'In Maidstone gaol, I am lamenting': Crime, punishment and socio-political comment

> So all you gallant poachers, give ear unto my song,
> It's a bit of good advice, although it is not long,
> Throw by your dog, gun, & snare, unto you I speak plain,
> For if you knew our hardships you'd never poach again.
> 'Van Diemen's Land ' (aka 'The Gallant Poachers')

POPULAR SONGS, PARTICULARLY broadside ballads, were an important source of information prior to the emergence of the cheap press but they were also commercial concerns. Unashamedly, they were intended to sell and make money; and unsurprisingly, crime figured large. A 'good' murder could generate significant trade. Broadsides celebrating the execution of Courvoisier, Corder, Good and Greenacre sold in total around 1.66 million each; while that of celebrity criminals, like Rush or the Mannings, each sold in the region of 2.5 million copies.[1] Crime, particularly shocking crime, made good copy as did a high-profile execution, but there was more than sensationalism. There are insights into popular attitudes towards certain crimes and their causes, and the law and its enforcement. Even more explicit were the socio-political songs that addressed directly major problems of the day. But, while the latter were commonly, though not exclusively, critical, even radical, the former were generally conservative.

10.5920/mummers.06

Scaffold ballads

The vast majority of crimes tried at quarter sessions or assizes in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century were non-violent crimes against property.[2] They were mostly mundane, received brief coverage, at most, in the local press, without becoming the subject of a popular song. The focus in song was mainly on murder and robbery with violence, though even here there was an element of selectivity. For some contemporary social commentators, such songs, with their titillating detail of gory crimes and their hero-worship of dastardly criminals, were seen as a cause of crime. This was to miss the point of many of these songs but, unfortunately, this pre-occupation with sensation has influenced later historians.[3]

Crime of violence had been part of popular culture since 'time immemorial' but the treatment was not constant over time. The 'transgressive' scaffold ballads of the late-eighteenth century contrast with the 'sentimentalized' songs produced in the early- and mid-nineteenth century. The earlier, eponymous heroes, 'Jack Chance' and 'Jack Hall' are devil-may-care rogues who die defiant, while in ballads such as 'Teddy Blink and Bandy Jack' there is a delight in thieving. The years of war against revolutionary, later Napoleonic France led to a powerful conservative reaction. Anything that appeared unpatriotic, by questioning the authority of government or threatening to undermine morality and/or patriotism, came under pressure. There was a demand from above for appropriate popular songs. 'Loyal' songs, and especially naval songs, were to be heard on the streets in the 1790s and 1800s. The old scaffold ballads, with their gory details, became as unacceptable as bawdy songs.[4] More than half of scaffold broadsides published in the first half of the nineteenth century contain no details. 'John Green' is a case in point. In others, brevity was the order of the day. 'Samuel Fellows,' who murdered his sweetheart, simply delivered 'a violent blow.'[5] A number refer to throats being slit from ear to ear as in 'The Walworth Murder Discovered,' but the account in the ballad – 'Then he drew the dreadful weapon/And cut his [son's] throat from ear to ear/And then the monster not contented/Killed his little daughter dear.' – is far less detailed than that given in the *Morning Chronicle*.[6] Given that detailed information was available in local newspaper, and

10.5920/mummers.06

used in some ballads, this points to deliberate self-censorship rather than suppression from above.

A minority (c.25 per cent) contained what might be seen as unnecessary detail, but the reason was more a desire to create a sense of shock, thereby reinforcing the moral of the story. The Harkness ballad 'Murder,' recounts the Mirfield Murders of 1847 in unusually gruesome detail. Throats cut, heads smashed in, fingers broken, no detail was spared, but the case was particularly shocking. Two of the victims were an elderly couple and the third a young servant woman about to be married. The fact that the alleged perpetrators were Irish hawkers added to the sense of outrage, which was reflected in the extensive and emotive coverage in the local press. The ballad transmitted pre-existing anger and indignation to a wider audience. Although all murders are condemned, some were deemed particularly abhorrent; so too murderers, especially if deemed to be hardened criminals or threatening 'others.'.

The portrayal of murders reflected more general discourses on criminality. Temptation, folly, immorality, at least in the form of drunkenness or greed, and godlessness were seen as root causes of crime. There was a particularly patriarchal tone to admonitory ballads such as 'The London 'Prentice Boy' in which the *femme fatale*, bedecked in silks and satins' leads the naïve hero into theft and murder before trying 'to swear away the life away of the London 'prentice boy.'[7] Poverty was not an explanation or excuse and even drunkenness was interpreted in terms of individual lack of self-control rather than a response to a harsh environment. Broadside morality was not imposed from above. Such was the nature of the trade (in terms of both supply and demand) that it was nigh-on impossible to do so. Rather in popular song was to be found popular morality.

Equally important was the depiction of the enforcement of the law, through the courts to the scaffold. By the mid-1830s murder was effectively the only capital offence. Broadsides were clear. The death penalty was the proper punishment for murder and public execution was literally justice being seen to be done. Judges, portrayed as cold and bloodthirsty in the satirical prints of Hogarth or Rowlandson, were generally represented as stern but just, ensuring that trials were properly conducted. The final act in the theatre of justice was execution. Here the state was

10.5920/mummers.06

seen to deliver justice. The scaffold also offered the opportunity for repentance and redemption and was the platform from which to deliver moral guidance. Cornelius Wood, executed for robbery and rape in 1824 was said to 'free confession make/ With shame and grief, I do confess/That I do justly die,' while in 'The Execution of Fish the Murder' the condemned man exhorts 'All young men, I pray take warning/By my sad and unhappy fate; /Don't give way to evil passions/Lest you repent when it's too late.' On the execution of Samuel Fallows, for the murder of his sweetheart/mistress Betty Shawcross, the following 'Lamentations' were printed in Gateshead.

> Repent ye youth who are astray before it be too late
> And let religion be your guide, on God your hopes let rest
> That after this you may reside in religion of the blest
> May God above then pardon me for the deed that I have done.
> .....
> My guilt lies heavy on my soul, have mercy Lord I pray,
> Accept repentance mighty Lord, into thy hands my spirit I resign.

The ballad is fascinating, not least for its total disconnect with Fallows' behaviour. Betty Shawcross already had one child to Fallows and was pregnant with a second when he, a supposedly respectable young farmer, murdered her in a particularly brutal manner, so that he could marry another woman. He exhibited 'perfect indifference' during his trial and, after sentence refused to talk with anyone about his crime, refused to repent before he mounted the gallows and died in 'sullen silence.'[8] But the moral purpose was more important than accurate news reporting. These songs provided an opportunity to repeat and reinforce advice. Men were exhorted to be sober and industrious, women to be chaste (and avoid men and drink, especially in combination), and all were reminded of the importance of church-going, honesty and industry.

The contrast between earlier 'transgressive' and later 'sanitized' execution ballads can be overstated. Gatrell's

10.5920/mummers.06

pioneering work was primarily concerned with moving beyond the simplistic and judgemental depictions of the scaffold crowd and explaining the mentalities of its members, not with providing a comprehensive survey of eighteenth-century execution ballads. In fact, moralising ballads were to be found alongside the transgressive broadsides on which he focuses. Further, there was an element of continuity that mirrors that of the bawdy ballad. Transgressive songs, such as 'The Night Before Larry Was Stretched' and (in modified form) 'Jack Hall' did not disappear and were still being printed in the mid-nineteenth century.

Transportation and prison

Despite the proliferation of capital offences in the eighteenth century, there was not a commensurate increase in the number of executions. In part this was the result of pragmatism – there were only so many corpses that could be seen, swinging in the breeze on the commons of London, particularly – but it also reflected the fact the 'Bloody Code' was predicated on the notion of discretionary terror/mercy.[9] Person and property were to be safeguarded by the threat of the death penalty, but there was no intention of executing everyone found guilty of a capital offence. Commutation of the death penalty to transportation had been a favoured option since the early eighteenth century. The most common destination was the American colonies, at least until 1776. After experimenting with a number of alternative locations, Australia was chosen as the new dumping ground.[10] In English transportation songs there is little in the way of defiance, in contrasts to Irish and Irish/Australian ballads, most notably those about Jack (or John) O'Donahue. Rarely was there a challenge to the legitimacy of the law but certain poaching songs, while sounding an explicit warning, implicitly recognised poverty as a cause of crime. Unusually, Harkness's 'The Transport's Lamentation' makes explicit the link between working-class poverty and criminality.

10.5920/mummers.06

Though crime is bad, yet poverty makes many a
man to be
A transport from his native land, across the raging
sea.
…..
The rich have no temptation, but all things at
command
It is for health or pleasure they leave their native
land.
But great distress and want of work, starvation and
disease,
Makes inmates for the prison, and transports for the
seas.

In many ways, transportation ballads were little more than variations on 'farewell' themes, with the obvious difference that this parting from doting parents and loving fiancées, was not voluntary. In 'The Transports' (better known as 'Farewell To You Judges and Jurries') the unfortunate convict laments leaving his 'Polly' in Liverpool; 'The Convict Maid' bemoans her separation from friends and agonizes over her mother's suffering. In such separation songs the emphasis is on the sense of loss, heightened after the relocation to Australia, by the added fear of a largely unknown but menacing destination. Details of Australia in these ballads were limited and the accounts of the experience of transportation, as in 'The Returned Convict, or the Horrors of Transportation,' highly generalized.[11] They were easily-adapted songs about un-named convicts, guilty of unspecified crimes, suffering 'dreadful' but non-specific conditions, such as 'cold chains and cold irons.' Songs written about eighteenth-century transportation to Virginia could be recycled in the 1820s simply by changing the destination to Botany Bay.[12] Similarly, the location of the original crime could be changed by an enterprising printer. 'The London 'Prentice Boy,' for example, became 'The Bristol 'Prentice Boy.' As with the execution ballads of the nineteenth century, there were warnings a-plenty to 'young fellows,' 'wicked blades' and 'gallant poachers.' Some poaching songs were more specific in naming individuals – 'Van Diemen's Land' specifies 'poor Tom Brown from Nottingham, Jack Williams and poor Joe' – but

10.5920/mummers.06

still fail to get beyond generalized descriptions of cottages 'of clods and clay and rotten straw for bedding.'

There was a broad consensus about the appropriateness of punishment for most crimes; but with one important exception: treason committed by Irishmen. The number of such ballads in the troubled years from 1798 to 1848, is small but they reveal often starkly differing attitudes.[13] An unambiguous loyalist stance is adopted in 'All Traitors,' sold by J Evans of London, with its call to rally to 'George's standard' in the fight against 'the Crops.' Each verse ends with the line 'Traitors all they must die.' Equally clear cut was 'The Soldier's Delight, Or, Croppies Lie Down.'

> We'll fight for our Country, our King, and our Crown
> And make all the traitors and Croppies lie down,
> Down, down, Croppies lie down.

However, in the Harding collection this ballad appears alongside another, printed and sold in Exeter, which is sympathetic towards the executed 'Croppy Boy.' So too are ballads, variously printed in London and Birmingham, celebrating two members of the Young Ireland movement, William Smith O'Brien and John Mitchel, both found guilty of sedition in 1848 and eventually sentenced to transportation under the hurriedly-passed Transportation for Treason Act.[14] The injustices inflicted on Ireland by 'tyrannical bad laws' are roundly condemned, and the two men are seen as martyrs in the cause of 'our dear Island "Free".'[15]

From the 1830s onwards, the eighteenth-century 'Bloody Code' was dismantled, the number of executions dropped dramatically, and new thinking about and forms of punishment came to the forefront.[16] For the early Victorians, the prison was to be the environment in which men would be ground good. Some prison ballads were a continuation of pre-execution lamentations. Richard Bishop 'in Maidstone Gaol … lamenting,' was a 21-year old murderer, saying farewell to his friends and neighbours around Forest Hill, and bereft at the thought that 'I shall Sydenham never see again;' but the main purpose of the song was to warn 'young men' not

10.5920/mummers.06

to be overcome by passion. Increasingly, ballads focussed on prison conditions and the new forms of punishment. Tommy Armstrong's 'Durham Gaol' was based on direct experience of harsh conditions – 'two great lumps of wood on which you have to lie' – harsh tasks – 'teasin' oakum, makin' balls and weavin' coco mats' – and inadequate food. 'Wakefield Gaol' also highlights hard beds and inadequate food but draws attention to the delights of cell cleaning and the risk of bullying between prisoners. 'The New Bailey Tread-mill' focused specifically on one of the most detested features of the new punishment regime. The emphasis is again on physical hardship – 'to turn this plaguey treading mill would kill a horse indeed' – and the deleterious effect on bodily strength – 'I feel the flesh desert my bones'. Strikingly, and unlike prison memoirs, there is no mention of the psychological pressures of the separate system of prison management.[17] As with scaffold ballads, the songs are essentially cautionary and conservative. 'The New Bailey Tread-mill' concludes: 'If ever I get my discharge I'll labour with good will/And taste no more of Manchester New Bailey's treading mill.'

Policemen

Although concerned with the prison regime, 'Wakefield Gaol' makes passing reference to 'the blue lobster's paw,' which brings us to the final element in the treatment of crime, namely the new police. Their introduction was controversial. There were problems of recruitment and retention, training and discipline and the popular response varied from begrudging acceptance to outright hostility in the early years. In contrast to the conservatism of execution and transportation ballads, those relating to the police are overwhelmingly critical. The shortcomings of the police – philandry, thievery, dishonesty and violence – are laid bare, but whereas *Punch* gently poked fun at the policeman's predilection for servants and mutton chops, ballad writers were less sympathetic. Constables imprisoned for stealing various items of food feature in 'The Policeman who Boned the Mutton,' 'Flyme Clarke's Wild Lament' and 'The Policemen on Drill.' An equally prominent figure is the policeman as seducer. Bet, in 'Bob the Policeman and Charming Bet' is eight-and-a half months' pregnant when

10.5920/mummers.06

she calls upon 'deceitful Bobby … don't leave me in the lurch/ But go and buy the wedding ring and take me to the church.' This he does not do and when taken before a magistrate, he denies paternity and admits he is already married. Although Bobby is told to pay 2s 6d maintenance per week, it is Bet who is left with 'a Bobby to dance upon [her] knee.' There are also several references to police violence. 'The New Policeman,' a recruit from Ireland, says 'I kick up a row for a spree, because I'm a new policeman' while another Met. constable in 'The New Police' goes further: 'I lie – swear false – break heads, egad./I'm one of the New Police.' A ballad from the late 1840s, 'The Adventures of a Policeman' brings together every shortcoming. The 'hero' works (and is dismissed from) various divisions of the Metropolitan police. In a career that lasts seven years and four months he sleeps with various women, once on duty, and fathers at least one bastard child. His thefts include goose, mutton and even a wooden leg and, all the while 'I used to break the people's head/And holloa out keep moving.' Having had 'some rigs and tossing' during his police career, he decides to buy 'a two-penny happence broom/And now [he] sweeps a crossing.' It is not surprising to find ballads warning the public of the threat posed by the police: 'If you'll be ruled by men, I'll give you my advice then,/Keep clear from all informers, and the New Police men.'

Social and political comment

Historians have looked often to social and political ballads for insights into popular attitudes in general and dissenting views in particular. As 'the voice of the poor,' ballads are seen to have an 'air of spontaneity, conviction and urgency' not found elsewhere.[18] Moreover, because of their dissenting tone, such ballads came under close scrutiny by governments, particularly around the turn of the nineteenth century. It is important to put these 'protest' songs in context. They were one part of a much larger corpus of ballads, and determining their popularity is problematic. Attractive as these songs are to later historians, did people want to sing about 'The Miseries of the Framework Knitters' or the 'Poor Frozen-Out Gardeners'? There is no simple answer but there are occasional glimpses. John Harland, the Lancashire ballad collector, talked of the

songs being 'cherished and preserved in remote villages' in the 1860s, while twenty years earlier, Samuel Bamford described one particular song – 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble – as 'the celebrated song … of which, perhaps, more copies have been sold among the rural population of Lancashire than of any other song.'[19] There is a further qualification to be made. Not every social-commentary ballad was critical; some were distinctly conservative.

The long-term transformation of agriculture, through commercialization and specialization, gave rise to ballads of complaint that condemned greedy farmers and avaricious middlemen. Shorter-term factors, notably the series of bad harvests, the upheaval and privation of wars around the turn of the century and the severe post-Waterloo depression played their part in grain-growing districts, which gave rise to the 'Bread or Blood' disturbances of the early 1820s and the Swing Riots of the early 1830s. Combined with the failure of the old poor law, the harshness of the amendment act of 1834 and the longer-term hostility towards the new game laws and the corn laws, added force was given to the recurring belief that life was better 'when this old hat was new.'

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century songs celebrating rural community were largely confined to harvest-home and the like in the calendar year. There were a growing number of ballads condemning the new breed of farmer, with his new-fangled ideas, social pretensions and lack of responsibility for workers and the wider community. Enclosure and engrossment, with its detrimental impact on local communities, were condemned in 'A New Song of the Times' and 'When This Old Hat Was New,' both of which date from the early 1800s. Low wages, high food prices, and harsh work conditions were recurring themes. Songs also condemned the breakdown of social ties as a new generation of 'large families' looked to improve their homes and life-styles. The fancy dresses of farmers' wives and the piano lessons of their daughters were held up to ridicule and contrasted with the hard lot of the labourer and his family.[20] Almost as unpopular were millers and corn-factors whose manipulation of the market in corn also ran contrary to notions of a 'moral economy.' In contrast, there was some sympathy (but also a

10.5920/mummers.06

warning) for poachers who broke the game laws, and praise for 'Jack Swing,' the mysterious figure behind the rioting and anger at the corn laws.[21]

Increasingly rapid urbanization and the emergence of new modes of industrial production provided more material for ballad writers. There were songs that combine wonderment – 'The scenes of Manchester I sing,/Where the arts and sciences are flourishing' – with concern – 'Then if you get a drop on a Sunday/To get yourself in tiff for Monday,/The raw lobster [policeman] pops you in the Bailey,/Since Manchester's improving daily.'[22]

Others were more melancholic: 'There's hardly a single place I know,/Which fills my heart with grief and woe,/For I can't find Brummagen.'[23] There were more specific concerns. The growing gulf between producer and consumer, a process which accelerated from the late-eighteenth century onwards, opened up opportunities for fraudulent behaviour. The adulteration of food was a particular target of critical balladeers, as can be seen from the following title: 'London Adulterations. Or Rogues in Grain, Tea, Coffee, Milk, Beer, Snuff, Mutton, Pork, Gin, Butter etc.' The problem was not confined to the food trades as 'A Chapter of Cheats, or The Roguery of Every Trade' made clear. Hatters, bonnet-makers, linen drapers, carpenters and wheel-wrights figure in a rogues' gallery which also included doctors and lawyers.[24] Exploitative employers were also condemned. From 'Wilkinson and His Thirteens,' in the 1790s, to 'The Cotton Lords of Preston' ballads could be excoriating.

> The working people such as we/Pass their time in misery,
> While they live in luxury/The Cotton Lords of Preston.
> They're making money every day/Yet when we ask them for more pay
> They had the impudence to say/'To your demands we'll not consent;
> You get enough to be content' -/But we will have our ten percent
> From the Cotton Lords of Preston.[25]

10.5920/mummers.06

Although new work conditions were problematic, attention often focussed on the losers in industrialization, notably the handloom weavers.[26] Although a love song, in 'The Weaver and the Factory Maid,' emotion is heightened by the fact that the hand weaver's livelihood is being destroyed by the new steam-powered weaving; but, in sentimental fashion, love triumphs: 'if I could but her favour win/I'd stand beside her and weave by steam.' More explicit were the hardships described in 'Jone o' Grifilt Junior,' also described as 'once a very popular song' by Harland.

> Aw'm a poor cotton-wayver, as mony a one knaws,
> Aw've nowt t' ate i' th' heawse, un' aw've worn eawt
> my cloas,
> Yo'd hardly gie sixpence fur o' aw've got on,
> Meh clogs ur' booath baws'n, un' stockins aw've none
> Yo'd think it wur hard, to be sent into th' ward
> To clem un' do best 'ot yo' con.

The references to nettles and Waterloo porridge (gruel) emphasises the woefully inadequate diet and the threat of starvation (clemming). Such are the inequalities and injustices that the once-proud weaver abandons his trade to become a humble stonebreaker on the roads.

Many of these ballads, urban and rural, were stoical, even fatalistic about the negative impact of change but some were openly defiant. There was criticism of legislation and associated institutions – notably the New Poor Law, as in 'A Dialogue and Song on the Starvation Poor Law Bill between Tom and Ben' – and support for fictional insurgent figures, such as Captain Swing or General Ludd, and radical movements, notably Chartism.[27] For the authorities, such songs were radical, even seditious; and yet their 'solutions' (implied or stated) were often conservative. There was a harking back to an older social order in which society, though hierarchical and unequal, was seen to be just and held together my mutual obligations. Many of the rural ballads expressed a wish that the centrality of agriculture be re-asserted and valued. Equally important, however, was a desire to reassert old values and restore the bonds that (or so it was believed) held society together 'when this old hat was new.'[28]

10.5920/mummers.06

Such conservatism is consistent with that expressed in ballads dealing with sexual encounters, and crime and punishment. It is also consistent with patriotic, particularly naval balladry. 'Loyal' ballads have a bad reputation, being linked with the repressive governmental acts of the 1790s and the destruction of the vibrant but vulgar culture of 'flash' ballads. There was, undoubtedly, a tightening of government regulation in the 1790s and people like Charles Dibdin produced many hugely successful songs, glorifying the navy and its men. 'Tom Bowling' is the best-known today but it was outsold by 'The Greenwich Pensioner,' which is estimated to have sold almost 11,000 copies. As well as its memorable opening line, 'It was on the good ship Rover,' the song was known for its patriotic conclusion: 'The King, God bless his Royalty … I'll praise with love and loyalty.' However, naval ballads were a feature throughout the eighteenth century. 'The Pacifick Fleet,' was a huge success for many years after its publication in 1729. Putting the haughty Spanish in their place went down well, even if it was achieved with a little help from the Dutch. 'Rule Britannia,' with its defiant injunction to Britons never to be slaves, was immensely popular from the 1740s onwards. There was a sense of national identity, even though the distinction between English and British was not always clear.[29] The mid-century wars enhanced the profile of the navy and in the patriotic songs of the time 'valiant Jack Tar' becomes a central figure, most enduringly celebrated in 'Hearts of Oak,' 1759. 'Hearts of oak are our ships, jolly Tars are our men, we are ever ready, steady boys steady, we'll fight and we'll conquer again and again,' a song that was to be sung repeatedly over the next two centuries. Thus, Dibdin, who was employed by the governments of both Addison and Pitt, was working within a well-established tradition, albeit at a time of heightened sensitivity regarding the multifarious threats posed by the French.

The heroic portrayal of the English sailor neatly glossed over some harsh realities. 'Fair maids' were parted from their sweethearts by the press gang; 'canny Geordie' hid away at the sound of 'the tender coming.' Conditions aboard could be grim, even by the standards of the day. In some songs the treatment was humorous. Patrick O'Neal, who 'set off like a

10.5920/mummers.06

fool from Kilkenny to Dublin,' fell foul of a press gang and suffered 'half-starved and sea sick' on the journey to Spithead, though his greatest trial was conquering his hammock. This was one of a number of songs that poked fun at the ignorance of Irish recruits.[30] Poor quality food – 'rank butter and musty horse meat with weevily old biscuit' – was one of the afflictions in 'The topman and the afterguard' and then there was the strict discipline, enforced in no small measure through flogging, to the tune of 'The Rogue's March.' But this was not the image that was presented in most naval ballads, in which the indomitable masculinity of 'Jack Tar' became a symbol for the nation. Their popularity suggests that there was a substantial audience for such sentiments.

However, this is not to suggest that songs were not contested. Perhaps the best-known of these naval songs was 'Britons, strike home,' a song of considerable popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, oft-times referred to as the third national anthem.[31] However, its history is more complex than some have suggested. The song dates to George Powell's 1695 play, *Bonduca; or the British Heroine*, with music by Henry Purcell and was commonly sung with another song from the play, 'To arms.'[32]

The chorus ran as follows:

> Britons strike home! /Revenge, revenge your
> Country's wrong.
> Fight! Fight and record. /Fight and record yourself
> in Druid's song.

The song became well-known, not simply in London as an entr'acte piece and a stand-alone concert number.[33] The outbreak of war against Spain in late 1739 (the War of Jenkin's Ear) enhanced its popularity. A one-act farce by Edward Philips, *Britons strike home; or the Sailors Rehearsal*, exploited a popular tune title, claiming that 'there is no Englishman in the kingdom but thinks it ['Britons, strike home'] the best tune that has been played for several years.'[34] And the song retained its popularity. It was claimed, at the time of the Seven Years War that 'even Children just weaned from the Breast were taught to lisp "BRITONS STRIKE HOME."'[35] Most spectacularly,

10.5920/mummers.06

MPs – or so it is said – stood and spontaneously sang 'Britons strike home' in November 1797, when Pitt the Younger announced to the House of Commons that his attempts to negotiate a peace with France had failed.

However, the song was not an unequivocally conservative/patriotic piece. Indeed, by the turn of the nineteenth century the song had acquired radical associations, in ways that did not happen for 'Rule Britannia' or, even more so, 'God Save the King.' So problematic were these connotations that revised, loyalist versions of the song appeared. 'Britons, strike home! A New Song' (1800 or 1803) was openly anti-French and commanded Britain's 'freeborn sons take the field, The Altar and the Throne to shield.' The chorus, still called on Britons to strike home and avenge their country's cause, but the purpose was now to 'protect your King, your Liberties and Laws,' Best-known were the new words written by Charles Dibdin in 1803, which pondered forthcoming conflict.

> There some must conquer, some must die boys
> But that appals not you or me.
> For our watch-word, it will be
> Britons, strike home! revenge your country's wrong.'

But the loyalist triumph was far from complete. In 1819 at the radical 'Mr Hobhouse's dinner' at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, one of the toasts was "The source of all legitimate power – the People' accompanied by 'Britons, Strike Home' while at Henry Hunt's procession the tune was played on various occasions and the slogan emblazoned on several flags.[36] True, one of the toasts at the Davenport Conservative Dinner, 1835, 'The Conservative cause, the work of Britain's safety' was accompanied by 'Britons, Strike Home,' but the tune was played for radicals and Chartists in the north-east of England and the West Riding.[37] The contested nature of this song points to a wider, cautionary point. Songs did not have a simple or single meaning. Irrespective of authorial intent, audiences made sense of the words in the light of their values and expectations.

10.5920/mummers.06

Some concluding observations

Crime, particularly violent crime, was a central, and profitable, theme in ballads and broadsides. Some, more so in the mid and late eighteenth century, were transgressive, celebrating devil-may-care criminals, rather than condemning them and their actions, but the enduring popularity of 'Jack Hall,' damning the eyes of all and sundry, can obscure the conservatism of many more, in which crime, especially murder, was condemned rather than excused, and punishment seen as appropriate and fairly delivered. While there was a degree of sympathy for the 'poor unfortunate,' as he made his (less often her) way to the gallows, commonly he was seen as a victim of personal shortcomings and his story a morality tale for the benefit of those who heard it.[38] Crime ballads, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, carried implicit and explicit messages that reinforced 'conventional' morality and created a sense of shared values across society at large. Like the increasingly popular melodramas, they were, with few exceptions, conservative (and often naïve) morality tales, which, nonetheless, offer valuable glimpses into the unknown lives of that 'very large body of our fellow-citizens.'[39] The social and political songs were a more obvious challenge to the socio-economic and political order of the day, even if some of their solutions were more backward-looking and conservative than radical.

However, the days of the ballad-singer were numbered, particularly in London and the great cities and, 'the decay of the street ballad-singer … we attribute more to the establishment of such places of amusement as Canterbury Hall and Oxford, and the sale of penny song-books, than to the advance of education or the interference of the police.'[40] It is to these new forms of entertainment that we now turn.

Endnotes

1 The murder of the aristocrat and MP, Lord William Russell, by his Swiss servant, François Courvoisier, was predictably shocking. An estimated crowd of 40,00, including Dickens and Thackeray, attended his execution in 1840. William Corder, who murdered Maria Marten in the Red Barn, in 1827,

10.5920/mummers.06

was tried and execution in Bury St Edmunds. Within days and months there appeared broadsides and plays, some produced by local travelling companies, others appearing on the London stage. The Red Barn remained one of the most popular stage melodramas and was made into a 1930s film. Daniel Good (executed 1842) murdered his pregnant girlfriend, whose dismembered body was discovered by chance. The Greenacre case (1837) also started with the discovery of a severed head in the Regent Canal, but according to a patterer: 'Greenacre didn't sell so well as might be expected for such a diabolical out-and-out crime … but he came so close after Pegsworth, and that took the beauty off him. Two murderers together is no good for nobody.' (Cited in J Flanders, *The Invention of Murder*, London, Harper Press, 2011, p.95) James Rush was a surprise celebrity, though double murder was unusual. The most sensational trial and execution of the year saw a married couple, the Mannings, meet their death at Horsemonger Lane Gaol. The fact that Mrs. Manning was good-looking and foreign added to the appeal of the case. As many as 50,000 people may have attended their execution, which was described, in shocked tone, by Dickens as well as being celebrated in *Punch's* cartoon, 'The great moral lesson.' The fact that the number of executions dropped dramatically after the mid-1830s may also be a partial explanation of the high level of sales.

2 See D Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, chaps. 2 & 3.

3 Flanders throw-away comment about broadsides 'frequently attracting crowds of *bloodthirsty* children' is but one recent example. Flanders, *The Invention of Murder*, p.4. Emphasis added. A similar situation applies to public executions and the crowds that attended them, where the deliberately emotive accounts of nineteenth-century abolitionists have been taken as objective descriptions. This approach has been rigorously criticised in V A C Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, Oxford University Press, 1994, esp. Part 1.

4 K Bates, 'Morality for the masses: the social significance of crime and punishment discourse in British broadsides, 1800-1850', unpublished PhD, Keele University, 2013, which is based on an analysis of 650 broadsides, almost three-quarters featuring murder.

5 See also 'The Lamentation of Thomas Henry Hocker' which tells 'thy head I smashed thy blood it flew' but without the detail found in the report in the *Morning Post*, 27 February 1843.

6 *Morning Chronicle*, 3 January 1857. Other, more detailed, accounts focus on factual description of the wounds and the weapons used.

7 Cited in C Nunn, ''Come all you Wild Wicked Youths': Representations of Young Male Convicts in Nineteenth-Century English Broadside,' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 20(4), 2015, pp.453-70 at pp.463-4.

8 *Lancaster Gazette*, 5 April 1823 and *Hereford Journal*, 23 April 1823. The same paper reported a week later that the family had tried the constable (with the staggering sum of £1000) to allow Fallows to escape. One paper, the *Leeds Intelligencer* alleged he had confessed to his brothers and sisters when they visited him in gaol, but this is the only such reference.

9 Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, chap. 7

10 Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, chap. 8

10.5920/mummers.06

11 Detailed information about conditions in Australia in the opening decades of the nineteenth century was limited and it took a generation (or more) to find an appropriate language and imagery with which to describe the new land. Consequently, early writings and paintings were essentially a reflection of English conditions, albeit with some prominent aspects of Australia.
12 James Revel was the subject of the lengthy 'The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account, of his Fourteen Years' Transportation at Virginia, in America' and this became 'The Unhappy Transport: Giving a sorrowful account of his fourteen years' transportation to Botany Bay, in New South Wales in February 1808 and his return home in March 1st, 1822, being a remarkable and sufficient history of the life of James Revel, the unhappy sufferer.'
13 Bates 'Morality for the Masses' refers to the crime of treason but does not consider any of the ballads mentioned here.
14 J Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement*, Cambridge University Press, 1987. Chapter 6 gives a detailed account of the trials.
15 See for example 'Mrs Smith O'Brien's Lamentation,' 'A New Song on O'Brien's Arrest,' 'Most Lamented Lines on the Prison Torture of Mr William O'Brien,' 'Mitchel's Address' and 'Mrs Mitchell's [*sic*] Lament for Her Husband.' A similar situation occurred following the execution of Michael Barrett in 1867 following the Clerkenwell bombing.
16 Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, chap. 7
17 Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment*, chap. 8
18 C Elkins, 'The Voice of the Poor: The Broadside as a Medium of Popular Culture and Dissent in Victorian England,' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 14(2), 1980, pp.262-74
19 J Harland, *Lancashire Ballads and Songs*, 2nd edition, London, Routledge & Sons, (1st edition 1865) p.x and p.162. Similarly, 'Jone o' Grinfilt Junior,' which begins 'Aw'm a poor cotton weaver' is also described as 'a very popular song' in the years after the Napoleonic Wars. *Ibid*, p.169
20 This was not confined to ballads. John Clare's *The Parish* damned the new generation of farmers, as did a number of rural melodramas. *The Factory Lad* was equally severe on the new generation of ruthless factory owners and contained a scathing critique of the game laws.
21 For a more detailed analysis see R Ganev, *Songs of protest, songs of love: Popular ballads in eighteenth-century Britain,* Manchester University press, 2009, especially chapters 2 – 4.
22 'The Scenes of Manchester' in R Palmer, *A Touch on the Times,* London, Penguin, 1974, p.62-4.
23 'I Can't Find Brummagen' in Palmer, *Touch on the Times*, pp.78-80. Strictly speaking this was a song written for and performed by James Dobbs at the Birmingham Theatre Royal, but it soon appeared as a broadside. Similar sentiments are expressed in 'Liverpool's an Altered Town' and this was a song format that was easily adapted for any town or city. See also R Palmer, *The Sound of History*, London, Pimlico, 1988, chap. 2. 'Manchester's An Altered Town' is included in C Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, London, Reeves & Turner, 1871.

10.5920/mummers.06

24 There were also songs commenting on disease, though one assumes that the catchy tune 'The Campbells Are Coming' offset the grim content of 'The Cholera's Coming.'
25 It should also be noted that 'meaning' could vary between generations. For those who lived through the 1853 strike, the song may well have had a different meaning to that of their children, who inherited it.
26 Industrial health hazards were not confined to the factories. The Sheffield metal worker, was a skilled artisan, nonetheless 'he shortens his life and he hastens his death/Will drink steel dust in every breath.' 'Tally i o, the grinders!
27 See for example 'Jack Swing,' 'General Ludd's Triumph' and 'The Chartists Are Coming.' There was nothing new in political songs. Political disputes between Whigs and Tories in the reign of Anne, the Hanoverian succession and the Jacobite risings all spawned songs.
28 A similar sentiment runs through John Clare's *The Parish*.
29 J Davey, 'Singing for the Nation: Balladry, naval recruitment and the language of patriotism in eighteenth-century Britain,' *The Mariner's Mirror*, 103(1), 2017, pp.43-66
30 See for example 'The Kerry Recruit,' though in this song, the eponymous Irishman finds himself in the Crimean War, seeing 'heads, legs and arms all scattered around' before 'a big Russian bullet she ran away with my thigh.' Anti-war sentiments are strong in 'Mrs McGrath' and 'Johnny I Hardly Knew You.'
31 The other two being 'Rule Britannia' and 'God Save the King.'
32 There was also a second song with the same title, which was essentially a love song focussing on a woman following her young man to sea, which contained the lines, 'While our rakish young fellows cry, /Britons, strike home, boys, /Briton's strike home. This was published in Chappell's *Popular Music of the Olden Times*, in which he referred to a popular old nautical song, which had been printed by both Pitt and Catnach.
33 M Vandresi, ''Britons, strike home': politics, patriotism and popular song in British culture, c.1695-1900,' *Historical Research*, 87, 2014, pp.679-702. The chorus is at p.688. Some texts have 'avenge, avenge' instead of 'revenge, revenge.'
34 E Philips, *Britons strike home; or the Sailors Rehearsal*, 1739, https://data-historicaltexts-jisc-ac-uk.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view?pubId=ecco-0744801000&terms=britons%20strike%20home pp.8-9
35 *Westminster Journal and London Political Miscellany*, 20 October 1764, cited in Vandresi, 'Britons strike home', p.689
36 *Morning Post*, 17 May and 13 September 1819.
37 *Morning Post*, 27 April 1835, *Newcastle Journal*, 6 February 1836 and *Leeds Mercury*, 23 January 1841
38 Female criminals appeared less frequently and were often doubly condemned for transgressing the law and the norms of femininity.
39 Anon 'Street Ballads' *National* Review, xiii, 1861, p.416
40 Anon 'Street Ballads' p.416

10.5920/mummers.06