

Crime and Punishment beyond 1066 Crimes and Punishments:

Henry Catlin - thief

Henry Catlin was born on Christmas Day in 1827 and lived in Bedford. His family were very poor. His father was a boot-maker but was sometimes not around, so his mother had to ask the Overseer of the Poor to support her family with money from the parish. His mother died in 1832, and his father was not very good at looking after his children. He wasted all his money and there was nothing for the children to eat. Henry and his sister, Maria, spent some time in the workhouse. Maria died, but Henry went back to his father.



Poor Victorian children

Henry had to steal food so he didn't starve. On 9th September 1837, when he was just nine years old, he was caught after stealing a pair of shoes. He was sentenced by the judge who told him: "The prisoner Henry Catlin will be imprisoned and kept to hard labour in the New House of Correction for this county for 4 calendar months. Every alternate fortnight of the said term shall be solitary confinement and he should be privately whipped once during his imprisonment."

When Henry got out, he went back to live with his father and they were still very poor, so Henry still had to steal. In 1842, when he was 14 years old, he was caught stealing three shillings and sixpence (42 pence) from some young girls and was sentenced to be sent to Van Diemen's Land (now known as Tasmania) for 14 years. Henry travelled on a ship to Van Diemen's Land for 118 days with 188 other prisoners. He arrived on 23rd September 1843 and was set to work on plantations set up by European settlers. On 5th February 1850, after only serving just under half of his sentence, he was granted a ticket of leave and a pardon for his crimes.



This is a picture of convicts working on a plantation in Tasmania in 1838.

Henry decided to stay 'down under' rather than come back to England. He married Harriet Coffee in Hobart church in Australia in 1852 and they lived in Bendigo where Henry worked as a shoe-maker. They had seven children. Henry died in 1918.

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John Law - duellist

We don't know exactly when John Law was born, but he was baptised on 21st April 1671 in Edinburgh in Scotland. His father was a banker and he was supposed to go into the family bank, but after his father died he instead went to London and got into trouble with gambling.

By 1694 John Law was living in the lodgings of Mrs Lawrence. The sister of a London 'dandy' (someone who was thought of as very well-dressed) called Edward Wilson lived there too. Edward got in a row with John over his sister. On the morning of 9th April the two men met in the Fountain Tavern in the Strand and argued. After a while John left, and then Edward followed in a coach to Bloomsbury Square. The two men met there, probably after arranging it in the pub, and John killed Edward with a single sword thrust through his heart.



John Law, with a cane and his sword hung from his belt

Duelling was technically against the law but the king usually pardoned people who took part, but killing someone in a duel was still murder so John Law was arrested. He was put on trial for murder at the Old Bailey, one of the courts of law. The judge was a man called Sir Salathiel Lovell who was known as the 'hanging judge' as he was very harsh. He sentenced John to death.

John went to Newgate Prison to wait for his hanging, but his rich friends managed to get him a good cell to stay in. His friends also appealed to King William III on the grounds that they decided it wasn't murder but manslaughter because Law said that it was Wilson who started the duel. The king decided to not hang John, but just to fine him.

Edward Wilson's family then also appealed to the king and John Law was put on trial again. This time it looked like he would not escape being hanged, so with help from his friends who drugged the guards, John managed to escape from prison and go to Amsterdam, then started travelling around Europe. He later returned to Scotland but he wasn't arrested again and the whole thing was forgotten.



John Law after escaping from jail

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Mary Read - pirate

Mary Read was born in 1685, although we don't know her exact date of birth. She was dressed as a boy by her mother when she was a child because her elder half-brother, Mark, had died and Mary and her mother still needed money from Mark's grandmother.

Mary continued to dress as a man when she grew up, and joined the army. She married one of the soldiers she fought alongside and settled in the Netherlands running a pub and dressing as a woman for the first time.

Her husband sadly died and Mary wore his clothes and pretended to be a man again, and got on board a ship headed to the West Indies. This ship was taken by pirates who forced her to join them.

Mary was eventually captured in 1718 by the British navy, but she was pardoned. Former pirates were often pardoned if they promised to hunt other pirates, but, instead, Mary Read joined the pirates, this time under Captain 'Calico' Jack Rackham and Anne Bonny, who also pretended to be a man.



Mary Read

The two women eventually revealed to each other and to the captain that they were women, and they went on to take a ship, called the William, in Nassau harbour and other smaller ships.



Mary Read and Anne Bonny

On 15th November 1720 the pirate crew were having a rum party at Negril Point off Jamaica when they were attacked by the pirate-hunter Captain Jonathan Barnet. Only Mary, Anne and one other pirate (not Calico Jack) stood and fought against Barnet but eventually they were captured.

Mary and the other pirates were sentenced to death in Spanish Town, Jamaica. If they had been brought back to England, they would have been wrapped in chains and left out for the tide to come in and drown them at Wapping in London. Because Mary and Anne were women, they were not executed but Mary died in prison.

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Ursula Kemp – witch

Ursula Kemp was born around 1525, but her exact date of birth is not known. She lived in St Osyth's in Essex. In her older age when she was a widow she was known as a 'cunning woman' which meant that people paid her for her medical help, especially in the care of children.

Most people believed in witchcraft at this time, and Ursula got a reputation for being able to break curses put on people by witches. After falling out with a neighbour in 1582, Ursula was accused of witchcraft by her neighbour Grace Thurlow.

Justice of the Peace, Bryan Darcy, talked to Ursula and her son Thomas, who was eight years old at the time. Thomas said that his mother kept four spirits, or familiars. He described them as a grey cat called Tyffin, a white lamb called Tyttey, a black toad called Pygine and a black cat called Jacke. He said that he had seen his mother give her familiars beer and cake, and let them suck blood from her body.



Ursula confessed to Bryan Darcy that she was a witch, and that she had these familiars, and that she had cursed her friends. It was common for women who were accused of being witches to confess to get a lighter sentence, and they often said other women were witches too. Ursula named fourteen other women as witches.

All fourteen women were put on trial in Chelmsford. Grace Thurlow said that she and Ursula had argued when Grace refused to employ Ursula as her baby daughter Joan's nurse. A few weeks later Joan fell from her cradle and died, and Grace believed that Ursula had cursed her baby. Grace then went back to Ursula for help for her leg, but refused to pay her a shilling for it, and so she thought Ursula had made her leg get worse.



Another neighbour, Alice Letherdale, had refused to let Ursula borrow some sand for scrubbing pots. Later her daughter Elizabeth had died, and Alice said she thought Ursula had cursed her too.

Ursula and one other woman called Elizabeth Bennet were hanged.

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Dick Turpin - highwayman

Richard Turpin was baptised on 21st September 1705 (we don't know his exact date of birth). He was born in Hempstead in Essex and his father was a butcher. By the age of twenty he was married and running his own butcher's shop. In the Royal Forest of Waltham in Essex, close to Turpin's butcher's shop, it was illegal to kill the deer, but in the 1730s a gang started to poach the deer. They were often known as the Gregory Gang after the three Gregory brothers who ran it. The gang needed a butcher to deal with the deer meat without telling the forest authorities, who offered a £50 reward for anyone with information about the gang. They got Dick Turpin involved.

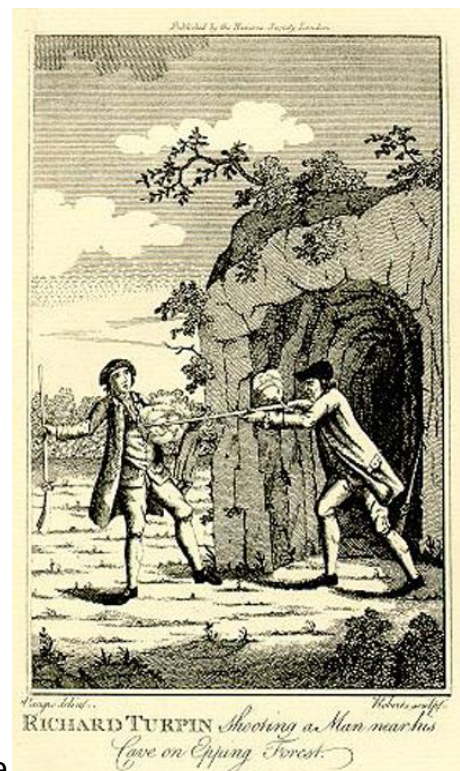
Later on, they stopped poaching deer and started robbing people's houses, and Dick closed his butcher's shop and joined the gang properly. They broke their way in to several people's houses and forced them to reveal where they had hidden their money, for instance by pulling them round the house by their noses or hair, or making them sit on the fire. Eventually most of the gang was caught but Dick was still free.



Dick then turned to highway robbery, stopping people's coaches on the road and stealing their belongings. He often worked with others, such as Thomas Rowden, and they stopped a Mr Godfrey on Hounslow Heath on 20th August 1735 and took six guineas (a type of coin). Again his partner in crime was caught but Dick got away. He escaped to Epping Forest where he was spotted by a forester Thomas Morris, who Dick later shot and killed.

Dick then went to Yorkshire and took a new name, John Palmer. He started stealing horses, and was finally arrested for this, but no-one knew he was also Dick Turpin. He wrote a letter to his brother-in-law from York and this is how he was finally identified as the highwayman and murderer Dick Turpin.

Dick was tried at York Assizes. After the trial, when he had been sentenced to death, he received lots of visitors who all wanted to have a look at the famous highwayman. He was hanged in York on 7th April 1739.



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Dic Penderyn - rioter

Dic Penderyn was born as Richard Lewis in Aberavon in Wales in 1808. By 1831 he was a coal miner in Merthyr Tydfil working for William Crawshay. At this time, employers could lower people's wages whenever they wanted to make more money, and could sack people for no reason.



Welsh coal miners

Trade unions, which were groups of workers trying to get better rights for themselves against their employers, were illegal until 1824 but after that were allowed. Dic Penderyn was very busy in the early trade union in his area, arguing for better pay.

William Crawshay decided to lower people's wages when his profits went down, and sacked a lot of miners, and this meant that a lot of people had their possessions taken away and sold to pay off their debts. On 30th May 1831 there was a public meeting where people complained a lot about this and afterwards a large group of people went and stole the possessions back.

Dic Penderyn may have joined the people who were angry at their treatment, who carried a red flag, and as there was no police force then the army was sent in to deal with the rioters. On June 3rd there was a battle in Merthyr Tydfil and both rioters and soldiers were killed. Dic Penderyn was accused of stabbing one soldier in the leg.



A cartoon of the Merthyr riot

Even though the soldier, Donald Black, did not identify Dic as his attacker, he was sentenced to hang by the judge. A man called James Abbott said he had seen Dic stab Donald Black outside the Castle Inn in Merthyr Tydfil. Joseph Price, who visited Dic in prison, became convinced of his innocence and 11,000 people signed a petition asking the Home Secretary Lord Melbourne for mercy. Dic always said he was innocent, but he was executed on 13th August 1831.

Many years later a man called Ianto Parker confessed on his deathbed to stabbing Donald Black and then escaping to America, and James Abbott confessed to lying at Dic Penderyn's trial.