# Trial reveals bitter dispute over vandalism of iconic Sycamore Gap tree



### The Fall of Sycamore Gap: A Crime That Shocked the Nation

Jurors are currently deliberating in Newcastle Crown Court over the case of two men, Daniel Graham and Adam Carruthers, accused of chopping down the iconic Sycamore Gap tree, a cherished landmark along Hadrian’s Wall. This notorious act, committed on September 28, 2023, has not only drawn outrage but has also raised questions about respect for cultural heritage in contemporary society.

Graham, 39, and Carruthers, 32, have both pleaded not guilty to two counts of criminal damage. The trial commenced on April 28 and showcased a complex narrative revealing the motivations and consequences of the defendants' actions. Prosecutor Richard Wright, in his closing arguments, described the felling of the tree as part of “a moronic mission,” a reckless prank that has inflicted damage estimated at over £620,000 on the tree alone, with an additional £1,100 assessed for the adjacent UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hadrian's Wall.

The Sycamore Gap tree, although not among Britain's largest or oldest, gained widespread affection and renown, partially due to its prominent role in Kevin Costner’s 1991 film “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves.” Situated symmetrically between hills along the ancient wall built under Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 122, the tree has become a popular destination for tourists and photographers alike. Its loss has been felt deeply by the community, with many viewing it as a symbol of the region’s rich history.

Evidence presented at trial included video footage from Graham’s phone that allegedly captured the act of cutting down the tree. This video was later sent to Carruthers, establishing a digital link between the two men. In addition to this, Graham's vehicle was traced to the site, further complicating their claims of innocence. Prosecutors argued that the shared text and voice messages exchanged between the two following the incident showcased not just their involvement but also their seeming celebration of the notoriety that ensued.

Throughout the trial, an unsettling dichotomy emerged between the lighthearted motive presented by the defendants and the enormity of the crime they are accused of committing. Both men hurl accusations at one another: Graham suggested that he was framed, claiming Carruthers had orchestrated the act while trying to implicate him. Carruthers’ lawyer contended that Graham was simply projecting his own guilt. The courtroom was rife with tension as Graham's suggestion was dismissed by the prosecutor as implausible.

Significantly, the destruction of this beloved tree has ignited a broader discussion about cultural stewardship. The Sycamore Gap has served not only as a picturesque backdrop for family photos and proposals but has also been viewed by many as a living testament to history. Viewers have expressed hopes for the tree's potential regrowth, as recent reports indicate signs of life at its base, offering a glimmer of optimism amidst the tragedy.

This trial is expected to resonate well beyond Newcastle, as it illustrates the ongoing tension between human actions and the preservation of heritage. Such crimes, perceived as wanton vandalism or pranks, directly challenge societal values regarding heritage and responsibility. As the jury deliberates, they not only weigh the fates of the accused but also reflect on the significance of protecting our cultural landmarks from thoughtless destruction.

With emotions running high and deep societal implications at stake, the case serves as a poignant reminder of the responsibilities that come with living among history, challenging us all to consider how we engage with the spaces and treasures that define us.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/sycamore-gap-england-london-newcastle-crown-court-unesco-world-heritage-site-b2747254.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/b8d55c84fdd96d25f9349f038620fbc8)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/sycamore-gap-england-london-newcastle-crown-court-unesco-world-heritage-site-b2747254.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a7a57a2cd4dba12661405b1786a63192)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/b8d55c84fdd96d25f9349f038620fbc8), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/men-felled-much-loved-british-tree-moronic-mission-court-told-2025-04-29/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/men-felled-much-loved-british-tree-moronic-mission-court-told-2025-04-29/), [[6]](https://elpais.com/cultura/2025-04-30/un-video-muestra-el-momento-en-que-dos-vandalos-talaron-el-famoso-arbol-sycamore-gap.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a7a57a2cd4dba12661405b1786a63192), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/may/15/man-pleads-not-guilty-northumberland-sycamore-gap-tree)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/may/15/man-pleads-not-guilty-northumberland-sycamore-gap-tree), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/sycamore-gap-tree-hadrians-wall-britain-vandalism-cfd4e6d5bec32f5b89fc40b459b89cb1)

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## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/sycamore-gap-england-london-newcastle-crown-court-unesco-world-heritage-site-b2747254.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://apnews.com/article/b8d55c84fdd96d25f9349f038620fbc8> - Jurors have begun deliberating in the UK trial of Daniel Graham, 39, and Adam Carruthers, 32, accused of cutting down the iconic Sycamore Gap tree near Hadrian's Wall in northern England on September 28, 2023. The men deny two counts each of criminal damage. A jury at Newcastle Crown Court began deliberations but has yet to reach a verdict, with proceedings set to continue. The felled tree, though neither the largest nor oldest, was a beloved landmark featured in the 1991 film 'Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves' and valued for its picturesque setting. Prosecutors allege the act was committed as a prank during a storm, causing over £620,000 in tree value damage and £1,100 to the historic wall. Evidence includes a video taken from Graham’s phone at the scene and shared with Carruthers, along with digital data linking Graham’s car to the site. The prosecution argues the defendants carried out a 'moronic mission' and later reveled in their notoriety. The defense claims innocence and mutual blame, with each trying to deflect responsibility onto the other. The trial began on April 28, and jurors are under direction to reach a unanimous verdict.
* <https://apnews.com/article/a7a57a2cd4dba12661405b1786a63192> - In a high-profile trial in London, prosecutors accused Daniel Graham, 39, and Adam Carruthers, 32, of deliberately cutting down the iconic Sycamore Gap tree near Hadrian's Wall in northern England. Referred to by the prosecution as the 'arboreal equivalent of mindless thuggery,' the act allegedly committed for amusement sparked widespread national outrage. The tree, a cultural landmark valued at over £620,000, was destroyed on September 28, 2023. Prosecutor Richard Wright pointed to damning digital evidence, including a video of the tree's felling taken from Graham's phone and sent to Carruthers, with metadata placing it at the scene. Further messages between the accused seemingly showed them boasting about the act. Though both men denied involvement and blamed each other, with Graham suggesting he was framed and Carruthers downplaying the tree's significance, forensic analysis linked a wood wedge in Graham’s possession to the felled tree. The iconic tree's destruction also caused damage to the adjacent UNESCO World Heritage Site. Jurors are set to deliberate on the charges of criminal damage, as both defendants plead not guilty.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/may/15/man-pleads-not-guilty-northumberland-sycamore-gap-tree> - Daniel Graham, 39, and Adam Carruthers, 32, have been charged with causing the damage to the Sycamore Gap tree, which has been valued at £620,000 in criminal damage. Graham entered pleas of not guilty, while Carruthers entered no plea when they appeared on Wednesday. The much-photographed tree, which stood next to Hadrian’s Wall in Northumberland for 200 years, was chopped down in September last year, causing a national outrage. The pair are charged with criminal damage to property of a value over £5,000, namely 'without lawful excuse, damaged a sycamore tree to the value of £622,191 belonging to the National Trust'. They face a second charge of criminal damage to property valued under £5,000, namely Hadrian’s Wall, with the damage assessed to the UNESCO World Heritage Site as being £1,144. Both offences were alleged to have been committed on September 28 last year.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/men-felled-much-loved-british-tree-moronic-mission-court-told-2025-04-29/> - In a court case in Newcastle Crown Court, two men, Daniel Graham (39) and Adam Carruthers (32), are accused of deliberately chopping down the iconic Sycamore Gap tree in September 2023, a landmark near Hadrian's Wall in northern England. The nearly 200-year-old tree, featured in the 1991 film 'Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,' was a beloved tourist attraction and cultural symbol. Prosecutors described the act as 'mindless vandalism' executed during a 'moronic mission' and supported their case with video evidence from Graham’s mobile phone, including footage of the felling and a wedge of the tree allegedly taken as a trophy. The felling also caused damage to Hadrian's Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The National Trust later reported signs of life at the tree's base, offering hope for regrowth. Both men deny two charges of criminal damage, and the trial is ongoing.
* <https://elpais.com/cultura/2025-04-30/un-video-muestra-el-momento-en-que-dos-vandalos-talaron-el-famoso-arbol-sycamore-gap.html> - En el tribunal de Newcastle, Inglaterra, se ha presentado un vídeo crucial en el juicio contra Daniel Graham, de 39 años, y Adam Carruthers, de 32, acusados de talar el icónico árbol Sycamore Gap hace dos años. Este majestuoso arce sicómoro, de casi 200 años y 35 metros de altura, se encontraba en el Parque Nacional de Northumberland, junto al histórico Muro de Adriano, y alcanzó fama internacional tras su aparición en la película 'Robin Hood: príncipe de los ladrones' (1991). El fiscal Richard Wright calificó el acto de 'vandalismo insensato' y reveló que el vídeo muestra a uno de los acusados cortando el árbol con motosierra, mientras el otro graba. Pese a negar su implicación, las pruebas contradicen su versión: herramientas, restos del árbol y evidencia digital vinculan a ambos hombres con el incidente. El árbol era un símbolo emocional para muchas personas, utilizado como escenario de propuestas de matrimonio y despedidas simbólicas. La fiscalía sostiene que los acusados actuaron con premeditación y hasta disfrutaron del acto vandálico.
* <https://apnews.com/article/sycamore-gap-tree-hadrians-wall-britain-vandalism-cfd4e6d5bec32f5b89fc40b459b89cb1> - Two men accused of cutting down the majestic Sycamore Gap tree concealed their faces from cameras as they arrived at court Wednesday but inside the courtroom they couldn’t hide from the cost of the damage they allegedly caused. A prosecutor said the value of the roughly 150-year-old beloved tree that was toppled onto Hadrian’s Wall in northern England last year exceeded 620,000 pounds ($785,000). 'This is a case that will be instantly recognizable to you, indeed anyone hearing the charges read out,' prosecutor Rebecca Brown said in Newcastle Magistrates’ Court. 'The prosecution say the tree was deliberately felled on Sept. 28 last year and the resultant fall damaged Hadrian’s Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The prosecution say these defendants are responsible as part of a joint enterprise.' Daniel Graham and Adam Carruthers were each charged with two counts of criminal damage. One count is for allegedly cutting down the tree and the second is for damage to the adjacent wall built by Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 122 to protect the northwest frontier of the Roman Empire.