

Bisexuality and Lesbianism in the later Seventeenth Century

The History Of The Nun: Or, The Fair Vow-Breaker. Written by Mrs. A. BEHN. (1689).

To the Most Illustrious Princess, The Dutchess of MAZARINE.

... Madam, when I survey'd the whole To[u]r of Ladies at Court, which was Adorn'd by you, who appear'd there with a Grace and Majesty, peculiar to Your Great Self only, mix'd with an irresistible Air of Sweetness, Generosity, and Wit, I was impatient for an Opportunity, to tell Your Grace, how infinitely one of Your own Sex ador'd You, and that, among all the numerous Conquest, Your Grace has made over the Hearts of Men, Your Grace had not subdu'd a more intire Slave; I assure you, Madam, there is neither Compliment, nor Poetry, in this humble Declaration, but a Truth, which has cost me a great deal of Inquietude, for that Fortune has not set me in such a Station, as might justifie my Pretence to the honour and satisfaction of being ever near Your Grace, to view eternally that lovely Person, and here that surprizing Wit; what can be more grateful to a Heart, than so great, and so agreeable, an Entertainment? And how few Objects are there, that can render it so entire a Pleasure, as at once to hear you speak, and to look upon your Beauty? A Beauty that is heighten'd, if possible, with an air of Negligence, in Dress, wholly Charming, as if your Beauty disdain'd those little Arts of your Sex, which Nicety alone is their greatest Charm, while yours, Madam, even without the Assistance of your exalted Birth, begets an Awe and Reverence in all that do approach you, and every one is proud, and pleas'd, in paying you Homage their several ways, according to their Capacities and Talents; mine, Madam, can only be exprest by my Pen, which would be infinitely honour'd, in being permitted to celebrate your great Name for ever, and perpetually to serve, where it has so great an inclination. In the me an time, Ma'dam, I presume to lay this little Trifle at your Feet; the Story is true, as it is on the Records of the Town, where it was transacted; and if my fair unfortunate *Vow-Breaker* do not deserve the honour of your Graces Protection, at least, she will be found worthy of your Pity; which will be a sufficient Glory, both for her, and, MADAM, Your Graces most humble, and most obedient Servant, A. Behn.

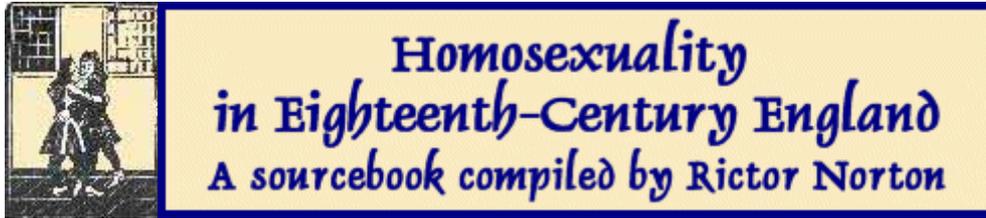
Hortense Manzini, Duchess of Mazarin, had been Charles II's mistress but was almost certainly bisexual and was thought to have had an affair with Lady Sussex, daughter of another of Charles II's mistresses, The Duchess of Cleveland (she was removed to a nunnery to end it). Behn's introduction is often said to indicate at least infatuation and perhaps more. Virginia Woolf celebrated Behn: 'All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds'. Behn was probably bisexual and had an acknowledged relationship with the bisexual John Hoyle (in 1687 he was tried and acquitted for sodomy). Her poem, To the Fair Clorinda, also celebrates female love and sexual ambiguity:

To the Fair Clorinda
*WHO MADE LOVE TO ME,
IMAGIN'D MORE THAN WOMAN*

Fair lovely Maid, or if that Title be
Too weak, too Feminine for Nobler thee,
Permit a Name that more Approaches Truth:
And let me call thee, Lovely Charming Youth.
This last will justifie my soft complainte,
While that may serve to lessen my
constraint;
And without Blushes I the Youth persue,
When so much beauteous Woman is in view
Against thy Charms we struggle but in vain
With thy deluding Form thou giv'st us pain,
While the bright Nymph betrays us to the
Swain.
In pity to our Sex sure thou wer't sent,
That we might Love, and yet be Innocent:

For sure no Crime with thee we can commit;
Or if we shou'd – thy Form excuses it.
For who, that gathers fairest Flowers
believes
A Snake lies hid beneath the Fragrant
Leaves.

Thou beauteous Wonder of a different
kind,
Soft *Cloris* with the dear *Alexis* join'd;
When e'er the Manly part of thee, wou'd
plead
Thou tempts us with the Image of the Maid,
While we the noblest Passions do extend
The Love to *Hermes*, *Aphrodite* the Friend



Princess Seraphina

1732

Introduction

Below is the complete transcript of a trial in 1732 in which John Cooper (also known as Princess Seraphina) prosecuted Tom Gordon for stealing his clothes. (NB: Cooper/Seraphina was not the person on trial: he was the accuser.) The transcript is rather long — but every bit of the testimony is full of human interest. Princess Seraphina was a gentleman's servant, and a kind of messenger for mollies (gay men), and a bit of a hustler. More to the point, she was the first recognizable drag queen in English history, that is the first gay man for whom dragging it up was an integral part of his identity, and who was well known by all his neighbours as a drag queen or transvestite "princess": everyone called him Princess Seraphina even when he was not wearing women's clothes. And he does not seem to have had any enemies except for his cousin, a distiller who thought that his behaviour was scandalous.

Gordon (the alleged robber) was acquitted of the charge of robbing Seraphina. Seraphina herself was not on trial — nor was she ever brought to trial for anything afterwards as a result of losing her prosecution.

To set the context: Masquerades flourished in London from the 1720s onward, and took place in assembly rooms, theatres, brothels, public gardens, and molly houses. The commercial masquerades were quasi- carnivals first organized by the impresario John James Heidegger at the Haymarket Theatre from 1717 onwards. His "Midnight Masquerades" were tremendously successful, and drew 800 people a week. They provided many people with the opportunity to explore fetishism and transvestism. Men disguised themselves as witches, bawds, nursing maids and shepherdesses, while women dressed as hussars, sailors, cardinals and boys from Mozart's operas. In the early days of the fashion, Richard Steele went to one where a parson called him a pretty fellow and tried to pick him up, and Horace Walpole passed for an old woman at a masquerade in 1742. The opportunities for illicit assignations provoked a host of anti-masquerade satires, and many tracts were mainly devoted to attacking the mollies who attended them, allegedly imitating infamous homosexual cross-dressers such as Sporus, Caligula, and Heliogabalus. Seraphina went to the very first [Ridotto al Fresco](#) held at Vauxhall Gardens, in June 1732, where he was not the only man disguised as a woman.

Molly houses — pubs and clubs where gay men met, especially on Sunday nights — were very popular in the 1720s in London. On special "Festival Nights" many of the men would wear drag, and sing and dance together, and engage in camp behaviour. For example, on 28 December 1725 a group of 25 men were apprehended in a molly house in Hart Street near Covent Garden and were arrested for dancing and misbehaving themselves, "and obstructing and opposing the Peace-Officers in the Execution of their Duty." They were dressed in "Masquerade Habits" and were suspected of being sodomites because several of them had previously stood in the pillory on that account; but they were dressed in a range of costumes, not all of which were female, and the date suggests a special holiday event rather than a familiar practice. It is interesting to note that they did not submit sheepishly to their arrest, but put up a show of resistance. None were prosecuted.

For another example, at one molly house in the Mint (in the City of London), according to a contemporary witness: "The Stewards are Miss Fanny Knight, and

Aunt England; and pretty Mrs. Anne Page officiates as Clark. One of the Beauties of this Place is Mrs. Girl of Redriff, and with her, (or rather him) dip Candle-Mary a Tallow Chandler in the Burrough, and Aunt May an Upholsterer in the same place, are deeply in Love: Nurse Mitchell is a Barber of this Society." James Dalton the highwayman was a witness to molly Festival Nights, which he described in his dying confession published just before he was hanged in 1728, and he briefly mentions John Cooper (Princess Seraphina), who at that time Dalton implied was a butcher. So Seraphina was "on the drag scene" for at least four years before the trial at which she comes dramatically to public notice.

Rictor Norton

Complete Trial Transcript July 1732

The Proceedings at the Sessions of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, for the City of London, and County of Middlesex; on Wednesday the 5th, Thursday the 6th, Friday the 7th, and Saturday the 8th of July 1732, in the Sixth Year of His MAJESTY's Reign. Being the Sixth Sessions in the Mayoralty of the Right Honourable Francis Child, Esq; Lord Mayor of the City of London, in the Year 1732.

Before the Right Honourable Francis Child, Esq; Lord Mayor of the City of London; the Right Honourable the Lord Chief Baron Reynolds; the Honourable Mr. Justice Probyn; the Honourable Mr. Justice Fortescue; Mr Serjeant Urlin, Deputy Recorder of the City of London; and others of His Majestys Justices of Oyer and Terminer for the City of London, and Justices of Gaol-Delivery of Newgate, holden for the said City and County of Middlesex.

Thomas Gordon was indicted for assaulting **John Cooper** in a Field in Chelsea Parish, putting him in fear, and taking from him a Coat, a Waistcoat, a pair of Breeches, a pair of Shoes, a pair of Silver Shoe-buckles, a Shirt, a Stock, a Silver Stock- buckle, and 4½d. in Money, May 30.

Trial Testimony

John Cooper. On Whit-Monday, May 29, I dress'd myself and went abroad, and returning between 1 and 2 next Morning to my Lodging at Numb. 11 in Eagle-Court, in the Strand, I knock'd once, but finding no Body answer'd, I went to a Night-Cellar hard by, I call'd for a Pint of Beer, and sitting down on a Bench, the Prisoner came and sat by me; he ask'd me if I did not know Mr. Price, and some other Persons, and so we fell into Discourse; we drank 3 hot Pints together, I paid the Reckoning 9½d. and went up; I was got about 15 or 20 Yards off when the Prisoner came up to me, said it was a fine Morning, and ask'd me to take a Walk; I agreed, and we went into Chelsea Fields, and turning up to a private Place among some Trees, he clap'd his left Hand to the right Side of my Coat, and trip'd up my Heels, and holding a Knife to me, "God damn ye," says he, "if you offer to speak or stir I'll kill ye; give me your Ring." I gave it him, and he put it on his own Finger; then he made me pull off my Coat and Waistcoat, and Breeches; I begg'd that he would not kill me, nor leave me naked; "No," says he, "I'll only change wi'ye; come pull off your Shirt, and put on mine"; so he stript, and drest hiimself in my Cloaths, and I put on his; there was 4½d. in my Breeches, and I found 3 ha'pence in his. He ask'd me where I liv'd, and I told him. "I suppose," says he, "you intend to

charge me with a Robbery by and by, but if you do, I'll swear you're a Sodomite, and gave me the Cloaths to let you B[ugge]r me."

While we were dressing, a Man pass'd by at a little Distance, if there had been 2 Men I should have ventur'd to have call'd to them for Help, but as there was but one I was afraid. Then the Prisoner bid me come along, and I follow'd him to Piccadilly, and so to Little Windmill- street, and there I call'd to 2 Men, who took him into an Alehouse; I told them he had robb'd me, and he said that I had given him the Cloaths to let me B[ugge]r him. The Men said they expected to be paid for their Day's Work, if they lost their Time about my Business; I promis'd them they should be satisfied.

When we came to Justice Mercer's, he was not up, so we went to the Coach and Horses by St. Giles's Church, and waited an Hour and an half; while we were there the Prisoner wrote a Letter to his Mother (as he said) and directed it to Numb. 20. in Colston's-Court in Drury-lane. I had charg'd a Constable with the Prisoner, I told him so; "Go and do it then," says the Justice, "and swear to the Things, and I'll commit him." So we went toward Tyburn-Road, into Marybone- Fields, and there the Men let the Prisoner go; "What do ye do?" says I. "Why what would you have us do," said they, "he charges you with Sodomy, and says you gave him the Cloaths on that Account." Another Man coming by at the same time, I desir'd his Assistance; but they telling him that I was a Molly, he said I ought to be hang'd, and he'd have nothing to do with me; then the Prisoner began to run, and I after him; but one of the two Men, who expected to be paid for their Day's Work, kick'd up my Heels, and as I was rising, he struck me down again; I was very much hurt, and spit Blood, so that I could not follow them, and so they all got over a Ditch and escaped; I went to my Lodgings in Eagle-Court.

They were surprised to see me come home in such a shabby Dress; I told 'em what had happen'd, and describ'd the Man, and said that he sent a Letter to his Mother in Colston's Court; "O," says one, "I know him, his Name is Tom. Gordon, and his Mother's Name is Abbot." So I got Justice Giffard's Warrant the same Day, and finding the Prisoner at a Brandy shop Door in Drury-Lane, we seized him, and carried him to Brogdon Poplet's [a public house], and I set for Mr. Levit, and Mr. Sydney, who lodg'd in the same House as I lodg'd in; so the Prisoner was sent to the Round-house, and carry'd before the Justice next Day. He told the Justice that I put my Yard into his Hand twice; and says the Justice, "You had a long Knife, it seems, why did you not cut it off? I would have done so." The Prisoner said that he was not willing to expose me so much. He are certain Ladies that belong to Brogdon Poplet, who, I suppose, have abundance to say for the Prisoner.

Court. What Business do you follow?

Cooper. I am a Gentleman's Servant, but am out of Place at present; the last Place I liv'd in was Capt. Brebolt's at Greenwich.

Prisoner [i.e. Gordon]. Did we go out of the Night Cellar together?

Cooper. No, you follow'd me.

Christopher Sandford, Taylor [tailor]. On the 29th of May, in the Evening, I was drinking with Mr. Mead at the King's-Arms by Leicester-Fields when the Prosecutor came in, dress'd in a black Coat, a white Waistcoat, and black Breeches; he sat down and drank, and then paid his Reckoning, and went away. Next Morning I saw Mr. Mead again, he said he had met the Prosecutor

in a dirty ragged Suit of Cloaths, and a speckled Shirt, and never set his Eyes on a Man so metamorphos'd. "But how came he in that Condition?" says I, "Why it seems he has been robb'd this Morning," says he, "by one Gordon, a Leather-breeches Maker."

I passed with Mr. Mead as I was going by Turnstile in Holbourn, the Prisoner pull'd me by the Coat, and said, "How d'ye do? what don't ye know me?" and indeed I hardly did know him in that Dress. "What is it to you, Mr. Gordon?" says I, "why I heard you was dead." "Dead!" says he, "who told you so?" "Why Cooper," says I, "he drank with me last Night." "Cooper is a great Rogue," says he; "What has he done?" says I; "He gave me these Cloaths this Morning," says he; "And is he a Rogue for that?" says I; "No," says he, "but he pretends to get 'em again by Force." "Hark ye, Tom," says I, "as you have a Soul to be sav'd, I fancy you'll come to be hang'd; for he has sworn a Robbery against you." "Has he really done it?" says he; "for God's Sake help me to make it up, I'll go and get 3 Guineas of my Uncle in the Temple, and meet you at the Bell and Horse-shoe in Holborn." I told the Prosecutor [i.e. Cooper] of this, and he went with me, but we could find no such Sign as the Bell and Horse-shoe.

John Sanders. Between 9 and 10 on Tuesday Night I was sent for to the Two Suger-Loaves in Drury-Lane; the Prosecutor gave me a Warrant against the Prisoner; we went before Justice Newton; the Justice having heard the Prosecutor's Charge, ask'd the Prisoner what he had to say for himself? "Why," says the Prisoner, "he laid his privy Parts in my Hand, and offer'd to B[ugger] me." Then says Mr. Newton, "You had better take him before Justice Giffard to-Morrow, he knows more of the Matter, for I see it is his Warrant." So the Prisoner was sent to the Round- house [a prison in St Giles].

The Prisoner's Defence.

Thomas Gordon: I was lock'd out, and went to Mrs. Holder's Night-Cellar; the Prosecutor came and sat by me, and ask'd me to drink, I thought I had seen him before; we fell into Discourse, and had 3 hot Pints of Gin and Ale between us; about 4 in the Morning he ask'd me to take a Walk; we went into Chelsea Fields, and coming among some Trees and Hedges, he kiss'd me, and put his privy Parts into my Hand; I ask'd him what he meant by that, and told him I would expose him; he begg'd me not to do it, and said he would make me amends. I ask'd him what amends? He said he would give me all his Cloaths, if I would accept of them, and so we agreed, and chang'd Cloaths.

After this, I ask'd him to go into the White Horse by Hyde-Park, but he said he would not, for he had Relations there, and did not care to expose himself in that Dress. We went farther, and I would have gone into another House, but he made the same Excuse: then we came to Little Windmill-street, where we found a Man knocking at an Alehouse Door; we thought to have gone in there, but it being early the People would not get up, and so we went to the White-Hart in Knaves-Acre; there he charg'd me with a Robbery, and I charg'd him with a Attempt to commit Sodomy. We went before Justice Mercer, who order'd us to get a Constable, and in going along, the Prosecutor raised a Mob, and squall'd as I had been murdering him, so that I was glad to get away. He afterwards met me again as I was talking with my Master in Drury- Lane, and carry'd me to Mr. Pople's.

Margaret Holder. I keep the Night- Cellar, the Prisoner came in about 10 at Night, and staid till 2 in the morning, and then the Prosecutor came in, and sat down by him, and said, "Your Servant, Sir; have you any Company belonging to you, for I don't love much Company?" Then they had 3 Pints of Huckle and Buff, as we call it, that's Gin and Ale made hot; and so about 4 o'Clock the Prisoner said he would go home, for his Mother would be up, and he might get in without his Father's Knowledge; and the Prosecutor said, "If you go, I'll go too"; so the Prisoner went up first, and the Prosecutor staid to change a Shilling, and went out after him. I believe the Prisoner is an honest Man; but the Prosecutor and Kitt Sandford too, use to come to my Cellar with such sort of People.

Court. What sort of People?

Holder. Why, to tell you the Truth, he's one of the Runners that carries Messages between Gentlemen in that way.

Court. In what way?

Holder. Why he's one of them as you call Molly Culls, he gets his Bread that way; to my certain Knowledge he has got many a Crown under some Gentlemen, for going of sodomiting Errands.

Robert Shaw. The Prisoner and Prosecutor, and four more came to my House, the White-Hart in Knaves- Acre, about 6 o-Clock on Tuesday Morning; says the Prisoner, "this Fellow charges me with a Robbery." "How so?" says I; "Why," says he, "we have been in Chelsea Fields, and he gave me his Cloaths to let him commit Sodomy with me, and now he wants them again." After the second Pot, they disputed who should pay; says the Prosecutor, "You know I have but 3 ha'pence, for when I gave you my Breeches there was 4½d. in 'em, and when I took yours, I found but 3 ha'pence in the Pocket." Then the Prosecutor desir'd to go to his Cousin Smith, a Distiller hard by, to borrow a Shilling; a Man went with him, he brought back a Shilling, and paid his Reckoning.

Court. Did the Prosecutor contradict what the Prisoner said about changing Cloaths?

Shaw. No, not in my hearing.

Edward Pocock. About 5 o'Clock o' Tuesday Morning, as I was coming along Chelsea-Fields, I saw 2 Men a stripping among some Trees; I thought they were going to fight, but I soon found there was no Quarrel; for when they had put their Cloaths on, they went away lovingly, and the Prisoner smil'd; they look'd as if they had not been a-bed all Night, no more than I had; for you must know, being Holiday time, I got drunk, and fell asleep with my Cloaths on.

Court. How far off was you when you saw them?

Pocock. Within 20 or 30 Yards.

Court. How came the Prisoner to find you out?

Pocock. I happen'd to go to Holder's Cellar, and there I heard talk of this Robbery; and says I, "I'll be hang'd if these were not the 2 Men that I thought

were going to fight"; so I went to Newgate to see the Prisoner, and knew him to be one of 'em; and he afterwards sent me a Subpoena.

John Thorp. It being Holiday time, I and another Stocking-maker, and 2 Shoe-makers, had been out a merry making, and in the Morning we can to the Two Brewers in Little Windmill-street; the People were not up, and while I stood knocking at the Door, the Prisoner and the Prosecutor came along close together; says the Prosecutor, "this Man has got my Cloaths on his Back"; and says the Prisoner, "He gave them me to commit Sodomy." We told them it was a scandalous business, and advised them to make it up between themselves, and change Cloaths again. The Prosecutor said he desir'd nothing more than to have his Cloaths again; but the Prisoner would not consent, "For nothing is freer than Gift", says he, "and I'll see you out."

We could not get in at the Two Brewers, and so went to Mr. Shaw's in Knaves-Acre, and not agreeing there, we went to the Coach and Horses by St Giles's Church; and there the Prisoner wrote a Letter to his Mother, it was directed to his Father, a Taylor, at Numb 4. in Colston's-Court, I found the House according to the Direction, and deliver'd the Letter, but his Father was not up, and when I return'd to the Coach and Horses they were all gone.

Prisoner. Did not you go to the Prosecutor's Cousin, the Distiller, in Warder-street?

Thorp. Yes; he told his Cousin he was pawn'd for a Shilling; says his Cousin, "As you are in the Neighbourhood, I don't care to be scandaliz'd by you, there's a Shilling, but go about your Business, and let me hear no more of you, for you are a vile Fellow, and I'm afraid you'll come to an ill end."

The Character of the Princess Seraphina.

Jane Jones. I am a Washer-woman in Drury-Lane, I went into Mr Poplet's, my next Door Neighbour, for a Pint of Beer, and said "There's the Princess Seraphina!" So I look'd at her, and the Prisoner was in the same Box; and says he to the Princess, "What a vile Villain was you to ——"

Court. What Princess?

Jones. The Prosecutor; he goes by that Name. "What a Villain was you," says the Prisoner, "to offer so vile a thing? Did not you do so and so?"

Court. So and so; explain yourself.

Jones. Why in the way of Sodomity, whatever that is; so says the Princess, "If you don't give me my Cloaths again, I'll swear a Robbery against you; but if you'll let me have them, I'll be easy." "No, you Villain, you shant," says the Prisoner. Next Day I went to Mr. Stringer the Pawn-broker's, facing Vinegar-yard in Drury-Lane; I wash for him, and there I saw the Princess a pawning her Shirt; "O Princess!" says I, "are you there? They will be very fine by and by; you will have no Occasion to pawn your Linen, when you get the Reward for hanging Tom Gordon. But how can you be so cruel to swear his Life away, when you have own'd that you chang'd with him?" What if I did," says he, "I don't value that, I shall do nothing but what I have been advised to."

Mary Popley. I keep the Two Sugar-Loaves in Drury-Lane, the Prisoner and the Princess came into my House, and the Princess charg'd the Prisoner with taking her Cloaths, and the Prisoner call'd her a Villain, and said she gave 'em to him. I have known her Highness a pretty while, she us'd to come to my House from Mr. Tull, to enquire after some Gentlemen of no very good Character; I have seen her several times in Women's Cloaths, she commonly us'd to wear a white Gown, and a scarlet Cloak, with her Hair frizzled and curl'd all round her Forehead; and then she would so flutter her Fan, and make such fine Curt'sies, that you would not have known her from a Woman: She takes great Delight in Balls and Masquerades, and always chuses to appear at them in a Female Dress, that she may have the Satisfaction of dancing with fine Gentlemen. Her Highness lives with Mr. Tull in Eagle-Court in the Strand, and calls him her Master, because she was Nurse to him and his Wife when they were both in a Salivation; but the Princess is rather Mr. Tull's Friend, than his domestick Servant. I never heard that she had any other Name than the Princess Seraphina.

Mary Ryler. I was standing at the End of our Court in Drury-Lane, and seeing the Prisoner coming along with a Crowd. "Tom!" says I, "what's the Matter?" "Why," says he, pointing to the Princess, "this Man gave me his Cloaths to let him B[u]gge[r] me, and now he charges me with a Robbery." I know the Princess very well, she goes a Nursing sometimes: She nurs'd his Master Tull and his Wife in their Salivation, and several others; and I was told that he was dress'd in Woman's Cloaths at the last Masquerade (Ridotto al Fresco at Vauxhall.) Sometimes we call her Princess, and sometimes Miss.

Mary Robinson. I was trying on a Suit of Red Damask at my Mantua-maker's in the Strand, when the Princess Seraphina came up, and told me the Suit look'd mighty pretty. "I wish," says he, "you would len 'em me for a Night, to go to Mrs. Green's in Nottingham-Court, by the Seven Dials, for I am to meet some fine Gentlemen there." "Why," says I, "can't Mrs. Green furnish you?" "Yes" says he, "she lends me a Velvet Scarf and a Gold Watch sometimes." He used to be but meanly dress'd, as to Men's Cloaths, but he came lately to my Mantua-maker's, in a handsome Black Suit, to invite a Gentlewoman to drink Tea with Mrs. Tull. I ask'd him how he came to be so well Rigg'd? And he told me his Mother had lately sold the Reversion of a House; "And now," says he, "I'll go and take a Walk in the Park, and shew my self." Soon after this, my Maid told me that her Highness was robb'd by a Man in a Sailor's Habit, who had changed Cloaths with him. And so next Morning I sent for him. "Lord, Princess!" says I "you are vastly alter'd." "Ay, Madam," says he, "I have been robb'd, but I shall get the Reward for hanging the Rogue."

Another Time, he comes to me, and says, "Lord, Madam, I must ask your Pardon, I was at your Mantua-maker's Yesterday, and dress'd my Head in your Lac'd Pinders, and I would fain have borrow'd them to have gone to the Ridotto at Vauxhall last Night, but I cou'd not persuade her to lend 'em me; but however she lent me your Callimanco Gown and Madam Nuttal's Mob [cap], and one of her Smocks, and so I went thither to pick up some Gentlemen to Dance." "And did you make a good Hand of it, Princess?" says I. "No, Madam," says he, "I pick'd up two Men, who had no Money, but however they proved to be my old Acquaintance, and very good Gentlewomen they were. One of them has been transported for counterfeiting Masquerade Tickets; and t'other went to the Masquerade in a Velvet Domine, and pick'd up an old Gentleman, and went to Bed with him, but as soon as the old Fellow found that he had got a Man by his Side, he cry'd out, 'Murder!'"

Eliz. Jones. I saw the Princess Seraphina standing at Mr. Poplet's Door. "What, have you been robb'd, Princess?" says I, "Has Tom Gordon stripp'd your Highness stark naked? An impudent Rogue! And yet, Ma'm, I think, your Highness had better make it up with him, than expose yourself, for some say it was only an Exchange." "Why," says he, "at first I would have made it up, and taken my Cloaths again, but now it's too late, and I must prosecute, for those that were concerned in taking him up, expect their Share in the Reward, and won't let me drop the Prosecution."

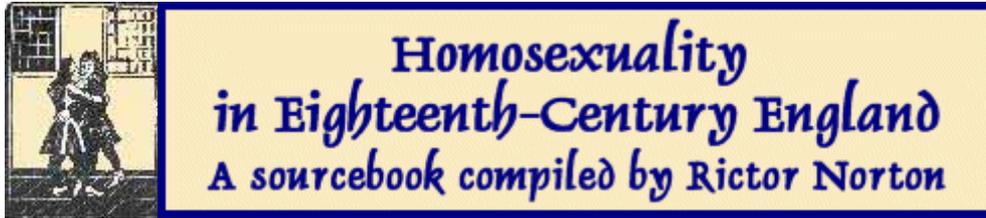
Andrew Monford. I heard the Prosecutor say to the Prisoner (at Mr. Poplet's) "Tom! give me my Cloaths." And the other answer'd, "No, you Rogue, I won't: Did you not put your Hand in my Breeches, to pull out what I had?"

Several of the Inhabitants of Drury-Lane gave the Prisoner the Character of an honest working Man, and the Jury acquitted him.

SOURCE: *The Proceedings at the Sessions of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, for the City of London, and County of Middlesex* ((London, 1732), pp. 166-70; Case number 37 out of a total of 67.

CITATION: If you cite this Web page, please use the following citation:
Rictor Norton (Ed.), "Princess Seraphina, 1732", *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. 2 January 1999, updated 31 January 2006
<<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/seraphin.htm>>.

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The Raid on Mother Clap's Molly House

1726

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NOTE: On my website [Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England](http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen) I reproduce numerous primary sources, including trials and newspaper reports and satires. This material can be used for historical analysis, for example as data illustrating particular historical themes, or as data for legal history (types of offence, rates of conviction, etc.). As the site grows and becomes more comprehensive, it will become increasingly possible to use it for statistical analysis (e.g. what percentage of trials involved mutual consent, or what percentage of the accused were married, etc.). The material can also be used to construct historical narratives, or the more traditional aspect of writing history. The following is an example of this technique, in which I have analysed various trials and newspaper reports, combining their sometimes conflicting allegations into a coherent chronological narrative of events surrounding one molly house. In this kind of chronicle, I pay less attention to theoretical issues such as "Were gay men effeminate?", and more attention to "What happened?" and "In what sequence did it happen?" and "How did it come about?" The story begins with a raid.

The Great Raid

On a Sunday night in February, 1726,¹ a squadron of police constables converged upon the molly house kept by Mother Clap in Field Lane, Holborn, tucked away between an arch on one side and the Bunch o' Grapes tavern on the other. All the avenues of escape being blocked, by the early morning hours the rooms had been emptied of forty homosexual men – 'mollies' or 'notorious Sodomites' in the language of the day – who were rounded up and hauled off to Newgate prison to await trial. By the end of the month several more molly houses had been similarly raided, and more mollies imprisoned. None of the men were actually caught *in flagrante delicto* – though a few were discovered with their breeches unbuttoned – and eventually most of them were set free due to lack of evidence. A number of them, however, were fined, imprisoned, and exhibited in the pillory, and three men were subsequently hanged at Tyburn.²

Margaret Clap's molly house was nothing out of the ordinary, for molly houses – public houses (usually alehouses or taverns, but in this instance a coffee house) where homosexual men kept their rendezvous – had existed in London since 1700, and apparently were thriving when they were first described in detail in Ned Ward's *The History of the London Clubs* in 1709. Her house, however, was one of the most popular molly houses during the

1720s, for she catered well for the wishes of her customers. According to the testimony given in the trials, for their greater convenience and entertainment 'she had provided beds in every room of the house', and with such an attraction it is not surprising that 'she had commonly 30 or 40 of such kind of Chaps every Night, but more especially on Sunday Nights'. (See [Lawrence's trial](#).)

The main room was large enough to accommodate dancing and fiddling – as occurred in other molly houses – but the flow of spirits was generous, the fire cheerful, and the company convivial. Samuel Stevens, a Reforming constable (i.e. a member of the Society for the Reformation of Manners) who became a member of her club by pretending to be the 'husband' of a homosexual informant, reports a visit he made on Sunday, 14 November 1725:

I found between 40 and 50 Men making Love to one another, as they call'd it. Sometimes they would sit on one another's Laps, kissing in a lewd Manner, and using their Hands indecently. Then they would get up, Dance and make Curtsies, and mimic the voices of Women. *O, Fie, Sir! – Pray, Sir. – Dear Sir. Lord, how can you serve me so? – I swear I'll cry out. – You're a wicked Devil. – And you're a bold Face. – Eh ye little dear Toad! Come, buss!* – Then they'd hug, and play, and toy, and go out by Couples into another Room on the same Floor, to be marry'd, as they call'd it.

And what did Mother Clap, a married woman and presumably heterosexual, think of such goings on? 'As for Mother Clap, she was present all the Time, except when she went out to fetch Liquors. The Company talk'd all manner of gross and vile Obscenity in her hearing, and she appeared to be wonderfully pleas'd with it'. (See [Wright's trial](#).)

Her special room was also a feature of other molly houses. It was sometimes referred to as 'The Marrying Room' or 'The Chapel', and usually it contained a large double bed. Though no ordained minister seems to have officiated at the nuptials celebrated therein, in Mother Clap's molly house there was at least a kind of marriage attendant, by the name of Eccleston. (See trials of [Clap](#) and [Lawrence](#).) He stood guard at the door to guarantee the occupants' privacy if they so desired. Often, however, the couples did not bother to close the door behind them, thus allowing the others to witness the carnal rite. As a general rule, 'when they came back they would tell what they had been doing, which in their Dialect they call'd *Marrying*'. (See trials of [Clap](#), [Lawrence](#) and [Griffin](#).) Although Eccleston was called a 'pimp', it is not absolutely certain that either he or Mother Clap regularly procured male prostitutes for the services of their customers. Unfortunately Eccleston died of old age or gaol fever while awaiting trial in Newgate, so we have no particulars of those activities which might have been revealed during his trial.

The portrayal of Mother Clap suggests that she was in the business more for pleasure than for profit. She was fond of joking about the time when a molly named Derwin was brought before Magistrate Sir George Mertins on charges of 'Sodomitical Practices' with a link-boy (a boy who carries a torch to light the street-lamps at night), and how her testimony as to the 'good Character' of Derwin so befuddled Magistrate Mertins that Derwin was freed. (See [Clap's trial](#).) From the evident humour wherewith she recounted this incident, one assumes she was more mischievous than mercenary. But of course this had occurred many months before her own honour was to be impugned. Mother Clap's house bore no specific name; it was a private residence and coffee house rather than a public inn or tavern. It was owned by her husband

John Clap, but he seldom appeared, letting her do all the business. Mother Clap went out to fetch liquor, probably from the Bunch o' Grapes alehouse next door. Her premises certainly consisted a 'disorderly house', but it probably wasn't specifically organised as a house of prostitution or male brothel. It is likely that she provided for herself simply by letting out rooms, by taking a percentage on the spirits she procured, and perhaps by accepting the occasional gift from a grateful guest. However, several men lived at her house, who might have been male prostitutes. These include Eccleston, mentioned above, and Thomas Phillips, a molly who lived at Mother Clap's for two years, but who 'disappeared' after the raid and was never tried. Also, two hustlers, to be discussed below, used her house as a base for their activities. And Griffin, mentioned below, who was tried for sodomy, also lived at Mother Clap's for nearly a year.

Mother Clap and her company would have gone unmolested were it not for the jealousy of an embittered homosexual turned informant named Mark Partridge. He was so helpful in aiding the police to carry out their successful raids that they returned the favour by not prosecuting him; his identity was carefully guarded in some of the documents, referring to him only as 'P—'. Sometime during October 1724, Partridge had a quarrel with his lover Mr Harrington (whose first doesn't seem to be recorded). What we can piece together from confusing court testimony (which is scattered throughout several trials since neither Partridge nor Harrington were themselves tried) is that Harrington revealed to someone that Partridge was his lover, and that Partridge when he heard of this betrayal was angry at being revealed as a sodomite, so he proceeded to revenge himself by spreading the (true) rumour that Harrington was an habitue of a number of molly houses. The rumour got out of hand – that is, it spread outside the confines of the molly subculture – and soon Partridge was contacted by the police. He was probably coerced by them into becoming an informer in order to avoid being prosecuted himself. (See trials of [Wright](#), [Griffin](#) and [Mackintosh](#).)

So by late 1725, Partridge was leading various constables to all of the London molly houses that he knew of, and introducing one or the other of them as his 'husband' so they could be admitted as *bona fide* members of each group. On Wednesday, 17 November for example, Partridge took constables Joseph Sellers and William Davison to another molly house, one kept by Thomas Wright in Beech Lane, where there was a very big row because the others had heard that they had been informed upon. They called Partridge a 'Traacherous, blowing-up, mollying-Bitch', and threatened to kill anyone who would betray them. Partridge, however, was able to mollify them by arguing that it was Harrington who let out the secret in the first place. So they forgave him and kissed him – and kissed the constables too, little suspecting who they were, and little knowing how treacherous Partridge indeed was.

But Partridge was not the only informer, and perhaps the greatest villains in the piece were the two hustlers Thomas Newton and Edward Courtney. Both men were rogues long before this, and harsh economic poverty contributed to their becoming queer-bait and *agents provocateurs* or entrappers for the police.

Thomas Newton, 30 years old, was a hustler in the employment of Thomas Wright, first at his home in Christopher's Alley in Moorfields, later at his own molly house in Beech Lane. (Most of the information about Newton is in [Lawrence's trial](#).) According to Newton, Wright 'has often fetch'd me to oblige Company in that way', an indication that Newton was a prostitute, although there is no explicit testimony during the trials that money exchanged hands, and Newton was getting a bit old for such an occupation. In any case,

Newton seems to have been bedded in nearly every molly house in London. Newton was not simply a mercenary, but a supportive member of the molly subculture. Soon after the February raid Newton kindly went to the police station with money to bail out Mother Clap. The source of this money is unknown – perhaps it came from his earnings, perhaps he was returning a favour to a woman who had procured business for him, or perhaps he was acting as a middle-man for the mollies who used her establishment. But unfortunately he was met at the station by constables Williams and Willis, who ‘told me they believed I could give Information; which I promised to do’.

Newton’s testimony may be inaccurate as to the actual date when he agreed to become an informer, for he was himself arrested at the end of the month of February, and it was not until he was set at liberty in March that he became an active informer. The likelihood is that the condition for his release and subsequent immunity from prosecution was his agreement to give evidence to help convict others. Constable Willis testified that the day after Newton was set at liberty he returned to the station and ‘made a voluntary Information’: Willis’ testimony is transparently designed to rebuff the suspicion that the police may have used unorthodox methods to assemble their case. Williams and Willis were probably members of the Society for the Reformation of Manners.

For the most part Newton simply gave testimony concerning those men who had slept with him – testimony which would lead to their imprisonment or death. But the police were overzealous and Newton acted upon occasion as their ‘trepanner’ or *agent provocateur* to entrap homosexuals who had not been apprehended in the actual raids. For example, there was a notorious cruising area in Moorfield Park – near Wright’s molly house – that was called ‘The Sodomites’ Walk’. When Newton told the police about this path, they obtained a warrant for the apprehension of homosexuals in the area. One night constables Willis and Stevenson followed at a discreet distance while Newton lured his prey:

‘I was no stranger to the Methods they used in picking one another up. So I takes a Turn that way, and leans over the Wall. In a little Time a Gentleman passes by, and looks hard at me, and at a small distance from me, stands up against the Wall, as if he was going to make Water. Then by Degrees he sidles nearer and nearer to where I stood, ’till at last he comes close to me. – *’Tis a very fine Night*, says he. *Aye*, says I, *and so it is*. Then he takes me by the Hand, and after squeezing and playing with it a little (to which I showed no dislike), he conveys it to his Breeches, and puts [his penis] into it. I took fast hold, and call’d out to Willis and Stevenson, who coming up to my Assistance, we carried him to the Watch house.’

The gentleman so awkwardly apprehended was William Brown, who, when ‘asked . . . why he took such indecent Liberties with Newton, . . . was not ashamed to answer, *I did it because I thought I knew him, and I think there is no Crime in making what use I please of my own Body*’. This answer is strikingly modern in its similarity to the basic principle behind the desired reforms of laws concerning ‘crimes without victims’ – it has been used especially in support of reform of laws against abortion and homosexuality – but it was not a sufficient defence in an early eighteenth-century court of law. At [Brown’s trial](#), in July 1726, Brown’s official defence was that he was innocently making water, and that he had been married for 12 or 13 years. The jury nevertheless found him guilty of attempted sodomy, a

misdeemeanour, and sentenced him to stand in the pillory at Moorfields, to pay a fine of ten marks, and to suffer two months' imprisonment.

The other hustler-turned-informant was eighteen-year-old Edward (Ned) Courtney. (Most of the information about Courtney is in [Kedger's trial](#).) He may have begun plying his trade as a male prostitute when he was an alehouse boy at the Yorkshire Grey tavern in Bloomsbury Market. Eventually he went to live with Thomas Orme, a silk dyer at the Red Lion in Crown Court in Knave's Acre, and there performed his services in Orme's private back rooms. By the time of the raids he was a bondservant to George Whittle (or Whittle), who was charged with keeping a molly house at the Royal Oak alehouse at the corner of St James's Square in Pall Mall.

Ned was an habitual rabble-rouser. He had already been sent to Bridewell Prison on three occasions: once for drunkenly hitting an old woman when he was an alehouse boy at the Curdigan's Head at Charing Cross (he was sacked, since the woman was the tavern-keeper's mother); a second time for stealing goods from Whittle's establishment; and a third time for disturbing the peace at an unnamed molly house in Covent Garden. Ned apparently turned informer as a means to spite Whittle, who had caused him to be arrested for theft. The jury's realisation that this may have been the motive behind his testimony, eventually led to Whittle's acquittal.

The giving of information also may have been a means for obtaining money, which Ned desperately lacked, and for which he was not above prostituting his own younger brother or extorting his customers. During the time when he was working in a cook's shop, in July, 1725, after he left the Yorkshire Grey and before he went to live with Orme, Ned claimed that he let George Kedger bugger him in a back room. Kedger claimed that Ned 'asked me to do it, . . . but I told him I would not. *What, says he, am not I handsome enough for ye? That's not the Case, says I, but I have got an Injury. That's only a Pretence, says he, but if you don't like me, I have got a pretty younger Brother, and I'll fetch him to oblige ye*'.

Kedger again met Ned later at Thomas Orme's, and again claimed that 'Ned solicited me to do the Story, and would fain have had me to have gone into the Necessary-House [outside toilet] with him, for he said he could not rest till he had enjoy'd me. And afterwards, when he was turn'd out of his Place, I met him by chance in a very poor and ragged Condition, and he told me that he had nothing to subsist upon but what he got by such Things. I advised him to leave off that wicked Course of Life; but he said he wanted Money, and Money he would have, by hook or by Crook; and if I would not help him to some he would swear my Life away'. Whether or not Kedger was homosexual – his excuse that declined to have sex because of an injury implies that he would have slept with Ned otherwise, and he travelled in the regular molly circuit. Ned's credibility as a witness was not above suspicion, and although Kedger at his trial in April 1726 was found guilty and sentenced to death, he was later reprieved.

The Trials

In April 1726 five men were brought to trial. The first to be tried was [Gabriel Lawrence](#), 43 years old, indicted on charges of having sodomised Thomas Newton on 20 July 1725, and of having sodomised Partridge on 10 November 1725. Newton and constables Stevens and Sellers testified that Lawrence was a frequent visitor at Mother Clap's. Newton specified that Lawrence and his friend Peter Bavidge (who was never caught) often expressed a desire to

sleep with him. 'They buss'd me, and stroked me over the Face, and said I was a very pretty Fellow'. But Newton apparently refused except upon one occasion when Lawrence, in the presence of Bavidge, took him upstairs and slept with him.

Lawrence in his defence acknowledged that he often drank ale at Mother Clap's, but he denied knowing that it was a molly house. Lawrence was a milkman, and Henry Yoxam, the cow-keeper who had supplied him with milk for the past eighteen years, said that Lawrence was a decent sort of chap, and that when they once got drunk at the Oxfordshire Feast and were coming home together in a coach, Lawrence made no advances towards him. Samuel Pullen, another cow-keeper, offered similar testimony on behalf of Lawrence's character. Margaret Chapman said that Lawrence often drank at her alehouse, and that he appeared to be a good man. William Preston said he often got drunk with Lawrence, who always kept his hands to himself. Thomas Fuller offered similar testimony, and added that Lawrence had married his daughter – now seven years dead – and had a thirteen-year-old daughter still living. Charles Bell, Lawrence's brother-in-law, said 'I never heard the like before'.

The jury nevertheless found Lawrence guilty as charged, and he was sentenced to death. The second charge, that he had slept with Partridge, was not pressed in view of the conviction on the first charge, so Partridge was not required to appear to give evidence. While Lawrence was awaiting execution in Newgate, according to the Ordinary (i.e. Chaplain), he made no confession, and steadfastly maintained that Newton had committed perjury. He attended the prison chapel regularly, and generally exhibited a grave demeanour.

William Griffin, a 43-year-old furniture upholsterer, was tried in April on charges of having also sodomised Thomas Newton. Newton testified that Griffin had lived for two years at Mother Clap's, and that he had slept with him on the night of 20 May 1725. Constable Stevens added that Griffin was often to be seen amongst the company, that he saw him accompany another man into the Marrying Room, and that on one occasion Griffin 'put his Hand into my Breeches'.

Griffin weakly testified on his own behalf that although he had lodged for a year and three-quarters at Clap's house, he had never realised it was a molly house. He brought forward no character witnesses. The jury found him guilty and he was sentenced to death. While awaiting execution, he spoke to the ordinary about how he had squandered his money and was forced to seek lodgings wherever he could. He maintained his innocence, and claimed to have a wife and two children, though they were separated.

Also in the April trials, Thomas Wright, a 32-year-old wool-comber, was charged with having sodomised Thomas Newton as well. According to Newton, Wright had been in the business of selling ale to various molly houses before he set up his own molly house in Beech Lane. There he supposedly slept with Newton on 10 January 1725, and afterwards regularly fetched Newton to sleep with his customers, particularly one Gregory Turner (never caught), who considered Newton his especial sweetheart.

Wright's molly house was nearly as popular as Mother Clap's. Constable Sellers testified that he went to Wright's house on 17 November 1725, 'and there I found a Company of Men fiddling, and dancing, and singing bawdy Songs, kissing, and using their Hands in a very unseemly Manner'. At Sellers' departure, Wright 'kiss'd me with open Mouth'. Constable William

Davison, who went there the night the mollies threatened Partridge, reported that 'in a large room there, we found one a fiddling, and eight more a dancing Country-Dances, making vile Motions, and singing, *Come let us [bugger] finely*'. (Unfortunately this ditty has been censored by the court reports, and the full text is lost). 'Then they sat in one another's Laps, talked Bawdy, and practised a great many indecencies. There was a Door in the great Room, which opened into a little Room, where there was a Bed, and into this little Room several of the Company went; sometimes they shut the Door after them, but sometimes they left it open, and then we could see part of their Actions'.

Edward Sanders, on Wright's behalf, said that he had known Wright for many years and 'never heard the like before'. Mary Cranton and Mary Bolton, who lodged in the rooms above the ground floor, said that 'indeed we had sometimes heard Musick and Merry-making, but we knew nothing of such Practices, and believe him to be a sober Churchman'. (Were these two women 'fag-hags', or prostitutes, or lesbians? It seems doubtful that they could have been unaware of what was happening below-stairs, but we know nothing else about them.) The jury brought in a guilty verdict, and Wright was sentenced to death. While awaiting execution, he confessed to the ordinary that he was indeed homosexual and that he had in fact kept a molly house, though he maintained that Newton's specific charges against him were false.

The last of the April round of trials were those of George Kedger and George Whittle, both charged with having sodomised Ned Courtney, which we have already mentioned. We should add that part of Kedger's defence was his assertion that he visited Thomas Orme not because Orme kept a molly house, but because Orme was an old school chum. One Francis Crouch testified that 'I believe he loved a Girl too well to be concern'd in other Affairs', and another woman testified to the same effect. (Again, we know nothing about these two women.) [Kedger](#), as noted above, was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was sent to the Gatehouse, Westminster, but later reprieved (*London Journal*, 23 April 1726).

The trial of [George Whittle](#), briefly mentioned above, merits our greater attention because the actual facts are very much open to question. According to Ned Courtney, Whittle's tavern, the Royal Oak, was itself a molly house, and there 'he helped me to two or three Husbands' in a small room called 'The Chapel'. The specific charge was that on the night of 1 December 1725, Whittle had said to Ned, 'there's a Country Gentleman of my Acquaintance, just come to Town, and if you'll give him a Wedding-Night, he'll pay you very handsomely'. So Ned, always eager for money, 'staid 'till Midnight, but no Gentleman came, and then it being too late for me to go Home, the Prisoner [i.e. Whittle] said I should lie with him, which I did. He put his Hand upon — and promised me a great deal of Money, if I would let him — which I agreed to, and he —'. (The charge was sodomy, so these prudent dashes were felt to be necessary in the published version of the court recorder's transcript.) But what was Ned's surprise and anguish when 'in the Morning he gave me no more than Six-pence'!

A certain Mr Riggs testified that Whittle's Royal Oak tavern had an ill repute in the neighbourhood, and was regarded as a popular molly house for the past two or three years. Drake Stoneman, a neighbour, also testified that the Royal Oak was known as a molly house – with a Chapel – for the past two or three years. He added his first-hand account: 'I have seen Men in his back Room behave themselves sodomitically, by exposing to each other's Sight what they ought to have conceal'd. I have heard some of them say, *Mine is the best*.

Yours has been Battersea'd. – I don't know what they meant by the Expression'.

'Battersea'd', nowhere else recorded in this verb form, probably is related to the common slang injunction 'you must go to Battersea, to be cut for the simples'.³ 'Simples' were medicinal herbs grown in large quantities at Battersea Park at this time, and this phrase meant 'to be cured of one's folly'. In the context of the trial, it would seem that one man's penis bore evidence of having been treated for venereal disease, but the slang term more likely meant that his penis was a ripe candidate for being treated for venereal disease, and 'Battersea'd' is probably a synonym for 'clapped'. The man's penis is more likely to bear the physical marks of the pox, than the visible evidence of being treated for it. Venereal disease during this period was treated either with mercury, either rubbed in or taken internally, or with balsamic salves containing rhubarb, juniper, sassafras, saffron, cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, and various astringents and diuretics, taken internally, or rubbed in, or injected into the urethra by a syringe. The compounds of polygonum, tomentilla, thyme, and *rosa rubra* would probably be gathered at Battersea. Many of the ointments to be applied externally also contained a mercury dilution to cause the ulcers to discharge their contents. If the testicles began to swell, fenugreek had to be applied morning and evening. Purgatives were generally favoured over balsams, and salivation was increasingly common (the ingestion of mercury to provoke spitting and slaving).⁴ It is just possible that 'Battersea'd' means 'covered with curative ointment', but these ointments were not visually remarkable; it is far more likely that the 'Battersea'd' penis was covered with the pustules, tubercles, shankers, ulcers, nodes, tumours, swellings, inflammatory buboes and blotches associated with the clap.

Whittle, quite undaunted by the charges, was certainly the most resourceful of the mollies, and he proceeded to mount a brilliant defence. First he undermined the credibility of the major witness by drawing the jury's attention to Ned's earlier imprisonments in Bridewell. Then he asserted that the rumours about him being a sodomite and running a molly house were spitefully started several years ago by a certain Mrs Johnson, 'a cursed Bitch', who, when drunk, which was often, would call him a '*Sodomite Dog!*' because he had her husband arrested for non-payment of half-a-year's rent on the barber shop he leased to him. He added that Mrs Johnson had once been sent to Newgate for perjury. The *coup de grâce* was his explanation for what Drake Stoneman had seen in his back rooms: 'There is nothing in it but this: I was acquainted with several young Surgeons, who used to leave their Injections and Syringes at my House, and to bring their Patients who were clap'd, in order to examine their Distempers, and apply proper Remedies. I have had them there on that Account eight or ten times a Week'. Whittle topped this off by bringing forward an array of character witnesses. His servant Peter Greenaway said that Ned simply wanted to get revenge for Whittle's having once refused him a free pint of bear late one night. Amey White and Ann Cadle, also his servants, said that the Royal Oak had no such room as the Chapel, that the middle and back rooms were public and had no locks or bolts. They added that surely they would have known if Ned had slept with Whittle in December, but that Ned had not been seen on the premises since Amey began working for Whittle on 13 October. William Baylis and Nicholas Croward deposed that they had lain with Whittle several times while his wife was still living, but they had never noticed anything in his behaviour to make them suspect him of sodomitical intentions. Elizabeth Steward and her husband confirmed that they had heard the scandal from Mrs

Johnson, and Alexander Hunter and William Brocket said they likewise had heard the rumours but never saw any foundation to them.

None of this evidence is conclusive one way or the other, but it should be noted that Whittle's wife was deceased, that three of the defence witnesses were in his employment, that Whittle's testimony about an apparently private examining room seems to contradict his servants' testimony about there being no other rooms besides the public ones, and, importantly, that no 'young Surgeons' ever came forward at the trial to confirm their giving of medical examinations. Further, if this really was an early clap clinic, the man whose penis 'was the best' had no reason to be there, or to show it off to his fellow patient. The jury nevertheless acquitted Whittle of the sodomy charge, and by implication cleared the reputation of the Royal Oak.

On Monday, 9 May 1726, Gabriel Lawrence, William Griffin, and Thomas Wright were taken in a cart to Tyburn and hanged together at the same time. Three persons could be hanged at one time at Tyburn, because the gallows consisted of three uprights with three cross beams forming an equilateral triangle. At the same time, three other felons arrived in another cart to be hanged, and the notorious Catherine Hayes was brought in a cart to be burned for the murder of her husband. (She became the subject of Thackeray's novel *Catherine*.)⁵ Before the hangman – Richard Arnett – could strangle her with a rope (as was customary), the flames reached his hands and he had to let go of the rope. The spectators were horrified by her screams as she struggled to kick away the burning faggots; she failed, and people watched in dismay as the eyes in her sockets melted from the heat; it required three hours for her body to be reduced to ashes.⁶

Such mass executions as these were quite popular, and the wealthier spectators could afford to sit in the viewing stands specially erected to accommodate them. On this particular occasion, the stands collapsed under the weight of 150 spectators, six of whom were killed. All that is necessary to conclude this bizarre episode in gay history is to note that, as was customary with hanged felons, Gabriel Lawrence's body was dissected at Surgeon's Hall on Tuesday, 10 May (*London Journal*, 14 May 1726).

A new round of trials began in July 1726. [Martin Mackintosh](#), a young orange-seller, was charged with an attempt to commit sodomy – a misdemeanour – with constable Joseph Sellers. Sellers testified that on the night of 12 November 1725, Partridge took him to a molly house owned by a certain Mr Jones (who was never caught), a candle-maker, at the Three Tobacco Rolls alehouse in Drury Lane, where an argument occurred between Partridge and Gabriel Lawrence. Mackintosh, because of his profession, 'went by the Maiden Name (as they call'd it) of Orange Deb' (*Select Trials* (1734-35), 2.208-209). On that night, Mackintosh 'came to me, thrust his Hand into my Breeches, and his Tongue into my Mouth, swore he'd go forty Miles to enjoy me, and beg'd of me to go backwards [to the back room] and let him. But I refusing, he pull'd down his Breeches and offer'd to sit bare in my Lap, upon which Partridge snatched a red hot Poker out of the Fire and threatened to run it into his Arse'. Three men testified on Mackintosh's behalf that he had a wife and child, and that on occasion they had lain with him but that he always kept his hands to himself. (It was common practice for men to share the same bed as well as the same room in a public house or inn, partly to save money, partly because of limited accommodation during this period, and partly because it simply was not thought to be out of the ordinary. Such overnight sleeping arrangements are frequently put forward as evidence on behalf of the accused in sodomy cases.) Unconvinced, the jury found him

guilty, and he was sentenced to stand in the pillory in Bloomsbury Square, to pay a fine of 10 marks, and to suffer one year's imprisonment.

Finally [Mother Clap](#) herself was brought before the bar of justice – on charges of keeping a disorderly house. Much of the evidence we have already covered was cited against her. Having only one defence, Mother Clap, with great presence of mind (and no little sense of irony), indignantly addressed the jury thus: 'I hope it will be consider'd that I am a Woman, and therefore it cannot be thought that I would ever be concern'd in such Practices'. Nevertheless, the jury found her guilty, and she was sentenced to stand in the pillory in Smithfield, to pay a fine of 20 marks, and to suffer two years' imprisonment. During her [punishment](#), she was treated so severely by the mob that she fainted and fell off the pillory several times, and was carried back to the prison having convulsive fits; the newspapers suggested that she would not survive the ordeal. Nothing more is heard of her.

By August 1726, three men had been hanged at Tyburn, two men and one woman had been pilloried, fined and imprisoned, one man had died in prison, one had been acquitted, one had been reprieved, and several were forced to go into hiding. The court may have sensed a witch-hunt atmosphere in the proceedings, not so much because the victims were innocent, but because the accusations came almost solely from only two men, both of whom were *participes crimen* in every instance, and both of whom were demonstrable rogues of dubious credibility. Whether or not the judges fully appreciated the disrepute into which they may have precipitated the administration of British justice, the trials ceased, there were no more convictions (although in December 1726 Samuel Roper, alias [Plump Nelly](#), died in prison while awaiting trial for keeping a molly house in Giltspur Street,⁷ and this particular episode of homosexual history came to an end.

Public Outrage

The molly subculture revealed by the trials prompted a public outcry. Outrage and indignation were vented in the weekly *London Journal, or The British Gazetteer* and was picked up on the subsequent publishing dates of other journals. The front-page editorial of the *London Journal* for 7 May 1726, expressed appropriate horror, and proceeded to expose the major cruising grounds in London: 'besides the nocturnal Assemblies of great Numbers of the like vile Persons at what they call the Markets, which are the Royal-Exchange, Moorfields, Lincolns-Inn Bog-houses [privies], the South Side of St James's Park and the Piazza's of Covent-Garden, where they make their Bargains, and then with draw into some dark Corners to *indorse*, as they call it, but in plain English to commit Sodomy'. This term comes directly from contemporary boxing slang, meaning 'to cudgel upon the back' or 'to knock down one's opponent upon the back'; ultimately it is derived from the Latin *dorsus*, the back.⁸ The editorial concludes with the hope that prosecution of the mollies will 'avert from these Cities those just Judgments, which fell from Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah'.

The same issue contains a letter signed by '[Philogynus](#)' (Latin for 'woman-lover') exposing more details of this vice. According to him, the mollies commonly refer to each other as 'Madam' and 'Miss Betty', and in a quarrelling mood will say such things as 'Oh you bold Pullet, I'll break all your eggs'. (In the heterosexual underworld, a Game Pullet was a young whore-to-be.)⁹ He cites another slang phrase, 'bit a Blow', which is equivalent to the modern gay slang 'score a trick'. Although Philogynus graciously acknowledges that the mollies 'are really very good Customers

where they frequent', he denounces their 'effeminacy', suggests that they 'despise the Fair Sex', and concludes this uncomplimentary personality profile by suggesting that they are 'brutish People . . . harden'd in Iniquity'. He reinforces the editor's allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah by quoting Genesis 18.20-21. Especially worth noting is his comment which illustrates that some people regarded homosexuality not merely as a great crime, but as a crime so terrible that it occupied a unique category unto itself: 'The greatest Criminal has some People that may drop some pitying Expressions for his unhappy and untimely Fate, and condole his dismal Circumstances, whilst those Persons convicted by the Laws for *Sodomy*, can neither expect Pity or Compassion, because they die for Crimes detestable both to God and Man'.

To describe this period as the Age of Enlightenment somewhat strains one's credulity. The early eighteenth century is noted as an era of unusually severe punishment, and we would misrepresent the facts if we did not acknowledge that very minor crimes such as the theft of a cap, as well as major crimes such as highway robbery and violent assault, were equally subject to sentences of hanging. Hogarth's illustrations of boys torturing animals are witness to this Age of Cruelty. The man in the street would not blanch at any punishment meted out to homosexuals, and would no doubt welcome the unsigned [modest proposal](#) printed in the next issue of the *London Journal*, for 14 May 1726:

'tis humbly propos'd that the following Method may not only destroy the Practice, but blot out the Names of the monstrous Wretches from under Heaven, viz. when any are Detected, Prosecuted and Convicted, that after Sentence Pronounc'd, the Common Hangman tie him Hand and Foot before the Judge's Face in open Court, that a Skillful Surgeon be provided immediately to take out his Testicles, and that then the Hangman sear up his Scrotum with an hot Iron, as in Cases of burning in the Hand.

Philogynus contributes another letter to the issue for 14 May, wherein he suggests that men become mollies because they engaged in the vice in their juvenile years, and 'find it an hard Task to shake it off' when they come to maturity. Perhaps his acquaintance with mollies is not so extensive as his earlier letter pretended, for he now goes on to castigate Pumpers (masturbators) and practitioners of heterosexual vice – Shackling Culls (fornicators) and Flogging Culls (disciplinarians), and several heterosexual scatological types – as if he's run out of information on the mollies. (In 1698 the Flogging Cullies in a club in Billingsgate were described as members of 'the Black School of Sodomy', but they were in fact men who wished to be caned by women, and were not homosexual.)¹⁰

The Covent Garden prostitutes apparently feared for their livelihood if this vice were allowed to progress untrammelled. In the issue for 21 May was published a letter purporting to have been sent in by an official delegation of the [Drury Lane Ladies](#). These 'honest whores' report their feelings: 'The other Night we had a general Meeting at a Gin-Shop, where it pass'd, *Nemine contradicente*, to return you our hearty Thanks for endeavouring to suppress the notorious Practice of the *Mollies*, by which Abuse of Nature we may properly call ourselves the greatest Sufferers: for of late, several of our Christian Acquaintance have resorted to the Jews, and in particular my old Friend Mr. P—e [i.e. Partridge], who . . . has left me and learnt a Way to go to the Devil backwards'. This is accompanied by a doggerel verse 'To that Sodomitical Villain, P—e', with couplets such as the following:

You stand indicted in the publick News,
For Innovations offer'd at the Stews,

...

What cursed Devil brought this Trick in vogue,
To spite a Whore, and doubly damn a Rogue?
To change the Laws of Nature, vice versa,
And set a Whore to Prayers – the Lord have Mercy!

I suspect the author of this poem is a witty *male* journalist, but it is not beyond the powers of an aggrieved woman, and the letter and poem may both be genuine. This letter from the Drury Lane Ladies – whether hoax or not – does express a malevolence genuinely felt by the female prostitutes of London towards the mollies.

Of course the Societies for the Reformation of Manners were immensely satisfied by the success of their good work. Richard Smalbroke, Lord Bishop of St David's, gave their [annual sermon](#) in January 1728 (1727 "Old Style") and congratulated the members on their zeal: 'that those abominable Wretches, that are guilty of the *Unnatural Vice*, have been frequently detected and brought to condign Justice, is very much owing to the laudable Diligence of the Societies for Reformation'.¹¹ He urges the magistrates to vigorously execute the laws that have justly made this practice a capital crime; zealous efforts must be exerted by the Brethren to inform upon any one pursuing such behaviour; they must advance the glory of God by routing out such vices, particularly among the lower ranks of society.

The thirty-third 'Account of the Progress' made by the Societies celebrates the fact that due to their efforts 'the Streets were very much purged from the wretched Tribe of Night-walking Prostitutes, and most detestable Sodomites'. From December 1726 through December 1727 the Societies prosecuted 1,363 offenders for disorderly practices, drunkenness, and keeping gaming houses, and for the past 36 years they prosecuted a total of 94,322 offenders; they also assisted in the discovery of offenders to be prosecuted by the magistrates. In particular, 'the said Societies have also been assistant in bringing to Punishment several Sodomitical Houses, as well as divers Persons for Sodomy, and Sodomitical Practices, who have been prosecuted by the Direction, and at the Charge of the Government'.¹²

But the Societies were increasingly being attacked for their methods of gathering evidence and for being informers rather than reformers. As early as 1714 they were characterised as 'sly reforming hirelings',¹³ and by 1727 they had prosecuted so many people before the civil magistrates that they had to defend themselves from charges of being officious meddlers. They also had to defend themselves against charges of accepting bribes and extorting money from offenders.¹⁴ The fashion for reform had passed, and people grew sick of the reformers and increasingly attacked them for being as corrupt and vicious as those they attempted to suppress. Amongst the members themselves there was widespread disillusion that they had failed to halt the spread of vice – there was clear evidence that it had in fact increased since they began their work.

By 1738 only a few Societies were left, and in that year they formally gave up their work, and all remaining Societies were disbanded.¹⁵ In the forty-fourth and final Account of their Progress, the Societies once again credited themselves for having instigated the prosecution of numerous sodomites and molly houses, then wound themselves up.¹⁶ Their only success story was the

SPCK, the Societies' essentially religious (and specifically Anglican) rather than reforming arm, which continues to distribute its literature today.

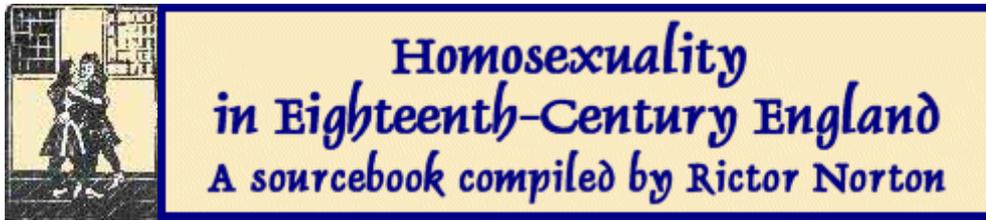
Notes:

1. This was February 1725 'Old Style', as the New Year didn't begin until March.
2. Most of the material in this essay is found in *Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy ... To which are added, Genuine Accounts of the Lives ... of the most eminent Convicts* (London, 1742, 2nd ed.), 4 vols. The relevant trials, from which I have drawn together a consecutive narrative, are those of Margaret Clap (3.37-38), William Brown (3.39-40), William Griffin (2.365-366), George Kedger (2.366-367), Gabriel Lawrence (2.362-364), Martin Mackintosh (3.36-37), George Whittle (2.369-372) and Thomas Wright (2.367-369). Most of these trials are also recorded in the following with minor variations in details: *Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rape, Sodomy ... To which are added Genuine Accounts of the Lives ... of the most eminent Convicts. From the year 1720 to 1724 [and 1724 to 1732]* (London, 1734-35), 2 vols; *Select Trials at the Session-House in the Old Bailey ... From ... 1720, to this time, etc* (Dublin, 1742, 1743), 4 vols; and *Select Trials for Murder, Robbery, &c at the Sessions House in the Old Bailey from 1720 [to 1741]* (London, 1742), 4 vols.
3. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937; repr. 1961), vol. 1, p. 770.)
4. Joseph Cam, M.D., *A Practical Treatise: Or, Second Thoughts on the Consequences of the Venereal Disease* (London, 1729), and *A Dissertation on the Pox* (London, 1731).
5. Ikey Solomons (pseud. William Makepeace Thackeray), *Catherine*, in *Fraser's Magazine*, serialised from Vol. XIX, No. CXIII (May, 1839) to Vol. XXI, No. CXXII (February, 1840). The concluding chapter describes her execution but does not mention the hangings of the sodomites just minutes before; in the event, the description of the execution has been entirely omitted from all subsequent editions of the novel.
6. See Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin, *The Newgate Calendar* (London, 1810 ff.), I.347-364; and *The Tyburn Chronicle* (London, c. 1769, 4 vols), 2.252-293.
7. *Weekly Journal, British Gazetteer, and London Journal*, 17 December 1726.
8. See Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937; 1961), vol. 1, p. 422.
9. Francis Grose, *The Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785), entry under 'Game Pullet'.
10. *The London Spy* for December 1698, p. 9.
11. *Reformation necessary to prevent Our Ruine: A Sermon Preached to the Societies for Reformation of Manners, at St. Mary-le-Bow, on Wednesday, January 10th, 1727* (London, 1728), p. 30.
12. The Account is appended to Smalbroke's sermon.
13. Ned Ward, *The Field-Spy* (London, 1714), p. 16, cited by Dudley W. R. Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 47.
14. George Smyth, *A Sermon To the Societies for Reformation of Manners, Preach'd at Salter'-Hall, On Monday, June 26, 1727* (London, 1727), pp. 19-20 and 31-33.
15. Bahlman, pp. 65-66.
16. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), p. 90.

CITATION: If you cite this Web page, please use the following citation:
 Rictor Norton, "Mother Clap's Molly House", *The Gay Subculture in Georgian England*, 5 February 2005 <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/mother.htm>>.

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James Dalton's Narrative

1728



A GENUINE
NARRATIVE
of all the
Street Robberies
Committed since *October* last, by
James Dalton,
And his Accomplices,
Who are now in Newgate, to be try'd next Sessions, and
against whom, Dalton (call'd their Captain) is admitted an
Evidence.

SHEWING

- I. The Manner of their snatching off Womens Pockets; with Directions for the Sex in general how to wear them, so that they cannot be taken by any Robber whatsoever.
- II. The Method they took to rob the Coaches, and the many diverting Scenes they met with while they follow'd those dangerous Enterprizes.
- III. Some merry Stories of *Dalton's* biting [stealing from] the Women of the Town, his detecting and exposing the **Mollies**, and a Song which is sung at the **Molly-Clubs**: With other very pleasant and remarkable Adventures.

To which is added,
A KEY to the Canting Language, occasionally made Use of in this Narrative.

Taken from the Mouth of JAMES DALTON.

London: Printed, and sold by J. Roberts, at the Oxford Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1728.



As *Dalton* was seriously walking one Night to look out for his Prey, he met with an Adventure of a quite different Nature from any Thing we have hitherto taken Notice of, and which, for the further Entertainment of the Reader, we shall here insert, *verbatim*, as we had it from his own Mouth. Walking out, (as above) one Night, he met with one —, alias [p.31] *Susannah Haws*, a Man who was what they call a *Bug* to the *Mollies*, and sometimes acting in that Capacity with those that were not establish'd in Clubs, picking 'em up, as if to commit that damnable Crime of Sodomy; and when they had got an *Handle*, or any Foundation to proceed upon, they would

extort Money from them, before they parted, or dog them to their own Houses, and there, by daily threatning, they would make a considerable Advantage of them. This *Susan Haws* told *Dalton*, if he would go with him to his *Wittles*, in the *Butcher-Row*, near *Temple-Bar*, he would treat him: Accordingly *Dalton* consented, and coming there, he found this Aunt *Wittle* was a Man, and no Doubt a *Molly*, for the Company seeing *Susan Haws* come in with a Stranger, they doubted not but he was of their beastly and unnatural Community; and they therefore arose and made *Dalton* very reverend Courtesies, which they perform'd with a great Deal of Respect and Ceremony; one of them was call'd *Lydia Gough*, and another *Garter Mary*, a Man who sells Garters, &c. about the Streets; these severally complimented *Dalton*, and [p.32] one *Moll Irons* would needs offer him some sodomitical Civilities; but he being outrag'd at such effeminate Actions, took up a Quart Pot, and calling them a *Pack of mollying Sons of B[itche]s*, swore *he would drive 'em all to the D[evi]l*; so kicking one, boxing another, and flinging a third behind the Fire, he soon convinc'd them that he was not for their Purpose; *D[am]n your sodomitical Sons of B[itc]hes Heads*, said *Dalton*, *I love a Whore as well as any Man in Christendom; but by G[o]d the first Man that comes near me to cringe, kiss or courtesie, I'll peg his Muns [face] as flat as a Pancake*: Upon which they very obligingly ask'd his Pardon, and begg'd he would depart, since he was not of their Profession.

Dalton enrag'd at *Sukey Haws*, for bringing him into such Company, could hardly be persuaded from laying him on the Fire, and sacrificing him to his Fury; but *Sukey* protesting he was not one who acted such Things himself, but only kept them company for Advantage, and not Inclination, he forgave him.

Soon after this, —, alias *Susan Haws* and *Dalton* went to another House in the *Hay Market*, where *Sukey* call'd the Landlord [p.33] *Aunt Mug*, alias *Belzebug*; but *Dalton* perceiving that this was likewise an House that harbour'd *Mollies*, and encourag'd a Crime, in Comparison of which, he accounted all the wicked Actions of his Life but as so many Virtues, he would not stay, and therefore propos'd to *Susan Haws*, that as they were both dexterous at picking Pockets, they had better apply themselves to that, and leave these *Indorsers* [i.e. sodomites, from boxing slang for pummelling the back] to their beastly Appetites: Accordingly going upon that Lay, *Susan* made a Dive into a Gentleman's Pocket in *Fleet-street*, and taking a Handkerchief, he handed it to *Dalton*, who finding it to be a good one, put it into his Pocket, and afterwards gave *Sukey* one of his own, not worth a Groat. This Bite [theft] of *Dalton's* so vex'd *Sukey*, that he told him the next Night he was a *Villain*, to bite a Brother of the Trade. But *Dalton* knowing him to be unsound in his Principles (that is, He was neither a downright Pick-pocket, a downright Sodomite, or a downright *Bug*, tho' a Part of every one of them) told him, There was no Faith to be held with Hereticks, and that if he would not stick honestly to some one Profession, he ought to be [p.34] discarded and banish'd from the Conversation of Men of all Denominations whatsoever. Upon this *Susan Haws* told him, *he would, for the future live soberly and honestly, in the Employment of picking of Pockets*. Whereupon *Dalton* gave him some Encouragement, hoping he might become a real Convert; but *Sukey* still continuing to practise among the *Back-door* Gentlemen [a common humorous term for sodomites, users of "the back door"], he dismiss'd him, saying, *I could never look in the nasty Dog's Face, but I thought him neither a Man's Man, nor a Woman's Man, neither a Whore's Friend, nor a Rogue's Confident, but a Persecutor of the Party he falls in with, and a Traytor to both Sexes*.

This made *Dalton* shun his Company; yet, that he might discover something of the Intrigues between these Beasts in the Shape of Men, he once went with him to *Billingsgate* to buy Eels (but what was previous to that, they were first

obliged to *haul a Cly* [snatch a pocket-book] for Money) where they fell in amongst a Company of Sodomites, who bullied *Dalton*; one call'd *Nurse Ashcraft*, and another call'd *Fish Hannah*, two Fishmen, told *Dalton* he wanted to debauch *Susan Haws*, and that such an Action would be encroaching upon their Property; but as [p.35] they were not willing to expose themselves in the Street, if *Dalton* and *Susan Haws* would go to such a Place, naming a noted *Molly-House*, near *Billingsgate*, they would come to them. This, *Dalton* said, vex'd him to the Soul, to go under the Imputation of a Sodomite, when he was endeavouring to detect them; but knowing that as those Villains have not the Hearts of Men, any more than manly Affections, he readily went to the Place appointed, thinking to give them some Marks of his Manhood, for thus scandalizing him, but they did not come near him: This made *Dalton* urgent with *Sukey* to discover what they did together, and in what manner they behav'd themselves, when in their most private Meetings: But, good God! the Relation was so astonishing, and so shocking to human Nature, that it is impossible any Man should hear it (that is not abandon'd to all Manner of Vice,) without shuddering, and his Blood running chill at the very Thoughts of it: Therefore as the Relation exceeds all Bounds of Modesty, and is too shocking to appear in publick, it is hop'd the Reader will excuse the Author's not exposing the [p.36] damnable, unnatural, and beastly Appetities of these Wretches, whose Filthiness exceeds more than Imagination can conceive: Yet, that some of them may know that their Actions are not so private as they may imagine, *Haws* has discover'd, that there is a Meeting of them at a Cellar in *Marygold-Court*, over against the Fountain Tavern in the *Strand*; and tho' they have given themselves fictitious Names, in order to be conceal'd, yet they are so far known, that 'tis hop'd the Intelligence that is here given, will be a Means to have some of them detected.

Sukey Haws, being one Day in a pleasant Humour, inform'd *Dalton* of a Wedding (as they call it) some Time since, between *Moll Irons*, and another *Molly*, a Butcher; and that one *Oviat*, (who sometime since stood in the Pillory) and another *Molly*, a Butcher of *Butcher-Row*, near *Temple-Bar*, stood as Bridemaids, and that one *Oviat* went by the Name of *Miss Kitten*, the Butcher by the Name of the *Princess Saraphina*; and that one *Powell*, who was call'd St. *Dunstan's Kate*, pretended to be deeply in Love with *Madam Blackwell*, the Person who was Evidence against [p.37] *John Potter*, convicted last Sessions for stealing the D[u]ke of *M[ontag]u's* rich Hangings.

With these and several others, *Haws* was so intimately acquainted, that he was let into their secret Intrigues; and where he found one that he could bully, he frequently made an Advantage of them; particularly once of a Taylor, whom he pick'd up in *Covent-Garden-Piazzas*; and the *Prick-louse*, tho' a Man of sixty or seventy Years of Age, offer'd such beastly Actions to *Sukey Haws*, as would not only astonish the Reader, but scarce gain Credit, the Profuseness was so unnatural; however, *Sukey* to be in the Way of his Trade, made the Taylor give him a broad Piece, and Three-Half-Crowns, otherwise he threatened to expose him.

At one *Sukey Bevell's* in the *Mint*, there is a Club of these *Mollies*, who, if possible, run into greater Extravagancies than the former: The Stewards are *Miss Fanny Knight*, and *Aunt England*; and pretty Mrs. *Anne Page* officiates as Clark [i.e. clerk]. One of the Beauties of this Place is Mrs. *Girl of Redriff*, and with her, (or rather him) *dip Candle-Mary* a Tallow Chandler in the [p.38] *Burrough*, and *Aunt May* an Upholsterer in the same Place, are deeply in Love: *Nurse Mitchel* is a Barber of this Society; but those which are call'd

the topping Beauties of the Place, have no Occasion for Men of his Occupation.

And here it will not be amiss, to give a List of the Names of the Chief of these *Mollies*, that they may be terrified from proceeding in their abominable Practices, lest the Person who has found out thus much, should still discover more, and bring them to such Punishment as the Law directs for such Offenderes. Some of their Sirnames are collected right, others will be sought after with the utmost Diligence; and if a compleat Discovery can be made by the Author of these Sheets, they may depend upon receiving the just Reward of their Demerits.

Their chief Names are as follows.

Ellinor Roden,

China Mary,

Flying Horse Moll,

Smal Coal Mary,

Johannah the Ox-cheek Woman,

Tub Nan,

Sukey Pisquill,

Garter Mary,

Hardward Nan,

Prety Criss, a Soldier of the 2d

Regiment,

Aunt England, a noted Soap Boyler,

Pomegranate Molly,

Orange Mary, an Orange Merchant

near *London-Bridge*,

Old Fish Hannah,

Kate Hutton an old Man that never

wears a Shirt,

Thumbs and Waste Jenny, [p.39]

Queen Irons, alias Pippin Mary,

Hanover Kate, spouse to Pippin

Mary,

Miss Kitten, (*Oviat*),

Rose Gudger,

Black Moll, &c.

To make themselves as ridiculous as Extravagance and Effeminacy can render them, they sometimes have a Lying-inn, when one of them is plac'd in a Chair, and the others attending with Napkins, a Bason of Water, &c. *Susan Guzzle*, a Gentleman's Servant, is the Midwife, and with a great Deal of Ceremony, a jointed Baby [i.e. wooden doll] is brought from under the Chair he sits on.

Mrs. *May* was sometime since brought to Bed of a Pair of Bellows, and *Aunt Grear* was brought to Bed of a *Cheshire Cheese*, *Madam Blackwell* and *Aunt England*, standing Gossips. *Sukey Haws* further told *Dalton*, That *H——n* the late *C——y M——l* [i.e. *Charles Hitchin*, the late City Marshall] once pick'd him up, and carried him to a Bowling-Green-House at *Islington*, where he sent for young *Miss Glade*, a *File* [pickpocket], whom he had under his Command, he not daring to refuse coming, knowing if he did, *H[itchi]n* would send him to [p.40] the Compter. When *Miss Glade* came, *H[itchi]n* was very liberal in calling for Drink, Cheescakes, &c. and presently took *Miss* into the Vault, as it were by Instinct, that they should resort to a filthy Place, to commit filthy Actions.

Thus *Sukey Haws* told *Dalton* of the Intrigues that are and have for some Time been carried on amongst these abandon'd Wretches; and 'tis a Pity, that he who knew and was accessory to their Beastiality, was not secured, till he brought out the Criminals: But this, *Dalton* says, was not his Business; however, 'tis hoped that they will be detected, through the Information that is given of them, and the Diligence of some, who have resolv'd to search into their most intricate Actions, in Hopes of doing a publick Justice to such, who, with the Appearance of Men and Christians, have degenerated to Devils incarnate.

But before we quit this Subject, as an Amusement to the Reader, it may be some Entertainment to hear one of their Songs, which is sung at the Club by that charming Warbler, *Miss Irons*; besides which, there are several others, but they are too [p.41] ludicrous and filthy to admit of a Publication.

[But Among Our Own Selves We'll Be Free](#)

[This song is published on a separate page.] [pp.42-43]

NOTES

Susannah (Susan) Haws: In *The Life and Actions of James Dalton* (May 1730) he is identified as Bartholomew Nichols, who also used the alias Fish Moll. 'Sukey' (the lower-class diminutive for Susan or Susannah) was a 'maiden' nickname commonly used among homosexual men to pick up men in the street.

Aunt Wittles: Perhaps [George Whittle](#), though his pub-cum-molly-house was at the corner of St James's Square, not near Temple Bar. 'Aunt' was a common molly 'maiden' name.

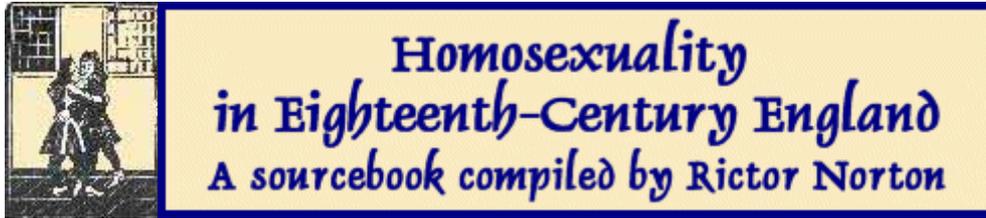
Moll Irons: [John Irons](#) alias Hyons or Hyon, who went by the 'maiden' name Queen Irons, and who together with Thomas Coleman was pilloried, fined and briefly imprisoned for attempted sodomy in late October 1726.

Nurse Mitchel: John Mitchell, who stood in the pillory later in [1728](#) and again in [1729](#) for falsely charging a man with attempted sodomy. At James Dalton's trial in April 1730 (when he was capitally convicted) he asked that Mitchell (who was in prison for some other offence) be allowed to testify on his behalf, but the judge refused because of Mitchell's record for lying.

SOURCE: *A Genuine Narrative of all the Street Robberies Committed since October last, by James Dalton*, London: Printed, and sold by J. Roberts, at the Oxford Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1728, pp. 31-43.

CITATION: If you cite this Web page, please use the following citation:
Rictor Norton (Ed.), "Dalton's Narrative, 1728," *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. 10 April 2000, updated 3 March 2005
<<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1728dalt.htm>>.

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The Trial of William Brown

1726

Introduction

In 1726 William Brown was found guilty of the misdemeanour of an attempt to commit sodomy, and sentenced to stand in the pillory in Moorfields, London, to pay a fine of 10 marks, and to go to prison for two months. The case is interesting for revealing a man who, though perhaps not "gay and proud" in the modern sense, nevertheless declared to the authorities that he was not ashamed of his behaviour and that he felt that how he used his body was his own business — a strikingly modern conception.

Moorfields was just north of London City Wall. By the early eighteenth century, a path in the Upper- Moorfields, by the side of the Wall that separated the Upper- field from the Middle-field, acquired the name "The Sodomites' Walk". The wall itself was torn down in [1752](#), but the path survives today as the south side of Finsbury Square. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, notorious as the author of *Sodom, or The Quintessence of Debauchery* (1684), was called "the *Moor-Fields* Author, fit for Bawds to quote". Moorfields was identified as a molly Market (i.e. a gay cruising ground) in an editorial in the *London Journal*, and was obviously well known to all — Richard Rustead the extortioner was recognized by a serving boy in 1724 as a frequent user of "the Sodomites' Walk in Moorfields". On the east side of Moorfields, Thomas Wright kept a molly house at his home in Christopher Alley (now Christopher Street). Thomas Newton was a 30-year-old a hustler in the employment of Thomas Wright, first at his home in Christopher's Alley in Moorfields, later at his own molly house in Beech Lane. According to Newton, Wright "has often fetch'd me to oblige Company in that way". Newton had been arrested in 1725, but he agreed to act as an *agent provocateur* in order to escape prosecution.

Rictor Norton

Testimony at the Trial July 1726

THOMAS NEWTON: *Willis and Stevenson* the Constables, having a Warrant to apprehend Sodomites, I went with them to an alehouse in Moore-fields, where we agreed that I should go and pick one up, and that they should wait at a convenient Distance. There's a walk in the Upper- Moorfields, by the side of the Wall that parts the Upper-field from the Middle-field. I knew that this Walk was frequented by sodomites, and was no stranger to the methods they used in picking one another up. So I takes a Turn that way, and leans over the Wall. In a little Time the Prisoner passes by; and looks hard at me, and at a small Distance from me, stands up against the Wall, as if he was going to make Water. Then by Degrees he sidles nearer and nearer to where I stood, 'till at last he comes close to me. — *'Tis a very fine Night*, says

he. *Aye*, says I, *and so it is*. Then he takes me by the Hand, and after squeezing and playing with it a little (to which I showed no dislike) he conveys it to his Breeches, and puts — into it. I took fast hold and call'd out to Willis and Stevenson, who coming up to my assistance, we carried him to the Watch house. I have seen him before at the house of *Thomas Wright*.

WILLIS: We asked the Prisoner why he took such indecent Liberties with Newton, and he was not ashamed to answer, *I did it because I thought I knew him, and I think there is no Crime in making what use I please of my own Body*.

SOURCE: *Select Trials*, 1742, 2nd ed., vol. 3, pp. 39-40.

Satire on William Brown

A satirical commentary and poem was sent to a newspaper shortly after Brown stood in the pillory:

SIR,
 The other Day passing by *Moorfields* whilst *Brown*, the Sodomite, stood in the Pillory, I could not help making some Reflections on the Shower of rotten Eggs, dead Cats and Turnip Tops that the Gentlemen of the Mob were pleas'd to compliment him with on that Occasion: This brought to my Mind Mr. *Humphry Wagstaff's* lively Description of *A City Shower*; and imagining that if a Gentleman of his Genius, who could draw so beautiful an Entertainment from so mean a Subject had ever thought it worth his while to give us the Representation of a Shower at the Pillory, it might have been a Present no less agreeable to the Publick. But as we have not often the Advantage of such Hands to adorn our publick Papers, I hope this faint Resemblance will not be unacceptable from

Yours, &c.

When faithless Men perversely tempt the Gods,
 To send a Pill'ry Shower, we see the Odds
 Betwixt descending Rains, t' increase the Seed,
 And thundring Storms t' avenge some filthy Deed.
 The sentence pass'd, the Clouds begin to rise,
 And threaten Tempests from the distant Skies.
 Black Welkin's Frown foretells the Storm must light
 On perjur'd Villain, Baud, or Sodomite.
 The Caitiff rais'd, the Shower comes tumbling down,
 Compos'd of Exhalations from the Town.
 Shrink in thy Head vile Wretch! hang down thy
 Chops,
 It rains both addled Eggs, and Turnip Tops,
 Young Puppies, Kittens, in the Dirt besmear'd,
 Must be a Lather for thy wretched Beard.
 For thy vile Sins, poor *Spot*, the Lap-dog, dies,
 And Mrs. *Evans's* made a Sacrifice.
 The storm continues, and the zealous Croud
 With their promiscuous Offerings swell the Cloud.
 Dirt, Rags, and Stubble, Bunters sh[itte]n Clouts,
 Pour on thy Head as fierce as lofty Spouts;

So fast the Tempest on the Wretch is hurl'd,
It apes the Deluge of the former World;
But not so clean nor long, for in an Hour,
As by Decree, the Ministers of Power
Disperse the Croud and dissipate the Shower.

(SOURCE: *The Weekly Journal: or, The British Gazetteer*, 1 August 1726. I am very grateful to Philip Mcleod for sharing his discovery of this verse with me.)

CITATION: If you cite this Web page, please use the following citation:
Rictor Norton (Ed.), "The Trial of William Brown, 1726", *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. 22 April 2000, updated 20 June 2008
<<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/brown.htm>>.

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