

## Information on Robert Hubert

### Summary

Robert Hubert (c.1640-1666) was a French Protestant from Normandy. He was arrested at Romford after the Great Fire on suspicion of attempting to flee the country. He confessed to starting the fire, claiming to be one of 23 conspirators. He said he'd gone to Sweden with a Stephen Peidloe and returned to London in August. Stephen Piedloe had apparently taken him to Pudding Lane on 2 September and he had put a fire ball through the window of Thomas Farriner's bakery. His evidence was very contradictory, but Farriner signed the evidence as true, despite the fact that Farriner himself denied there was a window in that part of the house or that the fire had started where Hubert claimed. However, Hubert identified the bakery in the ruins and described its appearance. Though the court found the evidence to be unsatisfactory and believed Hubert to be suffering from mental problems, due to public pressure he was convicted and hung at Tyburn on 27 October. Later, the Swedish captain of the ship which had brought Hubert to London testified they hadn't landed until two days after the fire started. In January 1667 the King's Council declared the fire was an accident.

### Details

Robert Hubert was a French Protestant born in Rouen, Normandy in 1640 to a watchmaker. He was arrested in Romford, Essex shortly after the Great Fire on suspicion of trying to flee the country. When questioned he confessed that he had set fire to Thomas Farriner's shop and thus had started the Great Fire. He claimed that he was part of a group of 23 conspirators in Paris who in 1665 planned to set fire to London. The plague delayed their plans and in the summer of 1666 he, Stephen Peidloe (or Pie-de-Low) and a third man went to Sweden and then returned to London at the end of August.

He said that on the night of 2 September 1666 he and Peidloe had gone to Pudding Lane where he lit a ball of gunpowder, brimstone and other flammable material at the end of a pole, and then pushed it through a window in Thomas Farriner's house. Peidloe ran off but Hubert stayed to make sure the building was on fire before he too fled. However his story conflicted with other accounts he gave. Farriner and his

family also said that there was no window where Hubert claimed and the fire had not started in that part of the building. No trace of Peidloe was ever found. The only evidence, other than Hubert's confession, was that he could find the site of the house among the ruins and could describe the house as it had been.

Hubert was tried at the Old Bailey October Sessions. The details of his story changed again and he added that his reward for starting the fire was just five pistols. The jury regarded Hubert as deranged and even the Lord Chief Justice told King Charles II that he did not believe a word of Hubert's confession. However, Hubert was a convenient scapegoat and was hanged at Tyburn on 27 October 1666. The Venetian ambassador reported that, as Hubert's body was taken down to be given to the Barber-Surgeons, the angry crowd tore his body to pieces. After the execution the captain of the ship which had brought him from Sweden to London was questioned and reported that Hubert had not gone ashore in London until two days after the fire had started. Three months later a Parliamentary investigation determined that the fire had indeed been an accident.

Lord Clarendon wrote of Robert Hubert: 'since he was only accused upon his own confession; yet neither the judges nor any present at the trial did believe him guilty, but that he was a poor distracted wretch, weary of his life, and chose to part with it this way'.