

THE LATE CASE OF STACK FIRING AT MIRFIELD.

COMMITTAL OF THE ACCUSED FOR TRIAL.

On Saturday last, Martha Jane Gledhill, milliner, of Mirfield, aged 26, was brought up on remand before Mr. Charles Wheatley, at the Dewsbury Court-house, charged with having set fire to a wheat stack belonging to Mr. Richard Hurst, a resident in Easthorpe-lane, in the former township. Mr. J. Ibberson appeared for the prosecution, and Mr. Ferns, of Leeds, for the defence. The examination lasted for nearly eight hours, and in the course of it the following evidence was taken:—

Mr. Richard Hurst said he was the owner of a stackyard situated behind his house. On the morning of the 10th ult. all the stacks were safe, but the same evening one was destroyed by fire. He was the owner of some kilns on the canal side at Mirfield, and the prisoner's mother had property adjoining. He claimed a right of road over her land to his kilns, and on the 10th, acting under legal advice, he set some men to dig up some posts Mrs. Gledhill had had put down to prevent him and his men passing. At half-past two he saw the men digging about the posts, and in about two hours afterwards he gave them certain instructions, and a horse was yoked to one to pull it up. Prisoner came up, and said to him "If I had a pistol I'd shoot you," or "I'll shoot you," and afterwards she said "I'll have my revenge." The post was pulled up, and some time after information was brought to him that a wheat stack in his stack-yard was on fire. He went home and found it to be one which might easily have been set on fire by a person from the road. It was surrounded by loose straw.—Cross-examined: The posts might have been down twenty years. It was about twenty years since he bought the property near the canal. Mr. Gledhill bought another portion. The post had not long been connected with a chain. He did not recollect the prisoner saying "I'll fetch law of you" that afternoon, but he heard her mother and sister say so. He believed he first heard of the fire a little after five o'clock. A mistal or shippon stands between his house and the stack-yard, and prevented a view from one to the other.

Mrs. John Walker, of Knowle, Mirfield, said her husband worked for Mr. Hurst. On the 10th ult. about a quarter to five o'clock in the afternoon, she passed through the stack yard as she was taking her husband's tea, and all then appeared quite safe, but after staying in the stable close at hand for about a quarter of an hour, she was attracted by hearing a crackling noise, and on going out saw a stack—one near the gate and the side of the lane—on fire. It was burning on that side nearest the lane. She went to the house and raised an alarm. Cross-examined—The stack might have been on fire as she passed through the yard.

Mrs. Barker, widow, Mirfield, said that on the 10th ult. she was nursing one of Mrs. Gledhill's neighbours. About half-past four, she heard a noise outside as of persons quarrelling, and on going to the door she saw the prisoner and other persons standing by near where Mr. Hurst was having some posts pulled up, and heard her say to him, "I'll have my revenge before the day is out." The prisoner went in the direction of her own house, and in about an hour and a half afterwards witness heard of the stack being in flames.—Cross-examined: A crowd of ten or twelve people were present, and some talking, but she could not tell what they said. She did not hear the prisoner say anything about law, shooting, killing, cutting, or stabbing.

Albert Marsland, aged 14, the son of a person residing near the prisoner, said that when Mr. Hurst's men were digging up the posts he saw the prisoner near them, and heard her say she would shoot Mr. Hurst, would kill him, and would go home, sharpen a knife, and either stick Mr. Hurst or his horses. She also said that she would be taken up for manslaughter, and only get one month. Mr. Hurst was not present then, but at half-past four he was, and the prisoner said, "I will go down home, put my bonnet on, and fetch him some law." She went, and witness saw that when she returned she was wearing a black hat, shawl, and dress. The witness then went on to say that he watched a woman, whom he believed was the prisoner, go up Easthorpe-lane, and that he saw her in custody at the Black Bull Inn, the same night. The witness was cross-examined at great length by Mr. Ferns, but that gentleman failed to shake his testimony.

Louisa Thornton, aged ten years, deposed that on the 10th ult., about a quarter to five o'clock, she and Alice Jubb passed the stack yard on their return from school, and apparently all was then safe. She saw the prisoner go through a stile which opened on two paths, one of which led past Mr. Hurst's house.

Alice Jubb, another little girl, supported her companion's statement.

Mrs. Barker, of Towngate, Mirfield, said she met the prisoner on the evening of the 10th ult., on a path near a sunk fence, not very far from Mr. Hurst's, and spoke to her. Soon afterwards the church clock struck five. On Thursday night week the prisoner saw her at Mirfield railway station, and said that if witness swore to her it would be "Ware waps to her." Cross-examined.—The day after the fire she was waited on by other policemen, and said to them that she could not swear to the woman she saw; she had since repeated that statement, but now was sure the prisoner was the person. Witness did not know the prisoner before. In the police-office at Dewsbury a constable had said to her, pointing to the prisoner, "Is that the woman?" and witness replied that she could not tell.

Richard Armitage said that at 4.10 p.m. on the day in question he saw Mrs. Gledhill go into her own house from the posts, and in five minutes afterwards noticed her leave and go away towards Easthorpe-lane. At 4.55 he saw her on a canal bridge, coming from the direction of the railway station. It took witness ten minutes to walk from Gledhill's to Beecock's (a place where the prisoner had been seen, Hurst's and back. Cross-examined.—He was present when the posts were being pulled up, and he neither saw the boy Marsland nor Mrs. Barker.

Ade Bell, a granddaughter of the previous witness, and who was with her on the night in question, supported her statement.

Polic-Sergeant Crockett deposed that on the night of the 10th ult. he apprehended the prisoner, and took her to the Black Bull Inn, Mirfield, where she was seen by the Superintendent. The witness also gave evidence showing what measurements had been taken of the district from points to points where the prisoner had been seen on the night in question, or where she was supposed to have been.

This closed the case for the prosecution, and Mr. FERN'S made an address on behalf of his client, and then called the following witnesses:—

William Whactwright said that at a quarter to five o'clock on the 10th ult. he saw a stack on fire in Mr. Hurst's farm-yard, and on running up to it he saw from its appearance that it must have been burning some time. His statement was taken down by the police at the Black Bull Inn.—Cross-examined—His watch was shown and found to be six minutes later than the clock of Mirfield church. He had said that the fire was in so small a compass when he arrived that it might have been put out with a few buckets of water. He did not notice any loose straw at the bottom of the stack.

Mrs. Ann Pearnley said she saw the prisoner close to the station on the night in question at 4.50 railway time, and spoke to her. The prisoner did not seem agitated.

Christiana Birkhead and *William Pearnley* give evidence in support of an alibi.

No other witnesses were called.

The Magistrate said that he felt it his duty to commit the prisoner for trial at the assizes, but would admit her to bail on entering into her own recognizances for £100, and finding one surety to the same amount. A surety was at once forthcoming, and the prisoner was then liberated.