

OpenVoiceNews U.K.

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

Ex-Farmer Wrongly Blamed for Sycamore Gap Tree Felling

July 13, 2025

— Categories: General News



Hounded by rumours and followed by police, a former farmer has spoken out about the distress he suffered after being wrongly accused of cutting down one of the U.K.'s most treasured trees.

Walter Renwick, a former lumberjack from Northumberland, found himself at the centre of a nationwide storm when the iconic Sycamore Gap tree was felled in September 2023. As news spread, internet sleuths quickly pointed fingers, convinced that Renwick was

responsible. With a forestry background, access to a chainsaw, and a recent fallout with local landowners, it didn't take long before suspicion took hold.

Northumbria Police arrived in force, searching his property, removing a chainsaw, and combing the surrounding land with drones and divers. "It was heartbreaking," Renwick told the *BBC*. "They were so sure it was me. Every time I popped into the shops in Haltwhistle or Hexham, people were whispering, pointing. I even wore a Rod Stewart wig to try to (sic) blend in. It sounds silly, but I didn't know what else to do."

A few months before, Renwick had been evicted from Plankey Mill Farm, land his family had farmed for generations. The Jesuits in Britain, who own the land, said they had no choice due to repeated breaches of tenancy, including unapproved camping and failure to allow inspections. Renwick admits he ran a campsite and that there were concerns about behaviour on the land. But he maintains the eviction was devastating. "I lost my home, my animals, everything my parents had left behind. Then this came along."

Social Media Storm

While Renwick battled public suspicion, another young man was also swept up in the frenzy. Just hours before Renwick's arrest, police had detained a 16-year-old boy. Pictures of the teenager in lumberjack-style clothing holding a chainsaw began circulating online, quickly fuelling the narrative.

Yet many locals weren't convinced. "There's no way that lad could've done it," said Scott Donaldson, who runs the Milecastle Inn nearby. "We've got family in the tree surgery trade. Cutting down a tree like that takes more than a chainsaw and some bravado."

Ed Corble, who owns a local bed and breakfast, said the community was confused. "It was absolute chaos. The boy's family didn't know what was going on, and the attention he got was really dangerous, especially after losing a close relative recently."

Renwick and the teenager were eventually told they would face no further action. But by then, the damage had been done. Kevin Donald, a freelance journalist covering the story, said the speed of online judgment was shocking. "People had it in their heads that Walter and the boy were related. In truth, they had never even met."

In May this year, the real culprits were finally brought to justice. Daniel Graham, aged 39, and 32-year-old Adam Carruthers, both from Cumbria, were convicted of criminal damage at Newcastle Crown Court. Northumbria Police praised the “meticulous and proportionate” investigation that led to the outcome.

For Renwick, the trial may be over, but the scars remain. “Why did they do it? Was it for attention? I still don’t understand. The tree was a loss, of course, but it was losing the farm that really broke me.”