

= Jack Sheppard =

Jack Sheppard ( 4 March 1702 ? 16 November 1724 ) was a notorious English thief and gaol breaker of early 18th century London . Born into a poor family , he was apprenticed as a carpenter but took to theft and burglary in 1723 , with little more than a year of his training to complete . He was arrested and imprisoned five times in 1724 but escaped four times from prison , making him a notorious public figure , and wildly popular with the poorer classes . Ultimately , he was caught , convicted , and hanged at Tyburn , ending his brief criminal career after less than two years . The inability of the notorious " Thief Taker General " Jonathan Wild to control Sheppard , and injuries suffered by Wild at the hands of Sheppard 's colleague , Joseph " Blueskin " Blake , led to Wild 's downfall .

Sheppard was as renowned for his attempts to escape from prison as he was for his crimes . An autobiographical " Narrative " , thought to have been ghostwritten by Daniel Defoe , was sold at his execution , quickly followed by popular plays . The character of Macheath in John Gay 's *The Beggar 's Opera* ( 1728 ) was based on Sheppard , keeping him in the limelight for over 100 years . He returned to the public consciousness around 1840 , when William Harrison Ainsworth wrote a novel entitled *Jack Sheppard* , with illustrations by George Cruikshank . The popularity of his tale , and the fear that others would be drawn to emulate his behaviour , led the authorities to refuse to license any plays in London with " Jack Sheppard " in the title for forty years .

= = Early life = =

Sheppard was born in White 's Row , in London 's Spitalfields . He was baptised on 5 March , the day after he was born , at St Dunstan 's , Stepney , suggesting a fear of infant mortality by his parents , perhaps because the newborn was weak or sickly . His parents named him after an older brother , John , who had died before his birth . In life , he was better known as Jack , or even " Gentleman Jack " or " Jack the Lad " . He had a second brother , Thomas , and a younger sister , Mary . Their father , a carpenter , died while Sheppard was young , and his sister died two years later .

Unable to support her family without her husband 's income , Jack 's mother sent him to Mr Garrett 's School , a workhouse near St Helen 's Bishopsgate , when he was six years old . Sheppard was sent out as a parish apprentice to a cane chair maker , taking a settlement of 20 shillings , but his new master soon died . He was sent out to a second cane chair maker , but Sheppard was treated badly . Finally , when Sheppard was 10 , he went to work as a shop boy for William Kneebone , a wool draper with a shop on the Strand . Sheppard 's mother had been working for Kneebone since her husband 's death . Kneebone taught Sheppard to read and write and apprenticed him to a carpenter , Owen Wood , in Wych Street , off Drury Lane in Covent Garden . Sheppard signed his seven year indenture on 2 April 1717 .

By 1722 , Sheppard was showing great promise as a carpenter . Aged 20 , he was a small man , only 5 ' 4 " ( 1 @ 63 m ) and lightly built , but deceptively strong . He had a pale face with large , dark eyes , a wide mouth and a quick smile . Despite a slight stutter , his wit made him popular in the taverns of Drury Lane . He served five unblemished years of his apprenticeship but then began to be led into crime .

Joseph Hayne , a button moulder who owned a shop nearby , also ran a tavern named the Black Lion off Drury Lane , which he encouraged the local apprentices to frequent . The Black Lion was visited by criminals such as Joseph " Blueskin " Blake , Sheppard 's future partner in crime , and self proclaimed " Thief Taker General " Jonathan Wild , secretly the linchpin of a criminal empire across London and later Sheppard 's implacable enemy .

According to Sheppard 's autobiography , he had been an innocent until going to Hayne 's tavern , but there began an attachment to strong drink and the affections of Elizabeth Lyon , a prostitute also known as Edgeworth Bess ( or Edgeworth Bess ) from her place of birth at Edgeworth in Middlesex . In his *History* , Defoe records that Bess was " a main lodestone in attracting of him up to this Eminence of Guilt . " Such , Sheppard claimed , was the source of his later ruin . Peter Linebaugh

offers a different view : that Sheppard 's sudden transformation was a liberation from the dull drudgery of indentured labour and that he progressed from pious servitude to self @-@ confident rebellion and Levelling .

= = Criminal career = =

Sheppard threw himself into a hedonistic whirl of drinking and whoring . Inevitably , his carpentry suffered , and he became disobedient to his master . With Lyon 's encouragement , Sheppard took to crime in order to complement his legitimate wages . His first recorded theft was in Spring 1723 , when he engaged in petty shoplifting , stealing two silver spoons while on an errand for his master to Rummer Tavern in Charing Cross . Sheppard 's misdeeds went undetected , and he moved on to larger crimes , often stealing goods from the houses where he was working . Finally , he quit the employ of his master on 2 August 1723 , with less than two years of his apprenticeship left , although he continued to work as a journeyman carpenter . He was not suspected of the crimes , and progressed to burglary , falling in with criminals in Jonathan Wild 's gang .

He moved to Fulham , living as man and wife with Lyon at Parsons Green , before moving to Piccadilly . When Lyon was arrested and imprisoned at St Giles 's Roundhouse , the beadle , a Mr Brown , refused to let Sheppard visit , so he broke in and took her away .

= = = Arrested and escaped twice = = =

Sheppard was first arrested after a burglary he committed with his brother , Tom , and his mistress , Lyon , in Clare Market on 5 February 1724 . Tom , also a carpenter , had already been convicted once for stealing tools from his master the previous autumn and burned in the hand . Tom was arrested again on 24 April 1724 . Afraid that he would be hanged this time , Tom informed on Jack , and a warrant was issued for Jack 's arrest .

Jonathan Wild was aware of Sheppard 's thefts , as Sheppard had fenced some stolen goods through one of Wild 's men , William Field . Wild asked another of his men , James Sykes ( known as " Hell and Fury " ) to challenge Sheppard to a game of skittles at Redgate 's public house near Seven Dials . Sykes betrayed Sheppard to a Mr Price , a constable from the parish of St Giles , to gather the usual £ 40 reward for giving information leading to the conviction of a felon . The magistrate , Justice Parry , had Sheppard imprisoned overnight on the top floor of St Giles 's Roundhouse pending further questioning , but Sheppard escaped within three hours by breaking through the timber ceiling and lowering himself to the ground with a rope fashioned from bedclothes . Still wearing irons , Sheppard coolly joined the crowd that had been attracted by the sounds of him breaking out . He distracted their attention by pointing to the shadows on the roof and shouting that he could see the escapee , and then swiftly departed .

On 19 May 1724 , Sheppard was arrested for a second time , caught in the act of picking a pocket in Leicester Fields ( near present @-@ day Leicester Square ) . He was detained overnight in St Ann 's Roundhouse in Soho and visited there the next day by Lyon ; she was recognised as his wife and locked in a cell with him . They appeared before Justice Walters , who sent them to the New Prison in Clerkenwell , but they escaped from their cell , known as the Newgate Ward , within a matter of days . By 25 May , Whitsun Monday , Sheppard and Lyon had filed through their manacles ; they removed a bar from the window and used their knotted bed @-@ clothes to descend to ground level . Finding themselves in the yard of the neighbouring bridewell , they clambered over the 22 @-@ foot @-@ high ( 6 @-@ 7 m ) prison gate to freedom . This feat was widely publicised , not least because Sheppard was only a small man , and Lyon was a large , buxom woman .

= = = Third arrest , trial , and third escape = = =

Sheppard 's thieving abilities were admired by Jonathan Wild . Wild demanded that Sheppard surrender his stolen goods for Wild to fence , and so take the greater profits , but Sheppard refused . He began to work with Joseph " Blueskin " Blake , and they burgled Sheppard 's former master ,

William Kneebone , on Sunday 12 July 1724 . Wild could not permit Sheppard to continue outside his control and began to seek Sheppard 's arrest . Unfortunately for Sheppard , his fence , William Field , was one of Wild 's men . After Sheppard had a brief foray with Blueskin as highwaymen on the Hampstead Road on Sunday 19 July and Monday 20 July , Field informed on Sheppard to Wild . Wild believed Lyon would know Sheppard 's whereabouts , so he plied her with drinks at a brandy shop near Temple Bar until she betrayed him . Sheppard was arrested a third time at Blueskin 's mother 's brandy shop in Rosemary Lane , east of the Tower of London ( later renamed Royal Mint Street ) , on 23 July by Wild 's henchman , Quilt Arnold .

Sheppard was imprisoned in Newgate Prison pending his trial at the next Assize of oyer and terminer . He was prosecuted on three charges of theft at the Old Bailey , but was acquitted on the first two due to lack of evidence . Kneebone , Wild and Field gave evidence against him on the third charge , the burglary of Kneebone 's house . He was convicted on 12 August , the case " being plainly prov 'd " , and sentenced to death . On Monday 31 August , the very day when the death warrant arrived from the court in Windsor setting Friday 4 September as the date for his execution , Sheppard escaped . Having loosened an iron bar in a window used when talking to visitors , he was visited by Lyon and Poll Maggott , who distracted the guards while he removed the bar . His slight build enabled him to climb through the resulting gap in the grille , and he was smuggled out of Newgate in women 's clothing that his visitors had brought him . He took a coach to Blackfriars Stairs , a boat up the River Thames to the horse ferry in Westminster , near the warehouse where he hid his stolen goods , and made good his escape .

= = = Fourth arrest and final escape = = =

By this point , Sheppard was a working class hero ( being a cockney , non @-@ violent , and handsome , and seemingly able to escape punishment for his crimes at will ) . He spent a few days out of London , visiting a friend 's family in Chipping Warden in Northamptonshire , but was soon back in town . He evaded capture by Wild and his men but was arrested again on 9 September by a posse from Newgate as he hid out on Finchley Common , and returned to the condemned cell at Newgate . His fame had increased with each escape , and he was visited in prison by the great , the good and the curious . His plans to escape in September were thwarted twice when the guards found files and other tools in his cell , and he was transferred to a strong @-@ room in Newgate known as the " Castle " , clapped in leg irons , and chained to two metal staples in the floor to prevent further escape attempts . After demonstrating to his gaolers that these measures were insufficient , by showing them how he could use a small nail to unlock the horse padlock at will , he was bound more tightly and handcuffed . In his History , Defoe reports that Sheppard made light of his predicament , joking that " I am the Sheppard , and all the Gaolers in the Town are my Flock , and I cannot stir into the Country , but they are all at my Heels Baughing after me " .

Meanwhile , " Blueskin " Blake was arrested by Wild and his men on Friday 9 October , and Tom , Jack 's brother , was transported for robbery on Saturday 10 October 1724 . New court sessions began on Wednesday 14 October , and Blueskin was tried on Thursday 15 October , with Field and Wild again giving evidence . Their accounts were not consistent with the evidence that they gave at Sheppard 's trial , but Blueskin was convicted anyway . Enraged , Blueskin attacked Wild in the courtroom , slashing his throat with a pocket @-@ knife and causing an uproar . Wild was lucky to survive , and his grip over his criminal empire started to slip while he recuperated .

Taking advantage of the disturbance , which spread to Newgate Prison next door and continued into the night , Sheppard escaped for the fourth time . He unlocked his handcuffs and removed the chains . Still encumbered by his leg irons , he attempted to climb up the chimney , but his path was blocked by an iron bar set into the brickwork . He removed the bar and used it to break through the ceiling into the " Red Room " above the " Castle " , a room which had last been used some seven years before to confine aristocratic Jacobite prisoners after the Battle of Preston . Still wearing his leg irons as night fell , he then broke through six barred doors into the prison chapel , then to the roof of Newgate , 60 feet ( 20 m ) above the ground . He went back down to his cell to get a blanket , then back to the roof of the prison , and used the blanket to reach the roof of an adjacent house ,

owned by William Bird , a turner . He broke into Bird 's house , and went down the stairs and out into the street at around midnight without disturbing the occupants . Escaping through the streets to the north and west , Sheppard hid in a cowshed in Tottenham ( near modern Tottenham Court Road ) . Spotted by the barn 's owner , Sheppard told him that he had escaped from Bridewell Prison , having been imprisoned there for failing to support a ( nonexistent ) bastard son . His leg irons remained in place for several days until he persuaded a passing shoemaker to accept the considerable sum of 20 shillings to bring a blacksmith 's tools and help him remove them , telling him the same tale . His manacles and leg irons were later recovered in the rooms of Kate Cook , one of Sheppard 's mistresses . This escape astonished everyone . Daniel Defoe , working as a journalist , wrote an account for John Applebee , The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard . In his History , Defoe reports the belief in Newgate that the Devil came in person to assist Sheppard 's escape .

= = = Final capture = = =

Sheppard 's final period of liberty lasted just two weeks . He disguised himself as a beggar and returned to the city . He broke into the Rawlins brothers ' pawnbroker 's shop in Drury Lane on the night of 29 October 1724 , taking a black silk suit , a silver sword , rings , watches , a wig , and other items . He dressed himself as a dandy gentleman and used the proceeds to spend a day and the following evening on the tiles with two mistresses . He was arrested a final time in the early morning on 1 November , blind drunk , " in a handsome Suit of Black , with a Diamond Ring and a Cornelian ring on his Finger , and a fine Light Tye Peruke " .

This time , Sheppard was placed in the Middle Stone Room , in the centre of Newgate next to the " Castle " , where he could be observed at all times . He was also loaded with 300 pounds of iron weights . He was so celebrated that the gaolers charged high society visitors four shillings to see him , and the King 's painter James Thornhill painted his portrait . Several prominent people sent a petition to King George I , begging for his sentence of death to be commuted to transportation . " The Concourse of People of tolerable Fashion to see him was exceeding Great , he was always Chearful and Pleasant to a Degree , as turning almost everything as was said onto a Jest and Banter . " To a Reverend Wagstaffe who visited him , he said , according to Defoe , " One file 's worth all the Bibles in the World " .

Sheppard came before Mr Justice Powis in the Court of King 's Bench at Westminster Hall on 10 November . He was offered the chance to have his sentence reduced by informing on his associates , but he scorned the offer , and the death sentence was confirmed . The next day , Blueskin was hanged , and Sheppard was moved to the condemned cell .

= = Execution = =

The following Monday , 16 November , Sheppard was taken to the gallows at Tyburn to be hanged . He planned one more escape , but his pen @-@ knife , intended to cut the ropes binding him on the way to the gallows , was found by a prison warder shortly before he left Newgate for the last time .

A joyous procession passed through the streets of London , with Sheppard 's cart drawn along Holborn and Oxford Street accompanied by a mounted City Marshal and liveried Javelin Men . The occasion was as much as anything a celebration of Sheppard 's life , attended by crowds of up to 200 @,@ 000 ( one third of London 's population ) . The procession halted at the City of Oxford tavern on Oxford Street , where Sheppard drank a pint of sack . A carnival atmosphere pervaded Tyburn , where his " official " autobiography , published by Applebee and probably ghostwritten by Defoe , was on sale . Sheppard handed " a paper to someone as he mounted the scaffold " , perhaps as a symbolic endorsement of the account in the " Narrative " . His slight build had aided his previous prison escapes , but it condemned him to a slow death by strangulation by the hangman 's noose . After hanging for the prescribed 15 minutes , his body was cut down . The crowd pressed forward to stop his body from being removed , fearing dissection ; their actions inadvertently prevented Sheppard 's friends from implementing a plan to take his body to a doctor in

an attempt to revive him . His badly mauled remains were recovered later and buried in the churchyard of St Martin 's @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Fields that evening .

= = Legacy = =

There was a spectacular public reaction to Sheppard 's deeds . He was even cited ( favourably ) as an example in newspapers , pamphlets , broadsheets , and ballads were all devoted to his amazing exploits , and his story was adapted for the stage almost immediately . Harlequin Sheppard , a pantomime by one John Thurmond ( subtitled " A night scene in grotesque characters " ) , opened at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane on Saturday 28 November , only two weeks after Sheppard 's hanging . In a famous contemporary sermon , a London preacher drew on Sheppard 's popular escapes as a way of holding his congregation 's attention :

The account of his life remained well @-@ known through the Newgate Calendar , and a three @-@ act farce was published but never produced , but , mixed with songs , it became The Quaker 's Opera , later performed at Bartholomew Fair . An imagined dialogue between Jack Sheppard and Julius Caesar was published in the British Journal on 4 December 1724 , in which Sheppard favourably compares his virtues and exploits to those of Caesar .

Perhaps the most prominent play based on Sheppard 's life is John Gay 's The Beggar 's Opera ( 1728 ) . Sheppard was the inspiration for the figure of Macheath ; his nemesis , Peachum , is based on Jonathan Wild . The play was spectacularly popular , restoring the fortune that Gay had lost in the South Sea Bubble , and was produced regularly for over 100 years . An unperformed but published play The Prison @-@ Breaker was turned into The Quaker 's Opera ( in imitation of The Beggar 's Opera ) and performed at Bartholomew Fair in 1725 and 1728 . Two centuries later The Beggar 's Opera was the basis for The Threepenny Opera of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill ( 1928 ) .

Sheppard 's tale may have been an inspiration for William Hogarth 's 1747 series of 12 engravings , Industry and Idleness , which shows the parallel descent of an apprentice , Tom Idle , into crime and eventually to the gallows , beside the rise of his fellow apprentice , Francis Goodchild , who marries his master 's daughter and takes over his business , becoming wealthy as a result , eventually emulating Dick Whittington to become Lord Mayor of London .

Sheppard 's tale was revived in the first half of the 19th century . A melodrama , Jack Sheppard , The Housebreaker , or London in 1724 , by W.T. Moncrieff was published in 1825 . More successful was William Harrison Ainsworth 's third novel , entitled Jack Sheppard , which was originally published in Bentley 's Miscellany from January 1839 with illustrations by George Cruikshank , overlapping with the final episodes of Charles Dickens ' Oliver Twist . An archetypal Newgate novel , it generally remains close to the facts of Sheppard 's life , but portrays him as a swashbuckling hero . Like Hogarth 's prints , the novel pairs the descent of the " idle " apprentice into crime with the rise of a typical melodramatic character , Thames Darrell , a foundling of aristocratic birth who defeats his evil uncle to recover his fortune . Cruikshank 's images perfectly complemented Ainsworth 's tale ? Thackeray wrote that " ... Mr Cruickshank really created the tale , and that Mr Ainsworth , as it were , only put words to it . " The novel quickly became very popular : it was published in book form later that year , before the serialised version was completed , and even outsold early editions of Oliver Twist . Ainsworth 's novel was adapted into a successful play by John Buckstone in October 1839 at the Adelphi Theatre starring ( strangely enough ) Mary Anne Keeley ; indeed , it seems likely that Cruikshank 's illustrations were deliberately created in a form that were informed by , and would be easy to repeat as , tableaux on stage . It has been described as the " exemplary climax " of " the pictorial novel dramatized pictorially " .

The story generated a form of cultural mania , embellished by pamphlets , prints , cartoons , plays and souvenirs , not repeated until George du Maurier 's Trilby in 1895 . By early 1840 , a cant song from Buckstone 's play , " Nix My Dolly , Pals , Fake Away " was reported to be " deafening us in the streets " . Public alarm at the possibility that young people would emulate Sheppard 's behaviour led the Lord Chamberlain to ban , at least in London , the licensing of any plays with " Jack Sheppard " in the title for forty years . The fear may not have been entirely unfounded : Courvossier , the valet of Lord William Russell , claimed in one of his several confessions that the book had inspired him to

murder his master . Frank and Jesse James wrote letters to the Kansas City Star signed " Jack Sheppard " . Nevertheless , a number of burlesques of the story were written after the ban was lifted , including a popular Gaiety Theatre , London piece called Little Jack Sheppard ( 1885 ? 86 ) by Henry Pottinger Stephens and W. Yardley , with music by Meyer Lutz and others .

The Sheppard story has been revived several times in the 20th century , including three silent movies , The Hairbreadth Escape of Jack Sheppard ( 1900 ) , Robbery of the Mail Coach ( 1903 ) and Jack Sheppard ( 1923 ) ; a book , The Road to Tyburn , by Christopher Hibbert ( 1957 ) ; a British costume drama , Where 's Jack ? , directed by James Clavell , with Tommy Steele in the title role ( 1969 ) ; an unrealised film project of FilmFour Productions in 2000 , Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild , for which Benjamin Ross , who would have been director , co @-@ wrote the screenplay with John Preston , with Tobey Maguire and Harvey Keitel slated for the main parts ; a 2002 television drama , Invitation to a Hanging ; and a series of novels by Neal Stephenson collectively known as , The Baroque Cycle ( 2003 , 2004 ) , in which the character Jack Shaftoe was partly inspired by events from the life of Jack Sheppard .

The reasons for the lasting legacy of Jack Sheppard 's exploits in the popular imagination have been addressed by Peter Linebaugh , who suggests that Sheppard 's legend was rooted in the prospect of incarceration , of escape from what Michel Foucault in *Folie et déraison* called the grand renferment ( Great Confinement ) , in which " unreasonable " members of the population were locked away and institutionalised . The laws levelled at Sheppard and similar working class criminals were a means of disciplining a potentially rebellious multitude into accepting increasingly harsh property laws . A nineteenth @-@ century view on the Jack Sheppard phenomenon was offered by Charles Mackay in *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* :