



Swing Riots

Trial of John Ford, Aged 17

Wilts Special Commission, Salisbury – Monday.

This morning Mr. Baron Vaughan, Mr. Justice Parke, Mr. Justice Alderson, the Marquess of Lansdown, the Earl of Radnor, and T. G. B. Estcourt, Esq., took their seats on the Bench at nine o'clock.

John Ford, aged 17, was indicted for riotously assembling with others, and destroying carding and other machines used in the manufacture of woollen cloth, and also with beginning to destroy them, being the property of William Nash.

The Attorney-General, instating the case to the Jury, observed, that it was a capital offence, and it was important to know that every subject had a right to resist such assemblies with any force, and if death ensued by either of the rioters falling, such death was justifiable; but if any parties resisting them should meet with death, that would amount to the crime of murder, and all who joined in such assemblies would be equally responsible with those who might lead them on.

Samuel Dowding, examined by Mr. Serjeant Wilde: He was at Quidhampton Mill, which is a factory for the manufacture of woollen cloth, on the 24th of November, when, between twelve and one o'clock, about 300 or 400 persons came there. Witness saw the prisoner, who came to the factory with a stick in his hand and began to break the windows, and when the mob got into the factory, the prisoner broke a machine, called a tucker. Witness saw him come out of the factory two or three times with parts of the machinery, which he threw into the mill-pond; he was employed about half an hour. After the mob left, witness found the machinery broken to pieces, which had been in good order before the mob came; most of the mob had sticks in their hands, and they told witness if he did not stand aside, they would fling him into the pond.

Josiah Pitt, Harriet Pitt, and William Nash, fully corroborated this evidence.

The prisoner, who made no defence, was found Guilty. He was then ordered up for judgement, and addressed by Mr Justice Parke. The Learned Judge said, that although sentence of death would be recorded against him, his case would be recommended to the mercy of his Majesty, and the sentence, he might expect, would be commuted to transportation for life. This was, however, only from the tenderness

of his years, as his culpability was enhanced from the circumstances of his having been employed on the very machine he had destroyed.

The prisoner, who did not look more than 14 or 15 years old, was removed from the dock apparently much affected.

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