

The Hogmanay Riot

The first name on the Scottish Police Roll of Honour is that of Dugald Campbell; this is an account of his death

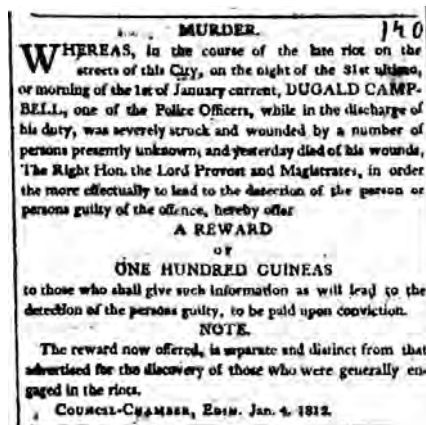
By MARTIN BAGGOLEY

It is often said that gangs of delinquent youths are a relatively modern phenomenon, but the events in Edinburgh on Hogmanay 1811 disprove this. From nine o'clock that evening until the early hours of the next morning, the centre of Edinburgh was the scene of widespread and organised disorder.

Those responsible were a number of gangs from various districts of the city. Many were as young as fourteen years of age, and all were armed with knives and other weapons with which they attacked and robbed the townsfolk out enjoying the celebrations. Anyone who attempted to resist was severely beaten, and two men died of their injuries sustained during the night.

James Campbell, a clerk, was beaten and robbed on the South Bridge at one o'clock and his head injuries were so bad that he could not be saved. The night's other casualty was Dugald Campbell, who had been singled out by the mob not to be robbed, but because they knew he was a member of the town's watch. The town's authorities were quick to respond to these events and within days had offered what was then a huge reward of one hundred guineas to anyone who provided information

leading to the arrests and convictions of those responsible for the deaths.



The Reward Notice, published in the Caledonian Mercury

The gangs' preferred booty was cash, but so many watches were stolen that the following notice was issued on 4 January;

The Right Hon the Lord Provost and Magistrates request that such persons as may have lost watches in the riot of the 31st ultimo, will transmit to this office, notes of the makers' names and numbers so that they may be immediately advertised. Meanwhile, watch makers and others are requested to be careful in purchasing watches from persons unknown to them and to secure all suspicious persons offering watches for sale. Sufferers will also please transmit a particular note and description of any other article of property they may have

lost. It is entreated that those who have sent anonymous information to the Magistrates respecting the late riots, will call in person at this office. Council Chambers, Edinburgh.

Sixty-eight arrests were made on the night and in the days that followed. Many of those detained accepted the crown's offer to testify against those considered guilty of the more serious crimes, so that they might escape prosecution. The information provided by these informants also demonstrated just how well the gangs had planned the night's events.

Those who eventually stood trial were John Skelton, Robert Gunn, Alexander McDonald, George Napier and John Grotto, all of whom were charged with robbery; Hugh McIntosh, Neil Sutherland and Hugh McDonald were charged with robbery and the murder of Dugald Campbell, who died on 3 January; nobody was ever charged with the murder of James Campbell.

Skelton was convicted of robbing three men of valuables, which included watch chains and a purse. He had denied the offences, claiming to have found the items in the street. Former employers, among them Mr Innes, a gunsmith, spoke highly of him and described him as a young

man of good character. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to death but later reprieved and transported for life. A similar fate awaited Gunn and Alexander McDonald, following their convictions of robbing their six victims of a silver watch and snuff box, cash, a silk scarf and hats.

Napier and Grotto were suspected initially of involvement in the murder of Dugald Campbell, but were only accused of two robberies, to which they pleaded guilty. They had taken hats, a gold watch, a pair of gloves, a handkerchief and five shillings in silver. Grotto was arrested that night but Napier fled to Yorkshire. However, he returned to Edinburgh voluntarily to face justice, explaining he had been suffering from a guilty conscience. Both youths were sentenced to be transported for fourteen years.

There should have been four defendants in the dock to be tried for the officer's murder, but one suspect, James Johnston, avoided capture and was destined never to be caught to stand trial for the crime. When the trial of Hugh McDonald, Hugh McIntosh and Neil Sutherland, who were also accused of ten robberies, opened on 20 March 1812, the absent Johnston was declared an outlaw. The three accused pleaded not guilty to all matters.

However, all of their alleged robbery victims identified the three as having played leading roles in the crimes. Furthermore, John Tasker, who in common with the accused was a member of the Niddry Street gang, gave extremely damaging evidence against them. He told the court that their gang had been responsible for intimidating passers-by and causing a nuisance in the town in the months leading up to the Hogmanay disturbances. This had led to the police targeting them to put an end to their activities, and the events of New Year's Eve were

intended by the gang to be a reprisal for this increasing attention. Tasker identified the three accused as the ringleaders, and confirmed he had been made responsible for cutting down branches suitable for use as bludgeons.

It was decided to cause as much mayhem as possible by committing robberies and, importantly, attacking any police officers who attempted to intervene. Members of the rival Canongate and Grassmarket gangs were invited to participate and they readily accepted. The gangs agreed that all the proceeds of their crimes on the night were to be handed over to McIntosh, who would be waiting at the South Bridge. He was to dispose of the stolen property and the gangs would share whatever money he received. It became clear that each gang had its own distinct whistles, which were used to communicate with their members and on the night they were used to co-ordinate activities and contributed greatly to what those caught up in the riot felt was a well-organised event.

McIntosh had arranged to sell the stolen valuables to John Dunkinson, a notorious Glasgow criminal and fence, but he had been arrested and put in gaol. McIntosh therefore persuaded two sisters, Janet and Anne Gemmel, to take the booty to him, past the notoriously lax and easily-bribed guards. As a reward, Dunkinson, who intended selling the goods from his cell, gave the sisters a watch, which in turn, they handed to a friend named William White. He was a soldier with the 25th Foot and became suspicious, having by then read of the events in Edinburgh. He approached the authorities, which led to almost all of the stolen property being recovered and the identification of many of those who participated in the riot.

The court then heard details of the attack on Dugald, firstly from a

number of respectable citizens. John Gilchrist and George Brown saw a group of youths rush towards him and confirmed that McIntosh played a leading role in the attack. However, they had not seen Sutherland strike him and heard McDonald urging the others to stop, telling them their victim had suffered enough. John Thompson saw the officer moments before he was attacked and had warned him that he faced being injured and should wait for assistance. He replied "Damn the fear", but on seeing the large group heading towards him attempted, unsuccessfully, to escape. When the attack began Mr Thompson attempted to intervene, but he too was hit repeatedly and was forced back.

When the youths finally dispersed, the witness helped carry the badly injured officer to the police office, where watchmen John Monroe and James Walker were shocked at the sight of their colleague's horrific injuries. They took him immediately to the Royal Infirmary, but he was beyond help.

Damaging testimony was also given by gang members John Kidd and James Black, who witnessed the assault. They were among a group of thirty youths, one of whom saw Dugald and shouted "It's the Royal Arch", which was the nickname given to him by the gangs. He had played a prominent role in attempting to curtail their earlier criminal activities, hence the decision to attack him with such brutality. Despite his attempt to make for safety, the group caught up with him near the Stamp Office. Neither witness saw Sutherland play any part, but they did see McIntosh strike him with a large club and McDonald kick him as he lay on the ground, screaming as he did so "Campbell is well out of the way".

In their defence, the accused provided alibi and character witnesses.



The Tolbooth Gaol

McDonald called sisters Janet and Margaret Ross, who testified that on the night of the crime he arrived at their home at nine and remained there until well after midnight. He drank a large amount of alcohol and was very drunk, which, it was argued, meant he could not have taken part in the riot. His friend James Cameron and former employer, shoemaker James Anderson, both spoke of his excellent character, describing him as honest and trustworthy, and neither could imagine him committing the crimes of which he was accused.

Mary Moffatt and Mary Murphy swore they were in Sutherland's company in the home of Robert Scrimgeour, all of whom testified on his behalf. They insisted he was with them at the relevant time and was innocent of the charges. Three witnesses spoke up for McIntosh, who stated he was at work on Hogmanay and did not leave his workbench until after midnight. These were his employer, shoemaker George Petrie, his workmate John Riddler and Catherine Ferguson, who lodged at the premises.

The crown acknowledged that all of these witnesses were respectable individuals, but they nevertheless failed to persuade the jury. McDonald and Sutherland were cleared of murder, but convicted of the robbery

matters. McIntosh was found guilty of murder and all of the robbery offences, and the jury added that many others, who had not been identified, were no doubt also guilty. After announcing their verdict, the jury members said they had collected a sum of seven guineas, which they asked to be passed on to the murdered officer's widow. The judge sentenced the three prisoners to death, and there would be no reprieves.

They were held in the town's Tolbooth Gaol to await their executions and received regular visits from friends and distraught family members. They were also comforted by a number of clergymen, and on the eve of their hangings they wrote brief entries in the Bibles they had been given. Sutherland wrote the following;

This blessed book has been my instructor and comfort when I thought of my grave. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all appreciation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. This Bible has been my candle when I was in the darkness and I have found more riches in it than in all the world, for I have found peace to my soul when it was weary and faint and it has made my chains light. It has turned a den of thieves into a house of prayer and made me happy even in going

to death, by defying its sting. NEIL SUTHERLAND born March 1794 died April 1812.

The others made briefer entries; McDonald wrote "Jesus Christ is my salvation and all my desire and the Bible all my hope." McIntosh included a brief note denying involvement in the murder and added: "I feel deeply grieved for my sins but trust for a free pardon through my Lord Jesus Christ."

There was a sad incident in the days leading up to the executions. As a convicted murderer, McIntosh could not be buried in consecrated ground, so instead his corpse would be handed to Dr Munro at the university to be dissected, a source of great shame to the criminal and his family. His parents were therefore greatly relieved to have a visit from a respectable-looking woman who claimed to be the cook in the home of a very good friend of Dr Munro. She assured them that in exchange for a fee she would be able to persuade her employer to use his influence with the doctor to have their son's intact body returned to the family secretly, so that a Christian burial could be arranged. They were poor but managed to raise what was for them a substantial amount, which was handed over to her. However, the woman was a confidence trickster, who subsequently disappeared with the money.

Executions were traditionally highly-ritualised and carried out in public to reinforce their deterrent effect. Given the circumstances of the condemned men's crimes, it was decided that the executions would not take place at the usual spot in the Grassmarket, but the gallows would be erected close to the scene of the murder, on High Street. This was a custom reserved for what were regarded as the most heinous crimes, and preparations began five days before the hangings, when a section

of pavement was removed to make space for the structure.

At twenty minutes to three on 22 April, as they were being pinioned in the Tolbooth, the youths were given wine, which they shared with their guards. They declined the offer of a coach to take them to High Street and instead opted to walk. The procession was an impressive sight as it made its way along the streets lined with thousands of onlookers. A contemporary report gave details of its composition;

The Moderator and a party of High Constables.

The City Officers, bareheaded

the four Magistrates in their robes, with white gloves and their Rods of Office.

The Principal Officer of the City with his Baton and Badge

Neil Sutherland accompanied by Reverend Dr Fleming, in his Gown and Bands

Hugh McIntosh accompanied by Dr Campbell

Hugh McDonald accompanied by the Reverend Mr Andrew Thomson

The procession was escorted at the rear by a large party of the Extra Constables, of which one hundred and fifty had been sworn in for the occasion.

At either side there was a contingent of the City Guard.

To ensure against a possible rescue attempt by their friends, the route was lined by four hundred soldiers of the Royal Perthshire Militia and the scaffold was surrounded by the Renfrewshire Militia. Key parts of the town were guarded by men of the Royal Edinburgh Volunteers, the 1st Regiment

of the Edinburgh Local Militia and troops from the 6th Dragoon Guards, together with a large number of police officers.

The condemned were placed on the drop at three thirty and, having said their farewells to each other, Sutherland gave a signal to the hangman that they were ready. Seconds later, they were dead and after the customary one hour, the bodies were cut down. Those of Sutherland and McDonald were returned to their families for burial, and that of McIntosh was taken to be dissected.



MARTIN BAGGOLEY is a retired probation officer, who has written extensively on the history of crime and punishment for magazines in the UK and USA. He is also the author of several books on historical murders and his latest, on the murder of police officers during the Victorian era, is due to be published in the near future. He and his wife Claire live in Ramsbottom.



High Street, where the executions took place