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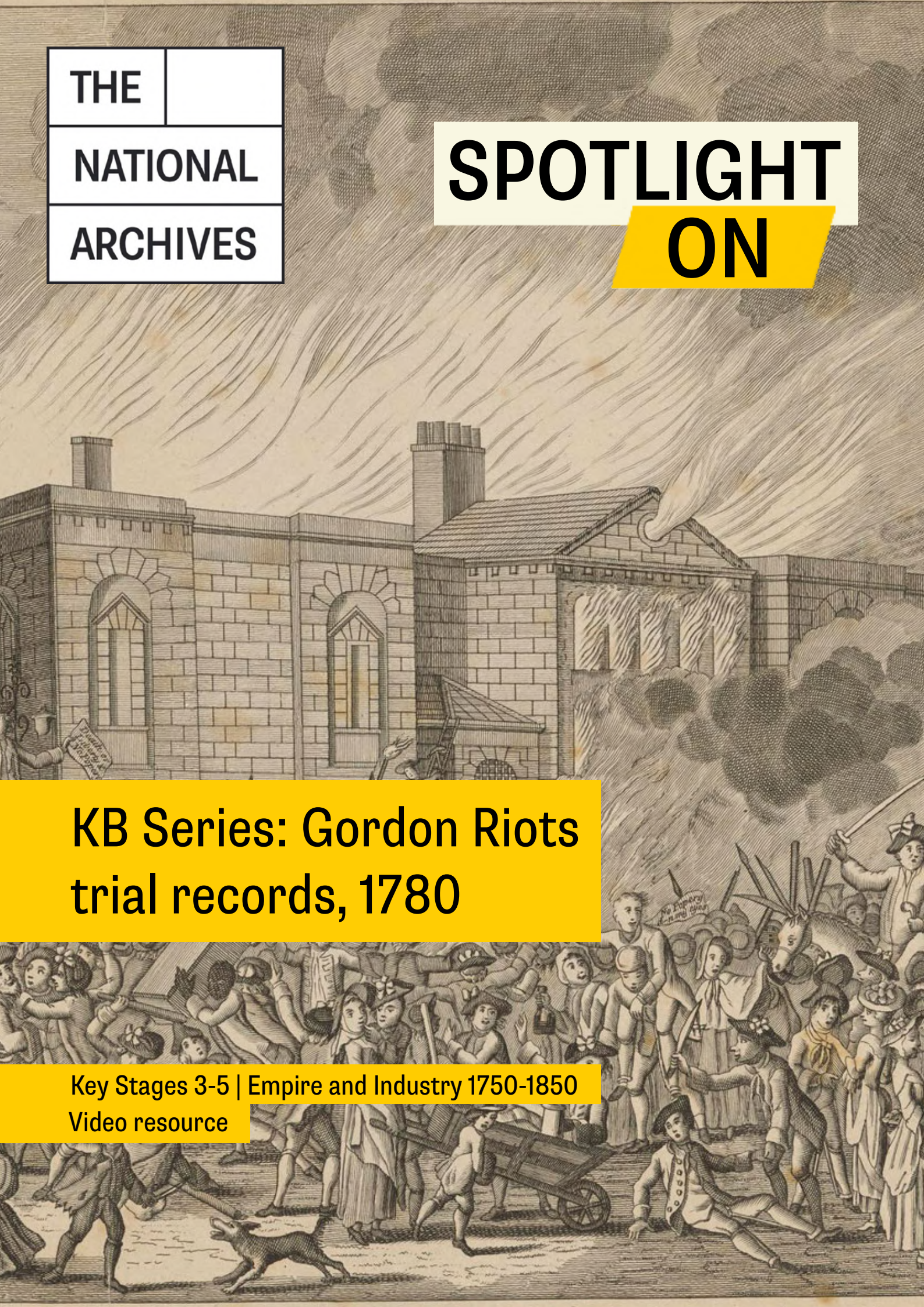
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KB Series: Gordon Riots trial records, 1780

Key Stages 3-5 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Video resource



KB Series: Gordon Riots trial records, 1780

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Legal Records Specialist, Daniel Gosling looking at records relating to the Court of King's Bench, which was the most senior criminal court for most of its existence. This video focusses on documents from 1780 concerning the Gordon Riots in London.

Suitable for:

KS 3-5

Time period:

Empire and Industry

1750-1850

[Watch video¹](#)

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU6eg6Qhs9Q>

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Video transcript

Hello I'm Dan Gosling and I'm Principal Legal Records Specialist at The National Archives. Today we're going to look at documents from our vast 'KB' document collection, the records relating to the court of King's Bench.

The King's Bench was the most senior Criminal Court in England and Wales for most of its existence. It was the court that heard the most serious cases, such as murder and treason, and it was also the court of appeal for all inferior Criminal Courts. It's called the Court of King's Bench because originally these were cases brought before the King, 'Coram Rege' in the original Latin. When there was a Queen on the throne the court was instead called 'Queen's Bench' and during 1649 to 1660 when there was no King or Queen the court was instead referred to as the 'Upper Bench.'

At the National Archives we hold records created by the Court of King's Bench from its 12th century origins all the way up to the 19th century. Up to the 18th century, the most common types of record in this collection are rolls which recorded the pleas of King's Bench cases and files which were records created as part of the court process such as writs for summoning parties to the court. Let's take a closer look at the record I have here, KB 27/1259, to see what most of these King's Bench records look like.

KB 27 contains the plea rolls or 'Coram Rege' rolls for the Court of King's Bench. These contain records of proceedings for each case for a given law term. The English Common Law Courts, which included King's Bench, sat at four times during the year four law terms these were named after religious festivals Hilary term in January and February, Easter term in April and May, Trinity term in June and July, and Michaelmas term in late October and November. This plea roll is from Michaelmas term in 1576 during the reign of Elizabeth I. The records are in Latin up to the 18th century but the language is fairly formulaic, so this title reads in Latin: 'placita coram Domina Regina apud Westmonasterium termino Sancti Michaelmas' so in English: 'pleas before the Queen held at Westminster in Michaelmas term.' These records are dated by the year the Monarch acceded to the throne so this play is for Michaelmas term in the 18th to 19th regnal year of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth's Reign started in the middle of November so Michaelmas term covered the end of one regnal year and went into the beginning of another. Many of these plea rolls contain portraits of the

Video transcript (cont.)

Monarch within the letter P. This roll shows Elizabeth but rolls for other reigns show different monarchs and they're sometimes illuminated.

You may notice too that these plea rolls don't look very much like rolls at all and this is because of the way that the records are sewn. In Chancery rolls each of the membranes is sewn end to end so the whole document can be rolled up into one cylinder but King's bench plea rolls are sewn differently and they're sewn at the top of the document. These plea rolls were created by the clerks and officers of the court to record cases as they came in. The clerk started writing at the top of the rotulet here, moved all the way down, and when they got to the end they would turn over and write on the reverse or the dorse. If a case was heard by the Court then the plea rolls were recorded and so these records are the first port of call for anyone interested in records relating to crimes in England and Wales from the Medieval period until 1702. After this date the King's Bench plea rolls were split between criminal and non-criminal cases. And this is just one document from our King's Bench collection but the court had another responsibility.

As the most senior Criminal Court in the realm the most serious crimes, Treason and Rebellion, were also heard here. For these extraordinary acts of rebellion a new King's Bench series was created, KB8: 'the Bag of Secrets', or Baga de Secretis in the Original Latin. The series which dates from the 15th century gets its name from the leather bag that these records were kept in. These cases were deemed so important that they were removed from the main King's bench series, such as the plea rolls in KB 27, into these bags for safekeeping. In this series records relating to some of the most notorious cases in English History are kept. Anne Boleyn's treason trial, the trial of the gunpowder plotters, and the prosecution of the Luddites all have records in KB8.

This document I have here is KB8/79, the King's Bench records relating to prosecution of people involved in the Gordon Riots. The Gordon Riots occurred in June 1780, named after Lord George Gordon, Head of the Protestant Association, the rioters were protesting the 1778 Papist Act which reduced official discrimination against British Catholics. Lord Gordon claimed that this act would allow Catholics to join the British Army and plot treason from within and so organised a march on Parliament on 2nd of June 1780 to petition for the act's

Video transcript (cont.)

repeal. Gordon's petition was overwhelmingly rejected in the Commons and the crowd that had marched on Parliament estimated at 40-60,000 strong was dispersed, though not before they had vandalised and destroyed a number of carriages and attacked members of the House of Lords. But the riots were not over, for the next few days there was widespread looting, rioting and burning of Catholic chapels across London, eventually the Army had to be deployed and hundreds of rioters were killed or arrested. So KB8/79 was created in the aftermath of these riots, recording the prosecution of all those that have been arrested for their involvement in this criminal activity.

This document that's sealed by Lord Loughborough, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and chief judge in the investigations against the Gordon Rioters, shows him appointing a commissioner for the court. These documents here are summonses to give evidence against rioters. So this top record summons James Ewer of George Street to give evidence against a man named John French who was accused of riot and felony near King's Bench prison.

The record I have here is KB 33/5/12. KB 33 is a King's Bench series held at National Archives collecting together papers relating to important cases. KB 33/5/12 is a bundle of papers, some relating to the Gordon riots, some of these papers were created as part of the trial process of both the rioters and Lord Gordon who was tried for high treason for allegedly levying war against his King. He was found not guilty in the end but not before a huge amount of paperwork had been created relating to his case. This small document here describes the punishment for those found guilty of high treason – hanging drawing and quartering. KB 33/5/12 has a complete copy of the whole of Lord Gordon's treason trial, as well as detailed notes about the form that the trial would take. It also includes this printed calendar of all the prisoners tried for their part in the Gordon riots and this roll is a copy of the indictment found in the main King's Bench series in KB 8 and KB 28. The records in KB 33 were created and kept not just as part of a specific court case but to provide precedence should similar court cases occur in future.

The documents in KB 8 and KB 33 tell us in detail the great lengths that the state went to to prosecute Lord Gordon and all those involved in the Gordon Riots, however this is just one

Video transcript (cont.)

case among hundreds of thousands heard by the Court of Kings Bench over the centuries. It's fair to say that when it comes to the King's Bench collections at The National Archives, there's plenty more to be discovered.

Tasks

Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What type of cases were heard by the Court of the King's Bench?
- How did the King's Bench also work as a court of appeal?
- How did the court get its name?
- What are the two other names used for this court?
- Explain the difference between the 'files' and the 'rolls' found in the King's Bench collections.
- What does the letter 'P' stand for as seen on King's bench rolls?
- In what language are the rolls written?
- How often did the King's court sit in a year?
- What religious festivals were these sessions named after?
- How do the King's Bench rolls differ from Chancery rolls?
- Which King's Bench series recorded the most serious crimes of treason and rebellion?
- Why is this series named the 'Bag of Secrets'?

Source 1

Etching entitled: 'An exact representation of the Burning, Plundering and Destruction of NEWGATE by the rioters on the memorable 7th of June 1780 published July 10th, 1781, by P. Mitchell North Audely Street, Grosvenor Square and J. Fielding, 23 Pater Noster Row. Wikimedia commons © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The Gordon Riots broke out in London on 2 June 1780 triggered by resistance to the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. The act granted certain civil rights to Catholics. Lord George Gordon, leader of the Protestant Association joined by a large crowd marched to parliament to insist on its repeal and present a petition, later rejected by Parliament. Following this, rioters attacked and burnt Catholic churches, businesses, and homes. The riots continued for a week and government buildings and institutions were attacked and damaged including Newgate, Fleet, and King's Bench prisons and their prisoners released. King George III called out troops to stop the riots. It is hard to give exact figures, but approximately three hundred people were shot dead, and many wounded. 450 people were arrested and at least twenty-five hanged. Lord George Gordon was tried and not found guilty of treason.

Tasks

Take a close look at this image and identify the following:

- Newgate prison in flames.
- A man on a ladder holding a torch and a hammer.
- Three 'No Popery' flags.
- A man on horseback (on right) holding a sword, he is saying 'Courage my boys this is for the glory of the good old Cause'.
- Released prisoners (on right) in irons who are talking and drinking with women.
- At the front (on left) a smith removing leg irons from a prisoner.
- In centre of the crowd a person of colour wields an axe, another holds a large box.
- On the left a man is holding three pamphlets: 'England in Blood', 'The Scourge', and 'The Thunderer' which were directed against the Government, the King, Lord Mansfield, Chief justice of the Court of King's Bench (1756-1788.)
- A man stands on a platform holding a sword and a paper called 'Death or Liberty & No Popery'.
- The keys of the prison held up on a pitchfork.
- A man with a handbell.
- A man (on left) sitting on the box-seat of a coach waving his hat.
- A woman wheeling a drunken man in a wheelbarrow.
- A released prisoner in irons sitting on a man's shoulders, saying 'No Popery d—m my eyes'.
- Men wearing ribbons in their hats, the blue ribbon of the Protestant Association.

Now answer these questions:

- Can you briefly describe this scene?
- Why do you think this image was produced?
- How helpful is the caption in explaining its perspective?
- How are males and females portrayed in the crowd?
- Define the term 'popery'. Why is this used in the speech bubbles and flags?
- What other sources would help us understand this topic?
- Find out more about the following:

(a) Protestant Association (b) Catholic Relief Act of 1778 (c) Lord George Gordon

Tasks

Source 2

Extracts from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780, held in the borough of Southwark, county of Surrey, Catalogue ref: KB 33/5/12.

This 'Kalendar' is one of the documents shown in the video which relates to the trial of Lord Gordon for treason. The 'Kalendar' gives information about people tried for their part in the Gordon Riots. There are 72 descriptions in the 'Kalendar'. Seven examples are shown here. In some cases, prisoner details have been annotated to give the outcome of their trial as 'convicted' or 'acquitted'.

Glossary for all extracts

Committed: The magistrates decided that there was sufficient evidence for a trial in court.

Charged on oath: A person was charged to be responsible for a crime by a person who had given evidence on oath that they had told the truth. The oath-taker would be prosecuted for the crime of perjury if they lied in a sworn statement spoken in a trial or given as written statement (deposition).

Stave: wooden post or plank.

Bludgeon: thick heavy stick used as weapon.

Feloniously: in an illegal manner, criminal activity that could be punishable by a prison sentence.

Riotously: in a loud and uncontrolled way.

Routously: as an assembly of people intent on committing an illegal act which would mean an offence of riot.

Tasks

Watch house or cage: small type of prison where a person(s) was kept under guard under temporary arrest.

Breach of the peace: This happens when harm is done or likely to be done to a person or (in their presence) to their property, or when a person is in fear of being harmed through an assault or disturbance.

Extract 2a

- What is the purpose of the document extract?
- For what crimes are (a) James Lovell (b) Robert Lovell convicted?
- Can you conclude anything from their names? Give you reasons.
- What does the extract infer about the Gordon riots?
- What does this extract reveal about the justice system at the time?
- What does it reveal about the government response to the Gordon riots? [Clue see document caption.]

Extract 2b

For what crimes has Henry Penny been convicted?

How many people were charged on oath to give testimony in his case?

Why do you think according to this extract, and extract 2a, the crowd also attacked 'the Watch-House' in the Parish of St George?

Extract 2c

- How does this conviction differ from those described in extracts 2a & 2b?
- What does the extract infer about the victim of these events?
- What does this extract infer about the Gordon Riots?
- What is meant by the term 'in Breach of the Peace' [Clue: see Glossary]

Tasks

Extract 2d

- How many crimes was John Taylor committed for?
- What does this extract possibly infer about the causes of crime?
- There is no note to say if Taylor was convicted, as in extracts 2a & 2b. Do you think it was likely he was convicted? Explain your reasons.

Extract 2e

- What crime was Edward Richardson committed for?
- Why do you think he was acquitted (not found guilty)?
- Why do you think the King's Bench Prison was attacked and prisoners released during the Gordon Riots?

Extract 2f

- What crimes were Sarah Harwell and Elizabeth Harwell charged with?
- What seems to be the verdict on this case written next to the description?
- Can you conclude anything from their names? Give you reasons.
- What does this extract infer about the Gordon Riots?

Extract 2g

- What was Robert Barks charged with?
- Why was Jonathan Mann charged with perjury? [Clue: see glossary]
- How does this explain why Robert Barks was acquitted (found not guilty)?
- Can you explain if extracts 2a- 2g support information inferred in the image, Document 1.
- What do extracts 2a- 2g infer about crime and punishment in the Eighteenth Century?

Source 1: Etching of Gordon Riots from 1781.

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Source 1: Image description

Gordon rioters are shown in front of Newgate prison. Flames are pouring from the central façade of the prison, a man on a ladder holds up a torch and a hammer. The foreground is crowded with figures. There are three 'No Popery' flags. A man on horseback (right) addresses the mob with a drawn sword, he says 'Courage my boys this is for the glory of the good old Cause'. Released prisoners (on right) in irons are talking and drinking with young women. On the left a smith removes the irons from a prisoner. A person of colour wields an axe, another carries a large box. On the left a man is holding pamphlets titled 'England in Blood', 'The Scourge', and 'The Thunderer'. These were pamphlets directed against the Government, the King and Lord Mansfield. A man stands on a platform holding up a sword and a paper titled 'Death or Liberty & No Popery'. The keys of the prison are held up on a pitchfork. A man rings a handbell. A man (left) sits on the box-seat of a coach waving his hat. A woman pushes a drunken man in a wheelbarrow. 'A released prisoner in irons is carried on a man's shoulders, he waves his hat, calling 'No Popery d—m my eyes'. Almost all the men wear ribbons in their hats, the blue ribbon of the Protestant Association. 10 July 1781 Etching with engraving.

Source 2a: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

convicted

4. Joseph Lovell, } Committed the 9th Day of June, 1780, by Gideon Fournier, Esq.
and } charged on the Oaths of Stephen Stratford, Joseph Ward, William

5. Robert Lovell, } Field, and William Ivey, with being with divers other Persons, riot-
ously, routously, and feloniously assembled at the County Goal in Southwark, in the County of }
Surrey, on Wednesday the 7th Day of June Instant, armed with Sticks, Staves, and Bludgeons, }
demanded the Gates of the same Prison to be immediately opened, and entered the same Pri- }
son, and feloniously released the Prisoners confined therein; and afterwards, (to wit.) on Thurs- }
day the 8th Day of June Instant, being with the same Mob and riotous Assembly, and pul- }
ling down the Dwelling-house of Thomas Connolly, destroying and burning the Furniture of }
the same. And also, he the said Robert Lovell, with an Iron Bar in his Hand, was aiding and }
assisting in feloniously pulling down the Dwelling-house of Lawrence Welch, and destroying }
and burning his Furniture; and also pulling down the Watch-house near St. George's Church, }
Southwark, in the County of Surrey.

convicted

6 Henry

Source 2a: Transcript

Convicted

4. Joseph Lovell and 5. Robert Lovell Committed 9th of June 1780 by Gideon Fournier, [Esquire] charged on the Oaths of Stephen Stratford, Joseph Ward, William Field and William Ivey, with being divers [various] other Persons, riotously, routously and feloniously assembled at the County Goal in Southwark, in the County of Surrey, on Wednesday the day 7th of June Instant [last], armed with Sticks, Staves, and Bludgeons, demanded the Gates of the same Prison to be immediately opened, and entered the same Prison, and feloniously released the Prisoners confined; and afterwards (to wit.) on Thursday the 8th Day of June Instant, being with the same Mob and riotous Assembly, and pulling down the Dwelling house of Thomas Connolly, destroying and burning the Furniture of the same. And also, he, the said Robert Lovell, with an Iron Bar in his hand, was aiding and assisting in feloniously pulling down the Dwelling-house of Lawrence Welch and destroying and burning his Furniture; and also pulling down the Watch-house near St George's Church, Southwark, in the county of Surrey.

Source 2b: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

6. *Henry Penny*, Committed the 9th Day of June, 1780, by John Levy, Esq. charged on the Oaths of Margaret Cooper, Elizabeth Fergusson, Stephen Stratford, Marmaduke Guest, and Walter Petherick, with being with divers other Persons, riotously, tumultuously, and unlawfully assembled in the Parish of St. George, Southwark, and Newington in the County of Surrey, and breaking open the Dwelling-house of the said Margaret Cooper, feloniously taking the Furniture thereof from thence, and burning it in the Street. Also broke open the Dwelling-house of Timothy Lacy, and feloniously taking sundry Goods from thence, and burnt them in the Street: Likewise pulled down, burnt, and destroyed the Watch-house and Cage belonging to the said Parish of St. George, Southwark, and other Felonies against the Peace.

Indicted

7. *William Smith*

Source 2b: Transcript

Convicted

6. Henry Penny, Committed the 9th Day of June, by John Levy, Esq. charged on the Oaths of Margaret Cooper, Elizabeth Ferguson, Stephen Stratford, Marmaduke Guest and Walter Petherick, with being with divers other Persons, riotously, tumultuously [full of confusion/or noise] and unlawfully assembled in the Parish of St. George, Southwark, and Newington in the County of Surrey, and breaking open the Dwelling-house of the said Margaret Cooper, feloniously taking the furniture thereof from thence, and burning it in the street. Also broke open the Dwelling-house of Timothy Lacy, and feloniously taking sundry Goods from thence, and burnt them in the street: Likewise pulled down, burnt, and destroyed the Watch-house and Cage belonging to the said Parish of St George, Southwark, and other felonies against the Peace.

Source 2c: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

8. *Thomas Greham*, Committed the 9th Day of June, 1780, by Gideon Fournier, Esq. charged on the Oath of Margaret, the Wife of Robert Chaffers, with having entered the Dwelling-house of the said Robert, in the Parish of St. Olave, in the County of Surrey, Yesterday, after the Riot at the Dwelling-house of Thomas Connolly, demanded of her some Liquor, and her saying she had none in the House, he immediately replied, damn you, your House shall be down in less than two Hours, to the great Terror of the said Margaret, and in Breach of the Peace.

Source 2c: Transcript

8. Thomas Greham, Committed the 9th of June 1780, by Gideon Fournier, Esq. charged on the Oath of Margaret, the Wife of Robert Chaffers, entered the Dwelling-house of the said Robert, in the Parish of St Olave, in the County of Surrey, Yesterday, after the Riot at the Dwelling-house of Thomas Connolly, demanded of her some Liquor, and her saying she had none in the House, he immediately replied damn you, your House shall be down in less than two hours, to the great Terror of the said Margaret, and in the Breach of the Peace.

Source 2d: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

26. *James Taylor*, Committed the 10th Day of June, 1780, by Richard Carpenter Smith, Esq. charged on the Oath of William Davidson, particularly for forceably taking away a Watch from and out of the Hand of his Servant, in his Shop ; and threatening to cause his House to be pulled down ; and also on Suspicion of being concerned with divers other Persons, in committing divers Riots and Outrages against the Peace.

—— Detained the same Day by Richard Carpenter Smith, Esq. charged on the Oaths of John Parker and Samuel Barwick, particularly for taking a lighted Torch, or Brand on a Fork, and throwing the same in at a Window of the Lodge of the House of Correction, whereby the same was Burnt ; and also in affixing in pulling the said House down ; and also for entering the Dwelling-house of Samuel Barwick, demanding Monies of him, and threatening to destroy his House.

Source 2d: Transcript

26. James Taylor, Committed the 10th Day of June, 1780 by Richard Carpenter Smith, Esq. Charged on the Oath of William Davidson, particularly for forcibly taking away a Watch from out of the Hand of his Servant, in his Shop, and threatening to cause his House to pulled down; and also on Suspicion of being concerned with divers other Persons, in committing divers Riots and Outrages against the Peace.

—– Detained the same Day by Richard Carpenter Smith Esq. charged on the Oath of John Parker and Samuel Barwick, particularly for taking a lighted Torch, or Brand on a Fork and throwing the same in at a Window of the Lodge of the House of Correction whereby the same was burnt and also in the assisting in the pulling the said House down and also for entering the Dwelling house of Samuel Barwick demanding Monies of him and threatening to destroy his House.

Source 2e: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

49. *Edward Richardson*, Committed the 17th Day of June, 1780, by Herbert Thomas, and Gideon Fournier, Esqrs. charged on the Oaths of Andrew Boror, and William Rose, with being with divers other Persons riotously, routously and tumultuously assembled, in Order to be aiding and abetting to each other, in feloniously burning the King's Bench Prison, and discharging the Prisoners therein.

Acquitted

Source 2e: Transcript

Acquitted

49. Edward Richardson, committed the Day of 17th June by Herbert Thomas and Gideon Fournier, Esquires, charged on the Oaths of Andrew Boror, and William Rose with being with divers other Person riotuously, routously and tumultuously assembled in Order to be adding and abetting to each other, in felonious burning the King's Bench Prison, and discharging Prisoners therein.

Source 2f: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

*Not guilty
convicted*

51. Sarah Harwell, } Committed the 19th Day of June, 1780, by Samuel Gillam, and
and } Herbert Thomas, Esqrs. charged on the Oaths of Elizabeth Cur-
52. Elizabeth Harwell, } rie, Thomas Valance, Robert Davis, and Ann Hunter, with ex-
citing and abetting a certain numerous and unlawful Assembly of People, in East-Lane, on }
the seventh Day of this Instant, feloniously to pull down the Dwelling-houfe of the said Eliza- }
beth, whereby some of her Windows was broke, and other Ills against the Peace.

Source 2f: Transcript

Not Guilty consent

51. Sarah Harwell and 52. Elizabeth Harwell Committed 19th June , 1780 by Samuel Gillam and Herbert Thomas Esquires charged on the Oaths of Elizabeth Currie, Thomas Valance, Robert Davies, and Ann Hunter, with exciting and abetting a certain numerous and unlawful Assembly of People, in East-Lane on the seventh Day of this Instant, feloniously to pull down the Dwelling-house of the said Elizabeth, whereby some of her windows was broke and other ills against the Peace.

Source 2g: Extract from 'A Kalendar of the prisoners to be tried by a Special Commission' on Riots', 10 July 1780. Catalogue Ref: KB 33/5/12

Acquitted
(Mann committed for Perjury)

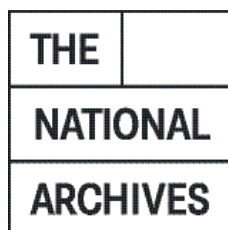
68. Robert Barks, Committed the 30th Day of June, 1780, by John Evans, Esq. charged on the Oath of Jonathan Mann, for that he, together with divers other Persons, were unlawfully assembled together at the King's Bench Prison, and was there aiding and affitting in the late Riot there; which Prison was soon after burnt down and destroyed.

in direct, and committing divers Outrages.

Source 2g: Transcript

Acquitted (Mann committed for perjury)

68. Robert Barks, Committed the 30th Day of June 1780, by John Evans charged on the Oath of Jonathan Mann, for that he, together with divers other Persons, were unlawfully assembled together at the King's Bench Prison, and was there aiding and assisting in the late Riot, which Prison was soon after burnt down and destroyed.



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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