

# TRAITOR ON TRIAL

*Who was Jonathan Martin and why did he set the Minster on fire?*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

This session can be adapted for classes from KS2 to KS4.

History Curriculum Links	RE/PSHE/Citizenship Links	English Links
<p><b>KS2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A study of an aspect of history or a site dating from a period beyond 1066 that is significant in the locality.</li> </ul> <p><b>KS3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source analysis</li> <li>Understanding cause and consequence</li> </ul>	<p><b>KS2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The spiritual significance of York Minster. Sights, sounds, practices and beliefs.</li> <li>Understanding some causes and effects of crime</li> <li>Understanding the civil system from a historical perspective</li> <li>Awareness of mental health issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>KS2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopting, creating and sustaining a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role.</li> <li>Understand and use the conventions for discussion and debate.</li> </ul>

### Aims

To enter the world of Jonathan Martin. Who was he? Why did he set fire to the Minster? What did he take with him from the scene of the crime and what did the witnesses say about his character?

The workshop will start with a general tour of the Minster where they will be told the story of the 1829 fire and Jonathan Martin when they are in the Quire.

The workshop will then focus on the 1829 fire. Pupils will study some sources and evidence to decide what should happen to this complicated and intriguing character. Pupils will then take part in a mock trial to decide Jonathan Martin's fate using character prompt cards. The class will act as a jury to decide whether Jonathan Martin was of sound mind and knew what was right and wrong. If he understood right from wrong at the time of the crime, he should have been declared guilty and the punishment at the time for arson would be execution. If he didn't understand right from wrong then he should be declared not guilty and pupils should then consider what should have happened to him in this case.



The workshop will end with a discussion about the verdict in the historical trial and this can lead into further discussion about the impact of mental health both in the historical case and how it would be treated today.

## Background information

Jonathan Martin was an intriguing character. Prior to setting the Minster on fire, he had a traumatic childhood before being press-ganged into the Navy. He was obsessed with the idea that God was judging him and would punish him. He became a Methodist, partly as he disliked formal church liturgy. He thought you didn't need a prayer book or a priest to talk to God. He also thought the Minster clergy were self-indulgent and unspiritual. Jonathan left notes around the Minster telling the clergy that God would judge them and calling them 'blind hypocrites' and 'Vipers from Hell'. Unfortunately, these notes weren't seen by senior Minster staff.

Jonathan had a dream where he saw smoke coming from the Minster and he thought God was telling him to set it on fire. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1829 he came to the Minster and hid behind a monument. After Evensong he entered the Quire, piled up the prayer books and kneelers and set the Quire on fire. It wasn't until the following morning that the fire was discovered by a choir boy coming to the Minster for an early choir practice. The whole of the Quire was destroyed in the fire which was eventually extinguished the following day. Jonathan Martin was caught and put on trial. The trial was not about whether he was guilty, as he happily admitted he had set the Minster on fire. It focused instead on whether he understood right from wrong at that time. The jury eventually found him guilty, but 'insane' which the judge said meant he was in fact 'not guilty' because he hadn't understood that what he was doing was wrong. Jonathan Martin was sent to Bedlam in London and was there until his death around 8 years later.

Interestingly, Jonathan's younger brother John who helped finance his defence, was a famous artist. His work can be seen in the Tate Britain and the local York gallery. He is known for painting huge apocalyptic scenes of fire and destruction and he also suffered from mental health problems later in his life.

## Question prompts to help pupils engage with the session.

- What were the factors that led to Jonathan setting the Minster on fire?
- Which of these factors do you think had the greatest impact?
- Why do you think Jonathan disliked the formal, liturgical services?
- Why was Jonathan happy to burn a place of worship down?
- Why do you think Jonathan thought God was telling him to do something illegal?
- Why don't we use the term 'insane' today when talking about mental health? What word might we use instead?
- What do you think should have been the outcome of the trial?
- Should Jonathan have been punished?



## Suggested follow up Activities

- Create a piece of artwork that is inspired by the fires at the York Minster.
- Create a wanted poster for Jonathan Martin.
- Write a diary extract from Jonathan Martin's perspective either just before or just after he set the Minster on fire.
- Write a letter to Jonathan Martin in prison asking him why he set the Minster on fire.
- Design a new Quire for York Minster following the 1829 fire.
- Research John Martin, Jonathan Martin's younger brother who was a well known artist.
- Research a mental health charity and design an advertising campaign to raise awareness of mental health issues.
- Write an expert opinion to be presented to the Judge from a Mental Health expert about Jonathan Martin.
- Research the fire at Notre Dame and compare this to the York fires.
- Design a stained-glass panel to commemorate the 1829 fire.
- Research the possible sentences for arson today.
- Research the 1984 fire at York Minster and compare to the 1829 event.

## Outcomes

Please feel free to email [learning@yorkminster.org](mailto:learning@yorkminster.org) with examples of creative work that are inspired by this resource.

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