, God would punish him. When bad things happened he saw it as punishment from God. He also had dreams of Hell and God's Judgement.



In the Navy

In 1804 aged 22, Jonathan was press ganged (forced) into the Navy on a ship bound for the Napoleonic wars. He tried to leave his ship several times unsuccessfully. He saw some traumatic incidents on board and according to his 'Life' (a leaflet he wrote about his adventures), he finally escaped 6 years later with the help of some of his shipmates.

His Religious Views

Jonathan often worried that he wasn't a good Christian and that his sins weren't forgiven. He didn't like the set prayers and readings in the Church of England and so he started going to a Methodist Church where the services were less formal. Jonathan was later expelled, however, because he was too outspoken and critical of the Church leaders. He went to various churches in the area and he sometimes hid in the pulpit and jumped up to complain about what was wrong with the service and the priests. He would often get thrown out of the church!

His Autobiography

Jonathan moved to Darlington and wrote (or dictated) a 56-page leaflet of his life called 'The Life of Jonathan Martin, of Darlington, Tanner, Written by himself'. He spent time travelling around the North East, selling over 14,000 copies of his 'Life' and preaching outside because he had been banned from entering churches.

Warning Signs

In December 1828 Jonathan moved to York and wrote a series of 5 warnings to the clergy of York signed 'Jonthan Martin, Your sincere friend'. One of these was placed on the Quire Screen gates in the Minster. He thought God was going to punish the priests because they were greedy and unspiritual.

The idea of the fire

One night Jonathan had a dream of smoke coming from the top of the Minster. He woke up and thought God was telling him to set the Minster on fire as a warning to the clergy for going to plays, balls, playing cards and drinking wine.

