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Animal rights fire-bomber jailed

An animal rights campaigner who fire-bombed Oxford University has been jailed for 10 years after being found guilty of conspiracy to commit arson.

Mel Broughton, 48, of Semilong Road in Northampton, targeted Queen's and Templeton colleges over plans to build an animal research laboratory.



Mel Broughton appeared at Oxford Crown Court

Broughton was arrested by police investigating the fire at the Queen's College sports pavilion in 2006.

He was told he must serve five years before being eligible for release.

It was the second trial Broughton had faced over the allegations. A jury was discharged in November 2008 after failing to reach a verdict.

'Sinister role'

Judge Patrick Eccles QC said Broughton was part of a "ruthless conspiracy" which struck fear into those connected with the building of the laboratory.

Speaking outside the court, prosecution lawyer Paul Harrison said Broughton was not a peaceful protestor, as he had claimed, but someone who took an active part in a fire-bombing campaign.

"We produced evidence in court to show that he played a far more pro-active and sinister role by taking part in a fire bombing campaign," he said.

A spokesperson for the University of Oxford said the court's verdict spoke for itself.

They said: "The university has always accepted the rights of protestors to voice their objections within the law.

"However, we will continue to work with all relevant authorities to protect staff and students from criminal activity of any kind."

Two improvised devices, constructed with fuel and a fuse made from sparklers, exploded at the sports pavilion in November 2006, causing almost £14,000 worth of damage.

Two similar bombs were planted underneath a portable building at Templeton College in February 2007 but failed to go off.

The court was told that Broughton was a single man who had "effectively dedicated his adult life to the cause of animal rights".

DNA sample

He was the leading figure of animal rights group Speak, which was set up in 2004 in protest at plans to build an animal testing research laboratory at Oxford.



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Speaking outside the court, a spokeswoman for the group said it would continue campaigning against animal research at the university.

"We are more determined than ever to continue the campaign against Oxford University's abuse of animals," she said.

The jury was told he had previously been convicted of conspiracy to cause an explosion likely to endanger life after police stopped a car he was travelling in and found a bomb in the boot in 1998.

It also heard a DNA sample found on a matchstick used as part of the fuse in one of the failed Templeton devices was found to be Broughton's.

When police arrested him at his home in December 2007, they discovered 14 packets of sparklers in an unused water tank in his bathroom.

They also found, underneath his carpet, a university employee's security pass and a notebook containing a list of those identified as targets for "direct action".



Broughton targeted Queen's College in 2006

The court heard the improvised devices were constructed of water bottles containing petrol and a "delayed-action fuse" made of ordinary sparklers.

A sequence of these sparklers were bound together with thread to bring into contact their active parts so, when ignited, it gave those planting the bombs time to escape.

Prosecutor Neil Moore had told the jury that acts of intimidation and violence were directed towards any companies who were even remotely connected to the project.

He also said the attacks on the Queen's College sports pavilion and the attempted attack on Templeton were both part of a "wider campaign" intended to bring to an end the construction of the laboratory in Oxford.

Despite the protests, the £20m Biomedical Sciences Building took its first delivery of mice in November last year.

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