

Suspended sentence for 'witch' who put laburnum seeds in food



The sailing family: Rosie and Colin Swale with their children

Rosie Swale is guilty of poisoning



SWALE: 'I do not regret what I have done'

ROSIE SWALE, round-the-world sailor and self-confessed witch, was found guilty last night of poisoning the former lover of her sex-change friend Tracey Stamp.

But the jury were unable to reach a verdict on the poison charge against Stamp, after retiring for nearly six hours. She will now face a re-trial, unless the charge is withdrawn.

The two women were both found guilty of attempting to pervert the course of justice and perjury at the end of the six-day trial at Winchester Crown Court, Hampshire.

Swale, 31, was given a nine-month prison sentence, suspended for 12 months, on the poison charge. Both women were given 12-month conditional discharges for the other offences.

During the trial, the court had been told of brews of laburnum seeds boiled to a background of chanting of 'hubble-bubble, toil and trouble'. The seeds, it is alleged, were then given to Mr Vincent via a black pepper grinder, causing him severe stomach pains.

The other charges related to a wreath supposed to have been sent in Mr Vincent's name to Stamp while the two women were living together at a cottage, at Blyth Wood, near Guildford, Surrey.

'Less conventional'

At the time, there was an injunction to stop Mr Vincent molesting Stamp, 45. But, the court was told, the wreath was sent by the two women who then made statements to the High Court alleging Vincent had sent the wreath with a note reading: 'To my dear wife, from Keith.'

The two women, of Pennfordd, Haverfordwest, Dyfed, South Wales, had denied the charges. In his summing up, the judge, Mr Justice Michael Davies, had told the jury: 'Both the defendants present rather different pictures from the vast majority we see in the courts. They are less conventional, or more colourful.'

'But I hardly need say there is no law against being unconventional or no law against being colourful. In a free country, people are entitled to behave as they wish as long as they don't break the criminal or civil law.'

After the jury failed to reach its verdict on Stamp, the judge said: 'I must most earnestly request the Press to be responsible and remember there is still a woman facing trial on this first charge.'

Mr Anthony Palmer, QC, for Stamp, then said: 'It is quite plain that whatever happened after these two people left, Keith Vincent was

By JON RYAN

moving heaven and earth to get this lady back. What was done, was done at a time when she was really ill.'

Mr Patrick Back, QC, for Swale, said his client wished to make a statement to the court, but the judge warned: 'I really think the less you say at this stage, the better.'

But Mrs Swale said that she was going to ignore the judge's advice and then made a statement. After hearing it, the judge warned that if any part of it was published, it would be treated as a 'grave matter'.

Mr Back said: 'She has always wished to take the blame. She has always put herself to the front. At least I can say that it is a courageous and generous woman that stands before you. She now has her wish.'

Sentencing the women, the judge said that offences involving the course of justice and perjury 'may be of the most grave kind', but in this case, he said, it was inexpedient to pass heavy sentences.

He told Swale: 'Suffice it to say that administering poison must always be regarded as a serious offence. It is very difficult, if not impossible in my view, to say it does not warrant a prison sentence. But if ever there was a case in all the circumstances that warranted the suspension of that sentence, this is one.'

'Not ashamed'

As she left the court, the caped Swale said: 'This trial has been more frightening than sailing round Cape Horn. I would rather have gone to jail for nine months than have Tracey suffer this. She is under great strain and a re-trial could kill her. I do not regret what I have done, and I am not ashamed. It was a just verdict.'

When the two women arrived at the court yesterday, there was an altercation with a group of photog-



STAMP: 'Under great strain'

raphers which resulted in the police being called in.

As the tales of witchcraft, sex-change and poisoning continued during the trial, the court had enjoyed lighter moments, with the 60-year-old judge playing a starring role.

He said that he thought the sending of the wreath was 'more of a hoot', and regaled the court with a school reminiscence of how an unpopular French master was sent a bottle of liquid to improve his sexual prowess by a boy in his form.

And when Swale decided she wanted to dispense with her barrister, but took the judge's advice to keep him, she said: 'I am taking Your Honour's advice because you are a judge, and the first judge I have ever met.'

He replied: 'You are the first round-the-world sailor I have met, so that makes us even.'

Downfall of the round-the-world blonde

WHEN Rosie Swale and her husband Colin set sail around the world with their young daughter Eve in 1971, they swept into a new life.

The voyage brought them fame and fortune. Suddenly they were personalities, the fun-loving, good-looking couple who had escaped from the routine of middle-class life.

But in just a few years, their dream life had changed and the marriage broke up. The glamorous wife, who posed nude for Colin's camera as they sailed their care-

free way around the globe, had achieved an uneivable notoriety.

During this week's trial the glamour of the early 70's seemed an age away.

She met Tracey Stamp in 1977 when the Swales and their children, Eve, 11, and nine-year-old Jimmy—born during their famous Journey—were living in their boat in Southampton. Stamp was sharing a house in Woolston, Southampton, with docker Keith Vincent.

It coincided with the breakdown of the Swales' marriage, and Rosie Swale began staying at the

large Victorian red-brick house. It was during this time that the two women are alleged to have given poison to Mr Vincent.

They moved on to a National Trust cottage at Guildford, Surrey. Stamp, who had a sex-change operation 20 years ago, ended a 12-year 'on and off' relationship with Mr Vincent.

With the publicity that surrounded the accusations of poisoning, they left Guildford and went to the Devon village of Plymtree, to live in the east wing of Heyne House, a 16th century mansion owned by an old friend of

Swales, property developer Michael Shears.

The women called their home 'the manor'. Village rector Rev Rufus Edwards, 72, remembers: 'Mrs Swale avoided me like the plague. I am not frightened by witchcraft, because I know a force much greater.'

Mr Shears wanted to move and put the house on the market. The problem was that the women would not move out. Eventually the property was sold for £140,000, and the two were evicted.

The women went to a remote village farmhouse, also in Devon,

belonging to a couple in their thirties. The wife was expecting their seventh child and the problems they had with Stamp and Swale living there ended with the mother visiting a clergyman.

The couple eventually began eviction proceedings. Before it came to court, the women left.

They went to yet another remote hamlet—Pennfordd, near Haverfordwest, on the side of a Welsh valley—where their home is a dilapidated chapel cottage.

After only weeks the words 'Burn Witch' were daubed in white paint on their cottage.