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## Crimes of Blood

Violence – both real and threatened – was endemic to eighteenth-century London. In the home, discipline was maintained with blows – husbands beat their wives and masters and mistresses beat their servants. On the public stage it was used to punish crime: felons were routinely hanged, whipped and branded to the applause or derision of the public, or pelted with rotten eggs, vegetables and even stones on the pillory by their neighbours. On the streets, violence was a normal way to settle a dispute – men fought duels and boxing matches or, more crudely, brawled outside pubs. It was also frequently used in popular protest. Crowds regularly marched through the streets, shouting, breaking windows and occasionally pulling down a house. But violence was rarely indiscriminate and these practices were accepted, within limits, as a part of the theatre of public life. It was commonly believed (although not technically true) that a husband could use a stick to beat his wife as long as it was no thicker than a man's thumb; while in the eighteenth century few doubted that sparing the rod would spoil the child. Despite this backdrop of everyday violence, however, some things remained beyond the pale. Violent killing in all its guises normally led to criminal proceedings at the Old Bailey.

With the exception of infanticide, homicide was a largely male phenomenon, with men accounting for 90 percent of those put on trial. During arguments, and especially when their point of view was contradicted, men were quick to defend their honour by challenging their detractors to a fight. In the early eighteenth century gentlemen frequently carried swords and were quick to draw them, while lower class men simply raised their fists. In many cases the parties would simply step outside the alehouse or coffeehouse where they were drinking to settle the matter. The resulting fights, conducted more or less according to accepted rules of fair play, normally ended when someone was injured or conceded defeat. Death was not the intended outcome, but given the crude state of contemporary medicine, injuries often proved mortal. When formal duels were arranged between gentlemen they normally took place the next day. In the first half of the century duels were fought with

swords and were frequently fatal. But as the century wore on, the pistol replaced the sword, making duelling both more formal and, ironically, safer, owing to the clear rules which limited their use. Unlike duels, which normally took place in private (since they were illegal), boxing matches took place in public and attracted large audiences. Spectators' interest in betting on the outcome often prolonged the matches beyond endurance and sometimes led to fatalities. Those responsible for causing deaths in fights and duels were always tried for murder, but sympathetic juries normally gave a verdict of manslaughter, under the pretence that the killing was not premeditated.

Whereas most male violence happened in public and involved other men, female violence typically occurred in or around the home, and claimed its victims from members of the household, both male and female. Women did not carry weapons, but there were plenty of possible instruments ready at hand, not least kitchen knives and pots and pans. Whereas male violence was circumscribed by unwritten rules, female violence was unexpected and therefore unregulated. As a result, while such violence was relatively rare, it occasionally led to brutal injuries and death.

Crowd protest was commonplace. Londoners were accustomed to taking to the streets to voice their grievances on issues as varied as politics, religion, working conditions and the sexual misdemeanours of their neighbours. By staging bonfires, shouting and chanting and marching through the streets, they called attention to their views. More aggressively, some crowds demanded that householders show support for their grievances by placing lighted candles in their windows. Those who failed to do so found their expensive panes of hand-made glass shattered by bricks and rocks. Where the target of mob hostility was associated with a particular place, such as a brothel, the house could be attacked and the entire fabric with the exception of the brickwork dismantled and burned in bonfires on the street. The violence of the crowd was typically focused on property, rather than individuals, but the sense of threat and fear felt by those who were the objects of mob attacks was nonetheless very real.

Riot was a misdemeanour and very rarely prosecuted at the Old Bailey. It could, however, be tried under specific statutes, notably the 1715 Riot Act, which made it a felony for 12 or more people to remain at the scene of a riot an hour after a command to disperse was read out by a magistrate, but prosecutions under this act were rare. The riots which generated the most trials were the Gordon riots in 1780, the most destructive in London's history. Crowds roamed the city streets for almost a week, initially in protest against a Catholic Relief Act, but the demonstration quickly degenerated into an uncontrolled *melée*. Dozens of houses, chapels, and public buildings, including Newgate Prison and the Old Bailey Courthouse itself, were damaged or destroyed, causing at least £100,000 worth of property damage. But although hundreds died in the riots, most were killed by soldiers attempting to suppress the disorder – once again, the crowds attacked property, not people.

Despite the chaos of the Gordon riots, the general trend over the course

of the eighteenth century was for public violence in London to decline. Cultural acceptance of violence became problematic as male honour was redefined and linked to qualities other than the ability to knock someone else's brains out. The homicide rate declined by a factor of six, to below modern levels, by the first decade of the nineteenth century. The development of the pistol duel, with its carefully orchestrated procedures and the mediating role of seconds, led to a significant reduction in fatalities, while boxing matches became more of a spectator sport, with the violence of the street transferred onto the stage. Crowd protest, fundamentally discredited by the excesses of the Gordon riots, became less common, and was largely replaced by new methods of publicising grievances, such as public meetings and lobbying conducted by clubs and societies. The increasing intolerance of violence can also be seen in changes in official punishments. Branding fell into decline and, together with burning at the stake, was eventually abolished. At the same time, new punishments such as transportation and imprisonment made corporal punishment seem less necessary. Wife beating became increasingly unacceptable, while sports involving violence to animals (such as throwing at cocks) were viewed as unnecessarily cruel. At the Old Bailey there was a growing desire to bring everyone responsible for violent deaths to trial, even when the death manifestly resulted from an accident.

Despite this trend, violence remained a fundamental feature of London life, although it gradually became more hidden. Homicides were increasingly confined to the home and wife beating continued unabated, although less frequently discussed. Pistol duels were more popular than ever, but now took place at dawn in out of the way places and with no spectators. In 1790, in the first scandal of its sort in British history, London was convulsed by a panic over the activities of a serial attacker. The 'Monster' was a man who cruised the streets at night insulting women and stabbing them with sharp instruments, usually in the buttocks. Over 50 attacks were reported. The huge public interest in these attacks, more than the crimes themselves, reflects the continuing place of violence at the forefront of the public imagination and indicates that the modern world of sex crimes had arrived.

Regardless of these changes, there remained plenty of business for the Old Bailey.

### **She Came out Through the Casement Window**

*The rules, both unwritten and written, which governed violence between men assumed that the two parties were essentially equals. Violence between the sexes had no such rules, with one exception. Men were entitled to 'discipline' their wives by beating them, as long as the violence did not cause serious injury. But as this was an unequal relationship the violence was difficult to police. Men did not appreciate interference in their relationships with their wives, and unsurprisingly this violence often got out of hand. Almost 10 percent of the killings committed by men and recorded in the Old Bailey Proceedings were of their own wives.*



**Figure 2.01** Hare Court, Spitalfields, 18th Century weavers cottages. 1914 watercolour, by Edward Arthur Phipson (it is signed using his adopted name of Evacusteas A. Phipson). Credit: City of London, London Metropolitan Archives

When Thomas and Sarah Daniels quarrelled on the evening of 28 August 1761 in a house in Hare Court off Aldersgate Street and the neighbours heard Sarah scream, they did not respond immediately. They knew that the couple often argued and they assumed that Thomas regularly beat his wife. They continued to listen, however, and were able to hear what happened – to be, in eighteenth-century terms, an ‘ear-witness’ to the events that followed.

As the daylight faded Mary Allen, who lived three doors away from the house in which the Daniels rented a second-floor room, was eating supper when the screaming started. Soon the noises became more puzzling. She ‘heard a noise like unto the knocking of a hammer as if nailing up a door’ and heard Sarah screaming ‘my life, never no more, my dear soul, never no more’.

Mary went down into the street, where she heard more shouting. The next thing she knew Sarah came tumbling out of the half-open casement window and fell face first into the gutter. She was totally naked, blood ran from her left breast and she was speechless. She was taken up and carried back into the house and a surgeon was called. She died the next morning.

Did Thomas Daniels kill his wife? This was difficult to prove, because no one had seen Thomas actually push her out the window, but it is clear from the witness statements at the trial that Mary Allen and the other neighbours quickly jumped to the conclusion that this was a case of wife beating run out of control. Thomas, however, conducted a strong defence and both the cross-examinations and his own testimony made these initial assumptions look less and less plausible.

Mary Allen was the principal witness for the prosecution. She told the court:

About a quarter after ten o’clock on a Friday evening, in the month of August last, I was eating my supper, I heard a woman scream. I got up, and went to the window, and when I came there, she had done screaming. I thought it was Daniels beating his wife, but I could not be sure. I came down stairs, and went to the end of the court. I heard Daniels say (I believe it to be him), I heard a man say, Damn you, you bitch, will you ever come after me more. She said, My dear life, never

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no more. She then gave another violent scream and came out of the window, and as she came out she was bent double, I saw her head first.

**She elaborated her story under questioning from the judge and was later cross-examined by Thomas Daniels:**

Question. Could you observe any body behind her?

Mary Allen. There was no light in the room, and as she was coming out, she said O! save me, save me.

Q. Did it appear to be her own voluntary act to come out of the window, or that she was forced out?

Allen. I believe she was forced out, by the violent force she came out with, and as she was coming out, she said these words. She fell face-downwards stretched, her full length into the kennel, quite naked, not a thread upon her, no shift, no cap. At my screaming out, the people came out at the next door. I then ran and called Mr Clark the constable.

Q. For what purpose did you call a constable?

Allen. Because I believed the woman to be murdered.

Q. By whom?

Allen. By her husband.

Q. Did you hear a man's voice offering to throw her out at the window?

Allen. No, I heard nothing more than what I have said.

**The constable was George Clark:**

Mrs Allen came and knocked at my door, and said, For God's sake come out, for Daniels has throwed his wife out at the window. When we got into the house, we went up into the two pair of stairs room that looks into the street. There we found the prisoner alone, without hat or wig, coat or waistcoat. I laid hold of his arm and asked him how he could be guilty of such a rash action, of throwing his wife out of the window, and asked how she came to be naked. He said, she pulled her shift off, and tore his shirt, and then threw herself out at the window. There was the shift torn all down before, and all at the wrists. I bid him put on his clothes, and said, he must go to the compter. I could hardly tell whether the shift was a shift or not, it was torn so. He looked about the room, and seemed to be a little confused. Then some more people came up-stairs. He put on his clothes and we took him to the compter.

**Thomas Daniels appears to have conducted his own defence. His initial statement told a rather different story than that related by his neighbours:**

That Friday evening I happened to be out till about ten at night at the Nag's Head in Houndsditch. I had three pints of beer, and a pint of beer along with a young man of my acquaintance. When I came home my

wife had locked me out. I found she was awake in the room and she would not let me in. I went down stairs and came up again, very serious and good-natured, and said, Sally, my dear, let me in. I took and put my back against the door, and broke it open. She came out of bed and flew upon me, and tore my shirt from my back almost. She hit me several blows. I said, Sally, what makes you do so? What do you use me so for? She tore her shift all off her back and cap from her head, and pulled and tore every thing from her back, and tore all to pieces. I said, Sally, be easy, don't do so. I was sitting on the bed unbuttoning my breeches. She took up something, as my back was towards her, and struck me over the side of my head, which perfectly stunned me. With that she flew out of the window directly, and cried out as she went down, Save me, save me, the last words she said. She was gone in an instant. There I sat upon the bed as Mr Clark found me. The door was open, just as I broke it open, when he came up. I never offered to nail the door, or put any thing to the door. When he came up, he said, How came you to throw your wife out of the window? I said, No, I did not, she threw herself out, as I am a living man. God Almighty is my witness.

**The principal witness he called in his defence was Joseph Holmes, churchwarden of the parish. Holmes raised some awkward questions for those who thought Sarah had been thrown from the window:**

In the morning, about half an hour after six somebody came and said, there was a murder committed. Now I will tell about the room. I went about half an hour after six; I do not know whether I did not see her expire myself. There was the mother and a great number of people crying and yowling; saying, she was murdered. I said, for God's sake, good people, let the door appear open. I went to see if any blood appeared under the window. There was none. I looked to see the situation of the room. There was a chest of drawers, a table, a low chair. The window is as high a window as is common. I saw no blood at all, and if there had been any struggle, by a man's forcing a woman out at the window, the window must be broke. There were garden pots standing on the outside of the window.

Question. What window do you speak of?

Holmes. I speak of a two pair of stairs window, there is but one window in the front. It opens with a double casement.

Q. Did the garden pots stand in that part of the window that was open?

Holmes. It may be a foot on the left-hand side, the side that was not open.

Q. Did it appear to you practicable for a man, with a table standing under the window, to throw her out at that window?

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Holmes. There was a chair. I rather think she must go to the window, to call out for assistance, and over balance herself in the hurry, and so tumble. I apprehend the chair was always standing there.

Q. What size woman was she?

Holmes. She was a shortish sort of a woman. I think it is impossible to throw her out without breaking the glass, and there is but one pane broke now.

Other witnesses confirmed that it would have been impossible to throw her out of the window without a struggle, and that there was no evidence of a disturbance. Sarah Frances testified that, although the couple were prone to quarrel, Thomas was not usually the aggressor:

I have heard her threaten several times, she would kill him. I have heard her cry out several times. Once I carried a pot of beer up, I looked through the key hole; and at that time, he was not near her when she cried out, Pray, dear Daniels, let me alone, he did not meddle with her. The key hole was so large I could see from the chest of drawers to the window.

Others testified that Thomas was a 'good-natured' man and that his wife had frequently abused him.

When the jury met to consider its verdict it must have been aware that, with no eye witnesses to the actual events in the room apart from Daniels himself, it was impossible to establish with any certainty what actually happened. But, unable to imagine a situation in which a wife might mistreat a husband, the jury could only see these events in the light of a man attacking his wife. As a result the jury found him guilty of murder. The seriousness of the crime meant that the court immediately sentenced him 'to be executed on the Monday following, and his body to be dissected and anatomised'. To increase the shame of his punishment, Daniels's body would be handed over to the surgeons and be cut up for medical instruction in front of an audience in the Surgeons' Hall.

Despite the limited time available, Daniels's friends managed to get the hanging postponed while they petitioned for a pardon. On 10 October the execution was formally respited, owing to the fact that 'several favourable circumstances have appeared in this case since his trial, which tend even to render doubtful the truth of the fact of which he was convicted'. On 26 October, following further investigation, he received an unconditional royal pardon.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Daniels's reputation was in tatters and on 23 November he published a 24-page pamphlet, *The Affecting Case of the Unfortunate Thomas Daniels*, in which he tried to convince the public, and particularly women, of his innocence (he seems to have wanted to remarry). He argued that, atypically, *he* was the mistreated spouse in their marriage. He reported that Sarah was frequently drunk and beat him. She had taken up with another

man and was in the habit of wounding herself and then telling the neighbours that he had mistreated her. On the evening of her death, he claimed, she had struck him several times with a hand brush, but then because she thought she had killed him she jumped out of the window in despair.<sup>2</sup> Whether his readers were convinced by these claims is impossible to tell, but if they had read the *Old Bailey Proceedings* they would have already been aware that there were two sides to this story.<sup>3</sup>

### **He was None the Best of Husbands**

*Women could be as cruel and violent as men, or perhaps even more so, since there were no equivalent unwritten cultural expectations governing how they should use violence. Most female violence took place in the home, and was directed against members of their own families and households.*

In March 1726 the residents of Westminster were shocked by the discovery of a man's decapitated head floating in the Thames near the horse ferry. The head was cleaned up and placed on a pole in St Margaret's churchyard, abutting Westminster Abbey, in the hope that someone would identify it. Although it was viewed by a large number of people, after four days still no one had identified it. The smell became offensive, so it was placed in a bottle of spirits. A few days later, suspicion began to fall on Catherine Hayes. Her explanation for the recent disappearance of her husband John seemed suspicious and the head shared many of his features. A warrant was issued for her arrest and when the constables arrived, Catherine was found in her darkened room with Thomas Billings sitting on her bedside, without his shoes and stockings on. The press later interpreted this as clear evidence of a sexual relationship.

Both Hayes and Billings were committed to prison, as was Thomas Wood, who had been drinking with them the night John Hayes disappeared. Wood was the first to confess that they had murdered him. Billings followed and finally Catherine acknowledged the crime. But when she learned that she could be found guilty of petty treason and burned at the stake for killing her husband (since he was legally her master), she changed her mind and resolved to plead innocent, resting her case on the claim that she had not actually committed the murder herself. When they came up for trial at the Old Bailey, Wood and Billings pleaded guilty. Only Catherine Hayes was tried, for the offence of 'being traitorously present, comforting and maintaining the said Thomas Billings in the murder of the said John Hayes, her husband', an offence which was legally deemed to be as serious as the actual killing. At the trial her earlier confessions provided the strongest evidence of her guilt. Richard Bromage and Leonard Myring provided damning testimony.

Richard Bromage. After Catherine Hayes was committed to Newgate, I and Robert Wilkins, and Leonard Myring went to visit her. I am sorry,



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says I, to see you here on this account. And so am I too, says she. For God's sake, says I, what could put it into your head to commit such a barbarous murder upon your own husband? Why, says she, the devil put it into my head. But however, John Hayes was none of the best of husbands, for I have been half starved ever since I was married to him. I don't in the least repent of any thing that I have done, but only in drawing those two poor men into this misfortune. I was six weeks in importuning them to do it. They denied it 2 or 3 times, but at last they agreed. My husband was made so drunk that he fell out of his chair, and then Billings (who was a tailor) and Wood carried him into the back room, and laid him upon the bed. I was not in that room, but in the fore room on the same floor when he was killed. But they told me that Billings struck him twice on the head with a pole axe, and then Wood cut his throat.

When he was dead I went in and held the candle while Wood cut his head quite off, and afterwards they chopped off his legs and arms. And why, says I, did you use your husband in such an inhumane manner. Because, says she, we wanted to get him into an old chest, but he was too long and too big. We thought to have done it with only cutting off his head and his legs, but we were forced to cut off his thighs and his arms, and then the chest would not hold them all. The body and limbs were put into blankets and carried out at several times the next night, and thrown into a pond. But what, says I, could induce the men to be guilty of all this? Was it for the sake of money?

No, says she, the devil was in us all, and we were all got drunk. And what, says I, can you say for your self when you come before the judge? Why, says she, it will signify nothing to make a long preamble. I will hold up my hand and say that I am guilty, for nothing can save me, nobody can forgive me.

**Leonard Myring's account of her confession, however, was less explicit:**

I was with the prisoner 2 or 3 times before this; one of those times was I think on the Sunday after she was committed. I am glad you are come, says she, for the men that did the murder are taken and have confessed it. I was not with them when they did it, for I was sitting upon a stool by the fire in the shop, but I heard the blow given and heard somebody stamp. And why did not you cry out, says I, because I was afraid they would kill me, says she. And after his head was cut off, it was put into a pail, and Wood carried it out. Billings sat down by me and cried, and would lie all the rest of the night in the room with the dead body. But what, says I, was the first occasion of your contriving to do this? Why, says she, my husband came home drunk one night and beat me, upon which says Billings, this fellow deserves to be killed, and says Wood, I would be his butcher for a penny, and I told them they might do as they would, and so they made a contrivance to kill him. But I did not know that they would do it the night that it was done on. And why, says I, did not you tell your husband of this design to murder him? Because says she, I was afraid that he would beat me.

John Blakesby, who lived at a nearby alehouse, the Brown's Head in New Bond Street, testified to the purchase of the substantial quantities of wine used to make John Hayes drunk:

On the 1st of March last, about 4 in the afternoon, the prisoner and 2 men that pleaded guilty came to our house for 6 quarts of mountain [strong Malaga wine], which she paid for at the bar, and saw it put into bottles. I sent a porter home with her that he might know where to fetch the bottles when they were empty. But about 9 the same night, one of those two men brought back the empty bottles and had another quart of wine away with him in a bottle which he brought besides ours.

The final prosecution witness was the Hayes's upstairs neighbour, Mary Springet, who, despite closely monitoring the strange noises and comings and goings which occurred on the floor below her that night, failed to detect the murder. Rather, she thought a different crime was being committed (a 'midnight flit' – moving out in the middle of the night in order to avoid having to pay rent) and she sought to prevent it. When she asked Catherine to explain the strange noises, Catherine asked her why she was so uneasy. Mary replied: 'Truly, Mrs Hayes I believe you're a going to move your goods by night, and I think its a shame you should do so when you have got money that lies by you'.

Catherine rested her slim hopes of an acquittal on making a limited confession:

The prisoner in her defence acknowledged that 3 or 4 days before her husband was killed, she knew that there was a design against his life, and that she was in the next room when the murder was done, but said that she had no hand in it, and therefore she was clear of his blood.

The jury thought otherwise, and found her guilty. She was convicted of the heinous crime of petty treason and was sentenced to be drawn on a hurdle to the place of execution, there to be burned alive. Billings and Wood were sentenced to death by hanging, but Wood fell ill and died in prison before execution day.

The *British Journal* reported not only the gruesome details of Catherine's execution on 14 May, but also some astonishing new facts about the case which rendered the crime even more sensational:

Catherine Hayes was drawn to Tyburn on a hurdle, and there burnt alive, without the indulgence of being first strangled, as is customary in such cases; for which a special order was sent to the sheriff. She was fastened to the stake by an iron chain round her body, having a halter also about her neck (running through the stake) which the executioner pulled at when she first began to shriek. She affirmed in Newgate that Billings was her own son, got by Mr Hayes, tis supposed before her marriage with him. If so, Billings murdered his own father, assisted in quartering him, and then lay with his own mother, while his father's mangled limbs were under the bed. A most horrible scene of wickedness!<sup>4</sup>



Figure 2.02 Catherine Hayes, Thomas Billings and Thomas Wood Decapitating the Body of John Hayes (1726). © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Shelfmark 1131.h.33.(1), frontispiece

The crowds pressing to see the execution were so large that a scaffold erected for the spectators collapsed. The same afternoon Thomas Billings was hanged along with three thieves and three 'sodomites'. Hayes's gruesome death, however, stole the show.<sup>5</sup>

In order to satisfy public interest, at least three pamphlet accounts of the murder were published, as well as one ballad. As he did following every execution day, the Ordinary of Newgate Prison, James Guthrie, published biographies of the executed convicts in his *Ordinary's Account*. If prisoners testified to their repentance, Guthrie willingly included accounts of their lives

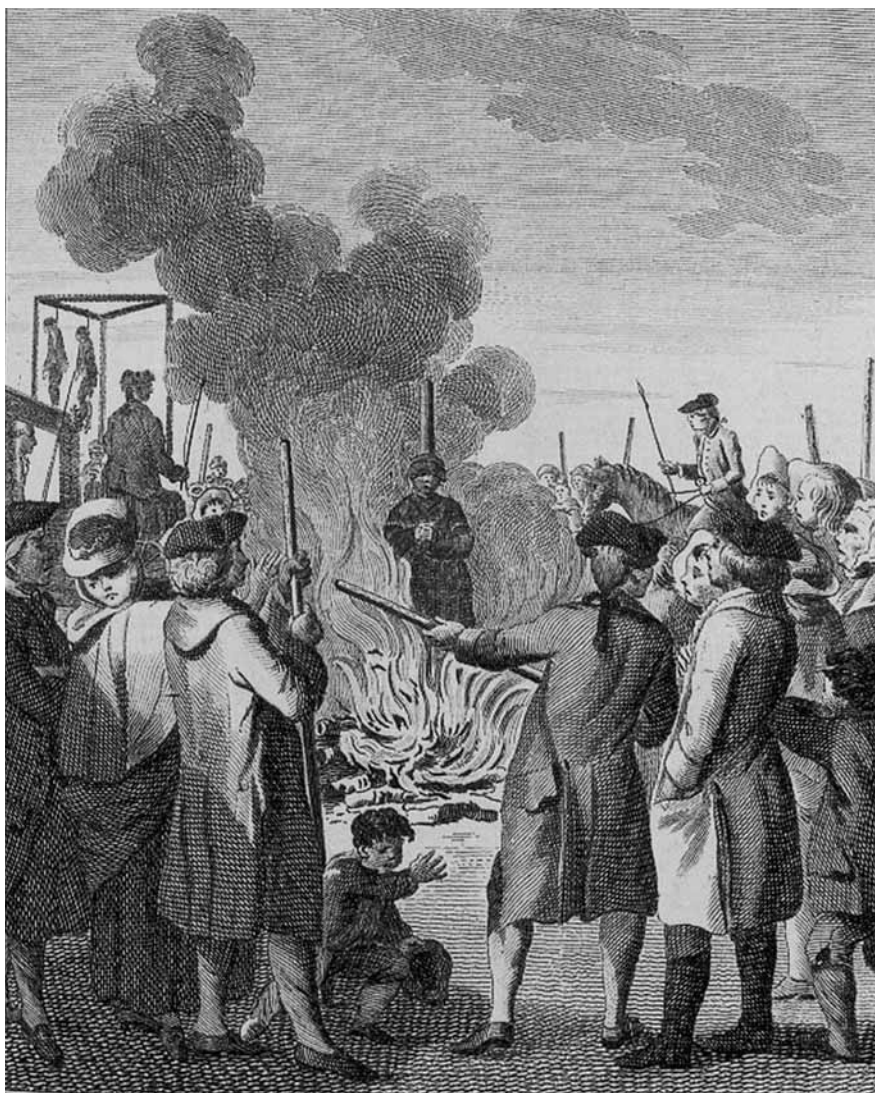


Figure 2.03 'The Manner of Burning a Woman Convicted of Treason' (1777). British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Shelfmark 1485.p.8.(2), folio 124-5

and crimes more or less in their own words. This allowed a more complicated picture of this crime to emerge, reflecting the murderers' own disagreement over whose idea it had been to commit the crime in the first place. While Billings blamed Catherine, she denied it, and claimed that her only prior knowledge of plans to murder her husband came from overhearing a conversation between him and Wood in which Wood told him: 'I think it no more a sin to kill you than a dog and a cat, because you are so cruel to that poor industrious woman, and because you are so atheistical and wicked'. She also reported that:

Mr Hayes was a very unkind husband, beating and mortifying her upon every trivial occasion in a cruel manner; and when she was with child, he would never suffer a midwife to be called but once which with his other ill usages proved the cause of an abortion, and commonly put her in hazard of her life.

When asked to explain why she concealed the murder, she said 'that the ill usage he always gave her cooled her affection towards him, and her only son being concerned, she could not think of delivering him up to public justice'.<sup>6</sup>

No doubt alarmed by these insults to the murdered man, the friends of John Hayes printed an alternative narrative of the killing in a 32-page pamphlet. This focused the blame for the crime firmly on 'the monstrous perfidy and cruelty of a woman'; and argued that the young men had been led astray by Catherine. The pamphlet also contained allegations of prior acts of deception and disloyalty committed by Catherine.<sup>7</sup>

A popular ballad, full of inaccuracies, further heaped responsibility for the crime onto her. 'A Song, on the Murder of Mr Hayes, by his Wife', sung to the popular tune of 'Chevy Chase', was sold on the city streets:

In Tyburn Road a Man there lived  
 A just and honest life,  
 And there he might have lived still  
 If so had pleased his wife.  
 But she to vicious ways inclined  
 A life most wicked led  
 With tailors and with tinkers too  
 She oft defiled his bed.

(Billings was a tailor.) Now labelled a religious zealot (rather than an atheist), the song alleged Hayes went to church twice a day:

This vexed his wife unto the heart  
 She was of wrath so full,  
 That finding no hole in his coat,  
 She picked one in his skull.

Having killed him, she cut up the body and disposed of it, and, when the body parts were discovered, she confessed the crime. Billings and Wood were not even mentioned in this account.<sup>8</sup>

These were just the first of many retellings of the story of this barbaric murder published in the ensuing decades. With each retelling it was increasingly Catherine who was held responsible, even though by all accounts she did not commit the actual murder. No doubt it was the shocking claim that she had encouraged her son to kill and brutally dismember his father and her husband, in combination with the belief that she had committed incest with him, that focused popular ire onto her. Catherine embodied popular fears of the chaos and disorder that women could create when they strayed from their prescribed social roles.<sup>9</sup>

### **He Behaved Honourably Enough**

*To be considered a proper man, you had to be willing to fight anytime you were insulted or challenged. In defence of their honour, many working men participated in boxing matches, while gentlemen fought duels. From the middle of the eighteenth century, pistols replaced swords as the weapons of choice in duels. Their introduction, the result of the large number of duellists with military training and access to firearms, was accompanied by accelerating criticism of duelling as a custom. Public opinion increasingly declared that it was based on a false concept of honour. Contributing to this perception was the fact that pistols were potentially more lethal than swords and at first there were no agreed rules for how to conduct a duel with these new weapons.*

On 11 December 1749 Admiral Charles Knowles faced a court martial on the charge of failing to fully engage the enemy in an action off the coast of Cuba with a Spanish squadron during the War of the Austrian Succession.<sup>10</sup> One of Knowles' accusers was Edward Clark, captain of the *Canterbury*, one of the ships that made up Admiral Knowles's fleet. Also present at the court martial was Thomas Innes, captain of the *Warwick*, part of the same fleet. Innes was an inveterate enemy of Clark. The court martial was dominated by charges and counter-charges voiced by these two captains and their supporters. In his testimony, Clark allegedly 'swore very hard' against Innes. In response, Innes suggested that Clark had been acting under the influence of an admiral other than Knowles. This was a suggestion even the court found shameful. Afterwards, a fellow captain told Innes, 'he had said so severe a thing of Captain Clark, which he could never forget, and that he must be obliged to resent it'. Undaunted, Innes replied: 'His sensations are so callous that I have long endeavoured to affront him, and cannot, adding, I look upon him to be a scoundrel and a coward; saying, I meant every word I said'.<sup>11</sup>

This attack on Clark's reputation, which Innes unguardedly repeated to several other officers, was bound to reach Clark's ears. As an eighteenth-

century gentleman, Clark could not allow the insult to stand. At 8 o'clock on the morning of 11 March 1750 Clark went to Innes's lodgings in Leicester Fields to confront him. As Innes's servant, William Newman, subsequently told the Old Bailey:

I heard a great knock at the door, I came down stairs, and met Captain Clark at the dining-room door. He asked me if Captain Innes was up? I said no, but I would call him, which I did. Captain Clark stayed in the dining room all the time. My master got up very soon. He asked me if it was Captain Clark, I said it was. After my master got up, and came into the dining-room, he ordered me out of the room. I went into the next room, and when I was there, I heard Captain Clark say to Captain Innes, Sir, you have used me very ill. I think Captain Innes's answer was, I have not used you ill. There was some discourse, which I could not distinctly hear; after that I heard somebody speak, insisting on his fighting sword and pistol (the voice I took to be Captain Clark's voice). After that there were some words passed, and Captain Clark came out of the room. He was there but a little while; he came down part of the stairs, then he went back again, and went to Captain Innes and desired him to call on him in the morning, and said, remember, tis sword and pistol. Then Captain Clark came down, and went away directly. After he was gone, I went up to the people of the house, and said to them, Captain Clark has been here and has challenged my master.

**Another servant, Edward Welton, testified as to Newman's reaction to this news:**

Newman came up stairs in a great fright (my wife and I were in bed). He told us, Captain Clark had been there, and challenged his master. I said, Lord no! Be sure to let me know when it will be. Said he, that I will, and at night he came up again, and said his master had ordered him to black his shoes, and set them by him; adding, he believed it would be tomorrow morning.

Duels customarily took place early in the morning in out-of-the-way places, in order to avoid attracting the attention of anyone who might try to interfere. But those who knew a duel was about to take place, particularly when it involved a close acquaintance, often tried to stop the duel. Innes attempted to prevent his friends and servant from attending by ordering Newman to invite two captains to come to his lodgings for breakfast. They were not fooled, however, and Welton later reported the events of the following morning to the court:

I heard the captain walking in his room, and heard him go down, and the door clap. I jumped out of bed and got to the window, and saw him go up Castle Street. I heard the door shut again and saw William Newman run towards Leicester Fields. I made haste to the back of Montague House, and looked about on every spot of high ground I could find, quite to Marylebone. I not finding them, made haste home again.

Newman, however, had heard that duels were often fought in Hyde Park, and on going there between 6 and 7 o'clock in the morning he found the duellists:

Captain Innes, with my master, was going down from Grosvenor's Gate. Captain Innes was on Captain Clark's right hand, not a great way from where the duel was fought. At my first seeing him I believe I was about 500 yards from him, being just got into the park. They walked down to the place where the duel was fought, then I came very near them – I believe within about twenty yards. I had a very clear sight of them, and as they parted the trees hindered me from seeing the position they were in, but then I moved so as to see them. Captain Clark was standing with his pistol in his hand, and Captain Innes was getting himself in a posture to be ready. They were about five or six yards asunder. As Captain Innes was reaching out his arm towards Captain Clark, Captain Clark fired his pistol. There was Captain Clark's servant at a distance and a mourning coach with two servants at some distance. My master turned round at the explosion of the pistol and dropt on his left knee. Captain Innes did not fire at all (his pistols were produced in court both charged, and the ball that was taken out of Captain Innes's side). Captain Clark's servant took the pistols up and gave them to me. The bullet penetrated on the right side and was taken out on the left. It had gone almost through him. I attended my master to his death.

Fighting by sword and pistol normally meant that the parties exchanged shots first before switching to swords. As this was one of the first duels involving the use of pistols, the unwritten rules which would later govern the use of these weapons were not yet fixed. This may explain why Clark fired too soon, but what is remarkable is the fact that Innes, although clearly unhappy at the way the duel had been conducted, was willing to forgive his killer. Part of the code which men of honour followed dictated that those injured in duels were expected to forgive their attackers, and that is just what Innes did. According to Newman, Captain Innes:

Bade me tell every body that should enquire about it, that Captain Clark behaved very well, but he did not think he behaved very honourable, for he took full aim at him, saying, he fired before he was ready. This he said as soon as his wound was dressed. He several times said, He forgave Captain Clark, and hoped God would forgive him. Captain Innes died about eleven that night. These words were spoke about 11 or 12 at noon. He did not think of surviving his wound. He said, in my hearing, this will be a long night with me, if please God to spare my life till morning; seemingly in great pain.

The words of a dying man were thought to possess a unique spiritual truth and were freighted with great emotional authority. Innes's forgiveness of his killer, demanded by the code of honour, was mentioned by more than one witness at the trial, and was held to be particularly significant. Innes was also reported to have told one of his servants: 'Never let my enemies know what I feel, and what I suffer'.<sup>12</sup> Even in death, he wished to defend his reputation.

Edward Welton testified to what happened when the fatally injured Innes was brought back to his lodgings:



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Newman came running home with his master's sword in his hand. This was about nine in the morning. The captain was brought home in a chair wounded. We got a surgeon and he was dressed. I held his hands in mine, I believe about six hours; they were cold, seeming almost dead. About eight at night he asked my wife and I how we did, and bid us take notice of what he said, and declare it when asked by any: As he was a dying man, he forgave Captain Clark with all his heart, and all the world; saying, he behaved like a gentleman, but he fired too soon. My wife asked him, how he could go to fight such a gentleman as Captain Clark? He said, God's will must be done, though he strove to take away my life at the court martial, it must be done, and is done.

**Edward Wood was the surgeon called to Innes's side. As was customary, he asked Innes about how he had received his wound. Innes's response reveals a further problem with the way the duel had been conducted: the parties had stood too close together.**

I am a surgeon, and extracted the ball. It entered close to the false ribs on the right side, about a hand's breadth from the pit of the stomach, and it had broke one of the false ribs on the left side, and there it was taken out. This wound, no doubt, was the occasion of his death. He told me, on my asking him, he got the wound in a duel with Captain Clark in Hyde Park; saying, he believed they stood about four yards from each other. Said I, that was murder to stand so close; but, said he, I was obliged to do it, because my pistols were small.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, men fighting pistol duels normally stood ten paces, or about eight to ten yards, apart. In this case, however, Innes's pistols were three-and-a-half inch 'common' pocket pistols which could not kill at that distance. It would also become customary for both duellists to fight with the same types of pistol, but in this case the weapons employed were quite unequal. Captain Clark's pistols were longer, seven-inch 'horse' pistols, and were 'screwbarrelled' or rifled to improve accuracy. Clark's weapon thus gave him a distinct advantage. Indeed, the impact of rifling on the accuracy of duelling pistols, and hence the death rate among duellists, ensured that later weapons were manufactured without this refinement in an attempt to save lives and increase the role of chance in the encounter.

Six weeks after the duel Clark was tried at the Old Bailey for murder. The high status of the defendant, the seriousness of the charge and the presence of two counsel each for the prosecution and the defence meant that this would be a long trial. Serjeant Hayward opened the case for the prosecution, telling the jury that this was no ordinary killing, but the result of the:

Wicked practice of dueling, in which the public seems to be greatly concerned, that the utmost endeavours ought to be used to stop it, as the motives to it, as well as the practices of it, are pregnant with danger to civil society. It would almost shock a man to think that human nature can be so depraved as to venture on practices of this kind; practices that can arise from nothing but implacable malice and revenge, which we are

strongly enjoined to forbear, and to calm and govern our unruly passions. It is said, by the military gentlemen, that it is inconsistent with their honour to put up with affronts and injuries, and that there is no way for them to resent any insult committed on their honour, but by dipping their hands in the blood of their adversary (an excellent doctrine this to gain ground in civil society!) and if ever this nation should be so unhappy as to have such a notion prevail, I think there would be an end of all civil society. It is a false and imaginary honour that is the occasion of it and it is against all principles of virtue and religion whatsoever. The principles on which it is founded are unchristian and thus the practice of it diabolical.<sup>13</sup>

Witnesses for the prosecution included Innes' servants, who had been present in the house when the challenge was issued, witnesses to the duel itself and the surgeon who treated Innes.

The substantial case for the defence was very incompletely reported in the *Old Bailey Proceedings*. All that was recorded was the bald fact that several prominent figures had testified to Clark's good character, saying that he was not the sort of person who would readily engage in a fight:

Lord Southwell, Admiral Martin, Admiral Byng, Admiral Faukes, Lord Montague Bertie, Captain West, Captain Wickham, Colonel Lee, Captain Dent, Sir John Cross, the Revd Dr Hale, the Revd Mr Horton, Mr Stanley, Captain Forrest, Colonel Durand, all, and each of them, gave Captain Clark an exceeding good character, for that of a gentleman's behaviour, not easily moved to passion, willing to reconcile differences, and one of a peaceable disposition.

But as was stated at the end of the trial, the publisher had been forced to abridge the report in order to make room for the other trials in that session, and in this special case the Lord Mayor had authorised the publication of a separate account.

From this additional pamphlet, we learn that the case for the defence rested on three further points. First, officers who had been present at the court martial testified to Innes having made highly dishonourable comments about Clark, thereby justifying Clark's attempt to restore his honour. Second, it was claimed that what was said in Innes's dining room did not amount to a challenge, since the words 'of sword and pistol' were not heard by all the witnesses, but the word 'satisfaction' was. It was claimed that what Clark demanded was only an explanation, not a fight. In response the prosecution argued that everyone had clearly understood that a challenge had been issued. Finally, other witnesses, who had been present at the duel, testified to Innes's magnanimous behaviour afterwards, suggesting that Innes did not think Clark guilty of any crime. Witnesses had secured Clark, to ensure he could not escape, but Innes reportedly said, slowly and distinctly: 'I desire you to release him, for what he has done was of my own seeking. He has behaved like a man of honour'.<sup>14</sup>

Although he called many witnesses, Clark himself did not testify in his

own defence. Instead, his counsel spoke for him, telling the court that Clark could only be found guilty of manslaughter, since there was no premeditated malice: Clark was under a simple obligation to defend his honour. The language Innes had used was such that 'must have raised a passion in any person whatsoever that was subject to the infirmities of human nature; it was hardly possible for flesh and blood to forbear'.<sup>15</sup> As one witness reported, following the duel Clark said, 'What I have done I was obliged to do, and I am very sorry for it'.

In contrast, Mr Serjeant Hayward, counsel for the prosecution, argued that this was a case of murder, since there *was* clear evidence of premeditated malice:

I own, I cannot at present see of what use this can be to the prisoner: I should rather think it a proof, that there was an inveterate hatred and implacable resentment subsisting between them, and would be taken to be an evidence of express malice. A challenge is an appointment to meet at a future time in order to fight with and take away the life of an adversary, and has always been considered as a deliberate and determinate act of the mind, and consequently carries malice along with it.

Hayward, waxing ever more eloquent and ever more pompous, then launched into another diatribe against the practice of duelling:

See here the melancholy consequences of this pernicious and abominable practice of duelling. One brave man lost to his friends, lost to his relations, lost to the community; another equally brave in great danger likewise of being lost, in all the before mentioned respects, as he seems now to me to stand on the very brink of eternity. Is not this enough to strike a horror into the most sanguine mind, and prevent for the future such pernicious practices that can arise from nothing but the practices of false honour, practices that tend so greatly to the prejudice, if not the destruction of civil society? Let me earnestly recommend patience and forgiveness of injuries; and take my word, that a time will come, when a compliance with this divine precept will be deemed meritorious in us, and looked upon as an act of righteousness. And then, amidst all affronts and wrongs done us, we may make ourselves easy with that comfortable assurance, that verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth.

No doubt influenced by this closing peroration, the jury found Clark guilty of murder. This was a highly unusual verdict, for murder cases resulting from duels almost invariably resulted in manslaughter verdicts, where the punishment was typically branding. But in this case:

When the jury brought in their verdict, the foreman acquainted the court that they could not by law do otherwise than find him guilty. But the provocation given by the deceased to the prisoner was so extraordinary, that they begged the court would please to recommend him to his Majesty's mercy.<sup>16</sup>

Once the trials were completed at each session, and before sentencing,

convicts were customarily allowed to address the court and plead for leniency. In Clark's case, no doubt owing to his high social status, he was allowed to do this immediately following his trial, rather than wait until the conclusion of the sessions. He gave the following speech:

My Lords, I am very sensible of the great indulgence of your lordships, in this early passing the sentence of the law upon me, though tis the last of all human favours I could have hoped to have received from your lordships hands.

As the jury, my lords, were pleased to show their compassion to the failings of human nature, in recommending me to the royal mercy, I hope there have appeared some circumstances in my case, which may not render me altogether unworthy of the recommendations of your lordships also.

Far, my lords, shall it be from me to endeavour, by the rules of law, to justify the crime I have been convicted of, nor can I express the affliction I am under for that unfortunate gentleman whose death has occasioned this trouble to your lordships, and misfortune to myself; but if through the mediation of your lordships, the royal mercy should be extended to me, the remainder of my life shall be employed in preventing other gentlemen from falling into those unhappy circumstances I now appear in.

The court ignored Clark's plea and sentenced him to death. Like juries, judges rarely explained the reasons behind their decisions and we can only speculate as to why Clark received such a severe sentence. Perhaps the judges had been persuaded by Serjeant Hayward's concerns about the pernicious effects of duelling. Or perhaps the court, concerned by the crime wave which appeared to be sweeping London following the end of the war, was determined to demonstrate its willingness to punish serious crime with the full rigour of the law.

In any case, Clark was not executed. No doubt repeating the arguments used in his defence, he, or his friends, was able to petition the Lords Justices to respite his sentence and eventually pardon him. In the end, this unfortunate and awkwardly conducted duel led to the death of only one of the participants.<sup>17</sup>

### **They Set Them To Like Two Cocks**

*Gentlemen were not the only men who settled their differences and defended their honour through fights conducted according to agreed rules. But the lower class version of the duel, the boxing match, had distinctive characteristics. Rather than fighting with swords or pistols, men used their fists. And while duels were typically conducted in secret, boxing matches took place in public, attracting large crowds and becoming the subject of furious betting. This sometimes led the audience to encourage the fighters to continue the fight long after they were ready to stop. As a result, what should have been a safer form of combat, given the lack of weapons, could easily become fatal.*

On 13 June 1751 a group of old shopmates, both carvers and sawyers, were drinking together in the Crown Alehouse (also known as the King's Head) in Compton Street, Soho, when an argument broke out. As one of the carvers, Charles Troop, later testified:

George Bartholomew and Thomas Prince came into the company both very much disguised in liquor; they called for six pennyworth of rumbo [rum punch]. The people let them have it; then they called for another; they would not let them have any more; then they called for a pot of beer. I offered to go away, they both insisted on my staying. Prince lent Bartholomew two shillings; Bartholomew said afterwards he had not got it; words ensuing, they threw the beer about the house. Then George Bartholomew gave him half a crown, and Thomas Prince gave him sixpence out of it. Then Bartholomew fell upon me about this money I saw him borrow, and said I ought to be beat, and he would lick me; then Bartholomew pulled out a crown, and said he'd fight me for it; then he took a handful of silver and threw it upon the table, and said he'd fight me for a shilling; then I said I'd fight for only a dozen of beer, so we went to fight for that shilling.

A dispute about borrowed money escalated into a challenge to Charles Troop's masculinity, which could only be settled by a fight, and, as was conventional with boxing matches, they agreed to fight for a small prize. George Smith, a sawyer, agreed to hold the money, and Prince, a carver, was to be Bartholomew's second. (It is not clear who acted as Troop's second.) According to Smith, the assembled men tried to prevent the fight:

I and three more were at the King's Head; we were on one side of the house, and Prince, Troop, and Bartholomew on the other; they had some words so as to come to fighting, I cannot tell what about. We begged they would be easy and not fight. They continued wrangling some time; at last they were to fight for a dozen of beer, the money was put down, I took it up. They wanted to fight in the house, the people desired them to be quiet; then they agreed to go and fight in the field.

From Compton Street, the men walked up Wardour Street, past Oxford Street, and into Marybone Fields, an open space on the edge of the metropolis which at this date was littered with debris from the construction of nearby houses. Smith's description of the fight suggests that it was conducted according to the rules of 'fair play':

They stripped and shook hands (they had both shook hands several times in the public house before, and declared no animosity). A lemon was bought and divided and each of them had half to suck before they began. I took up Bartholomew's clothes, and called out for a friend of mine to take care of the other's. They fought as near as I can guess about half an hour; a great many falls they had on both sides, sometimes one uppermost, sometimes the other. They both received blows, but the falls were a great deal worse than the blows.

By sucking on the lemon, the boxers would reduce the bleeding from any

facial injuries they might receive. Other witnesses reported that they had 'three set-tos', meaning that the fight was restarted three times after the parties had fallen. While Prince reported that the two 'fought fair boxing, what we call so, about twenty minutes', another witness, Thomas Bugden, reported an incident where Troop attacked Bartholomew after he had fallen, but he did not attach much importance to it:

I had not an opportunity of seeing the whole of it, but I saw two falls. Once Troop fell upon Bartholomew with his knee in his guts, which the company cried out shame on; but they fought a long time after that.

What all the witnesses agreed on was that Bartholomew and Troop were very drunk, lending a somewhat comical character to the fight. When they attempted to shake hands at the start, they staggered and missed and had to try again. During the fight, according to Charles Lucas, a sawyer, 'The two men were so drunk that as they went to strike at each other they missed their blows, and sometimes pitched on their heads or fell away.'

The fight took place on a Thursday and attracted a considerable crowd, consisting of passers-by and men working on the nearby construction sites. Thomas Bugden, for example, who was at work in Marybone Fields, saw the two men going to fight and recognised them as fellow workmen and went to watch. John Doller, a 16- or 17-year-old son of a bucklemaker who lived nearby on Tyburn Road, appears to have just been walking by when he 'saw a mob, and went up to them'. James Simpson, a japanner, had been sitting in the parlour of his house on Wardour Street when he saw the crowd heading towards the fields. He asked what was the matter, was told that two carvers were going to fight, and went with a neighbour to watch them.

The presence of a large crowd interfered with the fight and kept it going longer than the combatants wished. Lucas reported that they barely had room to swing their arms:

Thomas Prince, in assisting his friend, got one eye almost knocked out, and there were so many strangers come about that he and others were afraid to go nigh almost.

As James Simpson reported, the crowd shouted encouragement from the sidelines, maximising their enjoyment of the match by prolonging it:

After they had fought a minute, or a minute and a half, one of them lay down, he was taken up and set to, they fought the space of another minute, then there was another fall. There came a parcel of fellows from making bricks, I believe there were 20 of them, and said, you will not leave yet. Troop seemed sick one time and lay down. These people by main strength got them up again and set them to like two cocks, and made people afraid to attempt to part them.

The match ended after one of the falls when George Bartholomew could not get up.

At this point the crowd left. George Smith reported that 'After the battle was over Bartholomew lay alone on the ground; I lifted him up, he desired me to let him alone; I helped to put on his shirt and waistcoat'. Three men carried him to the nearby White Hart alehouse in Windmill Street, off Tottenham Court Road. John Doller helped wash Bartholomew's face, which was covered with blood. Bartholomew then drank a glass of brandy and vomited blood. He was having difficulty speaking and a coach was called to take him home. Bartholomew's wife, Jane, was present when he arrived:

On the 13th of June my husband was brought home in a coach, and never spoke after. He was put to bed, and there died between four and five the next morning. He was bruised in every part from head to foot, not a place in him was free, his private parts also. He was as black as a Negro.

As a suspicious death, the case was investigated by the coroner. He held his inquisition three days later and heard testimony from seven witnesses, including Thomas Tipping, a surgeon who inspected the body after death. Despite the fact that all that the key events of this story had been witnessed by several persons, the witnesses, perhaps in an attempt to ensure Troop was not charged with murder, provided very little evidence about the cause of the quarrel or the possible cause of death, simply stating that the participants were drunk and had fought fairly. At the inquest Smith testified that:

They had several falls and fought for about half an hour and they boxed fairly. When they gave out he took up the deceased. But he can't tell who gave out first. They shook hands before they began and when they gave out they shook hands again.

With similar brevity and emphasis on the handshake, James Simpson described the fight as follows:

Charles Troop stripped and trembled very much and when the deceased and he came together they shook hands, but both seemed to be very drunk. Then they attacked each other and Bartholomew endeavouring to make a blow, he fell down. They had several falls, but did not seem to hurt one another. There was a brick bat near where the deceased fell, but he did not see him fall on it.

It was the surgeon, Thomas Tipping, who provided the key evidence, suggesting (as hinted by Simpson) that the death was caused by one of Bartholomew's falls:

He opened the head of the deceased George Bartholomew and found a fracture on the *oss planum* near the left eye which he apprehends could not have been done with the fist. But it might have been done either by a stick or a violent weapon or a fall on a stone. There was another wound on the forehead but not mortal in its nature. But the first was. He then opened the body and found some extravasated blood and the liver putrefied.<sup>18</sup>

We have no information about the deliberations conducted by the coroner's jury, but their verdict was manslaughter. Troop, they ruled, should be held

responsible for Bartholomew's death, although the verdict judged that the killing had not been premeditated or with malicious intent.

When the City of London grand jury met about two weeks later they came to a different view and indicted Troop for murder. He was therefore put on trial at the Old Bailey on 3 July on charges of both murder and manslaughter. With the witnesses at the trial providing very similar evidence to that provided to the coroner, however, no prosecution evidence was presented to suggest that the killing was either premeditated or malicious. In his defence, Troop testified (in a passage cited at the start of this account) that although the dispute originated in an argument, the reason it ended up in a fight was because they had mutually decided to fight for a prize of some beer money. Key additional evidence was once again provided by Tipping, who now seemed more certain about the cause of death:

I opened his body by the desire of the coroner's jury, but did not open his skull. The parts of the body were all sound and well, only putrified by the extravasated blood. There were some external bruises, but none but the fracture had gone far in. There was a large contusion on the scrotum; his head was contused violently, and there were two great wounds upon it. I imagine the fracture was owing to the fall, as it seemed to be done by the round end of a stone about the breadth of a shilling, which fracture I look upon to be the cause of his death.

Charles Colwell, a witness for the defence who had not testified at the coroner's inquest, confirmed this theory:

I was the first that came into the field. I gathered the loose bricks that lay about and threw them at a distance, and cleared a place to fight in; the ground was dry and prodigious hard. When they first engaged Troop made a blow at Bartholomew and retired I believe near ten or twelve yards, staggered and fell. The deceased followed him up and waited for his getting up again. My opinion is that by this means they might get amongst more brickbats, and by the fall he might receive his damage.

Accepting this explanation, the jury found Troop guilty of manslaughter and he was sentenced to branding. More than 250 years later, this seems a justifiable verdict in the case of a death that was clearly the result of the public enthusiasm for conducting, and watching, boxing matches. These were fights intended to settle disputes and provide entertainment, not result in death.<sup>19</sup>

## Down With the Irish

*Crowd protest was a common and largely accepted feature of daily street life in London. Riots rarely involved violence against people; it was their houses that bore the brunt of the crowd's anger, with the new sash windows found in Georgian houses providing a tempting target for stones and rubbish. The popular expression 'to pull down a house' did not normally mean demolition down to its foundations,*



*but everything but the brickwork was vulnerable to damage. While the violence was thus circumscribed, the underlying threat to personal safety as well as property should not be underestimated.*

The streets, pubs and coffeehouses of London were simmering with fear and discontent in the summer of 1736. The threat of a Jacobite rebellion lurked in the background and the government, led by the long-serving Prime Minister Robert Walpole, continued to pass unpopular legislation. The Gin Act, which attempted to reduce consumption of this popular drink by imposing a duty of 20s per gallon and requiring all vendors to take out a licence costing the huge sum of £50, was set to take effect on 29 September. In July, a small bomb (containing phosphorous) went off in Westminster Hall. No one was injured, but it threw about the hall a parcel of handbills with a list of laws deemed injurious to the lives and trade of the country. Top of the list was the Gin Act. Although Jacobites were behind the explosion, they were not the only ones who were dissatisfied. An act against smuggling imposed harsh penalties on those trading in untaxed goods and an act authorising the building of a second bridge across the Thames, Westminster Bridge, threatened to put many watermen out of work. As J. Furnell, a government agent working in Shoreditch in the East End of London reported:

It is evident that there are great discontents and murmurings through all this mobbish part of town. The Gin Act and the Smuggling Act sticks hard in the stomachs of the meaner sort of people and the Bridge Act greatly exasperates the watermen insomuch that they make no scruple of declaring publicly that they will join in any mischief that can be set on foot.<sup>20</sup>

On top of all this, an influx of Irish workmen who were willing to accept lower wages than their English counterparts threatened the jobs of weavers and building workers, particularly in Spitalfields and Shoreditch. Always the subject of racial and religious prejudice, the Irish constituted an obvious lightning rod for popular hostility.

Twenty years earlier, in 1716, the tower of the medieval church at St Leonard's Shoreditch fell down during a service. It was only in 1736 that the rebuilding finally began to a design by the city architect, George Dance the elder, in imitation of Christopher Wren's more famous St Mary le Bow. During the demolition of the old church that summer, the contractor, William Goswell, a vestryman, faced a strike by his English workmen demanding higher wages. He dismissed them and engaged Irish labour from the area for half or two-thirds the wages he paid his English workers. When the English workers complained, fights broke out. Shortly thereafter a broadside was distributed throughout the neighbouring streets, whipping up hatred against the Irish by evoking their alleged violent temperament. It claimed that a female Irish cook had sworn 'it was nothing to cut up an English man's heart', while her husband allegedly offered 'ten guineas for a pint of English blood'.<sup>21</sup>

The broadside had the desired effect. On Monday 26 July hundreds gathered in Shoreditch, shouting 'Down with the Irish'. The next evening the crowd reached 4,000 and attacked and gutted a pub where the Irish ate and drank. According to the *London Evening Post*, the crowd 'pulled down the house almost to the ground in a few minutes, drank up all the beer in the cellar, and carried away and destroyed the goods in triumph'.<sup>22</sup> The City authorities unsuccessfully attempted to disperse the crowds by reading the Riot Act. The militia was called and played cat and mouse with the mob all evening, with the crowds only dispersing at daybreak. Thursday witnessed similar scenes. Asked by a militia lieutenant to explain their grievances, the 'captain of the mob' answered:

Mr Goswell had paid off his English labourers and employed Irish because they worked cheaper and several of the master weavers employed none but Irish by which means the English manufacturers were starving and that they now chose to be hanged than starved.<sup>23</sup>

The lieutenant promised to redress their grievances and the crowd dispersed, shouting two or three huzzas.

But the crowds formed again on Friday evening, starting in Spitalfields around 7 pm, at the beginning of what was to become the worst night of violence. They moved down Brick Lane towards the poorer districts of Whitechapel where many Irishmen and women lived. Looking eastward up Whitechapel Street, Richard Burton saw them coming:

I was at the end of Red Lion Street, and I saw the mob coming down Bell Yard, with sticks and lighted links [torches]. One of them made a sort of a speech directing the rest to go down Church Lane, to the Gentleman and Porter. There was about 50 or 60 of them then, and they had 2 or 3 links with them. One read from a paper the signs of the Gentleman and Porter, the Bull and Butcher, and the Tavern in Well Street. I did not hear them make any declaration what was to be done, but I went directly to Mr Allen's to inform him they had great sticks, like stakes.

Having warned Allen, Richard Burton resorted to subterfuge in an attempt to save his house:

While I was standing at Allen's door, the mob came down. I told them the house had been mine for a fortnight, and that the man who kept it before was gone. One of them was called Captain Tom the Barber, and was in a striped Banjan [loose flannel shirt]. I desired him to use me favourably, and told him it was my house. They said they knew I was not Irish by my tongue, and I should not be hurt. I made them set up candles in the windows, and pacified the mob seemingly well, but a woman telling them it was a sham, and that I was only the brewer's cooper, the sticks flew immediately and beat the candle out of my hand, as I stood at the door.

Graves Aikin, who lived nearby in Lemon Street, also heard that the mob was coming:

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July 30, at night, my child came to me about 10 o'clock and told me there was a great mob gone by. I went home and a lodger told me the great cry was, put up your lights. My wife was very much frightened and begged me to get out. I told her I would stay, but she insisting upon my leaving the house. I went out and heard the mob at Mr Allen's. I went thither and heard them cry, Down with the Irish – down with the Irish. I saw them breaking Allen's windows, and raking in the kennel, I suppose for stones, but I cannot say I saw them take any up. Then I heard them enquire for my house. A woman directed them to it, and they fell immediately upon it.

**Two of the houses that were hardest hit were the Rose and Crown, off Church Lane, and the Bull and Butcher, at the end of Church Lane on Cable Street. Their owners later testified to the damage in court:**

James Farrel. I live in Rose and Crown Alley in Church Lane. On the 30th of July I was at home. My wife was gone to bed with my godchild, and I was undressed and in my shirt when the noise came down the alley. I opened my window and looked out, and heard them knocking at the next house. Hall and Kelly cried out, Damn you that is not the house, and then they came to my house. I had a candle in my hand, and saw that Page and Kelly were the first that attacked my windows with their clubs. Kelly's wife opened her door, gave them a candle, and cried, Damn them, have their heart's blood. I was at the window with a candle in my hand, and saw Robert Page break my windows, and the middle panel of the door.

**By this stage Farrel had begun to fear for his life:**

When the door was broke, I thought it high time to get away, so I opened a back casement and got out in my shirt from the first story. I said to my wife, you can't get out, you must be at their mercy. I had no sooner spoke, but a board was thrown in which hit her on the thigh. I jumped out of the window into Hog Yard, and heard the mob crying, Damn it, which are Irish houses?

**John Waldon kept the Bull and Butcher in Cable Street:**

I have a great number of country shopkeepers lodge in my house when they come to town. We have some 60 or 70 people in the house, but that night we had but 18. The 30th of July every one in the house was gone to bed but myself, and I was stripped to all but my stockings and breeches; but hearing the mob come down, and crying, Down with the Irish, and seeing all the houses illuminated, I bid all my lodgers get up and shift for their lives. I got over a wall 8 feet high, and some of the neighbours helped the lodgers off. I left the house to their mercy (for my wife was out at a woman's labour) and they stole and broke every thing I had. I stayed in the house, till the shutters and glass all flew in together. Six of my shutters were broke, and 70 odd panes of glass, which damage cost me £3 13s. to repair.

**Frightened residents summoned help from Justice Phillips, the local magistrate, who immediately demanded military assistance, telling his neighbours:**

Reading the proclamation [the Riot Act] will signify nothing. If you will go to the Tower and give my service to the governor, and desire his assistance, I will venture my person. They went, and the governor sent 30 men to my door, and the captain told me, they had orders to go with me and follow my directions.

**The mob, however, had learned how to evade the military, and so special tactics were called for:**

I desired him that his men might march quietly without beat of drum and in the dark and when we came to the end of Lemon Street the houses were all illuminated and we heard a great noise, as if they were knocking the houses to pieces.

**Justice Phillips's intention was to arrest the largest number possible:**

The street was very light, and I could see (at a distance) the mob beating against the shutters with their clubs and could hear the glass fly. So I said to the captain, now let us be upon them at once. I drew my sword and ran to the house they were attacking, and that man Page, I took him with his club breaking the windows. I could not tell whether he might not make use of it upon me, therefore I told him, if you don't surrender I'll run you through. The soldiers at the word of command had stretched themselves into a line and then enclosed as many of them as they could. Page I took myself, driving furiously at the windows.

**Captain Joseph Hudson had direct command of the troops:**

As the mob were beating against the front of the house, Mr Phillips and I at the front of our men, with our swords drawn, struck at one or two of them, and two or three of those who were attacking the house we seized immediately.

**In the process of wielding their swords and making arrests, the soldiers inflicted several injuries, as one of them, Daniel Barnes, later admitted:**

I was indeed at the taking of William Orman Rod. He was cut in the head and was then very much disguised with his own blood. I remember I took Orman Rod out of the mob, and that either my captain or Mr Phillips cut him over the head. He was within 4 or 5 yards of the door, but I did not see him strike, nor did I see any thing in his hand.

**At this point, according to Richard Burton, the rest of the mob instantly dispersed:**

Justice Phillips coming down, and the captain with his soldiers, they took some of them and the rest made off immediately, and were gone as suddenly as if a hole had been ready dug in the bottom of the street, and they had all dropped into it at once.

**Nine were apprehended and taken to the watchhouse, located in the middle of Cable Street near the entrance to Lemon Street – the site of the Cable Street riots 200 years later. Given its proximity to the scene of the riots,**

however, there were considerable fears that the crowd might try to rescue the prisoners. As Justice Phillips told the court:

Those we had taken were carried to the watch house, and that I might be more sure of the prisoners I called them over at the watch house and took down their names. Then we posted 12 soldiers with their bayonets on their muskets round the watch house, because we were apprehensive the mob would rescue the prisoners.

Five were put on trial for riot at the Old Bailey, but not until the October sessions, two and a half months after the events in question. It may be that popular opposition to the Gin Act, which came into force in late September, prompted the government to press ahead with the trials despite the relatively weak prosecution case. All five defendants claimed that they were innocent bystanders who had been swept up by the soldiers in the commotion of the riot. William Orman Rod, a blacksmith from Church Lane, told the court that 'hearing the soldiers were come, I went out to see the sight, and was taken'. Thomas Putrode went outside to look for his wife, and 'the mob came past me, and the soldiers took me'. Joshua Hall claimed that the soldiers had mistook some wood which he was carrying home from his job for a weapon:

I worked at Mr Sharp's, a sawyer and lath render. As I came home from work I stayed half an hour, as others did, to look on. The people that swore I had a club in my hand are mistaken. 'Tis common for lath-renders to bring home a bit of a chip or a lath in their hands.

Witnesses testified that they had only seen Robert Page and Robert Mickey actually causing damage, though Putrode and Joshua Hall were seen shouting 'Down with the Irish'. The only testimony against William Orman Rod was that he had been taken 'out of the mob'. Nonetheless, in a climate of fear about a breakdown of public order, all five were found guilty. They were sentenced to between one and two years imprisonment, an unusually harsh punishment for rioters, and they were required to find sureties for their good behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

### **Pull Down All the Bawdy Houses**

*Brothels were a traditional target of popular hostility – in the seventeenth century, crowds of apprentices demolished them annually on Shrove Tuesday to reduce the temptations of sin during Lent. Eighteenth-century rioters occasionally continued the custom, but with different motives. Owing to worries about rising crime, the government attempted to suppress one riot of this sort in 1749 with particular vigour. But in this case prosecuting the rioters was not easy, since the authorities had difficulty proving that they had apprehended the right men.*

When the Grand Jury for the City and Liberty of Westminster met on Thursday 29 June 1749 to decide whether pending criminal prosecutions should proceed to trial, the session began, as was traditional, by an address

(the charge) from the chairman of the Westminster justices of the peace. Henry Fielding, who had just been appointed to this role after having become a justice of the peace the previous November, delivered a reasonably conventional speech on this occasion. He provided an outline of the key principles of the criminal law before moving on to the more topical part of his speech, where he identified the most threatening offences of the day which merited the special attention of the grand jury. With the recent arrival in the city of large numbers of demobilised sailors and soldiers with money in their pockets and sex on their minds, Fielding reminded jurors of their duty to indict bawdy house keepers 'as a matter of serious and weighty consideration'. Brothels were the cause of 'many mischiefs, the fairest end whereof is beggary; and tend directly to the overthrow of men's bodies, to the wasting of their livelihoods, and to the endangering of their souls'.<sup>25</sup>

Coincidentally, two days later the *London Evening Post* reported that a brothel had been destroyed in a riot:

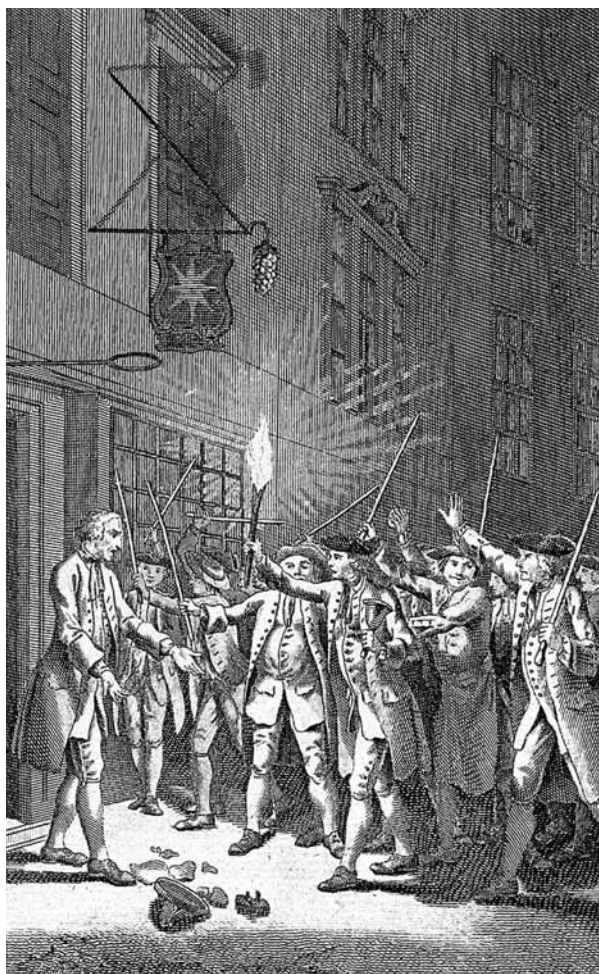
On Saturday two sailors thinking themselves ill used at a house, the sign of The Crown, near the New Church in the Strand, went out, denouncing vengeance, and in a little time returned with a great number of armed sailors, who entirely demolished all the goods, cut all the feather beds to pieces, and strewed the feathers in the street; demolished all the wearing apparel, and turned the women they found in the house naked into the street. They then broke all the windows and considerably damaged another house adjoining. A guard of soldiers was sent for from the Tilt Yard, but they came too late to prevent the destruction of everything in the house.<sup>26</sup>

During a visit to The Crown, three sailors had been robbed of 30 guineas, four Portuguese coins (moidores), a banknote worth £20 and two watches. When they complained to the keeper, they were met with 'foul language and blows' and so decided to seek revenge. The following night, another brothel, The Bunch of Grapes, was burned to the ground, and the mob broke open two watch-houses and rescued those who had been arrested for rioting.

Shortly after midnight the sailors started work on a third house, The Star. Around 100 spectators gathered to watch the sailors, and 'expressed their satisfaction by continuing huzzas'.<sup>27</sup> The arrival of a body of soldiers, announced by a beating drum, brought an abrupt halt to the proceedings and the mob fled, leaving the destruction half-completed. Many furnishings remained undisturbed and, although goods had been thrown into the street, the rioters had not yet had the opportunity to set them on fire. Several men were arrested.

Around one in the morning another man was arrested in a nearby alley. Edward Fritter, a watchman, testified in a sworn deposition:

As he was at his stand at the upper end of Bell Yard, Samuel Marsh, another watchman, called out to him, 'stop that man before you', upon which this informant ran after him, and at about a hundred yards distance overtook him, and pushed him up against the rails of Carey



**Figure 2.04** 'The Mob Assembled to Pull Down the Bawdy-House Kept by Peter Wood in the Strand, 1st July, 1749'. Credit: City of Westminster Archives Centre

Street. And this informant then said to him, 'so, brother, what is all this you have got here?' To which the man answered, 'I am an unfortunate young man, and have married one of the women of the town, who hath pawned all my clothes, and I have got all her linen for it'.

The man, who was drunk, was Bosavern Penlez, a journeyman barber and peruke maker and son of a clergyman. Inside his shirt he had stuffed a bundle of linen, consisting of 10 laced caps, four laced handkerchiefs, three pairs of laced ruffles, two laced clouts (pieces of cloth), five plain handkerchiefs, five plain aprons and one laced apron. He was taken to the watch-house, where he offered a different explanation, claiming that he had picked up the bundle in the street. The next day, he and the bundle were brought before Henry

Fielding, where the linen was identified by Jane Wood, wife of the keeper of the Star, as her property.<sup>28</sup>

Penlez was one of several prisoners who were examined that Monday in Henry Fielding's house in Bow Street as a mob gathered outside. As the interview with Penlez and the others continued, the mob rescued one of the prisoners and threatened to break into the house. Although hostile to brothels, Fielding was more concerned about public order and so committed the rioters to prison to await trial, charging them with the serious offence of 'high treason in levying war against his majesty by riotously and tumultuously assembling themselves together in order to suppress and pull down all bawdy houses'.<sup>29</sup>

James Cecil, a constable, described the difficulties he had in conveying the prisoners to Newgate:

Though an officer with a very large guard of soldiers attended upon the said occasion, it was not without the utmost difficulty that the prisoners were conveyed in coaches through the street, the mob frequently endeavouring to break in upon the soldiers and crowding towards the coach doors.

As Cecil passed the Old Bailey, 'He saw a great mob there, who had been breaking the windows of some house or houses there; several of the said mob were in sailor's habits, but upon the approach of the soldiers they all ran away.'<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile Fielding received information that a body of about 4,000 sailors had assembled on Tower Hill and intended to march to Temple Bar that evening. With speculation that the sailors would raid the armoury at the Tower for arms, Fielding felt justified in requesting more troops to patrol the West End. But the outbreak of rioting was now over.

Following several rescues and the death of one the prisoners, only five men remained in custody as the Old Bailey sessions approached. The decision to charge all five under the terms of the 1715 Riot Act was controversial: the act, which mandated the death penalty, had long been seen as an example of Whig tyranny and had rarely been used. Instead, most riotous behaviour was tried under the common law as a misdemeanour and those convicted were normally only fined. Moreover, a key stipulation of the Riot Act, that a proclamation to disperse the riot had to be read by a magistrate, had never actually been carried out during these disturbances. As in 1715 when the Act was originally passed, it appears to have been the government's fear of more serious unrest which led the act to be invoked in this case.

Two of the charges were rejected by the grand jury before the case came to court, and only three men, Bosavern Penlez, John Wilson, and Benjamin Lander actually stood trial at the Old Bailey on September 6 'for that they, together with divers other persons to the number of forty and upwards, being feloniously and riotously assembled to the disturbance of the public peace, did begin to demolish the dwelling house of Peter Wood'. The chief witness for the prosecution was Wood, keeper of the Star:



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I live at The Star in the Strand. I saw these prisoners at the bar at my house, in the night betwixt the 2d and 3d of July. They came betwixt 12 and 1 o'clock; there were I believe about 400 of them; they came ringing a bell, and calling out, the host, the host. The watchman came running over the way, and said, Mr Wood, they are coming, they are coming. About fifty of them passed by the door. I was in great hopes they would have gone by; I made them a bow and said good night, till such time as the bell came opposite my door. Then they that were past my door wheeled about and fell back towards George's coffee-house door, then they all surrounded the whole place. The first stroke that was given was at the lamp at my door. I advanced from the door directly and begged for mercy; saying, Gentlemen, if I have done any thing wrong, take me to the watch house or any place of safety. Then they all fell to breaking my windows; upon that I fell upon my knees. They broke the shutters, sashes and the glass of my windows. Said I, I'll give you 10 nay 20 pounds if you will desist; with that they seemed to stop a little. Somebody amongst them called out here is 10 here is 20 pounds offered, but upon this there was a grave gentleman came jumping from over the way.

**This man, whose name was Wrench, was indicted for promoting the riot, but the grand jury rejected the charge. According to Wood's wife, Jane:**

There was an elderly man came from over the way and said, pull away, my boys, take no money, down with the bawdy-houses, down with the bawdy-houses. Then they cried out where are your whores?

**Eight or 10 men entered the house through the window. According to Peter Wood:**

Wilson and Penlez were among them. They fell to breaking between the passage and the parlour. I saw the two prisoners break the partition with their sticks, and pull the pieces out with their hands. All the furniture in the parlour was destroyed; they threw all into the street. I was knocked down with a stick on the stairs, and there I lay. Some of them called out, and said the man is killed. I hearing that thought I would lie a little longer, thinking by that to raise their compassion. Then they went into the back parlour; I cannot immediately say what they did there; then they went up stairs. I was on the stairs; Penlez and Wilson said, You dog, are you not dead yet? They cried, all up, all up, all up; then I kneeled down on my knees, kissed their hands and begged for mercy.

**Wood was saved by the arrival of the soldiers:**

Then came the guard with a drum beating, then they all took to flight. They rang the bell and cried out, the guards, the guards; so they went all away that could directly. Lander was taken upstairs.

**He then went to inspect the damage:**

In the dining room, which had before in it a bed, pictures, chairs, a mahogany table and other furniture. Every thing was gone out of the room except a little marble slab, which I had put in a corner of the room. The windows were all torn to pieces, the frames all pulled down.

Peter Wood's testimony was corroborated by his wife Jane, and servant James Reeves. All three were then cross-examined by the defence counsel, who tried to suggest that none had actually seen the three defendants in the house causing damage:

Question. Was Lander one of them at their first coming up?

Peter Wood. I did not see him then.

Q. Did you see him any time before the guards came?

Wood. Yes, I saw him in the passage.

Q. How long before the guards came?

Wood. About half an hour before.

Jane Wood. Lander knocked me down, and I was beaten almost to a jelly.

James Reeves. I saw Lander there about a quarter of an hour before the guards came; I saw him strike Mr Wood over the head, as his back was towards him. I saw him push one of the partition boards down in the passage. I did not see him in the parlour. I never saw him do any farther mischief than with his shoulder.

Q. As to Wilson, can you mark any particular thing that he did?

Peter Wood. Yes, he broke the shutters, and after the place was laid open, I saw him come into the parlour.

Q. Did any others besides him break the shutters?

Wood. Yes, many.

Q. How come you to be so positive of the prisoners among so many?

Wood. Upon my kissing their hands.

Q. Did you kiss the hands of all three?

Wood. No, Sir.

Jane Wood. I held Wilson by the face and stroked him, and begged they would desist.

James Reeves. I saw Wilson in the parlour just as the settee bed was going to be thrown out; I saw him help to lift the bed out.

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Q. How could you distinguish Penlez, when you say you was knocked down upon the stairs?

Peter Wood. I was upon my legs when I saw him, there was nobody betwixt me and him, and I had hold of him by the hand two or three times, begging of him to desist. They cried out, they would destroy all the bawdy-houses in general. I believe he was a little in liquor.

Q. Did you see him before the guards came?

Wood. Yes, I did, sir, I saw him at the beginning of the riot at the outside.

Jane Wood. Penlez broke the clock with a stick, and the inside partition in the entry.

James Reeves. The first man that came to the door was Penlez, he came in at the door, then he came in at the window, and was the first man that struck at the clock. I saw him break the window shutter. When he came into the fore parlour he began to play away at the things, the glasses, the pictures. He beat down the bird-cages; the partition that parts the entry from the parlour; he was there the whole time; he was the first man that went up stairs; he was the greatest rascal amongst them all. I saw Mr Wood lying on the stairs, and heard Penlez say to him, You dog, are you not dead yet?

**Defence counsel was more successful in trapping Reeves and Jane Wood into giving contradictory evidence about the size of the stick Penlez allegedly carried:**

Question. What had Penlez in his hand?

James Reeves. He had a large stick, three foot and a half, or four foot long.

Q. to Mrs Wood. What did Penlez break the clock with?

Jane Wood. He had a short stick with which he struck it.

Q. How long was it do you think?

Jane Wood. Not long enough to walk with.

Witnesses for the defence testified to Peter Wood's bad reputation and the much more respectable character of the defendants. In cross-examination, Wood was asked why neither he nor his landlord had paid the scavenger's rate for removing rubbish. Wood was forced to say: 'The reason of it is upon the account of what some people say, it is a disorderly house. He never paid it'. Instead the tax was paid by John Thompson, who did not live there but

'has come sometimes to cut the ladies' hair in the parlour'. Wood was also forced to explain that he had been fined £20 for selling liquor without a licence. The defence then called John Nixon, the collector of the scavenger's rate. Asked if he believed that Wood and his wife were to be believed on their oaths, he said:

Upon my word, I think not. For my part I would not hang a dog or a cat upon their evidence, they keep such a bad house and other things. They have threatened my life, and my neighbours are afraid to appear against him.

Perhaps believing that this was sufficient to discredit the testimony against them, Wilson and Penlez offered no further evidence beyond several witnesses who testified to their good character.

Lander, however, also had an alibi. Going home shortly after midnight with some friends, he had met the soldiers who were going to suppress the riot. One of his companions, Edward Ives, told the court that a soldier told them:

They were going to disperse a mob in the Strand, and that was the third time they had been doing it that night. He told us, he would be obliged to us if we could get a pint of beer, saying he was very dry.

They obliged, and then Lander followed the soldiers to The Star. While inside the house, he was arrested. This evidence directly contradicted prosecution testimony that Lander had been present causing damage *before* the soldiers arrived. On this basis, Lander was acquitted. Wilson and Penlez, however, were convicted and sentenced to death, but with a recommendation to mercy.

News of the sentences caused public outrage and hundreds of Londoners petitioned the king for a reprieve. Petitions came not only from nearby parishioners, who had long suffered from the presence of bawdy houses in their neighbourhoods and who felt the riots were not that big a crime, but also from many respectable gentlemen. Newspapers reported that petitions were submitted from over 300 'principal inhabitants' of the parish of St Clement Danes, a group of 'worthy and honourable gentlemen', 'a worthy society of gentlemen of distinction', and 'several gentlemen of great repute'.<sup>31</sup> Even more surprisingly, the 12 jurors who had convicted Wilson and Penlez petitioned for a reprieve, both on the grounds of 'humanity and compassion' and because they had come to the conclusion that Peter Wood's testimony at the trial could not be trusted. They also felt that the case for the defence had not been as strong as it could have been, noting the 'fatal neglect' to produce witnesses to contradict Wood's evidence.<sup>32</sup>

At 10 pm on the evening before the execution a messenger arrived at Newgate Prison with the news that Wilson, but not Penlez, was to be reprieved. Why was Penlez left to hang? Days before the execution, the circumstances concerning his original arrest came to light. As the Ordinary of Newgate reported:

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There was a circumstance started a day or two before the execution which carried a bad face with it, and which no doubt was a great means of preventing mercy being extended towards him; which is, that when he was taken, there was a bundle of linen found upon him, tied up in a handkerchief. When this came to light, twas thought necessary to ask him particularly as to this fact. To this, his reply to me and others was that it was true, he had such a bundle, but how he came by it, he did not remember, nor could he recollect whether he himself tied it up, or any body else.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, Penlez had originally been indicted for burglary as well as riot, but once convicted on one capital charge the judge had ruled that he could not be tried again on another charge relating to the same incident. Most people were unaware of the circumstances of his arrest and the second indictment, but Henry Fielding himself appears to have brought this evidence to the attention of the crown. Faced with the contradictory demands of a desire to demonstrate mercy and the need for an exemplary punishment to address the current crime problem and dissuade the mob from further rioting, the king took the obvious step of pardoning one of the convicts and executing the other. With the additional charge of theft laid at Penlez's door, he was the obvious candidate for hanging.

Penlez would not be the only person to suffer on 18 October. He was joined on the scaffold by 14 others, 13 sailors and a sailor's wife. Paradoxically, although he was hanged for participating in a riot instigated by sailors, he was not a sailor, while all the others condemned to die that day for other crimes were sailors (or related to one). That morning, as the *London Evening Post* reported, a procession formed outside Newgate Prison:

Between nine and ten the fifteen malefactors were put into six carts; the sheriff was preceded by the warden of Wood Street Compter, and his own livery servants in due order; next the sheriff alone, with his gold chain round his neck, and a white wand in his hand, the proper tokens of his office, followed by the City Marshall, and several attendants two and two; and the procession closed with the criminals, guarded by legal officers.

At Holborn Bar, where the carefully ordered procession moved from the City of London into Middlesex, it was met by an officer and a party of soldiers, who offered to accompany the procession to preserve order. In light of the immense public opposition to the hanging of Penlez, this may seem a reasonable request. The sheriff, however, conscious that use of the military was more likely to foment than prevent disorder, rejected the offer, much to the satisfaction of the newspapers. The sheriff:

Genteelly dismissed the officer from any further attendance, as not apprehending any necessity for the support of the *military power* in the due execution of the law.

The paper then painted a very orderly picture of the executions:

At the place of execution the criminals appeared all to behave very penitent; and the carts drew off about twelve o'clock. The spectators were infinitely more numerous than ever were seen on the like occasion, but without the least tumult or disorder. Tis hoped that the great and remarkable example set by Mr Sheriff Janssen, in executing (agreeable to our constitution and ancient custom) his office without the aid of a *military force* will be productive of the most happy circumstances in many other instances, and prevent the soldiers from being called in to quell every little disorder.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, order had only barely been maintained. The crowd included thousands of sailors armed with bludgeons and cutlasses. There were widespread fears of an attempted rescue or that, as often occurred, there would be a violent struggle after the hangings for possession of the bodies between friends of the deceased and surgeons who wished to use the bodies for dissection. To defuse tensions, the sheriff spoke to the mob, promising that he would hand over the bodies following the executions, but he also threatened to read the Riot Act if any disorder occurred. This carrot and stick strategy worked. Later than evening Penlez was buried in the churchyard of St Clement's. The funeral was paid for by a subscription raised among the parishioners. The *London Evening Post* reported that 'the corpse was attended by an infinite number of persons, much lamenting the unhappy fate of the sufferer'.

Public opposition to the hanging of Penlez carried on throughout the autumn, as the case became caught up in a by-election campaign to elect a member of parliament for Westminster, a constituency with a notoriously radical and tumultuous electorate. The failure of Lord Trentham, the government candidate, to intervene to secure a pardon for Penlez was a major feature of the opposition campaign, and allowed the government's handling of the affair (including the use of the Riot Act and the summoning of the military) to be characterised as a typical government attack on the liberties of the subject. A number of letters and broadsides printed during the campaign raised the case of Penlez. Late in October a 'monumental inscription' to him was published, describing his execution as 'violent and ignominious', and noting that of 400 persons involved in the riot, 'he only suffered, though neither principal, nor contriver'.<sup>35</sup> The ghost of Penlez even appeared in an election procession:

A person was carried about in a coffin dressed in a shroud, attended by a number of lights (candles), etc. designed to represent Penlez who was executed for the riot at the bawdy house in the Strand. He frequently sat up and harangued the populace for his unhappy fate.<sup>36</sup>

According to one observer, this ghost 'carried about in triumph' was 'surely a high insult on the government' and 'had raised more people to vote in St Clements than there are houses in the parish'.<sup>37</sup>

The ghost of Penlez proved hard to lay to rest. On 7 November 'a gentleman concerned' published a 55-page polemical pamphlet, *The Case of the*

*Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez*, which claimed that the execution had been entirely unjustified. Attacking bawdy house keepers as parasites on young women, the author described Peter Wood's testimony as a pack of lies, pointing out that his testimony concerning Lander had been directly refuted during the trial, leading to his acquittal. If he lied about Lander, how could you trust his evidence concerning Penlez? Penlez was described as a 'silly unthinking lad', but of 'unblemished character', who, fuelled by drink, had unintentionally and innocently been caught up in the riot. To use him as 'an example of severity', therefore, was 'overstrained and unnecessary'.<sup>38</sup>

Henry Fielding, faced with criticisms of his own conduct (including the allegation that he had been bribed to protect the bawdy houses), and intending not only to shore up his own reputation as a novice justice but also to support the government (and his patron), published a defence of the handling of this case in *A True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez* on 18 November, four days before polling began. Complaining that Penlez had been 'transformed into a hero', Fielding sought to justify the Riot Act as an essential tool for the maintenance of order and to characterise the destruction of bawdy houses as a serious threat to public order. An example was called for and Penlez, as a thief as well as a rioter, 'deserved his fate'.<sup>39</sup>

In the end, with Penlez executed and a government victory in the election (albeit with a narrow majority), Fielding prevailed, although public resentment lingered. Even today historians still argue over this case, with some claiming that the execution was unwarranted and carried out simply in order to shore up Fielding's authority, while others believe Fielding's version of the events was essentially accurate.<sup>40</sup>

### **Newgate, A-Hoy!**

*The nadir of public order in eighteenth-century London came with the spasm of anti-Catholic violence that erupted in the hot days of early June 1780. The Gordon riots took Londoners by surprise and drove the city to the point of civil collapse. The streets were overrun with rioters moving from house to house, attacking Catholic houses and chapels and the houses of magistrates who opposed the will of the mob. Although almost no one was killed by the rioters, it took over a week, and the deaths of 285 men and women at the hands of the army, before a sepulchral peace could be reclaimed. In the aftermath of those days of destruction, the court at the Old Bailey (itself damaged in the riots) was called upon to mete out justice to the perpetrators. In the end only 160 of the tens of thousands involved were actually charged and only 25 eventually executed. To find yourself before the court you literally had to stand out from the crowd. James Jackson, Thomas Haycock, George Sims and Benjamin Bowsey did just that.*

Lord James Gordon's 'Monster Petition' was so large it could not be carried by even the strongest man. Filled with 40,000 signatures,<sup>41</sup> and composed of

hundreds of sheets of parchment rolled up into a huge bundle, it demanded the immediate repeal of the almost entirely innocuous 'Catholic Relief Act' of 1778. This act had removed some technical bars to inheritance and property holding for Catholics and lifted the threat of life imprisonment for priests. It also obliged Catholics to take an oath of loyalty to the crown. For many Londoners, however, the Catholic Relief Act was a wedge issue that appealed to a centuries' long tradition of anti-Catholic sentiment. Few could resist an appeal to rally in defence of the Protestant religion, which seemed to many to stand as much for traditional English liberties as for a body of religious beliefs.

By 10 in the morning on 2 June it was already hot and St George's Fields, to the south of the river, began to fill with supporters of Lord Gordon, his 'Monster Petition' and the Protestant Association he led. The intention was to deliver the petition to parliament and force the repeal of the act. Thousands of blue cockades were issued to the crowd, which was then divided into four companies. In the lead a Scottish division set the pace to the sound of bagpipes. It was led by a kilted Highlander, with drawn sword. Following behind were divisions from the City, Westminster and Southwark. In martial order the protesters marched across London Bridge, and up Fish Street Hill and Grace Church Street to Cheapside. Some contemporaries put their number at upwards of 100,000, although more conservative (and better informed) commentators estimated it at 14,000.<sup>42</sup> Historians have argued about the precise social mix of the petitioners who set out from St George's Fields, but it is clear that as this army of protest marched through the London streets many of the poor and unemployed joined its number. As this first group travelled along the traditional medieval procession route through London (from St Paul's to the Palace of Westminster), others took the shorter route across Westminster Bridge, to meet their fellows with an ear-splitting cheer in Parliament Street and New Palace Yard.

There followed hours of milling about as Lord Gordon tried to use the threat of public clamour to force parliament to his anti-Catholic will. A few days later, a young law student, Samuel Romilly, wrote to his brother describing the scene:

They seemed to consist in a great measure of the lowest rabble. A miserable fanatic accosted me to question where my cockade was, and told me that the reign of the Romans had lasted too long. I mingled in a circle which I saw assembled around a female preacher, who, by her gestures and actions seemed to be well persuaded that she was animated by some supernatural spirit. The want of a cockade was a sure indication of a want of the true faith, and I did not long remain unquestioned as to my religious principles. My joining, however, in the cry of 'No Popery!' soon pacified my inquisitors, or rather, indeed, gained me their favour; for a very devout butcher insisted upon shaking hands with me as a token of friendship.<sup>43</sup>



Members of Parliament and the House of Lords were manhandled and threatened, and above the whole Lord Gordon played the demagogue. In the end, the vote was deferred in the hope of dispersing the crowd. But disappointed of an immediate repeal, after a long hot day milling about and awaiting news, this Protestant *melée* slowly turned into a riotous assembly. In the hours after midnight, the Catholic chapel of the Sardinian ambassador was broken into and set alight, the moveable furniture fuelling one of the tens of bonfires that sprang up throughout the city. By the next morning the chapel belonging to the Bavarian Embassy in Warwick Street had been similarly looted, and the streets were full of the dead embers of countless bonfires.

In the days that followed, the homes of prominent Catholics were attacked, and groups of men and women roamed the streets, extorting money to support the cause – many with an iron bar in one hand and a hat held ‘in a begging way’ in the other, demanding what they called ‘mob money’. At night, lights were put in the front windows of houses in a general illumination. The lack of a candle was likely to result in the unwelcome attention of the crowds. Political prevarication and uncertainty fuelled the crisis, which grew ever more violent as Saturday turned to Sunday and then Monday.

Ann Candler, a pauper with child to her breast – who had recently come to London to join her alcoholic husband – spent that week cowering at home in a rented room, too frightened to go out. The experience destroyed the last vestige of her marriage and left her ‘exposed to the horrors of extreme poverty in the midst of strangers’.<sup>44</sup> Francis Place’s father, the owner of a ‘sponging house’ where men and women were held as security for their debts, spent that week similarly paralysed with fear.

By Tuesday June 6, and after another disappointed attempt to force parliament to repeal the act, the violence of the crowds turned from chapels and the homes of prominent Catholics to those of the magistrates who authorised the arrest of rioters, and then to the prisons of the capital, most notably to Newgate Prison.

That Tuesday afternoon outside the Houses of Parliament, James Jackson was in the thick of the crowd. A sailor, Jackson was dressed in ‘a brown coat, a round hat, a checked shirt, and a pair of long trousers’. He had recently returned from sea and was observed lifting his closed fist to the air and egging on the crowd. John Lucy, a hairdresser who worked in Clerkenwell was also in the crowd that day. At Jackson’s later trial, Lucy described the scene:

About the hour of five o’clock, as near as I can recollect, I observed a very large mob in Palace Yard and a very great tumult. A party of horse rode amongst them; as I was informed, by the order of Justice Hyde. Jackson hoisted a black and red flag, which was upon a pole. He stood the next man to me, or next but one. He cried ‘Hyde’s house, a-hoy’. He was seconded by several of the mob. They proceeded immediately there. I followed at a distance.

I saw the flag at Charing-Cross. I followed into St Martin’s Street, where I understood Justice Hyde’s house was, and the mob followed the

flag to Mr Hyde's house. They stayed there near an hour, as near as I can recollect. Jackson still had the flag. Then he cried out 'Newgate, ahoy'. That was about six o'clock, as near as I can recollect. He went down Orange Street coming towards Newgate. Great numbers of the mob followed him.<sup>45</sup>

Justice Hyde's furniture was piled high in the street and consumed in several bonfires. Even before the mob had started to move towards Newgate the prison keeper, Richard Akerman, feared that his house would suffer a similar fate. As a place where several rioters were imprisoned, Newgate was an obvious target for the rioters, and Akerman held the keys. By 5 o'clock he was already 'agitated a good deal, having had an information that the mob was coming to visit me'. He packed up his plate and asked Mary Clark, a servant, to help secure his substantial house next door to and interconnected with the prison. She later described how she 'barred the door, chained, and bolted it with two bolts and put up the shutters'.<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, the crowd moved deliberately from Justice Hyde's house, just south of Leicester Fields, past St Martin's Churchyard, down the Strand, and towards Newgate. A small boy, John Steel, on an errand for his father, saw the crowd surging up the Old Bailey, 'with great sticks in their hands and great spokes of wheels' which had been pilfered from a shop. Rose Jennings also saw the crowd:

The mob approached three abreast, some with paving mattocks, others with iron crows and chisels; and then followed an innumerable company with bludgeons. They seemed to be the spokes of coach-wheels. They divided; some went to Mr Akerman's door with the mattocks, some to the felon's door, and some to the debtor's door.

They attacked Mr Akerman's house precisely at seven o'clock; they were preceded by a man better dressed than the rest who went up to Mr Akerman's door. He rapped three times, and I believe pulled the bell as often. Mr Akerman had barricaded his house. When the man found that no one came, he went down the steps, made his obeisance to the mob, and pointed to the door, and then retired.<sup>47</sup>

The paviour's mattocks wielded by many in the crowd were heavy picks, shaped like an adze at one end, and a chisel at the other. Anyone carrying a mattock through the streets of London must have appeared uniquely threatening. Jennings was also:

Struck with the formidable appearance and order in which they divided and proceeded to destroy the place. The men threw their sticks up at the windows, which they broke and demolished, yet notwithstanding these sticks were coming down in showers, two men with a bar, such as brewers servants carry on their shoulders, attacked the parlour window to force it open. The window shutters were exceedingly tough. They at last forced them partly open, but not quite. I then saw a man in a sailor's jacket helped up [possibly James Jackson]. He forced himself neck and heels into the window. They found the house door still difficult to get open. Before it was got open the other parlour window was opened and

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the mob were throwing the goods out at the window. At last the house door gave way. About the same time some of the goods and furniture having been thrown out into the street, a fire was kindled.

Later that evening, drunk on both alcohol and the burning of Newgate, Thomas Haycock dropped into The Bell tavern in St James's Market flushed and proud. Haycock was a waiter and poor. A friend said of him, 'When you have lost that coat on your back you have lost all you are worth'. He also had a history of mental illness. But on this evening he was the centre of attention as he described his role in taking Newgate earlier that evening to an incredulous audience:

He related his heading the mob from the Parliament House to Justice Hyde's house. That after leaving a party to complete the business at Justice Hyde's, he marched them to the end of Drury Lane. How he went into some shops in Long Acre; that there they got spokes of wheels, crows, pickaxes, and iron bars, and then went to Newgate.

One of his audience, John Lambert, asked him: 'What could induce him to do all this?'

He said the cause. (And Lambert replied) Do you mean a religious cause? He said no; for he was of no religion. He said, there should not be a prison standing on the morrow in London. He said, the Bishop of London's house as well as the Duke of Norfolk's house should come down that night.

Haycock went on to describe what happened when the mob came to Richard Akerman's house next to the prison. He said:

Damn my blood I have done the business! He said, He had pulled down Akerman's house and let out all the prisoners. That there was a short man there with broad shoulders; a tall man got upon his shoulders and butted his head against the windows, and in four or five times he shoved the window in, and so got in. He said he was the first man who entered Newgate and after demanding the keys they gave Mr Akerman five minutes time to consider of it. With the sheets and furniture of Mr Akerman they set fire to the door, with a bureau he particularly mentioned they set fire to the door.

As some of the crowd were battling for entry to Akerman's house, others assaulted the main gate of the prison. Rebuilt only a few years earlier in an imposing classical style designed by George Dance the Younger, Newgate was, in the words of the poet George Crabbe, 'very large, strong and beautiful'.<sup>48</sup> Built to hold prisoners, it was a formidable task even for a large crowd to break in.

At the head of the crowd which included James Jackson and Thomas Haycock was George Sims, a tripe seller from St James's Market, where Thomas Haycock also worked. John Pitt recalled:

On the 6th of June, at about seven o'clock at night we saw a vast concourse of people coming down to Newgate. They hallooed Newgate

a-hoy. Sims and some others came up to the great gate, down the Old Bailey. He swore a desperate oath that he would have the gates down. He either damned his eyes, or damned his blood, he would have the gates down. Then they began at the gates, some with sledge hammers, and others with pick-axes. Sims had a large stick. I called to him because I had known him for some years. I said, 'Very well, George the tripe man, I shall mark you in particular'. I had known him six or seven years. Then he went towards Mr Akerman's house.

From his vantage point behind the grate, Pitt could see the front of Akerman's house:

I saw the feathers fly. They had got some of Mr Akerman's goods out, and they continued throwing them out. Then they set them against the gate and set them on fire, and they would have burnt those gates down, but we kept throwing water against them to cool them, to keep the lead from melting, and letting the hinges out. Then Mr Akerman's house was set on fire. That burnt into our fore lodge and into the chapel, and set the different wards on fire.

One way or another, Jackson, Haycock and Sims drew attention to themselves by their actions at the head of the mob. Benjamin Bowsey, a black man who had emigrated from America six years earlier, was the object of the court's attention almost solely because of his colour. He was an active



Figure 2.06 'An Exact Representation of the Burning, Plundering and Destruction of Newgate on the Memorable 7th of June 1780' (detail). © City of London, London Metropolitan Archives

participant in the looting of Akerman's house, but the witnesses who appeared at his trial emphasised his race more than his actions. Later depictions of the scene outside Newgate included two clearly drawn black figures at the centre of the action, one of whom was meant to represent Bowsey. He had been a footman to General Honeywood, but, at least according to the General, he was 'a very honest and very foolish fellow that got into idle company' while employed in the kitchens of St Alban's Tavern. This is the same tavern where Thomas Haycock was employed as a waiter, and it was located in St James's Market, where George Sims worked as a tripe man.<sup>49</sup> All three, Bowsley, Haycock and Sims, almost certainly knew each other, and it is entirely possible that they conspired to promote the riot. But, more importantly, despite differences in race and occupation, they were all part of a broader male culture of working Londoners for whom prisons and the court represented the power of the state.

Rose Jennings was sitting on the first floor of his brother's house across from the prison, and prided himself on his clear observation of the participants:

When the conflagration took place I applied my mind to the mob, and endeavoured to form a distinction between the active and inactive people. I thought I did so. The inactive people seemed to form a circle. I observed a person better dressed than the rest among those within the circle, who did not meddle, but seemed to be exciting and encouraging others. I saw several genteel looking men, and amongst them a black. When I first saw the black I turned to a lady and said, 'this is a motley crew, and of every colour'. Near nine o'clock I heard a cry and a jingling of keys in the hands of some persons. Amongst them was the prisoner at the bar, Benjamin Bowsey. He was without his hat, and his hands were down.

Jennings was particularly cross-examined at the Old Bailey about Bowsey's race, and Jennings's ability to make a positive identification:

Question. There were I believe other blacks in the mob?

Answer. I never saw but one; I saw a black at first, but did not remark him so as to swear to him.

Q. You could not swear to him I suppose from the difficulty every man has in his mind to swear to any black?

A. Yes.

Q. There is more difficulty to swear to a black than to a white man?

A. No. The second time I made my remark too judiciously to err.

Q. When was it you first saw the black?

A. After the goods were first set on fire, which was about a quarter after seven o'clock.

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- Q. What dress had the black on?
- A. Something of a dark colour, but my remark was on his face.
- Q. What was remarkable in that man's face more than another black?
- A. The make of his hair was one thing. The curls were out if he had had any, and his hair smooth on his head. His face was so exposed to my view the second time that I could not be better situated to make any remark on his face.

Ann Wood was watching the same scene from the 'three-pair-of-stairs room' across the way – the third-floor window – and took particular note of Bowsey:

It was a little after seven o'clock. I saw him in Mr Akerman's two-pair-of-stairs room. He stood against the window with something in his hand and looked at me for some time before I observed particularly what he was doing. I looked at him then, and he took up something off the ground and held it up to me. When he held it up, I went down from the window into the dining-room. I came up again, and he was there still. He seemed to be looking in a drawer upon the floor, and seemed to be doing some thing up into a bundle.

Like Rose Jennings, Ann Wood was positive she could identify Benjamin Bowsey, and like Jennings was vigorously cross-examined:

- Q. What makes you so positive that this is the man?
- A. I know his face perfectly again by his standing and looking at me so long.
- Q. You recollect him only by his face?
- A. His face and his hair.
- Q. Did you see any other black there?
- A. Yes, I did; not in the house but in the mob.

In some measure it was not just Bowsey's riotous behaviour and appearance that led to his trial. Unlike most of the people involved that night, more intent on burning Akerman's goods than stealing them, Bowsey made away with a number of items which were later found in his possession and produced in court. Bowsey's room in cheap lodgings was eventually searched by a constable, Percival Phillips, and three pairs of stockings, a pocketbook and a handkerchief were discovered in a locked trunk. Most damning of all, however, and on a shelf nearby, Phillips found a large ornate key, figured with a crown. Richard Akerman, keeper of Newgate Prison, identified the goods:

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This pocketbook, I believe, has been in my possession thirty years. It was, I believe, in one of the drawers belonging to my wife. Here are several of my banker's cheques which had my name to them.

**The stockings were equally distinctive:**

Here is a very remarkable pair which I had made for me, and the maker wove the initials of my name in them in open work. Bowsey has put the initials of his name (B B) over it. They were in the drawers in a one-pair-of-stairs room. Here are several others that were marked by my sister. They are mine. I believe the handkerchiefs to be mine, but there are no particular marks on them.

**And as for the key:**

This is a remarkable key; it is a key of the park, it has a crown and my name at length upon it.

While Bowsey was pilfering Akerman's goods, the crowd, having broken in to Newgate and set fire to the building, had to rush to save the prisoners. George Crabbe was in the crowd and recorded the events in his diary:

They broke the gates with crows and other instruments, and climbed up the outside of the cell part, which joins the two great wings of the building where the felons were confined. They broke the roof, tore away the rafters, and having got ladders they descended. Not Orpheus himself had more courage or better luck; flames all around them, and a body of soldiers expected, they defied and laughed at all opposition. The prisoners escaped. I stood and saw above twelve women and eight men ascend from their confinement to the open air, and they were conducted through the streets in their chains. Three of them were to be hanged on Friday. This being done, and Akerman's house now a mere shell of brickwork, they kept a store of flame there for other purposes. It became red-hot and the doors and windows appeared like the entrance to so many volcanoes.<sup>50</sup>

From Newgate alone some 300 prisoners, both felons and debtors, were released.<sup>51</sup>

Henry Angelo was also watching. He paid six pence for a place at a garret window above the scene. He saw 'The captives marched out, with all the honours of war, accompanied by a musical band of rattling fetters'.<sup>52</sup> As the prisoners had their chains knocked off, wine and gin liberated from Akerman's cellar was distributed through the crowd. As the fire grew, it began to threaten surrounding buildings, and to rage out of control. Eventually fire engines were let through, and the flames were doused.<sup>53</sup>

The firing of Newgate was just the first event of a long night of destruction. The neighbouring Old Bailey courthouse was invaded and furniture from the courtroom was burned in the street. Part of the crowd marched off to Bloomsbury Square, ringing a loud bell they had discovered in Akerman's cellar, declaring their intention to roast alive the Archbishop of York and the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield. At the same time, others set off for Bridewell, the New Prison and

Clerkenwell Prison. A crowd later attacked the Fleet Prison as well, forcing reluctant debtors from their beds. By the end of the night there was barely a prisoner or prison left in the capital. One estimate suggests that some 1,600 prisoners were released. The rioters 'insisted upon lights being put up at every window in joy for the destruction of Newgate; the illumination accordingly was general, the sky glowing on every side with the light of different conflagrations'.<sup>54</sup>

Until 3.30 in the morning the streets belonged to the rioters alone. But then the authorities changed their tactics. Up until this point, justices had been unwilling to order the army to fire on the crowds, fearing that in the event of any deaths the soldiers would be charged with murder. Now the king stepped in and ordered the soldiers to act directly without waiting for orders from the magistrates and the word was given for a small command of soldiers to open fire on the crowd. Five people, four men and a woman, were killed outright and seven more were wounded. This set off a running battle that carried on throughout the night and continued the next day.

On Wednesday little had changed. Although attacks on the Bank of England were repulsed, the King's Bench prison was fired, as was the Fleet, the Borough Clink and Surrey Bridewell. One of the largest distilleries in London, Langdale's, was attacked, and thousands of gallons of gin was appropriated by the rioters. The building was set on fire and as the flames took hold drunken men and women rushed to the cellars to claim more gin. Many died, soaked in raw spirits and burned to death.

Battles broke out throughout the city. Hastily marshalled troops were force-marched up from provincial towns and the channel ports. And while the violence continued through Thursday, on Friday, by opening fire and by sheer force of numbers, the army regained control of the streets. Writing to his brother, Samuel Romilly claimed that by Friday afternoon 'the most profound tranquillity reigned in every part of London'.<sup>55</sup>

This tranquillity had been bought at a high price. As well as the 285 rioters killed by soldiers, a further 173 were wounded. Four hundred and fifty individuals were under arrest, including Lord George Gordon himself, who was eventually tried for treason. Contemporary estimates put a price of £180,000 on the damage to property.

As for James Jackson, George Sims, Thomas Haycock and Benjamin Bowsey, they were among the 85 people tried at the Old Bailey for their part in the riots. Jackson was found guilty and hanged before the Old Bailey itself. George Sims, the tripe man, called several character witnesses, was found innocent and walked from the courtroom; while Thomas Haycock was found guilty and joined Jackson on the gibbet. Benjamin Bowsey was also found guilty and sentenced to death, but he escaped the noose. The king eventually granted him a full pardon.

As a 9 year old, Francis Place was soundly beaten by his father for skipping church to explore 'the ruins of the places burned by the rioters',<sup>56</sup> but neither the army's bullets, nor the court's terrible judgment, or even the blows of an angry father, could remove the Gordon riots from the popular imagination of



Londoners. At the least, the riots raised mixed emotions. For propertied Londoners, they represented a world gone mad and a warning for the future. Politicians (even radicals) would never again appeal so recklessly for the support of the mob. After the events of 1780 most no longer considered rioting a legitimate form of protest. But for others, the leaders who marshalled this seeming 'phrensy of the multitude' became heroes.<sup>57</sup> A ballad sung about the streets in the years after 1780 captures the admiration that many felt. 'Jack Chance' celebrated the life of a foundling child discovered on the steps of Newgate, who 'learn'd to curse, to swear and fight, And everything but read and write'. According to the ballad, he was a natural for the mob:

With blue cockade proclaimed for war  
 With bludgeon, strut or iron bar  
 No head, a mob he never would fail  
 At gutting the mass house or burning a gaol.

Like James Jackson and Thomas Haycock, however:

But a victim he fell to his country's laws  
 And died at last in religion's cause  
 No popery made the blade to swing  
 And when tucked up he was, just the thing.<sup>58</sup>

### Rejoicing to See the Lights

*Violence took many forms, and not all were the result of passion or malice. Coroners were required to investigate all deaths that occurred in suspicious circumstances, and inquest verdicts that blamed deaths on the actions of others, regardless of motive, regularly led to trials at the Old Bailey. As the century progressed there was a growing intolerance of all sorts of violence, and an increasing desire to hold to account even those responsible for accidental deaths.*

Tuesday 16 August 1796 was the Duke of York's birthday, and a fine excuse for an illumination, an elaborate display of candles formed into a dramatic shape. By a little after 8 o'clock that evening the gang of children living around Bishopsgate Street were 'making a great noise, huzzaing'. They were excited and happy as candles and lamps were lit opposite the church:

When the man began to light up the lights, three or four children ran across the way clapping their hands, rejoicing like to see the lights.

A few minutes earlier, however, the Newmarket mail coach had set out from one of London's great inns, on the much more serious business of delivering the post. It turned up Bishopsgate Street heading out on its overnight journey through the English countryside to East Anglia. The schedule was precise. The mail contractor later explained:

I am compelled to go to Newmarket in eight hours; 63 miles; they must go full ten miles an hour; government compels us to do that. There are five changes of horses in the night, and stopping for passengers to refresh; I am sure they must go full ten miles an hour.

Turning into the wide roadway of Bishopsgate Street, the coachman, William Clark, picked up speed. The guard, Bolt White, sat behind him, over the coach boot at the rear. A locked mailbox at his feet, he had a pistol ready in case they encountered highwaymen. White was dressed in the scarlet frock coat trimmed with gold braid that declared his employment by the Post Office, and he was meant to blow a regular warning to pedestrians on a three-foot tin horn. On that evening, however, no one could remember hearing him play. Lamb Beazley sold fish about the streets and was in Bishopsgate Street. Although she saw the coach 'coming on very fast', she did not hear 'the horn blow before the coach came up'. Neither did James Shakeshaft, who was returning home to Sun Street. He was a retired Post Office worker himself and knew how a mail coach was meant to behave:

I was on my return home from a little beyond Bishopsgate Church. I perceived a mail coach coming very furiously along, galloping; when I first saw it, it might be forty or fifty yards from the place where they were illuminating. I heard no horn blow, but at the rate that it was coming at, any one that stood in the way must have been killed, it was then in the middle of the road.

Mail coaches first appeared on the streets of London in 1784. They were light and fast – a technological marvel. The body of this particular coach was made up of maroon and black panels and rolled on bright red wheels. On each door the words London and Newmarket were stencilled above 'Royal Mail' and the royal coat of arms. On the boot a unique registration number was displayed. It had space for four passengers inside and a further two on the roof and was pulled by four fresh horses. The service was so regular that some people had even begun to commute into and out of London by coach.

On this evening, as on many others, John Morris caught the Newmarket coach:

I sleep out of town, and frequently get a lift by it. I leave the office about the time that the mail goes off; coming down Houndsditch I saw the mail go past and ran after.

Ten-year-old Michael Connel was one of the children excitedly waiting for the lamplighter to begin the illuminations. Lamb Beazley later recalled that Michael was one of four children who ran across the roadway:

I turned my head round to see if my little boy was among them. I then saw the mail coach coming very fast. I immediately stamped my foot, and hallooed to the children immediately to get out of the way. They got away as well as they could, and as the little boy that was killed was making his escape over to the other side, the horse's feet came rearing

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up, and the right side foot knocked the child down, and the horse behind him trampled over him as he lay upon his belly. The two wheels went over his back.

**At the same moment, Esther Wise set off:**

I sat at the corner of New Street with fruit in a barrow, and I was going to cross over for a candle. The mail coach was going by at the same time. I made a stop for it to pass me. I ran directly behind the coach as it passed me and I saw the horses rear up, and I saw the child under the fore-horses' feet, and the child turned upon its side as if trying to get up, and the other horse trampled upon him. I don't know whether the wheel went over him or not. It was done in an instant, and the mob gathered, and I saw no more of it.

**Dennis Brames was also waiting for the illuminations:**

I was standing to see the lamps lighting and I saw the mail coach coming along at a very great rate indeed. Just as it came to the spot, the man came out to light the lamps with a ladder, and the boys set up a great hallooing in the road. The fore-horses reared up and knocked the boy down, and the off hind horse trampled over him. The off fore-wheel and off hind-wheel went over his back and loins. I saw the boy taken up and in a few minutes after brought in to the doctor's and the coach went on at a very great rate afterwards.

**Just a few moments earlier, John Morris had seen the coach go by and had chased after it:**

It might be forty or fifty yards before me. I went after it, and overtook it at the time of the accident. I saw the wheel go over the deceased, I saw it was a boy, and as I was following the coach I jumped over the boy, and overtook the coach immediately after. I stopped the coach and got upon the box with the coachman.

Ignoring the crowd that was quickly assembling over the now dead body of Michael Connel, and having collected a paying passenger, the coachman, William Clark, whipped his horses and rode on. At Clark's subsequent trial for murder the guard, Bolt White, explained what happened next in response to the staccato questioning of first the prosecuting attorney, Newman Knowlys, and then the defence counsel, William Fielding:

Bolt White. I was guard to the Newmarket Mail-coach on the evening of the accident.

Question. Who was the driver of the coach that evening?

A. William Clark, the prisoner.

Q. Your place is behind the coach, not upon the box?

A. Yes.

Cross-examined by Mr Fielding.

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- Q. You were the guard?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You had a horn, I take it for granted?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you blow the horn frequently as you came along Bishopsgate Street?
- A. Yes.
- Q. This horn of yours was as a warning that you were coming along?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you remember when you were coming near a spot where illuminations were preparing?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you recollect whether you there blew the horn?
- A. Yes; all through the crowd of people.
- Q. Was there a noise, huzzaing and shouting, when you came near this place?
- A. Yes; just as we went through it.
- Q. Do you recollect at which side the coach was going, at this time?
- A. Rather nearer to the church side of the road.
- Q. Were you going at more than the usual pace that you go down Bishopsgate Street?
- A. Much the same that we commonly go.
- Q. How long has that poor fellow driven the mail coach?
- A. About seven months.
- Q. What is his character?
- A. A very good character.
- Q. Is he a good natured fellow?
- A. Yes.

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Q. He would not do a mischief to his fellow creatures, I hope?

A. No.

Q. Was he sober at that time?

A. Very.

Q. When was it that you knew of the accident having happened?

A. I did not know of it till we got to the Bald Faced Stag upon Epping Forest.

Q. When it was made known to him did Clark express his sorrow?

A. He told me of it when we got there; a passenger that had got up afterwards, told him that he had run over a boy.

Q. Did he accompany this declaration to you with a proper feeling?

A. He said he did not know whether he was hurt, he hoped not.

Mr Knowlys.

Q. Did you hear the cries of the people at all as you passed by?

A. No.

**William Clark himself let his defence counsel and his employer, George Boulton, speak on his behalf. Boulton, in particular, who claimed to have known Clark 'from his infancy', gave him the strongest support he could, saying he was 'a lad of remarkable good disposition':**

I never knew him in liquor in my life. He was brought up by my father, and has lived with me ever since. He has drove this mail from the first day I had it.

**Clark's temperament was discussed, as was his treatment of animals and his 'heart' and 'character'. Finally, William Fielding felt he had done enough:**

I have a number of witnesses from the Post Office, but I will not trouble the court with any more.

**The jury retired, and spent an unusually long time – two hours – arguing over the case. It was a hit and run accident with a tragic outcome. In the end, they brought in a verdict of 'not guilty' and William Clark walked free.<sup>59</sup>**

## The Monster

*The eighteenth century witnessed the birth of the criminal celebrity – notorious criminals whose exploits were publicised in the media and who became the subject of public fascination. At the end of the century this phenomenon took a disturbing new turn when public attention focused on an apparently psychopathic serial attacker. In this instance the moral panic created by media attention to ‘The Monster’ encouraged the very crimes the public was so concerned to stop. His trial, moreover, called into question the fragile system of justice meted out at the Old Bailey.*

On 12 May 1790 a German visitor, Georg Forster, noted in his diary that London was in an uproar. A ‘Monster’ was terrorising the streets, insulting women and stabbing them with sharp instruments, usually in their buttocks. This man ‘goes about in various different guises wounding beautiful women with specially invented instruments, with hooks hidden in bouquets of flowers, with knitting pins, etc.’ Londoners, he reported, talked about little else:

The newspapers are full of him; the playwrights entertain audiences with his exploits from the stage; the ladies are afraid of him. The mob gives every pedestrian a keen look in case he is the Monster; all the walls are covered with posters advertising a reward for the apprehension of the Monster; a fund has been opened to finance the hunt.<sup>60</sup>

Between May 1788 and June 1790 there were reports of over 50 attacks on women in public by unidentified men wielding sharp implements. Although the details varied, the assaults shared many characteristics. They were generally unprovoked and carried out by men unknown to the victim. The culprit used insulting and threatening language and a sharp object to cut through the victim’s clothes and into her flesh, typically in the thigh or bottom, but sometimes the face. He then lingered, clearly enjoying watching his victim suffer. The instruments, which were often disguised and sometimes designed to cause particularly horrific injuries, included knives hidden in canes or attached to shoes (for use when kicking), sharp pins disguised inside bouquets (which the victim was urged to smell) and claws with several sharp prongs. Some women were also kicked or punched on the breast or head.



Figure 2.07 ‘Renwick Williams, Commonly Called the Monster’ (1790).  
Credit: Guildhall Library, City of London

It was not until April 1790 that organised efforts to apprehend the culprit began. Newspapers, the Bow Street runners, neighbourhood associations, and an anonymous private philanthropist offering a reward, all joined the campaign. After several false arrests, in June a suspect, Rhynewick (or Renwick) Williams, a 23-year-old artificial-flower maker, was arrested and identified by several victims. Although assault was a petty crime, the desire to see the 'Monster' severely punished ensured that he was charged with a felony, under an obscure 1720 statute against cutting up women's clothes. With an angry mob outside the courtroom demanding vengeance (as well as a hostile audience inside), he was tried at the Old Bailey in July for an attack on Ann Porter which had occurred in the previous January.

Arthur Pigott (or Pigot), counsel for the prosecution, opened the trial:

May it please your lordship, and you gentlemen of the jury, this is the most extraordinary case that ever called for the attention of a court of justice. It is an unpleasant task to call your minds to a scene so new in the annals of mankind; a scene so unaccountable; a scene so unnatural to the honour of human nature, that it could not have been believed ever to have existed, unless it had been demonstrated by that proof which the senses cannot resist. It must appear unaccountable to us that any human being, unless impelled by some impulse which cannot be explained, should have committed an act, to which no hope of reward, no inclination of revenge, excited by a real or supposed injury, no idea of concealing an atrocious offence, nor any natural propensity which has hitherto been supposed to actuate a human creature, could have urged him. Thus acting apparently and visibly, without a motive for the commission of the deed, the prisoner at the bar has made a wanton, wilful, cruel, and inhuman attack upon the most beautiful! The most innocent! The most lovely! And perhaps I shall not trespass upon the truth, when I say the best work of nature!

That divine creation was Ann Porter, one of four daughters of Thomas Porter, keeper of an establishment called Pero's Bagnio, an apparently respectable hotel, tavern and bathhouse in St James.

Ann was attacked while returning home from the Queen's Birthday ball on 18 January. Appearing in the courtroom wearing a veil to protect her from Williams's gaze, she told the court that as she approached her house on St James's Street at 11.15 pm:

My sister desired me to make haste; and we went as fast as we could; she said something else, but I did not distinguish the words. Just as I was passing the corner of the rails I felt a violent blow on my hip; I turned round to see from whence it proceeded, and I saw that man (pointing at the prisoner at the bar) stoop down.

Her testimony to the court was frequently interrupted by questions from prosecution counsel:

Question. Had you ever seen that man before, madam?

Answer. Yes, sir.

Q. Oftener than once?

A. Three or four times.

Q. When you had seen him before had he said any thing to you?

A. Yes, he had.

Q. Did you know him as an acquaintance, or were you under the necessity of meeting him?

A. I know no more of him than walking in the middle of the day; he insulted me and my sisters with very gross and indelicate language; he walked behind me and muttered.

Q. I do not ask you to repeat what he said to you, but in what manner had he spoke, and what sort of language?

A. Very gross, and very abusive.

Q. Had that happened to you more than once?

A. Yes, sir, three or four times.

The questioning returned to the events on the evening of 18 January:

Q. When you was standing at the door of your father's house, and received this blow, and turned round, and saw the man stooping down, did you at that time recognise that man to be the same that had spoken to you before?

A. It struck me immediately to be the same man; I knew him the moment. He did not run away. I was very much shocked at the sight of him; I endeavoured to pass on the side of the door: I felt a very strange sensation; and I fancy he must have passed at the same time I did. He stood opposite to me, and stared in my face: he walked up to the top of the steps, on the opposite side of the door I was of, and he stood as close to me as he possibly could.

Q. Look at him, as he stands there; have you any doubt of that being the person that struck you the blow?

A. No, sir, I have not the smallest doubt; I could not have been positive, but I saw him three or four times before. I suffered so much from the insults I received, that it is impossible I could be mistaken. I could never forget him.

Q. In what manner were your clothes cut?

A. They are here, sir.



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Q. Did they appear to be cut with a sharp instrument?

A. Yes, a very sharp one.

**Sarah Porter, Ann's sister, had also encountered Williams before, and heard 'the most dreadful language that can be imagined'. She was also asked to describe the encounter with him on the evening of the 18th:**

Some chairman was passing by who said, by your leave; upon which he started round, stared in my face, and looked again, and said, oh! oh! and instantly gave me a violent blow on my head, the back of my head.

Q. Upon that what did you do?

A. I requested my sister to run. I said, Nancy, for God's sake make haste, do not you see the wretch is behind us; a name we always distinguish him by.

Q. There was another lady with you I understand: did you all run?

A. Yes, as fast as we could. I ran first to ring at the door; while I was ringing at the door I turned round to see if he was coming, and I saw him run past, across the stable yard; he was close to my sister; and he dropped down. I was so terrified, and I looked again; the words were half uttered when he rushed between Mrs Mead and me; and I saw him strike with the greatest violence, and I heard the silk rent. His hand was shut, I observed particularly.

**John Coleman, a fishmonger, then testified concerning the circumstances which led to the arrest of Williams exactly five months later. A second counsel for the prosecution, Mr Shepherd, led the questioning:**

Q. Do you remember being with Miss Porter on the 18th of June last, in St. James's Park, in the evening?

A. Yes; I perceived her very much agitated, indeed; and she told me the wretch had just passed her; she pointed him out to me.

Q. (Pointing to Williams sitting in the dock) Was that the person she pointed out to you?

A. That was the person.

Q. Did you follow him?

A. I followed him, and he walked exceedingly fast.

**Coleman then told an extraordinary tale of his pursuit of Williams, following him at a distance of between one and five yards, out of the park, through Whitehall and into St James, without actually accosting him. When he entered a house, Coleman simply waited until he came out again. Finally, in Bond Street, Coleman plucked up his courage and tried to engage Williams's attention:**

I did every thing that laid in my power to insult him, by walking behind him, and walking before him, looking at him very full in the face, and making a noise behind him. I used every art I could to insult him; he would not take any insult; he never said a word. I followed him behind; and I behaved in this kind of way (peeping over his shoulder, and making a clapping with his hands) and I was going to knock him down once or twice. He crossed Oxford Road, and went into Vere Street.

**When they reached South Moulton Street Williams went into the house of a Mr Smith. Coleman asked and was allowed to follow him in, where he was finally able to confront Williams:**

I began to make an apology for my rude behaviour to this gentleman; and I told him I thought it was very odd he did not take any notice of my manner of proceeding. I told him I had come to a resolution to know his address, and would give him mine. He said he thought it was very proper that I should assign some reason for my wishing to know his address. I did not know what reason to assign; I was a little agitated; I did not like to say, Sir, you are supposed to be this Monster; and I told him at last that he had insulted some ladies that I was very intimate with, that I was walking in the park with one of the ladies, and she had pointed him out to me, and that as far as lay in my power I would have satisfaction for that insult. He said, good God! I never insulted any ladies in my life. I told him I could not then proceed any farther with him, for I was not sure he was the man; but he must favour the ladies with a sight of him. Mr Smith said that I talked very fair, and that he thought it was very proper to give his address to me.

**They exchanged addresses and parted company, but then Coleman had second thoughts and returned to Williams, and asked him to go directly to see the Porters that evening. He agreed and they went to the house:**

I introduced the gentleman to the ladies in the parlour, and two of the Miss Porters immediately fainted away; that was Miss Sarah Porter, and Miss Ann Porter, exclaiming 'Oh my God! Coleman, that is the wretch'.

- Q. Did he say or do any thing when the Miss Porters cried out, that is the wretch?
- A. He said, the ladies' behaviour is extremely odd; he said, good God! they do not take me for this person, about whom there has been so many publications? I answered, it really is so, sir; I do not recollect he made me any answer to it.
- Q. How long did he stay there?
- A. He was there an hour. Miss Porter thought proper to send for some ladies: I heard him say once or twice that the ladies were prejudiced.

**Having established the Porters' identification of Williams as the culprit, the case for the prosecution concluded with testimony from Mr Tomkins, the surgeon:**

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Mr Shepherd. I believe you attended Miss Ann Porter after she was hurt?

A. I did.

Q. From the nature of the wound which she had, must it have been made with a sharp instrument?

A. A very sharp instrument.

Q. Did you examine the clothes?

A. I did; I examined the gown, which was considerably cut, and the petticoat too; I am not sure whether I saw the shift; I believe I did not.

Q. Did it appear to be done with the same instrument, and at the same time?

A. Certainly.

Q. How deep was the wound?

A. The first part of the wound was only through the skin, the middle part was at least three inches or four inches deep; and then it ran about three inches more through the skin only.

Court. What was the whole length of the wound?

A. I believe between nine and ten inches.

Mr Knowlys. Whether a cut with a sharp instrument, merely to cut the clothes, would have wounded so deep as that?

A. No; that I do not know. It must have been with great violence; part of the blow was below the bow of the stays; if not it would probably have pierced even the abdomen.

**Renwick Williams opened the case for the defence by reading a statement to the court:**

My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I stand here an object deserving your most serious attention and compassion. From conscious innocence of the very shocking accusations made against me, I cannot but hope that just and really liberal minds will have reason to commiserate my situation, and must feel me deserving pity and compassion. As my case has been multiplied in horror, though with submission I think, in comparison, far beyond even the sufferings of my accusers. I must reprobate the cruelty with which the public prints have abounded in the most scandalous paragraphs, containing malicious exaggerations of the charges preferred, so much to my prejudice, that I already lie under premature conviction,

by almost an universal voice. I rest my case to the decision of an English jury; and in hopes of being able to establish my innocence in your opinion, I most seriously appeal to the Great Author of Truth, that I have the strongest affection for the happiness and comfort of the superior part of this creation, the fair sex, to whom I have in every circumstance that occurred in my life endeavoured to render assistance and protection. I have nothing, my lord and gentlemen, farther to say, but that however strange and aggravated this case may appear to you, I solemnly, and with the utmost sincerity declare to you all, that this prosecution of me is founded in a dreadful mistake, which I hope the evidence I shall bring will prove to your satisfaction.

Several witnesses then testified to Renwick Williams's alibi – he had been at work at the time of the attack. His employer, Armarvel Mitchell (or Aimable Michelle; a Frenchman who gave his evidence through an interpreter), testified that Williams had been working for him in his workshop on 18 January, and owing to the press of work (a large order from Ireland, and a last-minute order for some fabric for a Mrs Abingdon) he stayed at work till 12.30 in the morning. Other women who worked with him corroborated this testimony, but they found it difficult to prove the time at which he left work. Several stated that:

The maid came in, and said, that when she opened the door, the watchman went by crying half past twelve; and she made a remark, that the clock went extremely right, for it agreed with the watchman.

But under cross-examination one witness admitted that this remark had not been made at the time:

Q. Do you mean that the maid stated that at that time?

A. I do not recollect that the maid mentioned the circumstance at that time; but since that time she came and told us of it, and made the remark voluntarily. We sent to the maid, to know if she could recollect the circumstance; and then it was that the maid stated the fact about the watchman and the clock.

Q. How long ago was it?

A. Since the prisoner was apprehended.

Several witnesses also testified to Williams's good character, including Armarvel Mitchell, who said that he had always behaved with civility and good nature to the young ladies that worked with him in the house. More shockingly, several 'beautiful' women testified to Williams's 'habits of fond, constant, and manly intercourse with them'. One woman even testified that he had once saved her life! Perhaps because it was so incongruent with popular expectations, the testimony of these women was omitted from the published *Proceedings*.<sup>61</sup>

The judge, Sir Francis Buller, then summed up the evidence in a long speech to the jury. He began by supporting Williams's plea that the jury

should ignore 'popular prejudice' and concentrate on the evidence presented in the courtroom. He then set out 'material points for you to discuss', but told the jury that owing to the fact that the offence Williams had been charged with was possibly inappropriate (he thought this was the first prosecution under this obscure statute), he had doubts about the form of the indictment. Consequently, should the jury find him guilty, he said he would refer the case to the opinion of senior judges.

The first question for the jury to consider was, had Williams been correctly identified as Porter's attacker? Here the judge seemed convinced:

Gentlemen, this is the whole of the evidence on the part of the prosecution; first you find that the four young ladies have all sworn very positively to the person of the prisoner; you will naturally examine what opportunities they had of knowing the prisoner, and whether they were likely to be mistaken; they had seen the prisoner several times before, and in the day time, and the manner in which they had seen him certainly called upon them to pay particular attention to his person. And upon no occasion did they entertain the smallest doubt; but when they saw him in St James's Park, they said most positively that he was the person, and challenged him likewise at their house.

Second, the jurymen were invited to consider how Williams had behaved when Coleman followed him, suggesting that Williams must have been aware of the pursuit, and that his failure to respond suggested he had something to hide. Similarly, the judge called attention to Williams's silence when he was brought before the Porters and accused of being the Monster. Finally, he called the alibi into question, noting missing details and contradictions in the evidence presented.

In summary, the jury was given a very clear steer:

Gentlemen, it is for you to say which side you give credit to. If you believe the witnesses on the part of the prisoner; and that he continued in Mitchell's house from two or three that afternoon, till half past twelve, he could not be the person that committed this injury; and of course you will acquit him. If on the other hand, you are satisfied from the testimony, and the very positive testimony, of the four Miss Porters, that he was the man, and that they knew his person so well before, that they could not be mistaken; if you see from his conduct at the time he was brought back, and in the moment he spoke to Miss Sarah Porter, that he was the man; if you believe her evidence when put together, you must give the effect to it, and pronounce that the prisoner was the man.

The jury, apparently without even retiring, immediately fulfilled the judge's expectations and pronounced a verdict of guilty. But owing to the legal uncertainty about the charge, sentencing was put off to the December sessions.

Following the trial, doubts about Williams's guilt were raised in several newspapers, and, most substantially, in a pamphlet published in September by the polemicist Theophilus Swift, who identified several procedural defects in the trial and claimed Williams was not the Monster. The pamphlet caused

an uproar and led some to question whether the Monster had ever really existed. In November the case was reviewed by the 12 senior judges of England, who quashed the indictment and ruled (as Buller had feared) that Williams had been charged with the wrong offence. He would therefore have to be retried on a new indictment.

Williams stood trial for a second time on 8 December, this time in the new Sessions House on Clerkenwell Green, on misdemeanour charges of assaulting with intent to murder three women, Ann Porter, Elizabeth Davis and Elizabeth Vaughan. At the start of the trial Williams was again allowed to address the court. He made a 'pathetic speech' in which he solemnly swore to his innocence and appealed to the candor and impartiality of the jury. Mr Pigott, counsel for the prosecution, then addressed the jurors and asked them to do the impossible, to forget everything they had previously heard about this case. He then once again outlined the horrible, unprecedented nature of the crime, declaring:

He had not words to express the dreadful injury, the shocking barbarity, the brutality, the ferocity of the prisoner, who in total want of all morality, of all humanity, and of all the claims of manhood, had made this attack on the person of Miss Porter.

The case for the prosecution was similar to that presented at the first trial, but with the addition of evidence of Williams's alleged previous insulting language given to the sisters. Mr Tomkins, the surgeon, also made Porter's injuries seem worse than he had in his testimony in the first trial. He:

Described the wound given to Miss Porter, as in the former trial; and added, that he had been in many scenes of horror, but never saw any thing that affected him so much before; that the room was full of blood, and the poor girl laying like a dead corpse. He said that if he had been to have made an incision as a surgeon, he could not have made a clearer wound; the instrument must be very sharp; she had a fever, and was five or six weeks before she could walk.

Notably, although Williams's insulting language seemed important to the prosecution, counsel refused to ask the Porter sisters what Williams had actually said to them. Pigott stated that he did not wish the 'young women to pollute their mouths with the repetition of that language which issued from him', but assured the jury that 'it was the most horrid, and the least sufferable to human ears'.

Williams had dismissed the counsel he used in the first trial, whose performance had been ineffective, and instead at the last minute secured the services of the pamphleteer who had come to his defence in print, Theophilus Swift. Having already vigorously cross-examined the prosecution witnesses, Swift commenced the case for the defence with a very long speech, in which he attempted to discredit the prosecution evidence by making a number of arguments that had not been made in the first trial.

First, he pointed to the existence of the offer of a £100 reward for the

arrest and conviction of the Monster, which he said had the potential to lead to untrustworthy evidence. Although the Porters had refused to accept any portion of the reward, Coleman had received £50. And indeed, Coleman's evidence was full of errors: 'Of all the witnesses I ever beheld, Coleman is the most extraordinary'. Earlier, Swift suggested Coleman had been engaged to marry Porter. Although she denied it, they were in fact married the next April.

Second, Swift called into question the identification of Williams as the man who attacked Ann and Sarah Porter. He argued that the Porters had allowed their previous interactions with Williams (which the latter admitted) to shape their belief, and that of two other prosecution witnesses, that he was their attacker: 'I call it bolstering up of the evidence'. He questioned whether there had been enough light for them to see Williams's face, since the street lamps had been obstructed by bow windows on either side of the door.

Third, and most extraordinarily, he argued that the previous conversations between Porter and Williams had been of a very different nature from the insults described by the prosecution:

There has been indisputably an acquaintance between the prisoner and the witnesses, and the conversation and the knowledge which the prisoner and the witnesses have was of a very different nature indeed. I will not stain the word justice, by saying that there were private motives behind the curtain, but there were conversations of a very different nature, such as excited the present prosecution.

In a word, Williams had courted, and been rejected by, Ann Porter, and in subsequent encounters they had exchanged insults, including allegations from Williams that Porter had slept with a Captain Crowder, 'with whom you went off from a bagnio'.<sup>62</sup> This is why the prosecution had been so unwilling to explain precisely what had been said when Williams had insulted Porter. Swift's raising the question of Porter's sexual virtue in the courtroom was considered scandalous and evoked loud disapproval from the audience.

Finally, and perhaps most damningly, Swift argued that Williams could not be the Monster because the attacks had continued after he was arrested and the recent attacker matched the description of the culprit that Ann Porter had given at Bow Street:

Gentlemen, I could tell you of a lady that has been most barbarously and cruelly wounded. I was with her at the moment it happened, on the 20th of August; and a most cruel business it was; and I am sorry to say that was the seventh time she had been assaulted since Williams was committed. I could not get the lady here today; her father-in-law is a very old man, and he is dangerously ill, but I hope you will give credit to the fact; if not I will be sworn to the truth of it.

Either copycat attackers had responded to the huge publicity this case received or Williams was not the Monster. This potentially damning evidence, however, was not mentioned again.

Following this speech, the defence returned to its 'indisputable alibi', and the same fellow workers were called to testify, but according to the *Proceedings* they were even less convincing than at the first trial. Nonetheless, overconfident of his own persuasive powers, Theophilus Swift did not allow Williams to testify in his defence.

According to the account in the *Proceedings*, the trial ended as follows, starting with a rebuttal to the defence case from the prosecution counsel:

Mr Pigot replied at considerable length, in a very forcible manner to Mr Swift's observations, and concluded with reminding the jury of the situation some of their families might be in, if by their verdict the wretch should be set at liberty again. After which the chairman summed up the case, recapitulating the whole evidence very minutely, with many pertinent observations, and begging the jury, for God's sake! to divest themselves of all prejudice. At one o'clock the jury retired for half an hour, doubting only whether they should find the prisoner guilty of an assault with an intent to murder, or only of a common assault, when they returned with a verdict, guilty of the whole indictment.

Williams was also found guilty of assaults on the other two women.

Justice William Mainwearing, chairman of the court, then addressed Williams:

Renwick Williams, you have been indicted for an assault on Ann Porter. You have been tried and found guilty by a cool, impartial, dispassionate, and deliberating jury, much to the satisfaction of the court, and much to their honour; for I must again say, that I never saw a jury conduct themselves with more propriety in all the experience I have had of courts of justice. They seemed to have divested themselves of all prejudice, and to be unconnected with the general mass of people.

Williams was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in Newgate for each of the attacks on the three women, six years in total. This was an unusually long prison sentence for the time, reflecting both popular outrage and judicial perception of the seriousness of the offence.

Although initially Williams, as a celebrity, was visited by many Londoners in his Newgate cell (and there was even a waxwork model exhibited of him attacking the Porters),<sup>63</sup> the case was quickly forgotten. The last recorded Monster attack took place in August 1790, while Williams was imprisoned awaiting the second trial. He remained in prison until his sentence expired in 1796. In the year after his release he married and promptly disappeared from the historical record. He died in the same obscurity in which he had lived until the astonishing events of 1790 threw him so reluctantly into the limelight.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

The delicate balance between the legitimised violence of the individual and the authority of the mob, on the one hand, and the demands of public opinion



and the brutal power of the state, on the other, changed only very gradually over the course of the eighteenth century. Men defending their honour with swords, pistols and fists became both less acceptable and more clearly limited by the bonds of customary behaviour. The deadly threat of a rapier's thrust, or the sudden blow of a fist outside a pub, was reduced by the introduction of almost courtly rituals. And while domestic assault continued, it too became less tolerated. By the end of the century violent deaths of all sorts caused a new disquiet, even when they clearly resulted from tragic accidents. Similarly, the mob, which had ruled the streets of early eighteenth-century London, became ever less trusted. The middling sort merchants and artisans who willingly put up lights in their windows in support of the anti-Irish riots of 1736 thought better of their actions in the years following the Gordon riots of 1780. In part, the driving force behind these developments was a new public opinion made manifest in the pamphlets and newspapers of Grub Street. The baying crowd demanding retribution and 'justice' did not so much go away, as go into print.

In so many ways, eighteenth-century London witnessed the creation of a recognisably modern world. Its declining violence, its rising tide of public opinion expressed in print and its growing intolerance and distrust of the mob seem oddly familiar. But, with these developments came distinctly modern problems. If the 'Monster' was Britain's first serial sex offender, on trial just as the Marquis de Sade was inventing violent pornography from his prison cell in the Bastille, he was a talisman of developments to come. And if his treatment, both at the Old Bailey and at the bar of public opinion, strikes a niggling note of distrust at this distance, this too seems remarkably modern and painfully familiar.

