# Activists plead not guilty after spray-painting Charles Darwin's grave to protest climate change



Two activists from the environmental group Just Stop Oil, Alyson Lee, 66, and Diane Bligh, 77, have pleaded not guilty to charges of criminal damage following an incident in which they spray-painted the grave of Charles Darwin in Westminster Abbey. The event took place on Monday, January 13, and the defendants marked the gravestone with the message “1.5 is dead” using orange paint, a phrase that draws attention to concerns surrounding climate change and the 1.5 degrees Celsius target set in the Paris Agreement.

Both women appeared at Southwark Crown Court in London on Wednesday morning for their plea and trial preparation hearing. Vincent Scully, representing the prosecution, detailed the actions taken by the defendants, stating that they had entered Westminster Abbey wearing Just Stop Oil T-shirts and subsequently painted the message. He added that the clean-up of the damage was estimated to cost between £10 to £15 and required several hours of work from specialists.

Despite Judge Nicholas Rimmer's encouragement for them to seek legal representation, both women opted to represent themselves in court. Bligh, dressed in a green cardigan and blue scarf, stated, “I have considered it and I'm choosing to be self-representing.” Lee echoed this sentiment, wearing an orange cardigan, and affirmed her decision to self-represent.

During the court proceedings, Bligh expressed her belief that they would not receive a fair trial, citing a sense of urgency regarding climate issues. “I need time to think about it, but the way my mind is moving at the moment, I am not a criminal and the damage was proportional to the threat that the whole world is facing,” she said. Lee further articulated their perspective, stating, “I may well be using the defence of the impossibility of having a fair trial on the basis that the judicial system is failing to prosecute the real system.” She highlighted their view that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has neglected serious environmental concerns, leading them to resort to their actions.

The two protesters are scheduled to return to court for their trial on May 5, 2026, with proceedings expected to last approximately three days. Court backlogs indicate that it will be over a year before their case is fully heard.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/01/14/just-stop-oil-protesters-charged-after-charles-darwins-grave-spray-painted> - This article corroborates the incident involving Just Stop Oil activists spray-painting Charles Darwin's grave with the message '1.5 is dead' and provides details about the charges and court proceedings.
* <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/climate-protestors-deface-charles-darwins-grave-2597247> - This article supports the claim that the protest action was related to climate change concerns and the surpassing of the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, as well as the involvement of Alyson Lee and Di Bligh.
* <https://anglican.ink/2025/01/13/climate-activists-vandalize-darwins-gave-in-westminster-abbey> - This article confirms the details of the vandalism, including the time and location, and the message '1.5 is dead' being used to highlight climate change issues.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-64813555> - This BBC article would provide context on the climate change issues referenced by the protesters, specifically the passing of the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/just-stop-oil-protesters-darwin-grave-b2307967.html> - This article likely provides additional details about the incident and the charges faced by the Just Stop Oil activists, including their court appearances.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/13/just-stop-oil-activists-charge-darwin-grave-vandalism> - This article would support the claims regarding the incident's context and the activists' motivations, as well as any legal developments in the case.