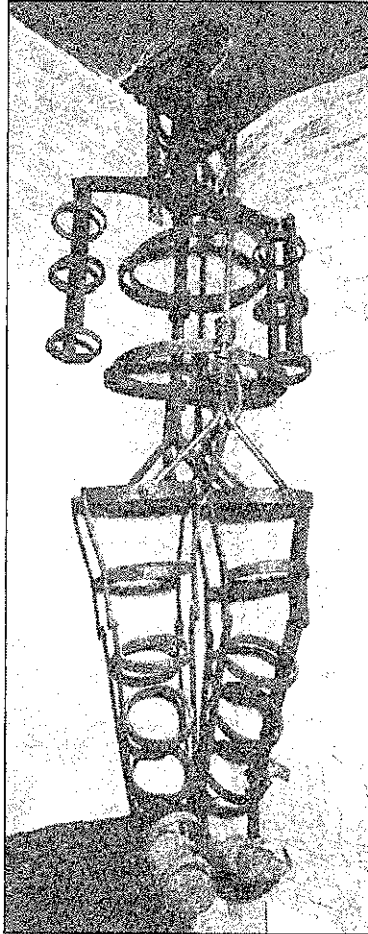


The Last Gibbet

At 11 pm on the evening of 30th May, 1832, neighbours noticed a huge fire blazing in James Cook's workshop in Leicester. As they hurried to the scene, they could not help but notice a strange smell. One man ran to fetch Cook and another to summon the constable. Cook explained that it was some bad meat that he was burning. The constable, however, was not satisfied, and took the charred flesh along with some small bones from the ashes to a doctor. The bones were those of human fingers!

A warrant was issued, Cook was arrested and made a full confession. The crime had been carefully premeditated, he had murdered a commercial traveller called John Paas whom he believed to be carrying a large sum of money.

At the trial, which lasted barely a quarter of an hour, Cook pleaded guilty and was sentenced to hang. The judge also added that his body should then be suspended in irons for public display. The Murder Act of 1752 had accepted ancient practice by allowing judges to order gibbeting as part of such sentences. By the 1770's up to a hundred gibbets



were said to have stood on Hounslow Heath, each with a rotting body inside its iron cage. The sight was supposed to act as a deterrent against violent crime.

Thirty thousand people crowded the Welford Road in Leicester to witness the execution. Later, a gibbet, thirty-three feet high, was assembled and Cook's body suspended in a specially made iron frame. Twenty thousand people came to watch. But times were changing, after three days enlightened residents, disturbed by the spectacle (and also anxious about the possibility of disease) petitioned the Home Secretary, and the body was removed. Within a few months the Act of 1752 was repealed, and James Cook entered history as the last person to be gibbeted in England.

For some time the gibbet irons remained at Leicester Gaol, but

in the early years of this century they were loaned to the city authorities to display in the town's Guildhall. They are now returned to the Prison Service, and displayed in the museum at Newbold Revel as a reminder of the brutality of justice in a by-gone age ■

Curator's Corner:

An occasional series of articles about curiosities, curios, and conundrums from prison history by the Curator of the Prison Service Museum.

Dr P J Davies

Curator H M Prison Service Museum

STATISTICS

Retention of prison officers (recruited in 1983)

	White	Ethnic Minority	Total
Recruited in 1983	821	22	843
Still in Service (at any unified grade)	754 (92%)	20 (91%)	774 (92%)

Retention of prison officers (recruited in 1983)

	Male	Female	Total
Recruited in 1983	996	52	1048
Still in Service (at any unified grade)	932 (94%)	45 (86%)	977 (93%)

[Equal Opportunities in the prison Service Progress Report 1 October 1993 - 31 March 1995]

The Economist says

... In 1993-94, recorded crime fell by 5% a year, and the 1994-95 figures, will show something similar. It is the biggest drop in the figures for 40 years.

Why is this happening? The Government, predictably, claims that its new, tougher penal policies deserve the credit. If that is true, why did similar policies fail to stop crime rising in the early 1980s? There are plenty of other explanations which, unfortunately for the government, sound more plausible.

One is the continuing fall in unemployment. The relationship between unemployment and crime is complex. There have been times, such as the second half of the 1980s, when unemployment has fallen and crime has risen. But a raft of studies (some of them, to the government's embarrassment, produced by Home Office researchers) have supported the idea of a positive correlation between unemployment and rising crime. Other things being equal, then, the current fall in unemployment should bring about a fall in crime.

Demographics could also play a part. Crimes are mostly committed by 15-24-year-old men. The fewer loutish youths there are around, the fewer crimes will be committed. And the number of men in that age group is falling rapidly – from 4.5m in 1989 to 4m in 1993.

The police prefer to think that they have something to do with it. Some forces – particularly in crime-ridden big cities – have been thinking hard in recent years about new methods of dealing with crime. London's Metropolitan Police, for instance, have been targeting a smallish group of suspects, using intelligence and undercover police to gather information about them. Operation Bumblebee, an anti-burglary campaign, and Operation Eagle Eye, against mugging, have both relied on such pre-emptive tactics; and it may be that they are having some effect.

Business may have been doing its bit, too. The rise in crimes against cars has led manufacturers to add security features to new vehicles to make life harder for car and car-radio thieves. Car crime makes up around a quarter of all recorded crime; and it fell by 10% between 1993 and 1994, thus accounting for half the drop in the total crime figure. ...

'The Tories' new weapon against crime' The Economist September 23rd 1995

THE SUN SAYS

Behind bars

CONSIDER these two facts.

ONE: The number of crimes has seen the biggest two-year fall for 40 years.

TWO: The number of people in prison has risen by a quarter in that time.

The link between the two is obvious.

The police are concentrating on locking up persistent known criminals and the policy is paying dividends all over the country.

So, too, is the use of closed circuit TV cameras. In one Norfolk town, car crime has dropped by 95 per cent.

Who says we can't crack crime?

The Sun 30/8/95