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Murder and Massacre in Seventeenth Century England

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Murder and Massacre in 17th Century England

Andrew Quesenberry

Honors Research Project

1/30/2022-4/22/2022

Contents

<u>Introduction</u> -----	2
<u>The Murder Narratives</u> -----	3
<u>Religious Homicide: Enoch ap Evan</u> -----	6
<u>Secular Homicide: John Rowse</u> -----	20
<u>Infanticide: Dorothy Lillingstone</u> -----	28
<u>Investigation & Prosecution: John Noyse & Esther Ives</u> -----	34
<u>A Selection of Murder Statistics</u> -----	39
<u>Concluding Remarks</u> -----	42
<u>Bibliography</u> -----	44

Introduction

When murder tragically takes place, it is natural for those involved, as well as society at large, to try and determine the perpetrator's motives. In the modern world of twenty-first century criminal justice, it is common to view the murderer's actions with an eye towards mental health and socio-economic factors. One would likely consider it bad policework to suggest that the perpetrator was under the influence of an evil supernatural entity. Whereas a modern journalist might investigate and write about a murderer's dysfunctional upbringing, a pamphleteer from seventeenth century England would probably tie the murderer's actions directly to his or her relationship with the Lord.

Religion was almost always involved in murder and massacre during seventeenth century England, if not in its content, then at least in its interpretation. The English Civil War serves as the most prominent example of religious-based violence, but even on the small scale of interpersonal homicide, this theme holds true. Sometimes it was purely religious disagreements that led to murder, which was not uncommon. However, even cases of secular "natural" homicide (for example, crimes of passion, collateral damage during robbery, and cover-up for previous wrongdoings) were usually interpreted through the lens of religion, and came with their own lessons delivered at the conclusion of written accounts. For instance, a popular pamphlet might warn men of the dangers of fornication after relaying the story of an irreligious man who killed his lover's husband. It is difficult to

find documentations of murder that do not contain at least some reference to religion, and those few sources are the exception. Though much of the written material resembles sensationalist tabloids, the accounts delivered during the period are a treasure trove of information on how homicide was prosecuted, and how it was interpreted.

The Murder Narratives

When attempting to piece together a story of the past, historians naturally have to be very critical of their sources. However, the notes, letters, pamphlets and books from the seventeenth century require special attention in this regard; written materials of the day are notoriously unreliable. For one thing, printing had only recently exited its infancy, and the lack of access, education, standardized spelling, and writing conventions hindered the promulgation of correct information. This is minor, though, compared to the problems posed by the "human element:" Authors were prone to retelling stories in a fashion that contained, at best, hyperbole, and at worst, fantastic details.

The primary medium through which murder narratives were told was perhaps the most unreliable; murder made excellent subject matter for the myriad of cheap print available during the seventeenth century. The best among the pamphleteers would give mostly accurate accounts of homicides. Unfortunately, most stories were deliberately exaggerated to sell as many pamphlets as possible. To this end, it cannot be ruled out that some pamphlets covered entirely fabricated events. However,

one would guess that at least something of the truth emerged from even the most dubious print, as basing a story upon actual events would be significantly easier than creating a totally fabricated account.¹

If the particulars of one murder pamphlet are to be believed (and the author goes into vivid detail, including complicated anatomical descriptions of the victim's remains), one Anne Hampton, enraged by her husband simply calling her a busybody, poisoned him with five drams of some powerful toxin. After pouring it in his food, she left their house for the home of her co-conspirator, confidant, and landlady, Margaret Harwood. After a few hours the women returned and were horrified to discover him horribly bloated and disfigured by the poison, to the point that he was unrecognizable. His hands had swollen to the size of balloons, and his corpse was charred as though it had been burned from the inside out. Their screams of terror led to their arrest. When a doctor performed an autopsy on the body afterwards, he found the poison pooled around the victim's heart. After identifying the delivery method, a piece of paper laying on the windowsill, he collected the remains of the poisoned sheet and put it into a glass vial. Upon entering the vial however, the glass then shattered, supposedly due to the sheer potency of the toxin.²

¹ Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-26.

² *Murther, murther, or, A bloody relation how Anne Hamton dwelling in Westminster nigh London by poyson murdered her deare husband Sept. 1641 being assisted and counselled thereunto by Margeret Harwood for which both committed to gaole and at this time wait for a tryall.* (London: Printed for Thomas Bates, 1641; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004),

Besides exaggeration, the element of bias was all too common in seventeenth century writing. Chief would be religious bias, which could be found to an unusual degree in all manner of publications. Protestants ridiculed Catholics. Catholics ridiculed Protestants. And as was especially common in Britain during this period, Protestant denominations ridiculed each other. Authors wasted few opportunities to lambast their religious opponents, and were not afraid to employ hyperbole and even outright lies to make the other side look bad. Thus, one must pay close attention to narratives that contain religious elements (which is to say, a lot of them); the reader must give the author's opponents the benefit of the doubt.

Not all sources are so unreliable, however. One Irishman commented on his countrymen's tendency towards exaggeration and bias, and compiled a list of Irish Catholic and Protestant massacres during the English Civil War that, to his knowledge, contained an accurate account of the slayings.³

In even the worst cases, a reasonable retelling of the events can be extracted, even from the most tabloid-esque works of the day. The sources used in this account have been taken from books, pamphlets,

<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240849318/12859948/390161D973B04A44PQ/1?accountid=14471>.

³ R. S., *A collection of some of the murthers and massacres committed on the Irish in Ireland since the 23d of October 1641 with some observations and falsifications on a late printed abstract of murthers said to be committed by the Irish / new published by R.S.* (London: Printed for the author, 1662; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240962081/12318616/E445A1EA52E7404FPQ/1?accountid=14471>.

and crown decrees, accessed through the Early English Books Online database. Their authors run the gamut from minsters to amateur historians, from curious journalists to shameless sensationalists. Because of the dubious nature of seventeenth century sources, the events as depicted in this reading should be taken with a generous heaping of salt.

Religious Homicide: Enoch ap Evan

Quivering with fright, Enoch ap Evan stood over his sleeping brother with a freshly sharpened axe in his grip. John, lanky, cheerful, and three years his junior, had recently returned from their father's fields. As was customary, he had lain down on a cushion in the main room for a brief respite. Enoch, well aware of his brother's routine, and full of a curious mixture of fear and religious zeal, had planned to rid his brother from the earth for nearly a week, ever since the revelation he had from the Lord. Ignoring the last-minute cry of his conscience, Enoch raised the axe above his head, and drawing a sharp breath, brought it down onto his brother's skull.

At 34 years old, Enoch ap Evan was a relatively unremarkable man. He was the oldest son of Edward ap Evan, who together with his wife Joan would have seven children, two boys and five girls. Short, stocky, and quiet, he was not as well-liked as his taller, handsomer, brother John. While John was a social butterfly, Enoch's family and peers recognized that the older son was withdrawn, and prone to frequent episodes of melancholia (a state that might today be

diagnosed as depression.) Still, Enoch was a literate, intelligent chap, and showed quite an aptitude for memorization.⁴

Those in the house of Edward ap Evan were firm adherents of the Church of England. They regularly attended services at their local church in the parish of Clune. Their faith was a source of comfort and unity, and it was firmly integrated into their daily lives: They prayed twice a day at regular intervals. And according to the traditions of the Anglican Church, they would kneel on the floor before taking communion. Enoch naturally took part in these rituals, reading to his family from the Book of Common Prayer in the mornings, while John led the prayers in the evening. It appears that in religion, Enoch found peace during his depressive episodes.

It happened one day that Enoch purchased for himself a small Bible, and therein began to read when he could, stealing spare moments when he worked in the fields, and late at night under candlelight. For the next two years, Enoch would be a zealous student of the Lord. He memorized passage after passage, and when time could be spared, he regularly rode three or four miles into neighboring towns on weekdays

⁴ Peter Studley, *The looking-glasse of schisme wherein by a briefe and true narration of the execrable murders, done by Enoch ap Evan, a downe-right separatist, on the bodies of his mother and brother, with the cause mooving him thereunto, the disobedience of that sect, against royall majesty, and the lawes of our Church is plainly set forth. By Peter Studley, Master of Arts, and minister of Gods Word, in Shrevvsbury.* (London: Printed by Richard Badger for Thomas Alchorne, and are to be sold at the signe of the greene Dragon in Pauls Church-yard, 1634; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), 19-22.

<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240947243/99853141/2?accountid=14471>.

to hear theology lectures. Evidently, what was initially serious devotion turned to an overinflated sense of self-importance, as Enoch increasingly believed he was set aside by the Lord for special revelation.

It was during this time that Enoch came under the influence of Puritan speakers, who convinced him of certain doctrines that were firmly in contrast to what he was reared on. Enoch became increasingly more irritable around his family, arguing against the family practice of praying at regular intervals (as opposed to being moved by the spirit) and kneeling before communion. He was especially combative about the latter.⁵

According to the account later delivered by Enoch in prison, there was one particular incident that drove him to the double murder of his mother and brother: On June 30th, 1633, the family was in the process of taking the sacrament when Joan, the mother, commented on Enoch's unwillingness to kneel before taking the elements. Enoch instantly became defensive and flatly refused, stating that the practice showed flippancy to the Lord by assuming such a "convenient posture." Indeed, most Puritans found the practice to be wholly idolatrous. Neither side gave any ground, and eventually Joan, quite agitated, told Enoch that he was a "sorry fellow," and wished for the Lord to correct him. John came to the defense of both his mother and the established Church, and likewise desired that Enoch comply with the practice of kneeling during communion. This argument caused

⁵ Studley, 23-25.

something to break within Enoch. Though the account is not clear exactly why, if he was upset with his mother, he was livid at John with a murderous rage. From that moment on, he looked for an opportunity to do away with him.⁶ For six days, he stewed, gathering justification for what he believed he was called to do next. On July 5th, 1633. He put his plan in motion.

Nervousness, and perhaps guilt, got the better of Enoch, such that immediate effect of the wild axe blow was merely to startle John awake. He scrambled up off the cushion as quickly as he could. But before he could even sit up properly, Enoch brought the axe down a second time into his brother's neck. The third and final blow succeeded in separating his head cleanly from his body, but not before the sounds of the struggle had alerted the entire house. Joan, having heard the commotion entered the room to investigate, where to her horror she found Enoch possessed with the spirit of Cain, and her youngest son dead at his feet. At seventy-two years old, there was nothing she could do but scream. Surging with adrenaline and out of his mind, he fell upon her with the axe. After a brief struggle, Enoch embedded the axe four inches deep into her chest, diagonally in-between her neck and the left shoulder. His rage not yet subsided, Enoch dragged her wounded body to the doorframe, where he struck her five more times with the axe until head and shoulder rolled to the floor.⁷

⁶ Studley, 35-36.

⁷ Studley, 37-41.

The bloody act finished, Enoch resolved to cover up the murder as best he could. He wrapped both heads in water-drenched cloth and laid them on the table. Then, after going upstairs to change out of his bloody clothes, he smashed his way through the clay walls of the room, hoping it would give the appearance that the murders were the result of a burglary gone awry. Taking the heads, Enoch absconded to the fields, where he hid the heads underneath a pile of thatch that was to be burned. After this, he walked about a mile to the house of his uncle where he stayed for about half an hour, hoping to see his cousin after he returned from work. While he patiently waited, he saw a Bible sitting on the shelf of his cousin's room, and taking it, he began reading from the book of Isaiah.⁸

It was perhaps while Enoch mindlessly thumbed through the pages that the body was first discovered. However, the original beholder was unlikely to tell anyone what he saw, or even care much at all for that matter: It was a large black horse from Edward's stables that had gotten loose through the carelessness of the servant boy in charge. His wandering brought him to the house where he lumbered through the wall into the scene of the crime. Thus, the human eyes that first witnessed the decapitated bodies of John and Joan—two of the family's maids, as it would turn out—also saw that black horse towering over them, prodding and pawing at the corpses. Long after Enoch was tried and executed, the rumor persisted throughout the countryside that the

⁸ Studley, 42-45.

Devil himself came to witness his disciple's handiwork, taking the form of a great black horse.⁹

One can only guess what was going through Enoch's mind as he waited. When his cousin finally arrived, he composed himself as best he could, and asked to borrow a book: *The Practice of Piety*. Enoch did not arouse suspicion from the young man, and his cousin cheerfully obliged. After a brief chat, he invited his cousin on a walk back towards his father's house. Enoch's behavior had thus far not betrayed any indication of his guilt, until upon approaching the house, he became visibly nervous. The thought occurred to him that the heads might have been found, so he told his cousin that he wished to check on something that was left in the field. Before he even had even finished talking, he was quickly approached by a mob. Having been pointed out by the maids, Enoch was seized by his neighbors and hauled before the justice of the peace. Evidently, he was already a prime suspect before the investigation even started.¹⁰

Holding out hope that he might get away with it yet, Enoch initially denied the allegations completely. Sir Robert Howard, the justice of the peace and Enoch's chief interrogator, pressed him for a long time without success. Allegedly, his methods of extracting the truth did not involve torture, but merely appealed to Enoch's conscience and desire to do the right thing. After extensive

⁹ Studley, 43-44.

¹⁰ Studley, 45-46.

questioning, Enoch finally relented, asked for a reverend, and then confessed his crimes in full.¹¹

The story of Enoch's incarceration is just as interesting as his murders. Immediately after his confession, Howard ordered Enoch to be transferred to the county jail of Shrewsbury to await trial. While he was being moved, the day became late. Thus, the company was forced to bed down for the night in the house of one Thomas Turner, five miles outside of Shrewsbury. Throughout the entire trip, Enoch had been a model prisoner: He showed no interest in escape, talked candidly with his captors, and when the evening's meal was presented, Enoch broke bread and gave thanks to God for the repast. After the meal, however, a young member of the guard spotted Enoch eyeing a poker near the hearth where the company rested. Fortunately, he was just quick enough to restrain him when Enoch rushed to seize it. For the rest of their stay, Enoch was held in a private chamber with a guard posted at the door around the clock. Two hours after this incident, a fearful cry came from Enoch's room. Suddenly, the door flung open, and Enoch rushed out of the room stark naked. He charged into the main chamber of the house crying "O they murder me!" over and over until his guards could restrain him and force him once more to bed.¹²

After Enoch arrived in Shrewsbury, he instantly became a source of curiosity throughout the countryside. He received dozens of

¹¹ Studley, 46-48.

¹² Studley, 48-55.

visitors during his imprisonment, who the reader was told came from all over Britain. Most of them were mere townsfolk who had come to satisfy their curiosity about the man who murdered his own kin in the name of God. Enoch's immediate family were not among his visitors; after hearing of the death of his wife and youngest son, Edward ap Evan flatly refused to speak to him. When his eldest sister reproached Enoch at their house shortly after his arrest, the murderous son was likewise in no mood to speak with her. "Peace foole," Enoch told her, "hold thy Tongue, We live in a false Church, and thou shalt see a change shortly." Only his brother-in-law ever came to see him during his incarceration.¹³

According to Peter Studley, Anglican minister and author of a book describing the case, many of Enoch's visitors were members of Shrewsbury's Puritan sect, who had come to convince Enoch of his errors and, as much as possible, distance themselves from him. But Enoch held firm to his apparently Puritan convictions, while freely confessing to all that he had killed his mother and brother. Like others before him, Studley requested permission from his jailors to speak with Enoch so that he could comfort and correct him. Where others had failed, Studley evidently succeeded: Studley became Enoch's closest comforter and confidant, and he visited him eighteen times before his execution. While the two men interacted, Studley kept

¹³ Studley, 48-50.

detailed notes about the encounters, even recording specific instances of Enoch's body language.¹⁴

During each of his visits, the two men debated the murderer's motivations, and Studley pieced together more and more of Enoch's story. In essence, Studley tried (naturally) to convince Enoch that he was not acting in accordance with God's will, and was merely being used as an instrument of Satan. Enoch maintained that he only acted out of zeal for God, and cited the tenth chapter of Matthew as his justification.¹⁵ As the two men battled, Enoch's confidence wavered, and he intermittently let his guard down enough to admit that his actions could have been wrong. Eventually, he was convinced of his wrongdoing, and accepted his punishment. The Anglican minister, however, was never able to convince Enoch that his Puritan convictions were false.¹⁶

If Enoch felt crippling guilt about his actions, he did not show it. For the remainder of his imprisonment, he ate and drank cheerfully, and talked freely with his jailors, visitors, and fellow prisoners. Never once was he known to shed a tear for his actions, and

¹⁴ Studley, 56-59, 130.

¹⁵ Matthew 10:34-37 (KJV) "Think not that I am come to bring peace to the Earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes *shall* be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

¹⁶ Studley, 59-116.

he was unmoved during judgement and sentencing. His flippancy was made most manifest just days before his execution.

As Enoch stood in rank with five other prisoners that were to be executed, one of them spoke disdainfully of the hangman: "I could finde in my heart to breake yonder knaves pate, but that it is a sin, and I have enough of that upon me already." To which Enoch quickly replied, "It is no sinne to kill death, and had I knowne that knave to bee the Hang-man, I would have beaten out his braines, if I could have come at him." Consequently, the first conversation Enoch had with Studley the next day was one of harsh rebuke.¹⁷

But Studley's castigation was soon put behind them. That day, both men saddled up and rode thirteen miles by horseback to the town of Bishops-Castle for Enoch's execution. One of Enoch's final acts as a Christian was to request communion. Ironically, both Studley and the minister present denied granting him this unless Enoch would kneel during the ceremony. Enoch angrily refused, but after receiving pressure from the others in the company, and perhaps acknowledging that this was his last chance to take the elements, he relented.¹⁸

Before he climbed the gallows, Enoch knelt and said a short prayer. As the executioner slipped the rope around his neck, he trembled violently. His last words, delivered moments before the floor gave way, were "God bee mercifull to mee, a great Sinner!" On August

¹⁷ Studley, 133-36, 149-53.

¹⁸ Studley, 160-62.

the 20th, 1633, Enoch ap Evan was hanged for the double murder of his mother Joan and brother John. His body was placed in a cage, and displayed to rot in Bishops-Castle for over three weeks. His final resting place is not known.¹⁹

Of all the accounts contained in this piece, Studley's retelling of Enoch ap Evan is arguably the most reliable. Excepting the author's clear bias against Puritanism, there is very little that would disqualify it as a true account of what happened. Studley was no pamphleteer; he was an ordained clergyman and scholar within the Church of England. The account he delivered about Enoch ap Evan was written in 1633—less than ten years prior to the English Civil War, which would primarily pit Puritans against Anglicans—and contained hundreds of pages. Furthermore, there were frequent biblical references throughout. Presumably, he had a reputation to uphold, and he listed multiple witnesses that would be available to verify the events contained within the account. Naturally, one would also expect a minister to deliver a true-as-possible retelling of the events as they happened.

There are common themes with how people in 17th century England interpreted murder. Studley's account of Enoch ap Evan does not deviate far from these cultural conventions. Though Enoch's actions had a specifically religious bent to them, it was already common to view crimes of murder and slaughter through a religious lens. There were two distinct views of Enoch's state of mind: One, that Enoch was

¹⁹ Studley, 163-164.

simply an insane man who hated his brother, and subconsciously leapt at an excuse to do him in. And two: that Enoch, with the aid of his sinful heart, was seduced by Satan to commit the murders under the false pretense of zeal. Often, it appears these perspectives overlapped with each other, but they usually tended in each case towards the end that would be most beneficial to the interpreter.

Whenever wrongdoing was found in seventeenth century England, there was usually one culprit who was ultimately responsible in the eyes of both clergy and the populace: the Devil. Contemporary Christendom in England subscribed to the medieval tradition of Satan as tempter, manipulator, and source of natural woes. According to Historian Darren Oldridge, the Devil was viewed not merely as evil, he was inversion and corruption incarnate. Instead of tending to mothers in their old age, those under the influence of Satan might hack them to pieces with an axe. Instead of raising and caring for their children, "satanic" mothers could murder them to continue with their lewd lives. Though the World's fallen human beings were hardly excused from their part in the sin they committed, it was often Satan who was to blame for pushing people to truly terrible acts. His role therefore, as regards murder, was to tempt the perpetrators by bringing out their innate murderous aspects.²⁰

²⁰ Darren Oldridge, *The Devil: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012; Very Short Introductions, 2013), Chapter 1: Introduction. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uakron.edu/2443/10.1093/actrade/9780199580996.003.0001>,

Thus, most of the Puritan ministers who visited Enoch would probably agree that he was somewhat under the influence of Satan. However, this same group would contend that it was chiefly Enoch's insanity that drove him toward the murders. Studley, and presumably many Anglicans, adopted a different view. They were certain that Enoch was acting in accordance with the will of the Devil, and placed very little emphasis on his supposed hatred and insanity (Enoch apparently swore to Studley that he had loved his brother, and never so much as said "thou"²¹ to him before the incident). Studley himself viewed that Enoch's actions the were inevitable result of his Puritanism: A perversion of religion had turned into a perversion of nature.

This reveals an important understanding that many English held about the Devil: Those who were acting outside of God's will were more prone to the temptations of Satan. One did not have to be actively living a lewd lifestyle to fall prey, one could simply believe in "incorrect" doctrines.

Since Peter Studley was a fierce opponent of the Puritans, his account focuses less on Enoch's story and is mostly a scathing attack on Puritanism. Enoch is used as an example to this end. At the end of the biography, Studley stated that cases like Enoch's were far too common: Though murder was not always involved, those who even dabbled

²¹ Matthew 5:25 (KJV) "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

in Puritanism were ripe to experience misery and misfortune, in this life and the next.²²

Was Enoch insane? It is difficult to say. Perhaps he was a victim of extreme neuroticism, and it was his unique religious views that drove him to murder. Many people in the Seventeenth Century recognized their religion to be something that was all-or-nothing. Thus, there exists the distinct possibility that Enoch would have otherwise gone through life in his melancholic state had he not committed so fiercely to his beliefs. Studley too, thought that it was the sin of pride that had done the murderer in; Enoch believed that he was set aside for special revelation from the Lord. What Enoch interpreted as zeal, Studley interpreted as self-importance. Ironically, Studley, the minister, actually believed that Enoch prayed and read to an excessive and unhealthy degree.

Though personal interpretations obviously varied, the story of Enoch ap Evan served as a cautionary tale for the people of seventeenth century England. Studley's account, besides being merely a tale of murder, also added its voice to the growing body of works that Puritans and Anglicans created to use against each other. Furthermore, his tale lends credence to the idea that religion and murder were often closely connected in seventeenth century England; in this case, it was in a very overt, inextricable way.

²² Studley, 141-148.

Secular Homicide: John Rowse

Holding back tears, John Rowse succeeded in keeping his six-year-old daughter Mary calm, but only just. When he roused her from her early morning slumber, she was already aware that her younger sister Elizabeth was missing from their shared bed. As he gently picked Mary up, she asked him where her sister, two years her junior, had gone. After stifling a sob, John told her that he would bring her to where she was. It was not until they were walking down the steps of the cellar that she dared to ask him what he was doing, and whether he would carry her back to bed. "Fear nothing, my child," he said, "I will bring thee up again presently."

In the span of a few short years, John Rowse had fallen from his place as a middle-class and respected member of the community, to being a destitute filicide. His collapse was far from sudden, rather it was a precipitous slide into poverty brought about by a series of his own poor choices.

John worked as a fishmonger in the town of Ewell and held a modest estate that brought in roughly 50 pounds per year. Like most, he eventually married and lived contentedly with his wife for a brief period. John's troubles began six months into their marriage. Desiring to have a maidservant, the couple hired one Jane Bindell to perform the task. Who approached who is not explicitly stated, but only a short time after her employment, John and Jane were already engaged in an affair. His wife, naturally, was devastated upon the discovery of

his duplicity. Nonetheless, the two continued to cohabit until her death two years later.²³

John quickly remarried, but continued his affair with Jane throughout his second marriage. As time went on, John's behavior grew more riotous: He drank excessively, fathered a "brace of bastards" with Jane, and spent far more than his means would allow. In an alarmingly short period his savings were drained, and he began accumulating massive amounts of debt. Mortgaging most of his property, and selling the rest, failed to make a significant impact, and by the time he had to flee his creditors he was over 200 pounds in debt.

Taking the advice of an unnamed friend (and the friend would remain unnamed, at John's request), the debtor abandoned his second wife and went with Jane to London, about ten miles away. This friend evidently had schemes planned for John, and cozied up to him as much as possible. John felt very fortunate to have this friend, and gladly took him up when he offered to lodge them in his home. After a few weeks, the friend arranged for a more permanent solution: John and Jane would assume false names, pose as a married couple, and then board with another family who were presumably tenants of his friend. This was adequate for a brief time, but when John's creditors caught

²³Taylor, John. *The vnnaturall father, or, The cruell murther committed by [one] Iohn Rowse of the towne of Ewell, ten m[iles] from London, in the county of Surry, vpon two of his owne children with his prayer and repentance in prison, his arrai[gn]ment and iudgement at the Sessions, and his execution for the said fact at Croydon, on Munday the second of Iuly, 1621* (London: Printed for I.T. and H.G, 1621; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), 3. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240937518/21467899/A3A3AD26ABB5474APQ/1?accountid=14471>.

his scent, his friend suggested that he leave the country altogether for Ireland.²⁴

John and his friend had a loose financial arrangement during his stay in London. Promises were extended both ways, and generally whenever John needed some money, his friend would loan him small sums so that he could get by, usually in the amount of five to ten shillings. Surprisingly, John's property had never been seized. However, by the time he was ready to depart he had basically no liquid assets remaining. Thus, his friend arranged for John to make over all of his remaining properties and possessions to him in trust. Presumably, the friend would hold the property temporarily in safekeeping and send John the money it generated. In return, the friend would receive a small amount from the same, or possibly future pieces of ownership. If John had any doubts about the trustworthiness of his friend, he was soothed by his friend's clasped palms, and solemn oath that he would never betray their arrangement. Besides signing the appropriate documents, John also swore an oath in the open court of Westminster Hall, declaring to the court and witnesses present that his land had been lawfully sold to his friend. The property that his friend now legally owned was valued at about 260 pounds.²⁵

²⁴ See note 23 above.

²⁵ Taylor, 3-4.

Living in Ireland did not sit well with John, and before long he moved himself and Jane to the Low Countries, again at the advice of his friend. In Holland, John was finally safe from his creditors, and could have spent the rest of his days with Jane. However, his newfound security was small comfort to him, as an entire life's work, his work, lay across the Channel. He was unsure whether he would ever see his property again. And most significantly, his conscience began to prick at him. Thus, one day he resolved to return to England, pay off his debts, and set himself straight.

One can imagine his impotent rage when he returned to his friend and found a stone wall. When he did eventually make contact, the friend bluntly stated that he bought the land for its full value and intended to keep it; he had all of the proper documentation to prove it, including a sworn oath in court which said the same. This was the end for John Rowse. Buried six feet under a mound of debt, with his only means to pay it off snatched away by his own lack of judgement, he finally relented to his last available option: He came home to his wife.²⁶

His wife evidently forgave him for everything, and the two daughters he had with her welcomed him with joy. Threats of eviction, however, now clung to the household like a grim specter. Every day, John became more and more depressed at the family's prospects, especially those of his daughters. Fearing that they would likely

²⁶ Taylor, 4.

spend the rest of their lives as homeless beggars, John resolved to spare them their wretched fate.

On the eve of the murders, John gave his wife some money, and instructed her to go to London in the morning in order to buy him a new riding coat. Something about his behavior did not sit well with her, as she would later state that she had a premonition of something terrible happening. Nevertheless, she set out early in the morning on the next day while the children were still fast asleep. Making sure the door was locked, he went upstairs to their chamber to retrieve Elizabeth, the youngest. Taking her in his arms, he carried her gently down the steps. The Rowse Household had previously been fortunate to have a crystal-clear natural spring that welled up inside their cellar. Taking his daughter to it, he forced her head under the water until she stopped struggling. After that, he carried her upstairs and placed her body out of sight for the time being. Then, he returned to their bedchamber to scoop up Mary, the oldest. In an almost identical fashion, he too carried her down the steps and drowned her in the spring.²⁷

He gathered their bodies together in a separate room, covered them with a sheet, and then paced around the house wailing and lamenting his rotten state. John's life was finished, and he had no intention of fleeing. When a servant girl arrived a little later to do some housework, he helped her wring out buckets of clothes under the

²⁷ Taylor, 5.

same spring he had used to murder his children not long before. After her work was finished, he asked her to help him move most of his goods out of the house, stating that the sheriff of Surrey was going to confiscate them soon. She knew of the family's financial woes, and thus helped him, thinking that the goods were to be seized for his creditors. Soon after, his wife arrived home and asked where the children were. He gave multiple different stories, initially stating that they were at a neighbor's house in town, and then with a kinsman four miles away. When his frightened wife volunteered the servant woman to go fetch them, he gave up the ruse, and told her exactly where she could find them.²⁸

After he was arrested, he was questioned by the constable as to how he could be so diabolical to murder his own children. In reply, he stated that he had done it to prevent them from an inevitable life of beggary. In addition, he believed that since the children were his own, he was at liberty to do with them as he wished. John freely admitted to what he had done; thus, the criminal investigation was brief. He was hauled to the White Lyon Prison in Surrey, where he would remain for fifteen weeks until his execution. Apparently, some of those present during his official sentencing were moved to tears when he confessed his crime, and told the story of his life's ruin. Like Enoch ap Evan, he was a model prisoner. For the first time in his life, he actively read the Bible, gave no trouble to his jailors, and freely talked with anyone who was curious about his case. He seemed

²⁸ Taylor, 5-6.

rather sorry for what he had done, and met such inquisitions with tears and sighing.²⁹

On Monday June the 2nd, 1621, John Rowse climbed the common gallows at Croydon. With tears in his eyes, the rope was slipped around his neck, the floor gave way, and he breathed his last. He was 50 years old. His final place of rest is also unknown.³⁰

According to the written account, John Rowse had an accomplice to the murders, one that could not be prosecuted by man: The Devil himself was his constant companion throughout life, contributing first to his wanton living, and then eventually to his filicide. Quite literally, Satan's presence is manifest in the narrative alongside John, being metaphysically present in the house when the murders took place. The account concludes with what the author believes is to be an important takeaway: Access to a minister is the chief way to prevent cases like John's from ever taking place.³¹

Unlike Studley's tale, there are a few reasons why one might doubt the details of this story. This particular account was written sometime in late 1621, and presented in the form of a brief pamphlet. Though almost a decade earlier, this particular incident happened in a similar social climate to the case of Enoch ap Evan. There is no reason to believe that there was not a man named John Rowse who killed

²⁹ Taylor, 6.

³⁰ Taylor, 6-7.

³¹ Taylor, 7.

his own children because of his financial woes, but the author never informs the reader where the specific details of the events were sourced from. In addition, the author never mentions personally meeting Rowse or anyone else related to the case. If such a thing happened, it would surely be included to give the work veracity. It would be wise to take the events contained with a grain of salt given its short length, and the presumably second-hand nature of its sourcing.

Just like Studley's story of Enoch ap Evan, the author briefly explores the story of John Rowse, and then spends most of the pamphlet exploring the religious implications of the murders: Even though he lived an irreligious life, committed an irreligious murder, and the only mention of him reading the Bible was when he was a prisoner on death row, the account is mostly interpreted through a religious lens. The author, a man named John Taylor, specifically railed against the dangers of incontinence and drunkenness, citing multiple biblical and contemporary examples of how they lead to ruin. In the end, his chief complaint was that both of these things could have been prevented, had the nearest minister not been ten miles away in London.

The town of Ewell's only defense against the Devil was a reader who the author described as "a poore old man that is halfe blinde, and by reason of his age can scarcely read." There simply had to be a

minister, who would keep the town accountable, and teach them the dangers of indulging in the sins that John Rowse committed.³²

What John Taylor found unusual about the case of John Rowse was that it was the father who had murdered his own offspring: He noted, with much chagrin, that it was far more prevalent for mothers and stepmothers to be the ones who killed their children. As it would turn out, in Seventeenth Century England, cases of infanticide took place almost as frequently as common murder.³³

Infanticide: Dorothy Lillingstone

Dorothy Lillingstone had worn many labels throughout her life: busybody, wench, and homewrecker. If she had ever been caught for all she had done, then "murderer" would have been added to that list. Sitting in the trunk of her room was the body of her infant child, strangled to death by very the woman who had brought it forth into the world.

By the time she was thirteen years old, Dorothy Lillingstone left her childhood home in Oxfordshire to escape her parent's displeasure: Among other things, she had become more acquainted with local boys than modesty permitted. At age fifteen, she moved away and began working as a prostitute in a public house in the nearby town of Wattleton. If the supposed autobiographical account of her life is to

³² See note 31 above.

³³ Taylor, 8.

be believed, she did not mind her choice of profession, and even came to enjoy it after a time. Regardless, she desired a better estate. She moved three more times, first to London, then back with her parents, then finally into the home of a family in Chesham to work as a maid.³⁴

After about three months in the service of this family, she caught her master's eye. Their affair, which lasted for nearly two years, was spoiled when Dorothy became pregnant. Fearing their discovery, the master sent her away to London. Evidently, he provided for the child after it was born, perhaps to keep Dorothy from revealing his duplicity. Dorothy then left for Roderith, where she took up work as a wet nurse for an upstanding and religious family. It was only after she moved once more, this time to Frogmorton-street, that her troubles truly began.³⁵

This new family that she worked for was also very upright and religious, and Dorothy would later bemoan the fact that their moral character did not rub off on her. At the time however, Dorothy and the mistress of the house did not get along well. After hearing that Dorothy was seeing a local man, and dealing with him in a manner most immodest, the mistress became very reproachful of her. Her cautions

³⁴ *Gods mercy and justice displayed, in the wicked life and penitential death of Dorothy Lillingstone executed the 7. of April, 1679. at Kennington, for murtherring her bastard-childe. Published at her earnest request. With Allowance.* (London: printed by J. Bennet, for R. Miller, 1679; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), 1-4.
<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240960498/99833972/C00F4800D7B549A2PQ/1?accountid=14471>.

³⁵ *Gods mercy and justice displayed*, 4-5.

would prove to be well-founded, as Dorothy once again became pregnant out of wedlock. After discovering the same, the mistress became furious, immediately fired Dorothy, and kicked her out on the street.³⁶

The account is not exactly clear how, but Dorothy's first child did not put any strain on her means. Her baby was provided for, either through an agreement with his or her father, or through adoption. This second child, however, would evidently have left both mother and infant utterly destitute. Dorothy did rent a room for herself, and was able to find work in the county of Surrey, but her future prospects were certainly bleak. Adding to this, she now became an object of constant derision and suspicion, which added to her stress and contributed to her eventual decision to murder her child.³⁷

Sometime in early 1679, Dorothy delivered the child by herself in her private room. Immediately after giving birth, she strangled the infant and then hid the body in a small trunk with her belongings. She must have lacked any clear cover-story for the death of the child because it was only a short time before she was arrested and jailed.

While in prison, a narrative was written containing the events of her life and a lamentation of her actions. Here too, the murder account is seeped with a religious message for the reader: Very little of the account actually pertains to her life or the murder. Most of the pages are used to write warnings of, and tirades against the

³⁶ *Gods mercy and justice displayed*, 5.

³⁷ *Gods mercy and justice displayed*, 5-6.

Devil. Dorothy Lillingstone profusely blamed Satan for her life's troubles. In the account, she wept for her actions, praised God for being able to forgive her, and told the reader about how the lack of both Jesus and chastity ruined her life.³⁸

In actuality, it is unlikely that Dorothy wrote this story by her own hand. According to a statistic given by historian Margaret Spufford, on average between 1580 and 1700, only eleven percent of women were even capable of signing their own name.³⁹ Given her choice of profession, it is highly unlikely that Dorothy would have been part of this minority. Moreover, the metaphors, biblical knowledge, and language that is employed is not consistent with her education level. More likely, she told the events to an individual who ghost-wrote the account for her in prison. This is further reinforced by a substantial post-script section where the anonymous author recounts Dorothy's execution, and reiterates her warning to live a just life. Of the murder accounts contained in this piece, this one is definitely one of the more suspect, since one cannot rule out the possibility that the story was written entirely without Dorothy's consent simply to convey a message. Like the account of John Rowse, it takes the form of a short pamphlet meant to be sold at a cheap price, and the author elected to remain anonymous. However, regardless of its authenticity

³⁸ *Gods mercy and justice displayed*, 7.

³⁹ Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth Century England* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 21.

it clearly shows the trend of English society to make murder a deeply religious matter.

Sadly, her life would not have fared much better had she continued to live with the consequences of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Being a grass widow (or, a woman who was "wed" on the grass, and then "divorced" thereafter) was a sure ticket towards a life not just of shame, but abject poverty: So strong was the public reaction against lewdness in women, that the chances of the mother ever being married again were virtually non-existent.⁴⁰ Without a husband to care and provide for them, the mother would have to spend the remainder of her life as either a beggar or prostitute, and her child's future would be equally bleak. Thus, many women felt that their only choice was to kill their baby, either to save themselves, or ostensibly prevent their child from suffering.

Infanticides occupied such a large proportion of murders, and society at large found them so reprehensible, that Parliament frequently passed laws to crack down on the practice. For instance, in 1624 Parliament made it law that any mother who concealed a stillbirth would be subject to execution. Nevertheless, the rate of infanticide generally increased throughout the seventeenth century, and with it rose the number of convictions. According to historian James Sharpe, around the time of Dorothy Lillingstone's execution, there was

⁴⁰ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 125, 150-59.

something of an "infanticide wave" happening in England. Nearly half of all murders were classed as infanticides, and women were being convicted and hanged at such a rate that the "Witch Craze" appears tame in comparison: between 1580 and 1709 in the county of Cheshire, thirty-three women were executed for infanticide, compared to eleven men and women for witchcraft.⁴¹

Only a year after Dorothy's execution, in 1680 Parliament passed "An Act to prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children." Though many successive acts had identified the practices of infanticide and codified punishments, there was still difficulty in being able to prosecute the baby's mother after the fact, as the high mortality rate of infants gave plausible deniability to any woman who wanted to be rid of their child. In addition, if it was palatable for the mother to allow her child to die of neglect, it would be even more difficult to prove foul play. Thus, effective one month after passing the Act, Parliament stipulated that any woman whose bastard child was found dead would be charged with murder, unless a witness could testify that the baby had died at birth. This obviously opened the door for possible false convictions, but Parliament, like much of the society, evidently did not care for lewd women either.⁴²

⁴¹ James Sharp, *Crime in Early Modern England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013; Perlego, 2022), Chapter 3: Measuring Crime, Measuring Punishment. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1555881/crime-in-early-modern-england-15501750-pdf>.

⁴² *Anno vicesimo primo Jacobi Regis, &c. an act to prevent the destroying and murthering of bastard children*. (London: Printed by Samuel Roycroft, 1680; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004),

Investigation & Prosecution: John Noyse & Esther Ives

On the 5th of February 1686, the town crier of Rumsey heard a series of disturbing cries during his post-midnight rounds. The sound was coming from the direction of the local victualling-house, and he quickly raced to investigate. This particular business—which served also as a domicile—was owned by William and Esther Ives, a couple who was known to have a troubled marriage. Approaching the inn, which bore a sign with a hatchet, he came to a ground-floor window where he discovered the family's children crying. When the crier asked through the window what was going on, they told them that their father, William, was dead.

The crier was immediately alarmed. Not long before when he happened to pass the inn, he recalled hearing the voice of Ives angry and confused, shouting: "What dost thou do to me, Noyse?" The crier recognized the man Ives referred to as a local cooper named John Noyse, who was rumored to be having an affair with Esther. After briefly assuring the children, he swiftly left to retrieve the constable.⁴³

<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240871872/24038244/6D1AD5436D4A40F2PQ/2?accountid=14471>.

⁴³ *A Full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther, committed by Esther Ives, with the assistance of John Noyse a cooper; on the body of William Ives, her husband, at Rumsey in Hampshire, on the fifth day of February 1686. : Together with the miraculous and wonderful discovery of the murther and murtherers. : As also an account of their tryals at the last assizes, holden at Winchester, where being found guilty of the said murther, they received sentence of death, viz. John Noyse to be hang'd, and Esther Ives to be burnt. : With their manner of behaviour and execution, according to the said*

After he, the constable, and a local guard returned to the Inn, they found that someone had been outside to light a candle. In addition, there was now clear activity inside of the house. Apparently, by now the men had already suspected that there might have been a murder. After a few raps on the door, Esther Ives came to the entrance to greet them. The company inquired as to whether they could get a few drinks from the inn, despite the lateness of the hour. At first, she tried to dissuade them, saying that her husband was indisposed. However, at their insistence she hurried back inside, ostensibly to grab them their drinks and be rid of them. After only a short wait, it appears the men barged inside whereupon going upstairs, they found a macabre sight: Here was Esther Ives, John Noyse, and the body of William Ives. Just before the murderous lovers were disturbed, they were in the process of dressing Ives with his clothing, as it would later be discovered, to throw him down the stairs and make his death look like an accident.⁴⁴

The murder investigation immediately began. Both of the suspected murderers were detained, while the room and body were searched for evidence. Under pressure, Noyse and Mrs. Ives claimed that he had died suddenly and with no explanation from some strange malady. Ives' bed

sentence. (London: Printed for P. Brooksby at the Golden Ball in Pye-corner, 1687; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), 4.
<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240896040/45097791/BB01783F1D834004PQ/1?accountid=14471>.

⁴⁴ *A full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther*, 5.

was still warm from where his body had been pulled off minutes before. There were clear signs of a struggle; a search of the body revealed extreme bruising in the region of the victim's neck. In fact, the grappling was so intense that blood was pouring from the victim's head and neck, staining both the pillow and his shirt. Furthermore, the victim had been dead long enough to have soiled himself, his shirt, and the bed.⁴⁵

At this point, the facts of his murder were abundantly clear, and they proceeded to search the perpetrators. Esther Ives was found to be covered in her husband's blood, which could have come either from the struggle, or from moving his body. Once the authorities collected sufficient evidence, the two were detained until a justice could examine the case in the morning. Both the justice, and two surgeons present, examined the body and agreed that the incident had been foul play. Thus, both Ives and Noyse were whisked away to Rumsey Jail to await trial. No date was set initially, because they had to wait for the judicial circuit to come to the nearby town of Winchester. After the justices arrived to hold the Lenten Assize, they left Rumsey for Winchester on the 24th of February 1689.⁴⁶

After the evidence was presented by the prosecution, Noyse testified first. His flimsy defense was that he happened to be in the house when there was an argument between husband and wife, and he had

⁴⁵ See note 44 above.

⁴⁶ *A full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther*, 6.

merely gotten between them. It was in the process of breaking them up that he had accidentally killed Ives. Esther Ives took a slightly different approach, more or less throwing Noyse completely under the bus, claiming that he had willfully killed her husband, ostensibly to be with her. The details of the trial are omitted in the account, and it is not clear if either party ever actually confessed. However, the jury's official verdict was that both parties had conspired and carried out the murder of William Ives.⁴⁷

Sometime between twelve-thirty and two in the morning, John Noyse, after heavy drinking, went upstairs from the inn and strangled Ives in his bed. Esther Ives either directly provoked the murder, or was compliant in its execution. Naturally, they had done this to make way for their "unlawful lusts." Upon her children discovering the death of their father, she made the hasty excuse to them that his death was an accident. Had the crier not heard their wails, they would have proceeded with their plan to throw him down the steps—perhaps more than once—in order to give the appearance that his death was, in fact, an accident.⁴⁸ Given the description of the body, and the confidence of the coroners that the death was a murder, it is unlikely that they would have gotten away with it.

John Noyse was sentenced to death by hanging, while Esther Ives was to be burnt at the stake. On March 11th, 1689, they were escorted

⁴⁷ *A full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther, 7.*

⁴⁸ *A full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther, 1-6.*

from Winchester Jail back to Rumsey for their execution, both riding together on a single horse. At the gallows, Noyse finally admitted his guilt. Apparently, he made a speech to the crowd, and especially the young people, to keep the Sabbath holy, and to avoid drunkenness. After other brief comments, Noyse was executed for his part in the murder of William Ives. Shortly afterwards, Esther would pay for hers. Mercifully, she was strangled to death before her public burning.⁴⁹

Out of all of the accounts delivered thus far, this particular story is the briefest, and contains some elements that would make it untrustworthy. Like the tales of John Rowse and Dorothy Lillingstone, this story was written as a pamphlet to be sold for only a few pennies. Nonetheless, if the seventeenth century equivalent of a murder-sensational tabloid can deliver an in-depth example of a homicide investigation, it is likely that a local constabulary would have methods at least as competent. Though the English were unlikely to appreciate it at the time, this murder took place at during one of the safest decades of the seventeenth century.

Naturally, not all murderers would be caught, and many cases went cold with scant evidence and no suspects ever named. For instance, a pamphlet written two years later in 1691 warned housekeepers to watch out for daytime robbers, after a burglary gone awry left the bodies of three women at a local coffeehouse. The perpetrators made off with the

⁴⁹ *A Full and true account of a most barbarous and bloody murther, 7-8.*

women's jewelry and belongings, and were never found. Even here, the Devil himself was blamed for inciting these men to violence.⁵⁰

A selection of Murder Statistics

John Sharpe's work *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* remains perhaps the greatest compilation of English crime statistics during the period. A complete picture of murder statistics is not forthcoming, and this is for a myriad of reasons. As Sharpe notes, unlike what is commonly done in the modern era (post-1800s), countries simply did not publish official statistics of murder. Secondly, though many records of homicide survive, there was no central court or record keeping system: literally hundreds of different courts existed throughout Britain, and not all of their records survive. What is useful, and readily available, are records of certain counties at specific time periods. If it is taken for granted that they are representative of the whole, than one might get a picture of how common crimes were relative to each other.⁵¹

It should be noted also that though many contemporary books and pamphlets were written about the murders, there certainly are not enough of them remaining to form a reliable sample for murder

⁵⁰ *Murther upon murther being a full and true relation of a horrid and bloody murther committed upon the bodies of Mrs. Sarah Hodges [...] Mrs. Elizabeth Smith and Hannah Williams at the Loyal Coffee-House near [...]* (London: Printed by G. Croom, 1691; Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2004), <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2264215716/4C77270636CA4D3DPQ/1?accountid=14471&imgSeq=1>.

⁵¹ Sharpe, Chapter 3: Measuring Crime, Measuring Punishment.

statistics. Court records, though they come with their own problems, remain the best source for compiling data on a scale that is useful.

Murders only made up a small proportion of overall crime; the majority of crimes in early modern Britain were misdemeanors. As Sharpe notes, gathering data on these instances is notoriously difficult: it was common practice in England for both claimants and prosecutors to settle cases out of court, either through agreement or arbitration. Obviously there can be no records of a court case that never took place, and even then the vast majority of misdemeanors were never reported in the first place.⁵²

As regards felony offences, much better documentation exists, though this too is sparse. Below in Figure 1 is a compilation of felony statistics given by James Sharpe for some of the counties in the London area:

	Middlesex Sessions, 1550-1625 (%)		Sussex Assizes, 1559-1625 (%)		Hertfordshire Assizes, 1559-1625 (%)		Cheshire Court of Great Sessions, 1580-1709 (%)		Essex Assizes, 1620-80 (%)		Devon Assizes, 1700-9 (%)		Cornwall Assizes, 1700-49 (%)		Norfolk and Suffolk Assizes, 1734-7 (%)	
Property offences	7,158	93	1,664	74	1,536	86	2,875	74	1,965	81	259	76	689	80	197	85
Homicide and Infanticide	400	5	219	10	83	5	623	16	279	11	52	15	113	13	19	9
Sexual offences	70	1	21	1	13	1	77	2	65	2	1	-	4	1	3	1
Witchcraft	21	-	16	1	41	2	34	1	101	4	1	-	-	-	-	-
Arson	1	-	-*	-*	-*	-*	17	-	9	-	10	3	11	1	5	2
Coining	5	-	-*	-*	-*	-*	96	2	10	-	7	2	10	1	1	
Other	5		229	13 [†]	138	8 [†]	184	5	8	-	12	3	38	4	7	3

* Data not available. [†] Includes some misdemeanours

Sources as p. 243, n.8. All percentages rounded to nearest whole number. No percentage given if below 0.5%.

Figure 1

⁵² See note 51 above.

As can be seen, between 74 to 93 percent of felonies were property offences like theft and burglary, with a median proportion of 80½ percent. For murder and infanticide, the proportion ranges from five to sixteen percent, with a median of ten-and-a-half percent. Besides witchcraft and arson, the majority of other felonies were usually grand instances of offenses that would otherwise be misdemeanors. Of note is how homicide and infanticide were lumped together into the same category. Being both instances of murder, this makes sense, but it is important to note that they were given some legal distinction: There were many more laws targeting and categorizing instances of infanticide than natural homicide, and cases were prosecuted differently.

A comparison of Middlesex, Hertfordshire, and Sussex counties reveals another interesting distinction. Importantly, Middlesex is located in the heart of London, Hertfordshire is south of that, and Sussex is further still. Contrary to what one might expect, it appears that living in less populated counties led to a greater proportion of murder to property offenses. This is not to say that life was more dangerous in the countryside than the big city, but it is interesting to note that the further away a felony victim lived from a metropolitan area, the more likely that person was a victim of homicide. However, this interesting bit is likely due to a greater prevalence of property offenses in urban areas.

The actual rate of murder (say, per 100,000 people) is difficult to solidly quantify, but there were definitely better and worse

periods of it during the seventeenth century. For instance, the 1620s saw the largest number of murder indictments in the Palatinate of Chester, while the 1690s had the least. In most places, homicide rates rose to their peak in the 1620s, and then dropped throughout the remainder of the century. At the same time, rates of infanticide mostly increased throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, then remained stagnant at that level throughout the latter half. The effect of this was the "infanticide wave" that was present during the time of Dorothy Lillingstone. Though the rate of infanticide had stagnated after 1650, regular homicide rates had dropped to a level where the ratio between them approached fifty-fifty. By 1710, instances of infanticide actually overtook murder in the Palatinate of Chester. However, by 1700 the overall rate of murder and infanticide combined was quite low compared to the start of the last century.

Finally, though sensationalist pieces could make it seem like there was a murderer-in-wait around every corner, over a 129-year period Cheshire county only convicted 623 homicides and infanticides, which suggests that while murder was far from unheard of, one's individual chance of falling victim to it was quite low throughout the century.⁵³

Concluding Remarks

When faced with the tragedy of murder, seventeenth century English Society required some interpretation to understand why.

⁵³ See note 51 above.

Naturally, one could grasp that it was one's behavior and circumstances that drove he or she to murder, but this was an incomplete explanation; it was assumed by many that a person's relationship with the Lord—and Satan—determined their conduct, and therefore their likelihood to murder. Thus, if there was to be a decrease in murder, there must be an increase in piety. Though many publications of the day were sensationalist, most authors went out of their way to add this religious message in their works. One might argue that some of these sections were included merely because the authors were expected to. While this certainly could have been the case for some, the majority of most publications were not about the grisly details of the murder, rather the Christian lessons that could be taken away from them. In either case, this lends credence to the idea that society at large primarily viewed murder through the lens of religion.

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