

EXPERT'S CUSTARD PIE TESTS

A THROWN custard pie is less dangerous than a tennis ball and considerably less hazardous than a hurled half brick or speeding bullet, an expert witness told Nottingham magistrates today.

Dr Robert James Cann, an academic with a doctorate in mechanical engineering, was giving evidence on the third day of the Nottingham Council House poll tax riot trial.

Four people are appearing before Guildhall magistrates on charges arising from the March 5 incident when anti-poll tax campaigners stormed the council chamber as councillors prepared to set the community charge.

The four deny the charges. Two are accused of common assault on councillors — throwing a custard pie at them made of shaving foam on a paper plate.

Dr Cann said he had investigated the physical and dynamic properties of custard pies and had set up experiments to determine, among other matters, the terminal velocity of the pie at impact and its kinetic energy.

One of Dr Cann's findings was most of its potential energy for causing injury was taken up in the squashing effect of the pie on contact with its victim.

To determine how they worked, he told the court, he had constructed a hinged wooden frame.

"By throwing the pie at the frame," he said, "it was possible to determine the terminal velocity of the pie at contact and its kinetic energy."

He compared the energy value of a custard pie hurled at between 2½ and 4m a second with a tennis ball thrown at 30mph and a half brick.

Finally he compared it with a bullet travelling at 200m a second. "The custard pie is right at the bottom of the scale on these classes," he said.

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Under cross-examination by Mr Brian Gunn, prosecuting, Dr Cann admitted that whatever the case force was needed to throw a custard pie.

Earlier, Waddingham had asked: "In your opinion would a custard pie be a dangerous, offensive weapon?" Dr Cann said: "No."

Also accused are: Keith Duncombe, 25, of Daybrook Street, Sherwood, who denies assaulting Coun Mrs Barbara Ricks; Catrina Moyes, 25, of Waterloo Crescent, Radford, and Jaz Singh, 27, of Berridge Road Central, Radford, both of whom deny obstruction.

Proceeding