

Department of Humanities, Northumbria University

Honours Dissertation

**A Comparison of Female Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century London and
Dublin**

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Abbreviations

Old Bailey Proceedings Online, *OBP*

British Newspapers 1600-1950, *BN*

Eighteenth Century Collections Online, *ECCO*

Introduction

This dissertation will focus on three main aspects of female prostitution in the eighteenth century from brothel-keeping to the differing experiences of common prostitutes and courtesans. Exploring such will enable an understanding the trade from different perspectives, that of the procurer and fallen woman, and gain an insight into how diverse the lives of prostitutes could be depending on their status. The work will explore both the criminal and legal aspects of the trade in relation to two capital cities: London and Dublin, in an attempt offer a different perspective to that of existing literature on the subject of eighteenth-century prostitution. Considering all of the above, this dissertation will argue that prostitution was a diverse trade in the eighteenth century in that the experiences of women involved in the industry altered dramatically due to both legal and social initiatives and attitudes in addition to other influences.

Legislation before and during the eighteenth century was ambiguous towards prostitution and efforts to prevent it have been described as ‘fragmentary and sporadic’ by Drew D. Gray.¹ Prostitution was legal in Britain at this time, with the only illegal aspect of the trade being brothel-keeping. Until the early nineteenth century the word ‘prostitute’ was not included in legal terminology, and prior to this a prostitute was placed under the equivocal banner of ‘idle and disorderly’ alongside beggars and criminals.² A number of factors

¹ D. Fleming, ‘Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Ireland’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol.32, no.1 (2005), pp.1-18, p.6; D. D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations: The Summary Courts of the City of London in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.135.

² T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), pp.76, 194; F. Dabhoiwala, ‘The Pattern of Sexual Immorality in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century London’ in P. Griffiths & M. S. R. Jenner, *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.86-106, p.88.

account for the ambiguity of the law towards the trade and these will be considered throughout.

Much work on the subject of eighteenth-century prostitution in Great Britain has focused on London alone. Dan Cruickshank and Tony Henderson have provided extensive research on prostitution in eighteenth-century London and as such, their work has been of great use to this dissertation in aiding an understanding of the trade as a whole. Though London was by far the centre of the industry, it is important to recognise other areas where the trade was rife. This is why the sex industry in Dublin will also be considered, enabling a comparison of two capitals. Until the passing of the Renunciation Act in 1783, Ireland was under English parliamentary rule and as such, throughout much of the eighteenth century, the two countries' legal systems were almost identical.³ Regarding London, there is an abundance of information available, both primary and secondary, with the *Old Bailey Proceedings* providing significant insight into the London criminal justice system. Dublin, however, is lacking a sufficient alternative so information will be drawn from sources other than court records in order to compare Dublin with London.

Court records to memoirs and newspapers will be used in order to gain a greater insight into the trade in this period. Old Bailey proceedings often show prostitution from the perspective of whores involved in criminal activities, such as theft, rather than the actual prosecution of the industry. The trying of sexual offences had previously been the responsibility of the Ecclesiastical courts, however, by the eighteenth century, this had become increasingly the duty of the secular courts.⁴ Court records are extremely useful in

³ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett: Memoirs of an Irish Whore* (London: Querous Publishing Limited, 2015), p.115.

⁴ G. Parker, 'The Regulation of Sexual Activity and the Protection of Females', *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, Vol.21, No.2 (1983), pp.187-244, p.214.

gaining insight into the types of crimes prostitutes engaged in but they must be treated with care. Old Bailey proceedings do not offer a complete imitation of what was discussed in court as the documenting of sexual offences faced increasing censorship as the century progressed. Reports of prostitutes picking their clients' pockets still contained details of sexual encounters, however, the information included in the proceedings was less explicit than previously published.⁵

The decision to base the final chapter around memoirs was inspired by Laura J. Rosenthal's anthology of whore memoirs, *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century*, in which she discusses the benefits and implications of using these narratives to gain an alternative insight into the trade. Memoirs will be used to gain an understanding of the lives of prostitutes less likely to engage in criminal activities and to document the lives of bawds. Memoirs are extremely useful in that they show the trade from a different perspective to that of the legal system. These sources, however, must be treated with care as many were not written by the prostitute herself and often only touched upon exciting experiences.⁶

The first chapter of this work will explore brothel-keeping. As the only illegal aspect of the trade in this period, it is interesting to find out why it was criminalised whilst other elements remained outside of the law. The chapter will focus on different legislative measures implemented to control the vice alongside less official attempts made by reformers. Procuring and entrapment will be discussed as two important reasons for the crackdown on brothel-keeping. Bawds were viewed as the facilitators of prostitution and as

⁵ C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, 'Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source', *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 31/03/16.

⁶ L. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), pp. x, xi.

such, they, not the fallen women, were the real problem. The hard-line approach to brothel-keeping advocated in legislation, however, should not be over-exaggerated. In practice, the law appeared to be more interested in controlling the vice than eliminating it. As a necessary outlet for male sexual tension, only the least discrete, disorderly brothels, as opposed to the respectable elite establishments were targeted to retain some sort of outlet for male lewdness. The chapter will also draw upon the practices and experiences of notorious eighteenth-century bawds, with some of the information being drawn from their memoirs.

The second chapter will focus on common prostitutes, as opposed to those of a higher class that will be discussed in the following chapter. The law was extremely ambiguous when it came to discussing such women and as a result, unless deemed 'disorderly' or engaging in criminal activities, common prostitutes could not be arrested. However, many of them did participate in a number of illegal acts, particularly theft. The involvement of common prostitutes in various kinds of theft is noticeable in a number of cases tried at the Old Bailey and these cases give us an important insight into the lives and practices of low prostitutes. These cases also show inconsistencies within the legal system at the time, particularly concerning the differing decisions made by different magistrates.

The final chapter of this work will examine the lives of courtesans or high-class prostitutes, who, for the purpose of this study, will be considered simultaneously, despite the possibility of defining them as two different circumstances. The life of a high-end whore will be contrasted to that of a common prostitute in order to show how life differed at either end of the trade. The memoirs of some of London and Dublin's most elite prostitutes will be explored, including those of Sally Salisbury, Peg Plunkett alias Mrs Leeson and Fanny

Murray. Their memoirs will enable greater insight into their lives, particularly with the absence of criminal records. This absence can be attributed to the more discreet and private manner in which such women conducted their affairs, in addition to their often-powerful clients, and as such, the law had little interest in restricting their activities.

Overall, this dissertation will explore the nature of prostitution in eighteenth-century London and Dublin, drawing on all of the above in order to argue that the experiences of, and attitudes towards, women within the trade were not uniformed but diverse.

Chapter 1: Keeping a Brothel

The profession of keeping a brothel, as the only illegal aspect of prostitution in the eighteenth century, is a beneficial place to begin our exploration into the diversity of the trade. Contemporaries viewed bawds as the facilitators of prostitution and as such, this concept can be used to explain the legal and social attitudes towards this element of the trade.

Brothel-keeping in the eighteenth century was regarded as a misdemeanour and as such the offence was often tried in various courts from the Sessions of the Peace to the Court of King's Bench.⁷ It is extremely interesting to note that only two people were tried at the Old Bailey for keeping a brothel in the eighteenth century, in 1726 and 1728, and that both of which were houses intended for practices of sodomy and not those of heterosexuality. This is a peculiar occurrence due to the illegality of brothel-keeping, however, as a misdemeanour, such an offence was more regularly tried at one of the alternative courts mentioned above. It should not be suggested that there was a complete failure to implement the law in regard to brothel-keeping, or that it was a result of tolerance towards the profession, but that it was rare for someone accused of such an offence to be tried at the Old Bailey during the eighteenth century. Until 1818, bawds could 'remove their cases to the court of the King's Bench on writ of certiorari', a strategy that was stopped by the Disorderly Houses Act of 1818. Bawds used this tactic because it denied the prosecutor

⁷ C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey', *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 29/11/15.

any financial support from the crown and made their prosecution more expensive, causing prosecutors to think twice before taking a bawd to court.⁸

A 1545 Statute made it a 'common law offence to keep a brothel anywhere in London or to engage in grossly indecent behaviour in a public place' and such was to be enforced by parish constables or the night watch. The enforcement of this, however, was 'irregular and inefficient' as corrupt enforcers would often take bribes.⁹ Laws based on the statute were also difficult to implement because of the problem of proving a house was actually a brothel. From the 1690s onwards, as part of the early reforming movement, an 'agent provocateur' could inform and complain about a brothel, fill in a warrant with the details of the accused and ask for it to be signed by a willing magistrate. The reforming societies could then enforce the warrant themselves, however, this was a risky tactic. If their suspicions turned out to be wrong, or if there was little or no evidence available to solidify their claims, prosecutors themselves could be prosecuted. Many societies, therefore, chose to accuse houses of being disorderly, as opposed to bawdy, as this was much easier to prove.¹⁰ The underlying reason for the introduction of legislation and action taken against brothels was to try to stop bawds facilitating the fall of women to prostitution.¹¹

Bawds both assisted and in many cases precipitated the prostitution of women. As the primary facilitators of prostitution, it is no wonder that such individuals were the main focus of the law in this period. Saunders Welch in his 'A proposal to render effectual a plan to remove the nuisance of common prostitutes from the streets of this metropolis' (1758)

⁸ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, p.63.

⁹ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History of Georgian London* (London: Windmill Books, 2010), p.464.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp.465, 472.

¹¹ T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p.28.

touches on the practice of procuring young women into prostitution through the use of 'agents'. Bawds hired these men to meet the carriages of young women arriving in London seeking employment and to pick from them the most eligible for the trade. It was the agent's job to find out where the chosen girl intended to stay and if she had not yet made arrangements to 'luckily' recollect a woman in need of a domestic servant. The naïve girl would gratefully accept the offer and only upon arrival at her new home would she realise she had made a mistake, and by that time she was already trapped.¹² Welch proposed that both bawds and their agents should have received a sentence of seven years transportation if convicted - the same punishment for those convicted of felony - however, he also highlighted the problem of successfully convicting such people.¹³ Welch noted that the difficulty in convicting brothel-keepers was a result of 'the various arts and stratagems' they employed, for example, the bribing and threatening of witnesses. There was also significant difficulty in proving that a house was in fact a brothel. Due to the extensive number of such establishments in London, and their situation in plain sight of passers-by, it would have appeared as though the practice was tolerated as opposed to condemned by the law.¹⁴

Agents were not the only persons involved in the recruitment of women for prostitution as bawds themselves were also directly involved in the practice. Charlotte Hayes is one example. Fergus Linnane has described Hayes as 'the greatest bawd of early Georgian times' and as such an influential figure in the trade, her process of procuring and

¹² S. Welch, 'A proposal to render effectual a plan to remove the nuisance of common prostitutes from the streets of this metropolis' (London: Royal Exchange, 1758), *ECCO* [<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>], accessed on 05/02/16, pp.11-12; B. Capp, 'When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England' (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.37.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.20.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp.7-8.

entrapping women is well-worth noting.¹⁵ Hayes frequented recruitment agencies intended for the hiring of domestic servants, picking the most suitable girls and preparing them for employment in one of her London-based brothels. Once within such an establishment, the girls were trapped, their only way out being the acquisition of an affluent husband to pay their debts. Hayes ensured that all her girls became indebted to her by charging them for the fashionable items they were required to wear, their lodging and food.¹⁶ This practice was common amongst all eighteenth-century bawds. Charlotte's girls, unlike many others, received relatively good treatment, frequently going on walks and riding in her carriages.¹⁷ Mother Wisebourne, another eighteenth-century bawd, used different methods of procuring her girls to that of Hayes. Wisebourne visited prisons, 'clutching her Bible' to buy the freedom of girls deemed suitable for work in her establishment and purchased young girls for sale outside St. Martin's Church.¹⁸ William Hogarth depicted the involvement of bawds in the practice of entrapment in his series of plates entitled 'A Harlot's Progress' published in 1732. The first plate, see appendix one, shows a young girl who had just arrived in London being examined by the notorious early eighteenth century brothel-owner Mother Needham. The girl's motivation in moving to London is likely to have been to gain employment as either a seamstress or domestic servant and not to prostitute herself. A tumbling stack of pots on the left-hand side of the image suggests that the girl's fall into prostitution is imminent. Londoners appear to be getting on with their daily lives with little

¹⁵ F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City: A Thousand Years of Vice in the Capital* (London: Robson Books, 2003), p.111.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.112-113.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.112.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.111.

regard for the incident that is taking place right in front of them. This suggests that such scenes were common occurrences in the period.¹⁹

In an issue of the *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* in 1720 a statement was included from the Lord Mayor and Court of Alderman ordering a crackdown on bawdy houses and 'penalties inflicted on those who shall be taken offending as the law requires'.²⁰ This infers that the suppression of brothels was going to experience a large increase, however, three years later there is an example of a case where a prisoner admitted to keeping a bawdy house yet no conviction was carried out for that crime. Despite the fact that owning a brothel had been illegal from 1545, the case of Elizabeth Anger shows that if a person was on trial for one offence, this did not mean that if it became known that they had also committed another offence that they would be charged for such. Anger was on trial in 1723 for 'theft from a specified place' after having been accused of stealing from John Stulker. Anger dismissed all claims that she had stolen the goods but did admit to keeping a bawdy house. It is interesting that the court appeared to have overlooked the defendant's statement about keeping such a house and instead went on to charge her solely for the theft for which she was sentenced to transportation.²¹ This case should not be dismissed as merely an anomaly as a similar case was tried on 2nd July 1766 involving Margaret Cassady and her lodger Mary Caton. This case too involved theft, however, Cassady was not found guilty on the lines that it was merely 'a dispute between a bawd and a whore about

¹⁹ William Hogarth, 'A Harlot's Progress' (1732), *Royal Collection Trust*, [https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/811512/a-harlots-progress], accessed 23/03/16.

²⁰ 'Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post' (London), 19th November 1720, issue 103, *BN* [http://find.galegroup.com/bncn], accessed 05/01/16.

²¹ Case of Elizabeth Anger tried for theft from a specified place (t17230828-16), convicted 28th August 1723, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 20/06/15.

property, and not a felony'.²² It is interesting that despite the evidence given by Caton regarding the occupation of Cassady, the court chose to acquit the prisoner.

On the 1st June 1752, an additional form of legislation became effective in London – the Disorderly Houses Act. Dan Cruikshank has suggested that this was a response to popular beliefs that disorderly houses were ‘the breeding grounds for crime and the most dangerous and infamous of disorderly houses were brothels and bawdy-houses’.²³ The act strove to close rough establishments to reduce crime by making it necessary for all places of entertainment to apply for a license from a magistrate. As a result of the new act, as published in the *General Advertiser*, fifty or more houses of ill repute in the Strand area of Westminster had been closed by 8th June 1752, just one week after the act was implemented.²⁴ This demonstrates the immediate effectiveness of the Disorderly Houses Act. The act also contained a clause aimed at suppressing the sex industry. Despite the importance of not suggesting that all disorderly houses were brothels, many brothels were described as disorderly houses in contemporary literature. Robert P. Maccubin argues that the act was ‘more to contain and control than to eliminate prostitution’ by keeping the trade out of ‘the more desirable residential districts’.²⁵ Brothels, as places of entertainment, also had to apply for licences. If accused of keeping a bawdy house, two inhabitants of the parish in which the house was located were required to ‘enter into a recognisance of twenty pounds each to produce evidence against such persons’, however, the monetary reward for doing such was outweighed by the fear of the consequences. People were reluctant to

²² Case of Margaret Cassady tried for grand larceny (t17660702-12), acquitted 2nd July 1766, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 20/06/15.

²³ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.486

²⁴ *General Advertiser* (London), 8th June 1752, issue 5503, *BN* [http://find.galegroup.com/bncn], accessed 2nd July 2015.

²⁵ R. P. Maccubin, *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality During the Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.67 & D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.487.

inform, as they did not want to expose 'powerful and unscrupulous criminals who were also their neighbours.'²⁶ Bawds were generally wealthy and could afford to hire sophisticated legal help and even if convicted, they could return to the trade upon completing their sentence. Middlesex and London were the only areas to which the act applied, hence, bawdy houses in other locations remained untouched.²⁷

Exclusive and discreet brothels with affluent clients were also untouchable because they were not regarded as disorderly and therefore were beyond the reach of the Disorderly Houses Act and the interest of the authorities.²⁸ Peg Plunkett, alias Mrs Leeson, was a notorious brothel owner who ran an elite establishment in Dublin. Before becoming a brothel owner, Peg went from being a kept woman to a courtesan. Her earlier life will be discussed in detail later, whilst considering the memoirs of other elite prostitutes. As a brothel owner, her clientele included clergymen, who were less likely to remain chaste than they are today. Her first brothel was opened in Drogheda Street and although it was a type of brothel, it would not have been referred to as such; brothels were common and Peg's establishment was not common, it was exclusive.²⁹ Due to its exclusivity, Peg's brothel remained outside the grasp and concern of the law.

In both London and Dublin, violence carried out against brothels and their owners was commonplace. The police forces were inadequate considering the extent to which these two urban centres were growing. To achieve some form of protection, some

²⁶ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.487; A. E. Simpson, 'The Mouth of Strange Women is a Deep Pit: Male Guilt and Legal Attitudes Toward Prostitution in Georgian London', *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, Vol.4, No.3 (1996), pp.50-79, pp.62-63.

²⁷ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.488; R. P. Maccubin, *'Tis Nature's Fault*, p.66; A. E. Simpson, 'The Mouth of Strange Women', p.62.

²⁸ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, pp.487, 494.

²⁹ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, pp.66,70; A. Jackson, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.196; D. Fleming, 'Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Ireland', p.3.

prostitutes opened brothels together. Some brothel owners took bullies to court for compensation but doing such was not easy for a woman, never mind a whore.³⁰ This, however, did not deter Mrs Leeson from filing a suit against the Pinking Dandies, a group of educated, rich men, who in 1779 broke into her house, smashed everything and attacked her.³¹ As a result of the attack, Peg claimed that her two year old daughter died from shock along with her unborn baby. The attackers were mistaken if they believed that their 'high birth and good connections' would save them from prosecution because Richard Crosbie, the ringleader, was apprehended in Newgate (Dublin's main jail) for two days. The death of her unborn baby meant that Crosbie was liable to be charged with murder and for such receive the death sentence. Peg was put under pressure by the sheriffs to drop the charge of murder to which she agreed. Crosbie received a fine and jail sentence.³² Despite the serious trauma Peg experienced as a result of the attack, she defied popular beliefs that bawds were villains in proving that some were capable of compassion.

The eighteenth-century legal system rested much on economic considerations. The inclusion of jurors, witnesses and informers in legal proceedings meant that corruption was frequent.³³ In the case of Jervis Rhodes, tried for violent theft of Elizabeth Kent, Kent's landlady deposed that she was taken up for keeping a disorderly house by a 'lifeguard-man', escorted to a constable and asked to pay one Guinea 'to make it up'. This is an example of the level of corruption that permeated the police force in this period.³⁴ In a case where one of Peg's rivals was suing her for slander, she was lucky in that the members of the jury,

³⁰ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, pp.80-81.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.78.

³² *Ibid*, pp.79, 82.

³³ *Ibid*, p.86.

³⁴ Case of Jervis Rhodes tried for violent theft, convicted 3rd December 1729, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 20/06/15.

usually tradesmen appointed by the Lord Lieutenant, favoured her as a valuable customer. Her rival, however, it was noted, 'never laid out a single farthing in Dublin that she could avoid'.³⁵ There was a stigma in Ireland at the time regarding people who made their money in Ireland only to return to England with it and Peg's rival was depicted as having been included in this camp.³⁶ The two cases in which Peg was involved exhibit how the court was not always prejudiced against prostitutes or brothel-owners and that if they were victims of maltreatment, they too deserved justice. It should be noted, however, that this was not a regular occurrence and often prostitutes *were* prejudiced against.

Bernard Mandeville, a contemporary physicist and satirist, proposed the opening of public brothels across the county, as in his opinion, unregulated prostitution was the real threat to society, and not the trade itself. Mandeville argued that 'public brothels would not encourage "men to be lewd" but... would encourage them only to exercise their lewdness in a proper place'.³⁷ This concept corresponds with a wider belief at the time that prostitution was a necessary outlet for male sexual tension and that a continuation of the trade was needed in order to protect respectable women from becoming victim to male promiscuity. This is why the law remained so ambiguous towards the trade – it was widely acknowledged that 'male appetites' generated the problem of prostitution.³⁸ Additionally, in this period, great emphasis was placed upon proving a man was heterosexual. Contemporaries believed that without female prostitution men might turn to sodomy - an activity that was

³⁵ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, pp.86-87.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.87.

³⁷ R. P. Maccubin, *'Tis Nature's Fault*, pp. 67-68.

³⁸ A. E. Simpson, 'The Mouth of Strange Women', pp.50, 62.

punishable by death in this period.³⁹ Brothel owners encouraging sodomy could also face punishment in this period. The case of Margaret Clap alias Mother Clap in 1726 is an example of such. She was tried at the Old Bailey for the crime of having fifty men in her house at one time who were engaging in sodomitical practices. Clap was found guilty, fined 20 marks, committed to one year's imprisonment and a time in the pillory.⁴⁰ The suppression of homosexuals was more severe than that experienced by those involved in female prostitution in this period, inferring that the former posed the greatest threat to society.

It is possible to learn about cases that were not tried at the Old Bailey by looking at a number of newspaper articles. For example, in the Westminster Quarter Sessions section in the *Sun*, a case in which two persons were convicted for 'keeping a common bawdy house' in 1794 was included. Hugh Martin and Mary Brown took eighteen-year-old Mary Canley into their house and proceeded to take the girl's earnings from prostituting herself.⁴¹ The journalist then explained that 'the rest of this witness's evidence is too shocking to be stated'.⁴² A woman corroborated Canley's evidence but there was nothing to suggest that Martin played an active role in the running of the house through the prostitution of young women. Martin was acquitted whilst Brown was found guilty and sentenced to two years imprisonment and a stand in the pillory.⁴³

³⁹ R. Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp.69-70 & C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, 'Homosexuality', *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 29/11/15.

⁴⁰ Case of Margaret Clap tried for keeping a brothel, convicted 11th July 1726, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 20/06/15.

⁴¹'Westminster Quarter Sessions', *Sun* (London), Saturday 25th October 1794, issue 648, *BN* [http://find.galegroup.com/bncn], accessed 05/01/16.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Overall, the legal system remained relatively inadequate in its dealing with brothels as the only criminalised element of prostitution in the eighteenth century. The legislation implemented both before and during the period was too ambiguous in its terminology and regarding the means to which a bawd could be brought to trial. London and Dublin also lacked the existence of reliable police forces vital to the successful restriction of the trade. Such inadequacies can be attributed to the common belief that brothels enabled men to fulfil their sexual needs and without such an outlet they would turn to corrupting respectable young women. Bawds, however, were seen as the facilitators of prostitution and such is why numerous attempts were made to restrict their practices, regardless of whether these efforts were effective or not. This can explain why other aspects of prostitution did not face any significant threat from the law during this period. Despite being viewed as undesirable, common and elite prostitutes did not experience the same amount of condemnation that society directed at bawds, as the facilitators of the industry.

Chapter 2: Common Prostitution

This chapter will focus on streetwalking in order to gain a greater understanding of the life of a common prostitute as opposed to those of a much higher class. Other forms of low prostitution existed in the period and by looking at areas such as inhabiting common brothels, we are able to gain insight into the lives of low-grade whores. It is important to note that this was a level experienced by most, if not all, women involved in the trade at some point in their lives, and only a select few were able to transcend such into high-class prostitution.

Streetwalkers did not face any significant threat from the law until 1822 when the 1744 Vagrancy Act was altered to crack down on their actions. The altered legislation meant that a streetwalker could face imprisonment for being unable to give a 'satisfactory account of herself', for example, being unable to justify her lurking in the street.⁴⁴ This change in legislation was said to be too extreme and consequently in 1824 it was narrowed, making the arrest of streetwalkers possible only if such women were found to be brazen or disorderly.⁴⁵ The original 1744 Vagrancy Act had been too ambiguous in dealing with the problem of streetwalking. 'Vagrant' was a widely defined term and could include persons such as beggars, seasonal workers and prostitutes.⁴⁶ If a prostitute was not deemed 'disorderly', they remained outside the reach of the law. Jonas Hanway, an eighteenth-century philanthropist, held the view that all streetwalkers were disorderly and described them as 'the most disorderly and indecent in the world'.⁴⁷ Inhabitants of brothels, however,

⁴⁴ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.503.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.473; 'Vagrancy', *London Lives 1690 – 1800: Crime, Poverty and Social Policy in the Metropolis*, [<http://www.londonlives.org>], accessed 12/01/2016; D. D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations*, p.127.

⁴⁷ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.473.

were also able to escape the reach of the law as their work tended to be more discreet and out of the public eye. It was also difficult to prove that a house was a brothel and the bawd usually received harsher punishment over that of her prostitutes.

There is evidence to suggest that from late 1751 to 1752 there was an increase in initiatives taken by constables in the London area to arrest prostitutes. A number of newspaper reports detailing the activities of constables point to this conclusion. In an extract from the *General Evening Post* in 1751 the journalist claims that constables visited houses of ill repute in Goodman's Fields, with many of the women inside being sent to prison for being unable to 'give a good account of themselves'.⁴⁸ On several other occasions, searches just like this were carried out in different areas of London with many lewd women being committed to Tothilfields Bridewell house of correction.⁴⁹ Petty criminals were regularly sent to Bridewell in an attempt to punish and reform them through hard labour.⁵⁰ However, despite the numerous attempts to arrest such women, prostitutes never found themselves permanently expelled from the streets of London or their brothels⁵¹

The authorities objected to the visibility of streetwalking, not the trade itself. Their lack of opposition towards higher-class prostitution in both London and Dublin is evidence of this.⁵² Punishments could include a spell in Bridewell prison, however, as A. E. Simpson has stated, Magistrates were extremely hesitant in making the decision to send women to

⁴⁸ *General Evening Post* (London), 19th December 1751, issue 2812, *BN* [<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>], accessed 02/07/15.

⁴⁹ *London Daily Advertiser* (London), 13th February 1752, issue 298, *BN*, [<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>], accessed 02/07/15; *General Advertiser* (London), 6th October 1752, issue 5597, *BN* [<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>], accessed 02/07/15.

⁵⁰ C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, 'Punishments at the Old Bailey', *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16.

⁵¹ D. D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations*, p.172.

⁵² M. Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.13.

Bridewell because it was a 'known training ground for criminals'.⁵³ It was believed that rather than forcing a woman to question her morality through punishment, a spell in the prison amongst other criminals could actually precipitate her further decline. This point is shown by the fact that if a streetwalker was arrested, she would usually spend a short amount of time in a local prison, but after such amount of time, it was often believed that she had suffered enough and would be released before attending trial.⁵⁴ If a streetwalker did experience some kind of legal proceeding, she was usually discharged without receiving any form of sentence. As Drew D. Gray has found, looking at the 'outcomes of prosecutions of prostitutes at the City summary courts' for 1762, 1778 and 1780, of a total of fifty-seven arrests, forty-four were discharged, three reprimanded, eight imprisoned and two 'passed'.⁵⁵ This infers that imprisonment was rarely seen as a necessary punishment.⁵⁶

In addition to a number of legislative changes taking place in London at this time, legal measures were introduced in Dublin that were to prove threatening to those involved in the trade. Streetwalking prostitutes were at an increased risk of apprehension, particularly in Dublin following the introduction of the Dublin Police Act in 1786. Before this act came into being, the Church of Ireland parish managed the policing of the city, however, as a growing urban centre, new methods of policing were required and as such, a special police force, under control of the Lord Lieutenant, was established.⁵⁷ Peg Plunket experienced the new vigour of the police first hand when she decided to walk home from an acquaintance's house, accompanied by her footman. It was believed that 'respectable'

⁵³ A. E. Simpson, 'The Mouth of Strange Women is a Deep Pit', p.61.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.62; D. D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations*, p.128.

⁵⁵ D. D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations*, p.128.

⁵⁶ T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p.196.

⁵⁷ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, p.142; D. Fleming, 'Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Ireland', p.10.

women should not roam the streets at night and as such, Peg was targeted and asked to accompany the constable to the watch house. Julie Peakman has suggested that he was probably hoping to receive a bribe as many amongst the police force were corrupt and used arrests as a way of making surplus income.⁵⁸ Peg was lucky in that she had companions in the army who had authority over 'ordinary policemen' and upon calling for them was sent home.⁵⁹ Peg in this instance, exhibited how beneficial it was to have friends in high places in eighteenth-century Dublin society. The new police force did not last long due to being inefficient and expensive, and by 1795 control of the police had come under parish control once more.⁶⁰

The criminal justice system was not the only establishment that attempted to regulate prostitution, reformist societies also aimed at achieving the same goal. The Society for the Reformation of Manners, active in the early eighteenth century, was one group that strove to reduce the level of vice in the metropolis through 'an unprecedented and violent vigilante campaign against prostitution'.⁶¹ Prostitutes were poorly portrayed in contemporary literature but, as Laura Rosenthal has suggested, reformers actually 'hunted them down in the flesh'.⁶² Reformers dwelled little on the circumstances that had caused a woman's prostitution but often followed the views of their 'Restoration predecessors' that these women were driven into the streets out of want to satisfy their sexual desire.⁶³ Throughout the course of the eighteenth century, however, there was a significant alteration in the attitudes of reformers towards fallen women. From the middle of the

⁵⁸ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, p.143.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.143.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.143.

⁶¹ L. J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth Century British Literature and Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.44.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

century, new reform movements sprang up that hoped to reform such women as opposed to punishing them. This led to the establishment of Magdalen Hospitals, asylums for penitent prostitutes, in both London and Dublin. Although the Magdalen Hospitals were important, our focus will not turn to the reformation of common prostitutes but rather their engagement in criminal activities.⁶⁴

From looking at a number of Old Bailey cases, it is possible to assert that it was extremely common for streetwalkers and inhabitants of brothels in London to be involved in various forms of theft, from pickpocketing to grand larceny. This assertion is particularly true regarding the case of Charlotte Walker, a poor, young woman, who engaged in both prostitution and pick-pocketing. In an analysis by the King of the Old Bailey Sessions Papers for 1792, it was found that prosecutors often claimed that they had been lured into alleyways or lodgings when drunk by prostitutes and then robbed either before or after the 'promised sexual transaction' had taken place.⁶⁵ Surviving depositions of the London Metropolitan Archive for the period between 1780 and 1785 also point to this conclusion – 212 women put on trial for theft were 'either explicitly or implicitly in the context of casual and generally sexual acquaintance'.⁶⁶ This corroborates the point that a significant amount of streetwalkers participated in theft. This was certainly true regarding many cases that Charlotte Walker was involved in but also other prostitutes as well.

⁶⁴ For further discussion of the Magdalen Hospitals in London and Dublin see *D. T. Andrew, Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989); S. Lloyd, 'Pleasure's Golden Bait: Prostitution, Poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in Eighteenth Century London', *History Workshop Journal*, No.41 (1996), pp.50-70; M. O'Dowd, *A History of Women in Ireland, 1500-1800* (Hallow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005).

⁶⁵ M. Clayton, 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker: Prostitute and Pickpocket', *The London Journal*, Vol.33, No.1 (2008), pp.3-19, p.8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.15.

Charlotte Walker was a frequent offender and was arrested approximately thirty times in the last three decades of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ Out of these thirty, she was tried only twelve times at the Old Bailey, see appendix 2 for details of trials, and only convicted during the twelfth trial. Through an examination of Charlotte's criminal activity and trials, using the Old Bailey and Mary Clayton's 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker, Prostitute and Pickpocket', it is possible to conclude that important changes were occurring within the criminal justice system in the late eighteenth century. As Clayton has suggested, escaping conviction on so many occasions was only possible because until the 1790s no criminal register existed. Only in 1791 did a Criminal Register come into existence and begun documenting each trial and conviction in order to distinguish between new and frequent offenders.⁶⁸ Her crimes were evenly spread throughout the three decades and therefore she never became a 'notorious' criminal.⁶⁹ It is also important to note that there was a rule in the early eighteenth century that prevented 'evidence of a defendant's bad character or former crimes from being introduced by the prosecution'.⁷⁰ This meant that frequent offenders, such as Walker, faced punishment as first-time offenders rather than as the common criminals they were.⁷¹ The Criminal Register stopped this practice. On the 15th January 1800, Charlotte Walker, now fifty years old, received the death sentence for her final crime of pickpocketing a Mr John Taylor.⁷² However, further investigation by Mary Clayton found that Walker escaped death and instead was transported to Australia for life.⁷³

⁶⁷ M. Clayton, 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker', p.3.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.10, 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.10.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.7.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.7.

⁷² Case of Charlotte Walker tried for pickpocketing (t18000115-80), convicted 15th January 1800, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁷³ M. Clayton, 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker', p.15.

It is extremely interesting to uncover the ways in which Walker escaped conviction on so many occasions. On 15th September 1790, Walker faced trial for pickpocketing Mr Joseph Visher.⁷⁴ According to Visher, a porter for the East India Company, he became lost one night walking back from one of his comrade's houses and ended up agreeing to let Walker guide him home. Instead of doing so, Walker took the prosecutor to her lodgings, where he fell asleep and upon waking found that his belongings, including a silver watch and plated shoe buckles, were missing. In her defence, Walker stated that she had been at an acquaintance's for much of the evening, only returning home in the early hours of the morning to find a man asleep on the bed. Walker testified that it was not she who had brought him there but that other girls had access to her apartment as there was no lock on the door. Walker was found not guilty but the court warned her to 'be very cautious how you come here again'.⁷⁵ Charlotte, on this occasion, and four times previously, was tried before Mr Recorder and therefore it is interesting that the Judge failed to convict her. It is even more interesting to note that on 14th February 1798 Walker was tried for grand larceny before Mr Recorder for a sixth time but escaped conviction.⁷⁶ The eight-year gap may have caused the Judge to forget Walker, however, it is unlikely that after meeting each other six times in total that the Judge would fail to recognise the defendant. It is interesting that Mr Recorder was the only Judge to have had so many run-ins with Walker, yet, Mr Justice Heath, the Judge to finally convict her in 1800 had had no prior contact with the defendant.⁷⁷ Mary Clayton has suggested a number of possible reasons how Charlotte

⁷⁴ Case of Charlotte Walker tried for pickpocketing (t17900915-26), acquitted 15th September 1790, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Case of Charlotte Walker tried for grand larceny (t17980214-45), acquitted 14th February 1798, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁷⁷ Case of Charlotte Walker tried for pickpocketing (t18000115-80), convicted 15th January 1800, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

escaped conviction for so long including: the fact that she usually stole money which was 'hard to identify', she had 'several lines of defence' making her 'prosecutors out to be drunks' and found ways to refute evidence against her.⁷⁸ Charlotte Walker was extremely lucky to have escaped conviction for such a long period of time, but other women were not so lucky.

The case of Hannah Rossiter exhibits the potential uncompromising severity of the law. On 4th December 1741, Rossiter was convicted for grand larceny and sentenced to seven years transportation.⁷⁹ Rossiter, like Walker, made her living through prostitution and theft. It is interesting to note that Rossiter was accused of stealing less than Charlotte Walker had been on several occasions, yet it was Rossiter's first offence and she received an extremely harsh punishment. Rossiter's case, however, was different to that of Walker's in that she failed to provide any substantial evidence or witnesses to testify on her behalf and such is why she was found guilty.⁸⁰

Another case in which the law can be viewed as being particularly harsh is that of Martha Stracey tried on 16th January 1745. Stracey was indicted for 'assaulting William Humphreys on the highway, putting him in fear, and taking from him one guinea' and for such received the death sentence.⁸¹ Highway robberies interfered with 'the freedom to travel' and thus is why they were taken very seriously by the court.⁸² The Ordinary of

⁷⁸ M. Clayton, 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker', p.10 & 13.

⁷⁹ Case of Hannah Rossiter tried for grand larceny (t17411204-55), convicted 14th December 1741, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16; Old Bailey Proceedings punishment summary, John Scot, 4th December 1741 (s17411204-1), *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁸⁰ Case of Hannah Rossiter tried for grand larceny (t17411204-55), convicted 14th December 1741, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁸¹ Case of Martha Stracey tried for highway robbery (t17450116-6), convicted 16th January 1745, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁸² C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey', *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

Newgate's (James Guthrie), account of the 'behaviour, confession and dying words' of Stracey and others executed at Tyburn on 15th March 1744 gives us personal information about Stracey that the court proceedings fail to do.⁸³ Guthrie talks of how Stracey fell into whoredom, becoming 'known to all the constables' in her area.⁸⁴ Apparently she was repeatedly warned to reform herself, presumably by the constables with whom she was so well acquainted, however, she failed to do so and instead 'turn'd common' acquainting herself with 'gangs of whores and thieves' who aided her eventual 'fatal catastrophe'.⁸⁵ Martha admitted to having committed the crime, in addition to other previous robberies for which she escaped trial and to having been a common streetwalker. Just like Rossiter, for Stracey, this was her first time being brought to trial at the Old Bailey. Stracey also failed to give a substantial amount of evidence pertaining to her innocence and such is why she was convicted.

The case of Mary Blewit alias Dickenson alias Bowler was also one for which the punishment was particularly severe. It is interesting to note that women often used pseudonyms when questioned by the authorities in an attempt to disguise their real identity. Such is the case here as the court records show that Mary was known by three surnames. Blewit was indicted for stealing goods worth less than one shilling from a Mr Edward Hartrey on 11th July 1726. The prisoner was said to have taken Hartrey to a brothel in King Head's Court on Shoe Lane where she examined his breeches and robbed him.⁸⁶ After accusing Blewit of theft, her bullies beat Hartrey but this did not prevent him from

⁸³ Ordinary of Newgate's Account of the Behaviour, Confession and Dying Words of the Malefactors Who Were Executed at Tyburn on Friday 15 March 1744 (OA17450315), *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12/01/16.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Case of Mary Blewit alias Dickenson alias Bowler tried for theft (t17260711-34), convicted 11th July 1726, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16.

taking her to court, showing that the use of bullies was not always effective.⁸⁷ Hartrey had a watchman vouch for him and Blewit herself presented a number of witnesses who 'depos'd' that the prosecutor has also accused them of stealing from him inferring that he was unsure who had robbed him.⁸⁸ Blewit was sentenced to transportation for stealing less than one shilling's worth of goods, however, as the use of pseudonyms suggests, she had committed criminal offences in the past and as such was treated as a recurring criminal despite the absence of a Criminal Register at this time.⁸⁹

All of the above show the inconsistencies regarding magistrates' decisions on cases tried at the Old Bailey throughout the eighteenth century.

Dan Cruikshank has suggested that there was not only a link between prostitution and theft but also one between prostitution and 'premeditated, organised and very violent street crime' and the case of Ann Duck fits this theory effectively.⁹⁰ According to the Ordinary of Newgate's account, Ann Duck started out as a servant in a bawdy house, later 'walking the streets', insinuating a link to prostitution, before becoming a pickpocket and violent robber.⁹¹ According to the *Daily Post*, Ann Duck was a well-known 'night-walker' in London and was tried numerous times at the Old Bailey for violent theft.⁹² Duck was always acquitted and only finally convicted on 17th October 1744 and 'deservedly condemn'd' to death.⁹³ However, an extract from the *Daily Post* on 10th September 1743 suggests that

⁸⁷ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.473.

⁸⁸ Case of Mary Blewit alias Dickenson alias Bowler tried for theft (t17260711-34), convicted 11th July 1726.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, p.479.

⁹¹ Ordinary of Newgate's Account of the Behaviour, Confession and Dying Words of the Malefactors Who Were Executed at Tyburn on Wednesday 7th November 1744 (OA17441107), *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org].

⁹² *Daily Post* (London), 10th September 1743, issue 7467, *BN* [http://find.galegroup.com/bncn], accessed 02/07/15.

⁹³ Case of Ann Duck tried for violent theft on four different occasions, finally convicted 17th October 1744, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16; Ordinary of Newgate's Account of the Behaviour, Confession

Duck had received a sentence before. The journalist has written that Ann was ‘committed to Newgate for ... robbing Mr Thomas Grefham/Gresham... in one of the houses of ill repute in Chick-Lane’.⁹⁴ The case to which the article would have been referring is that of 7th September 1743 where Duck was on trial for violently robbing Thomas Greetham in a ‘dwelling-house’, however, the Old Bailey proceeding states that Duck was acquitted on the grounds that the prosecutor failed to turn up to trial.⁹⁵ Duck would have been held at Newgate awaiting her trial, as all criminals in the period were, however, the journalist appears to insinuate that such was her punishment.⁹⁶ This can be linked to the point made earlier that it was common for prostitutes to be acquitted on the count of them having faced enough punishment by being held at Newgate prior to their trial. This case is just one example showing how lucky prostitutes engaging in criminal activities could be in escaping conviction on so many occasions.

The case of Ms Susannah Hill is an extremely interesting and one for which the court proceedings cannot be found in Old Bailey records. According to her ‘memoirs’ written in ‘Modern Propensities or an Essay in the Art of Strangling’, a pamphlet published at the end of the eighteenth century, Hill was born in ‘Somersetshire’ but travelled to London in order to find her fiancé who had not returned home after taking a trip there. After eventually finding him and nothing more becoming of their relationship, Hill was in desperate need of

and Dying Words of the Malefactors Who Were Executed at Tyburn on Wednesday 7th November 1744 (OA17441107), *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16.

⁹⁴ *Daily Post* (London), 10th September 1743, issue 7467, *BN* [http://find.galegroup.com/bncn], accessed 2nd July 2015.

⁹⁵ Case of Ann Duck tried for violent theft (t17430907-70), acquitted 7th September 1743, *OBP* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16.

⁹⁶ C. Emsley, T. Hitchcock & R. Shoemaker, ‘Punishments at the Old Bailey’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 14/01/16.

money and was compelled into prostitution.⁹⁷ Hill lived in Vine Street, an area known for prostitution, and always left her door open with an inviting sign placed upon it in order to draw customers in. On 2nd September 1791 a Mr Francis Kotzwarra entered her lodgings and the two engaged in a number of indecent acts before Kotzwarra asked her to participate in two very unconventional acts, one which resulted in her being tried at the Old Bailey. The first was that she was asked to 'cut off (his) means of generation' to which she refused.⁹⁸ The second being to hang him for five minutes. Hill agreed to this but after the five minutes was up she cut him down and realised that he was dead. Despite obvious evidence that she had committed manslaughter, Hill was discharged and the Judge instructed the reporter to destroy his notes in the hope of deterring others from attempting to carry out similar acts.⁹⁹ This is why the case does not exist in Old Bailey records. The case did not remain concealed for long as soon after the trial, an anonymous pamphlet was distributed which documented the events in addition to information about Susannah Hill's private life.¹⁰⁰ This case was rare in that the law took a softer approach towards prostitution and to a certain extent, protected Hill, in that she escaped possible conviction for manslaughter.

It was not until the nineteenth century that common prostitutes, particularly streetwalkers, came under significant threat of the law. Legislation introduced during the eighteenth century was too ambiguous, especially as prostitutes had to be regarded as disorderly to be arrested. If a prostitute was arrested, she was rarely taken to trial and if she was, rarely received a sentence. The connection between common prostitution and theft

⁹⁷ 'Modern Propensities or an Essay on the Art of Strangling & c. Illustrated with Several Anecdotes. With memoirs of Susannah Hill and a Summary of Her Trial at the Old Bailey on Friday, September 16, 1791, on the Charge of Her Hanging Francis Kotzwarra, At Her Lodgings in Vine Street on September 2', *ECCO* [<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>] (London: printed for the author and sold by J. Dawson, 1791), p.31/35/37; D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, pp.505, 508.

⁹⁸ 'Modern Propensities or an Essay on the Art of Strangling', pp. 43-44.

⁹⁹ D. Cruikshank, *The Secret History*, pp.505, 508.

¹⁰⁰ 'Modern Propensities or an Essay on the Art of Strangling', whole document.

was a significant one in this period and was one that brought prostitutes into the clutches of the law. A number of court cases are available which point to this conclusion. The law was not only inadequate in its approach towards brothel-keeping but also to that of common prostitution. The lack of a Criminal Register until later in the century meant that there was an inability to identify past and frequent criminals and as such repeat offenders were able to serve their sentences and return to their criminal activities. Additionally, the law was inconsistent in its conviction of thieving prostitutes in that they received a wide array of sentences. Overall, the visibility of streetwalking is what people and the law objected to and such is why a number of attempts were made to restrict the practice. This can be contrasted to the way higher-class prostitutes were viewed and treated in eighteenth-century society.

Chapter 3: High-Class Prostitution

The life of a courtesan in the eighteenth century was one of wealth, glamour and luxury.

In contrast to the state of low prostitution that streetwalkers and inhabitants of common bawdy houses experienced, courtesans lived glamorously. By examining the memoirs of famous eighteenth-century courtesans and high-class prostitutes, we are able to generate a picture of how life for women at both the top and bottom of the trade differed. Such memoirs give significant insight into the luxurious lifestyle of an elite prostitute and the acquisition of this status. Using such sources, however, can also be problematic. Primarily, as Laura J. Rosenthal has noted, not all narratives which fit into the genre of 'memoirs' truly represent the 'prostitute's perspective'.¹⁰¹ There are a number of 'memoirs' available which were not actually written by the prostitute herself.¹⁰² Few court records concerning these women exist and a number of factors can account for this, including discretion, powerful acquaintances and corruption. Memoirs, whether written by the prostitute herself or others, are extremely important in enabling historians to paint a picture of the lives of such women, especially with the absence of legal records. It was relatively uncommon for courtesans to write memoirs as their success rested on their ability to be discrete. Unlike common prostitutes that conducted their work in dark alleys and vulgar disorderly houses in a very indiscreet manner, the whore of higher class 'came and went unseen'.¹⁰³ That is, unless a man wished to make a show of his association with her, as to take the most desired prostitute of the day into keeping, was an assertion of a 'man's wealth, taste and virility'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ L. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives*, p.xi.

¹⁰² L. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives*, p.x.

¹⁰³ Mary Lyons, *The Memoirs of Mrs Leeson*, p.xii.

¹⁰⁴ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.27.

The position of a courtesan was different to that of a common prostitute in that she had greater control over her destiny. She was both a high-class prostitute and a mistress but neither term is sufficient to describe her. As Barbara White has stated, a courtesan undertook similar activities to a high-class prostitute, particularly in the exchange of sex for money or luxuries, however, she had much more say over the type of lovers she took. Unlike high-class prostitutes, a courtesan was usually free from the control of a bawd and hence possessed more independence. Just like a mistress, the courtesan 'offered sophisticated companionship', however, it was common for her to have a number of 'temporary husbands' as opposed to the one protector a mistress possessed.¹⁰⁵ However, for the purpose of this study, courtesans and high-class prostitutes will be considered collectively as women occupying the most elite tier of the trade.

Sally Salisbury was the first prostitute to receive the title 'Toast of the Town' in the eighteenth century, and like the others who came after her, was born into a poor family.¹⁰⁶ Fergus Linnane has noted how she was 'seduced, poxed, cured... and re-virginised' all by the age of fourteen.¹⁰⁷ From this age she worked for Mother Wiseborne, abbess of an exclusive establishment in Covent Garden, where she access to a number of wealthy clients. For a while, she was mistress to Colonel Francis Charteris, however, he left her probably as a result of her explosive temper.¹⁰⁸ Following a riot at Wisebourne's establishment in 1713, Salisbury's short temper landed her in Newgate. She remained there for only a short time as Judge Blagney, who Linnane suggests was very fond of her, ordered her release.¹⁰⁹ This incident exhibits how beneficial it was for women such as Salisbury to have friends, or

¹⁰⁵ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.27; Mary Lyons, *The Memoirs of Mrs Leeson*, p.xiii.

¹⁰⁶ F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.125.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.126.

possibly lovers, in high places to bail them out when they found themselves in trouble. However, at last Salisbury's temper landed her in a dilemma that she, nor her acquaintances, could get her out of - she stabbed her client John Finch and returned to Newgate. Despite Finch's pleas to release her, she remained there and died due to jail fever. Cesar de Saussure noted in 1723 that not only Finch stood by Salisbury but other 'lovers... crowded into the prison, presenting her with every comfort and luxury possible.'¹¹⁰ Despite her already acquired fame, this incident, and her resulting death, thrust her further into the limelight. Betsy Careless filled Sally Salisbury's place as 'Premier Toast' temporarily until her death in 1739, when Fanny Murray took her position.¹¹¹

The 'memoirs' of such women must be treated with care. In this case, Salisbury's 'memoirs' were pieced together by Captain Charles Walker, who gathered narratives of her life from acquaintances responding to his advertisements in newspapers.¹¹² The implication of collecting information in such a way is that certain aspects of her life are likely to have been neglected in favour of anecdotes that are more colourful. The extent of her fame, however, need not be contended, as her every move was followed and documented in the magazines and newspapers of the time and as such we are able to confirm that the fascination with her was genuine. This was also the case for other eighteenth-century courtesans of her status.¹¹³

The most elite courtesans were those who were not only mesmerising in appearance but also intelligent, witty and civilised in company. Such qualities were necessary as they were often part of the same class and lived in a similar manner to the elite men who bought

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp.128-129.

¹¹¹ L. J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*, p.101; F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.129.

¹¹² L. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives*, p.x.

¹¹³ F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.125.

their services.¹¹⁴ In the case of Fanny Murray, despite being considered as part of the upper class, respectful women could not associate themselves with her except in the realm of fashion, where they imitated her style.¹¹⁵ Fanny's male admirers could buy mezzotints and small portraits of her.¹¹⁶ Women lusted after her dress, whilst men lusted after her looks, however, she still remained just outside respectable society.

The life of the courtesan Fanny Murray, like many others, is one of 'rags-to-riches'.¹¹⁷ Born into a musician's family in Bath in 1729, Barbara White has inferred that it is possible her family who had hit hard times acknowledged Murray's entrance into prostitution. White has stated that there is much evidence to suggest that 'middle-class fathers in straitened circumstances acknowledged that even their daughters might "have to turn out whores" to help support the family' and it is likely that this was true for Murray.¹¹⁸ Her 'memoirs' were written by an anonymous author and White has suggested that 'Murray would not have approved of this biography' as even at her height of fame she preferred to keep her personal life personal.¹¹⁹ Upon moving to London in 1744, her 'memoirs' suggest that she started out as a low prostitute under the control of a coercive bawd and was permitted to keep only sixpence a week of her earnings.¹²⁰ Murray was extremely fortunate in that she obtained a mention in *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies* as a 'new face' and as such, her journey to becoming an elite courtesan began.¹²¹ *Harris's List*, recording a number of whores in London, began publication in the 1740s and soon roughly 8,000 copies of each

¹¹⁴ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, pp.26-27.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.27.

¹¹⁶ Ibid; Mezzotint - 'a print made from an engraved copper or steel plate', definition from *Oxford Dictionaries* [<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>].

¹¹⁷ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.13.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.43.

¹¹⁹ F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.129; B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.13.

¹²⁰ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, pp.70-71.

¹²¹ L. J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*, p.104.

issue were being sold. Inclusion in *Harris's List* greatly improved the status of many prostitutes by launching them into 'fame and fortune'.¹²² Harris described Murray as 'a fine Brown Girl rising nineteen years next Season... Fit for High Keeping with a Jew Merchant.'¹²³ Inclusion in this list was undoubtedly the making of Murray's career as she was able to raise her prices and gained access to the 'whore's club' (a type of trade union for prostitutes included in the list) and as such access to a network of wealthy clients.¹²⁴

'Courtesans lived in an uncertain world...where they might be abandoned at any moment in favour of a more desirable toast of the town'.¹²⁵ Murray was extremely lucky in that she managed to maintain keeper Sir Richard Atkins, sixth Baronet of Clapham, for almost eight years, despite her frequent unfaithfulness and explosive temper. White has suggested that the end to this relationship coincided with the start of Murray's decline as the most lusted-after courtesan of the age.¹²⁶ By this time (1754), Murray was twenty-five, a mature age for a courtesan in London, but she managed to retain the captivation of the nation for a while longer. However, fresh-faced courtesans were threatening Murray's sovereignty as the most elite prostitute of the age, her closest rival being the much younger Kitty Fisher.¹²⁷ Without the protection of Atkins, Murray had to try her hand at gaining a new benefactor. She petitioned Lord Spencer, the son of her original seducer, who agreed to support her financially if she agreed to reform and accept an arranged marriage.¹²⁸ She married David Ross, 'an established actor on Drury Lane stage', in 1756. This marked a turning point in

¹²² F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, pp.85-86.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p.131.

¹²⁴ L. J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*, p.104; F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.86.

¹²⁵ B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.106.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.107, 121, 141, 157.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.126, 157.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.167-168.

Murray's life as she severed all ties with her former trade and transformed herself into a respectful woman.¹²⁹

Kitty Fisher's life, like Murray's, exhibited a rags-to-riches style of mobility. Fisher was the daughter of a tradesman and worked her way up the prostitute scale until she reached Murray's level as an elite courtesan.¹³⁰ Fisher's time came as Murray's supremacy was coming to an end and in Murray's place, she became the fashion icon of the day.¹³¹ Fisher was much less private than Murray and chose to manipulate the media in order to gain herself more attention. It is debated as to whether her suffering an equestrian accident in March 1759 was merely an accident or in fact a publicity stunt. Fisher was 'an accomplished equestrian' so when she fell from her horse whilst riding in St. James's Park, she gained a lot of media attention, with numerous articles linking her accident to the concept of the 'fallen woman'.¹³² Though Murray was less melodramatic in her attention-seeking methods, it should be noted that she used alternative methods in order to gain publicity. On one occasion, Murray ate a twenty-pound note given to her by Atkins between two pieces of bread and butter. She had obviously seen his gift as too modest and wanted to prove that such amount of money was insufficient. Fisher almost a decade later went one-step further by doing the same with a one-hundred pound note, as a way to exhibit her final ascendancy over Murray.¹³³ As with all courtesans of the day, Fisher had extravagant taste. Fergus Linnane has noted how she demanded 'impossible presents' from her

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.178.

¹³⁰ L. J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*, p.8.

¹³¹ L. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives*, p.x.

¹³² B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.127.

¹³³ Ibid, pp.118-119.

protectors, 'ate fresh strawberries in the depths of winter' and 'for a time slept only with members of the House of Lords.'¹³⁴

Phebe Phillips was another prostitute who experienced upward mobility from a family facing financial ruin to a kept mistress in the later eighteenth century. Phillips was seduced, taken to London and put her up in 'very genteel apartments near St. James's'.¹³⁵ She was wise enough to realise what the man's intentions were but decided to submit herself to him in the hope of rescuing her father from his financial predicament, however, this backfired when her parents disowned her. Unlike Fanny Murray, for whom it can be suggested that her family accepted her entrance into prostitution due to economic need, Phillips's parents did not support her fall.¹³⁶ She was kept in the 'upmost splendor', however, she felt trapped and chose to run away to Calais with another man.¹³⁷ Removed from the comfort of a rich keeper, Phillips soon found herself destitute, returning to London and becoming a 'common street-walker'.¹³⁸ After gaining work for a couple of years in the house of the bawd Mrs J-, Phillips moved to a house 'with a back door that opened into a church yard' where she received clients in a very private manner.¹³⁹ Phillips did not permit men under the age of 40 into her house as she believed them to be indiscreet. One of her most notable clients was in the 'commission of the peace' and she noted him as having possessed an uncompromising attitude towards streetwalkers.¹⁴⁰ This infers that he considered high-class prostitution as more acceptable than that of common prostitution for

¹³⁴ F. Linnane, *London the Wicked City*, p.65.

¹³⁵ P. Phillips, 'Authentic Memoirs of Phebe Phillips; Otherwise Maria Maitland; Well Known in the Vicinity of Covent Garden. Written by Herself', London (1799), *ECCO*, accessed 21/03/16, CW100850370 [<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>], pp.6-8.

¹³⁶ P. Phillips, 'Authentic Memoirs of Phebe Phillips', p.14; B. White, *Queen of the Courtesans*, p.43.

¹³⁷ P. Phillips, 'Authentic Memoirs of Phebe Phillips', pp.14, 24.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p.25.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p.30.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.32.

which there had been numerous attempts at regulation throughout the period.¹⁴¹ This supports the idea explored at the start of this chapter that prostitutes of a higher class were different to that of their underprivileged counterparts not only in relation to their lavish lifestyles but also in the way they were viewed by society. Though not as famous a prostitute as the likes of Salisbury and Murray - in that she was depicted to a lesser degree or even at all in popular culture - Phillips's memoirs are extremely useful in aiding an understanding of how diverse the life of a high-class prostitute could be. Phillips experienced two types of upward mobility from that of a destitute girl to woman in high keeping and later from a common streetwalker to high-class prostitute. Like other women who fit the category of high-class prostitutes, Phillips chose to retire, whereas, women of a lesser position rarely had such an opportunity, leaving the trade only upon release from their bawd or death.

The Dublin equivalent of the women discussed above was Peg Plunkett alias Mrs Leeson. Adhering to the common theme, Plunkett experienced a level of social mobility, starting out as the daughter of an Irish landowner, becoming a kept mistress to a number of protectors, eventually reaching the status of a courtesan.¹⁴² As opposed to Fanny Murray, who would have disapproved of the writing of her memoirs, Plunkett wrote hers herself with a specific intention in mind. She published her memoirs in three volumes from 1795 to 1797 as a means of threatening previous companions into paying their debts. Such men were given the opportunity to pay up before the next volume was published and as such have their names removed.¹⁴³ Though written by herself, one still needs to retain caution

¹⁴¹ F. Dabhoiwala, 'The Pattern of Sexual Immorality in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century London', p.87.

¹⁴² J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, preface, p.4; D. Fleming, 'Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Ireland', p.3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p.4.

when reading such material as all prostitutes tended to leave out less entertaining events.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, we do not gain an insight into every aspect of a high-class prostitute's life. Plunkett represents another example of a woman seduced by a wealthy man only to fall into prostitution. Julie Peakman expresses how prostitutes like Peg rarely chose to sell themselves but that they often did so out of necessity. Peakman infers that once they had been seduced and their virginity taken, such women had little choice but to turn to the trade.¹⁴⁵ Peg had a number of protectors and found herself deserted by many of them on a number of occasions. One keeper, Mr Leeson (from whom Peg took her working title 'Mrs Leeson'), abandoned her as a result of her numerous infidelities. She, like many other prostitutes of her status, engaged in sexual relations with men other than her protector. It was illegal to have numerous husbands in the eighteenth century, however, because such women were usually unmarried, they could not be criminalised for having more than one lover.¹⁴⁶ Peakman has suggested that Peg went from being a kept woman to a courtesan in approximately 1783, when she would have been almost forty years old. Barbara White, whilst referring to Fanny Murray, has suggested that twenty-five was a mature age for a courtesan in London, however, it should be noted that the situation could have been different in Dublin.¹⁴⁷ Whilst many such women chose to retire from prostitution altogether once they grew tired of relying on wealthy protectors or lost their looks, Peg chose to retain involvement in the trade by establishing her own brothel in the mid-1770s.¹⁴⁸ Her life as a bawd has already been touched upon in chapter one.

¹⁴⁴ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, preface; D. Fleming, 'Public Attitudes to Prostitution', p.3.

¹⁴⁵ J. Peakman, *Peg Plunkett*, pp.22, 39.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.48.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.126.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.69.

The life of an elite prostitute has been examined in order to gain a greater insight into the differing levels of prostitution that existed in the eighteenth century. Memoirs of such women have enabled this exploration and are vital to our understanding of the lifestyles they lived, particularly with the absence of court records. Elite prostitutes were less likely to engage in criminal activities and often found themselves outside both the clutches and interests of the law. These women were not only different to common prostitutes in regard to discretion but also the clients they entertained, their civilised conduct and luxurious way of life. It is important to remember, however, that even the elitist of prostitutes experienced the lowest status of prostitution at some point in their lives. The considered memoirs all infer a rag-to-riches style upward mobility that separated them from their modest counterparts. Only a small proportion of women were fortunate enough to attain the status of an elite prostitute, with much of the population of whores experiencing particularly dire circumstances. In contrasting Fanny Murray with Peg Plunkett we are able to suggest how the trades could differ in two different locations, particularly with regard to the age at which prostitutes experienced their height of fame. In both cities, however, elite prostitutes were treated with particular ambiguity by the law and to a certain extent were tolerated by society, setting them apart from both bawds and common whores.

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that prostitution in the eighteenth century was a considerably diverse trade, particularly concerning the treatment of and interest in bawds, common prostitutes and courtesans by the law and wider society. By looking at these three main aspects of prostitution we have been able to contrast the lives of women facilitating prostitution with those who fell victim to the trade and explore the degree of social mobility that was available to such women.

The profession of keeping a brothel has been analysed as the only element of prostitution that was illegal in the eighteenth century. Though this aspect was criminalised, the law remained relatively ambivalent towards it. The implementation of laws suggested an uncompromising attitude on behalf of the government towards brothel-keeping, however, in practice such was not the case. London and Dublin both lacked a satisfactory police force necessary to implement the law on a large scale. Additionally, the belief in the need for an outlet for male sexual tension played an important role in the inefficiency of the law in dealing with the vice. There was a fear that without brothels, which offered opportunities to relieve such tension, that men would corrupt innocent women. This aspect of the trade was viewed as the least desirable of the three discussed and was the element upon which the law focused the most.

Common prostitutes were the next group upon which aspects of the legal system directed their attention. Their overtly indiscrete manner was what led to attempts to restrict their practices. However, much like that of keeping a brothel, the law was generally ambiguous in its dealing with the problem. In the eighteenth century, a woman had to be

considered 'disorderly', or engage in criminal activities, to come within the reach of the law. The engagement of common prostitutes in theft is visible in a number of court records for the period, with some women featuring on more than one occasion in Old Bailey records. Looking at court records, we are also able to document inconsistencies within the legal system at the time concerning the handing out of various sentences for similar crimes. Other women were lucky enough to transcend this low position of prostitution and rise to the top of their trade.

An exploration of high-class prostitution has enabled a comparison of the upper and lower tiers of the trade. Elite prostitutes were the opposites of common whores both socially and economically. These women, positioned at the top of the profession, were the companions of powerful men and the leaders of fashion. Whores of this class posed the least amount of threat to society in eighteenth-century London and Dublin and as such, the attitude of the legal system towards them was one of indifference and passivity. It is interesting to note how the degree of legal action taken towards all three groups of women in this period depended, to an extent, on the perceived danger they posed to law and order.

As previously mentioned, a number of works are available documenting the trade in London, however, Dublin, as a city where the trade was also rife, has been largely neglected. Though it does not necessarily claim to fill a void in the existing literature, this work has strived to compare the industry of prostitution in London and Dublin in order to gain a wider perspective of prostitution in the eighteenth century with the relative absence of literature on vice in the two cities.

Court records and memoirs in particular have been of vital importance to the writing of this dissertation as they enable access into the lives of women involved in the trade. Court records have provided a necessary insight into the experiences of common prostitutes in particular, whilst memoirs have enabled a greater understanding of the experiences of more elite prostitutes for which, there is lack of legal documents.

Overall, following a consideration into all of the above, it is fair to conclude that prostitution in the eighteenth century was a diverse industry in which all female participants, whether a bawd or whore, experienced the trade differently, be that as a result of legal or social initiatives and attitudes. In general, the law remained relatively inadequate in its attempts to regulate certain aspects of the trade. It was not until the nineteenth century that any serious attempts were made to rid the legal system of ambiguities that had hindered the control of prostitution in eighteenth-century London and Dublin.

Appendices

Appendix 1: William Hogarth, 'A Harlot's Progress'



Source: William Hogarth, 'A Harlot's Progress' (1732), *Royal Collection Trust* [<https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/811512/a-harlots-progress>], accessed 23/03/16.

Appendix 2: Crimes of Charlotte Walker Tried at the Old Bailey 1777-1800

Trial Date	Goods Stolen	Trial Result	Tried Before
3 rd December 1777	½ guinea in money	Evidence of trial not reported. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
12 th January 1780	Leather book worth 2 shillings and twenty pound note	Claimed prosecutor was drunk. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
25 th April 1781	Pocket book worth 1 shilling, 8.5 guineas and 8 shillings	Claimed the prosecutor was drunk. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
20 th October 1784	4 guineas	Claimed prosecutor wanted 4 guineas to drop prosecution. Acquitted	Lord Loughborough
21 st February 1787	2 guineas	Evidence of trial not reported. Acquitted	Mr Justice Grose
12 th September 1787	A crown piece and 8s 6d	Evidence of trial not reported. Acquitted	Mr Justice Grose
2 nd April 1788	Silver watch and 7 guineas	Evidence of trial not reported. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
10 th September 1788	Silver watch	Evidence of trial not reported. Acquitted	Mr Baron Hotham
15 th September 1790	Silver watch, 3 guilt seals, metal key, ½ guinea and a man's hat and shoe buckles	Claimed the prosecutor was asleep on her bed when she arrived home that night. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
15 th December 1792	2 guineas	Claimed that if she had robbed him she would not have stayed put. Acquitted	Lord Loughborough
14 th February 1798	3s	Claimed that prosecutor was drunk. Acquitted	Mr Recorder
15 th January 1800	Silver watch, chain, seal and key	Claimed watch had been given to her as assurance of payment of services in morning. Guilty – death (later altered to transportation)	Mr Justice Heath

Source: 'Charlotte Walker', *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* [www.oldbaileyonline.org], accessed 12 January 2016; M. Clayton, 'The Life and Crimes of Charlotte Walker: Prostitute and Pickpocket', *The London Journal*, Vol.33, No.1 (2008), pp. 3-19, pp.4-5.

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Case of Margaret Cassady tried for grand larceny (t17660702-12), acquitted 2nd July 1766, *OBP*, accessed 20/06/15.

Case of Margaret Clap tried for keeping a brothel, convicted 11th July 1726, *OBP*, accessed 20/06/15.

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