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OXFORD 

Campaigner admits previous direct action

8:42pm Tuesday 4th November 2008

By Ellie Simmonds »

A campaigner accused of plotting attacks on Oxford University buildings today said he understood why people took direct action to support animal rights.

But Mel Broughton, who denies conspiracy to commit arson, possession of an article with intent to destroy or damage property and keeping an explosive substance with intent, told Oxford Crown Court he did not encourage such action.

The 48-year-old landscape gardener said: "I can understand why people take direct action for animals. As someone who once felt like that, and did that, it would be hypocritical for me to say I do not understand those motivations — but that is not to say I encourage it."

Oxford Crown Court heard Broughton had hidden 14 packets of sparklers, a battery connector, a university security pass and a plan of the laboratory in his flat in Semilong Road, Northampton.

Broughton told the court he was involved in organising legal demonstrations against Oxford University's animal laboratory in South Parks Road, which is still under construction, and had hidden the items because he was concerned they would be misinterpreted by the police.

He said: "I was very mindful of the amount of pressure I was under as a high-profile spokesman of the campaign. I fully accept it was not the most rational thing to do."

The jury also heard Broughton had hand-written lists detailing the registration numbers of vehicles he had seen entering and leaving the site, which he said was for legal demonstrations, as well as the home address of Oxford neurosurgeon Tipu Aziz, who has publicly defended the use of primates in medical research.

Broughton said he had been given Prof Aziz's address by a campaigner, but did not intend to use it for illegal purposes.

Earlier in the week-long trial, the jury heard that two separate quantities of cellular material, alleged to be from Broughton, were found on unexploded bombs beneath a portable building at Templeton College in Kennington in February last year — one on a match used as part of a fuse and the other on a bottle top.

Broughton is also accused of carrying out an arson at Queen's College sports pavilion, off Abingdon Road, Oxford, in November 2006, which caused £14,000 of damage.

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In his closing speech, John Price, prosecuting, told the jury not to look at the forensic evidence in isolation, but to consider all the evidence in combination.

He said: "If the defendant was not involved in planning and/or carrying out one of these attacks, if that is not his DNA, or if it got there by some indirect route, then all one can say is that he must be one of the unluckiest men alive."

David Bentley, defending, told the jury not to rely on the forensic evidence.

He said: "The science in this case is plainly contentious."

The jury is expected to begin considering its verdict today.

The case continues.

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