

Re-typed report of the "Jones v Watts Libel Case" that took place on the 22nd November 1831, as reported in 'The Age' newspaper on the 27th November 1831

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS. - TUESDAY, Nov. 22.

Mr. Justice Park sat this day at Nisi Prius, in the Committee-room (No.12) of the House of Commons.

JONES v. WATTS LIBEL.

Mr. Serjeant Bumpus stated that this was an action against the defendant for a malicious libel, published by him in a Sunday Newspaper of the dates of April 10, 17, 24 and May 1, and the nature of the libel was as follows:- The plaintiff, Mr. Samuel Jones, was an experimental chemist living in the Strand, and the defendant was in the same profession. Mr. Jones had, some time ago, invented a match to produce an instantaneous light in lieu of the use of sulphuric acid, or the vulgar and old woman's method of a tinder-box - and he had given his ingenious invention the name "Promethean," and which, although an alarming name, there was nothing injurious in its construction. The plaintiff had always received a most extensive call for his new method of procuring a light, and his export trade was also very great, and the "Promethean" became in general use. Subsequently the plaintiff invented another description of match, which he designated with the frightful name of the "Lucifer," but which was equally harmless. For the "Prometheans" he had secured himself from his invention being pirated by procuring letters patent, but for the "Lucifer" he had not so secured his right as the patentee. The consequence was, that in about a year afterwards, when the invention of the plaintiff had been lectured upon at the London and Royal Institutions, the defendant made an exact imitation of the "Lucifer Match," and represented himself to be the sole inventor, in various advertisements inserted by him in a Sunday newspaper of the above dates. Mr. Jones, in another advertisement, contradicted the right taken by Mr. Watts to the invention, which drew forth an answer from the defendant, and which was published in the same paper, still declaring himself to be the inventor, and stating "that he would no more imitate Jones's 'Lucifer,' than Sir Thomas Lawrence would, when he was yet alive, have resorted to the daubers in his profession to exalt his fame [loud laughter]." In the same advertisement the libel now complained of was contained, viz :- "That Jones's 'Prometheans' were dangerous, and would not stand climate. "These statements had materially tended to injure the sale of the "Prometheans," and were a malicious libel to the injury of the plaintiff. The Learned Serjeant then called Mr. Cooper and Mr. Everett, experimental chemists, and Mr. Hennell, the chemical operator of Apothecaries' Hall, all of whom he had tried experiments upon the Prometheans, and declared that they would not ignite under 415 deg. F. (nearly double the heat of boiling water), four times hotter than any climate in the world. Mr. C.F. Oppenheim, Purser of the Georgiana East Indiaman, proved that he had never found them ignite. Several other scientific witnesses were called, who proved they never considered Jones's Prometheans dangerous. - Mr. Pollock having addressed the Jury for the defendant, and Mr. Serjeant Bumpus having replied, Mr. Justice Park summed up. The jury instantly found a verdict for the plaintiff, damages to the full amount claimed, and costs.