

= Elizabeth Needham =

Elizabeth Needham (died 3 May 1731) , also known as Mother Needham , was an English procuress and brothel @-@ keeper of 18th @-@ century London , who has been identified as the bawd greeting Moll Hackabout in the first plate of William Hogarth 's series of satirical etchings , A Harlot 's Progress . Although Needham was notorious in London at the time , little is recorded of her life , and no genuine portraits of her survive . Her house was the most exclusive in London and her customers came from the highest strata of fashionable society , but she eventually ran afoul of the moral reformers of the day and died as a result of the severe treatment she received after being sentenced to stand in the pillory .

= = Character = =

Nothing is known of Needham 's early life , but by the time she was middle @-@ aged she was renowned in London as the keeper of a brothel in Park Place , St. James . Her house was regarded as the most exclusive in London , superior to those of Covent Garden , even to that of the other notorious bawd of the time , Mother Wisebourne . She was said to still be attractive in middle @-@ age ; Hogarth described her as a " handsome old Procuress ... well dressed in silk " , but mentions " patches on her face " and in his picture her face is seen to be pock @-@ marked . She went by a number of aliases : Bird , Howard , Blewitt and Trent are among those ascribed to her , although Mother Bird was also the name of another brothel @-@ keeper who was committed to Newgate Prison with Needham in 1724 . Needham was apparently ruthless with the girls and women who worked for her . They were forced to hire their dresses from her , and , if they were unable to pay the exorbitant rentals , she would force them to take more customers or have them committed to debtors ' prison until they met her demands (a scheme John Cleland 's heroine falls prey to in Fanny Hill (1748)) . Once they were too old or too ill to attract customers , she would throw them out .

Needham procured her prostitutes from many sources including the houses of other brothel @-@ keepers , the " Bails " in Covent Garden where homeless girls would sleep rough , Tom King 's Coffee House , and , it appears , from auctions , but , as depicted in Hogarth 's picture , she particularly targeted girls and women fresh from the country . The essayist Richard Steele found her pitching to a newly arrived girl when he went to meet a wagon bringing him items from the countryside . He described her as " artful " , and it seems that she was friendly and engaging with her potential employees , revealing her vicious character only when they were under her roof ; in The Dunciad , Alexander Pope warns not to " ... lard your words with Mother Needham 's style " . Pope mentions her once more at the end of The Dunciad (1728) , making reference to her foul mouth , and again , alongside other notorious madams of the day , in the last verses of his Coronation Epistle (which were suppressed in editions of the poem from 1769 until 1954) :

For Want of you , we spend our random Wit on

The first we find with Needham , Brooks , or Briton .

Henry Fielding refers to her in his Pasquin (1736) and used Hogarth 's representation of her as the model for Mother Punchbowl in The Covent Garden Tragedy (1732) . Mary Davys 's bawd in the Accomplish 'd Rake of 1727 is called " Mother N @-@ d @-@ m " and targets young girls fresh from the countryside , just as Needham did .

= = Customers = =

Chief among her customers were Colonel Francis Charteris and his cousin the Duke of Wharton ? Charteris is lounging in the doorway behind Needham in Hogarth 's picture . Ronald Paulson suggests that the model for Moll Hackabout in Hogarth 's first scene is Ann Bond , who was lured by Needham and raped by Charteris . Charteris , already known as the " Rape @-@ Master General " , was convicted and sentenced to death as a result of the Bond rape , although he was later pardoned . Needham 's name was not mentioned during the legal proceedings .

Needham may have introduced Charteris to Sally Salisbury around 1708 . Salisbury was the pre-eminant prostitute of the day and was kept by Charteris for a short time as mistress at the beginning of her career . When her previous bawd , Mother Wisebourne , died in 1719 , she became a member of Needham 's household and brought with her a clientele from the highest ranks of society . Salisbury brought further fame to Needham 's house by involving another of her girls in the theft of the Earl of Cardigan 's clothes . The two women accompanied him to Newmarket where he became drunk , and after putting him to bed at an inn they stole his clothes and jewellery and returned to London . The Earl treated the matter as a joke .

Some idea of the reputation of Needham 's house can be gathered from one of Joe Miller 's Jests , which involves her asking her landlord to wait for his money until Parliament and the Convocation sit , at which point she will be able to pay him ten times over , and by a satirical premature obituary , which appeared in the London Journal . The latter describes a will in which she distributes appropriate gifts to her famous clients : " a picture of Sodom and Gomorrah to indorsing D ? n ; an ounce of Mercuris Dulcis to Beau C ? e , of St. Martin 's Lane ; her estate to the Duke of Wharton ; her library to Ned C ? ; and a receipt to cure a clap to little Quibus " . At the time , the figures mentioned would not have been spared their blushes by the omission of their full names , but identifying them now is guesswork .

Her well-connected clientele may have allowed her to escape arrest . Despite the popular notion that Sally Salisbury 's 1723 stabbing of John Finch , the son of the Duchess of Winchelsea , had taken place in her house (it had actually occurred at the Three Tuns Tavern in Covent Garden) , the first time Needham was raided was in 1724 :

Yesterday morning the celebrated Mother Needham and Mother Bird , two eminent conservators of the Game of the Kingdom , were committed to Newgate ; their houses being disturb'd the night before by the Constables , who disengaged the Gentlemen and Ladies to a great number , and carried them to the Round @-@ House . This being the first time Mrs Needham ever received publick correction , since her being at the head of venal affairs in this town , ' tis thought will be the ruin of her household . Daily Journal , Tuesday 21 July 1724 .

The constables had found " two women in bed with two men of distinction " . The men were bound over , but the women were sent to Tothill Fields Bridewell to do hard labour . Needham 's punishment on this occasion is not recorded , but it appears that she was still incarcerated in September when her house burned down , killing one of the inhabitants , Captain Barbute , a French officer . In 1728 , several of her girls were arrested , but she appears to have escaped punishment .

= = Arrest , conviction and death = =

In late 1730 , Sir John Gonson , a Justice of the Peace and fervent supporter of the Society for the Reformation of Manners , spurred on by the furore surrounding the Charteris rape case , began conducting raids on brothels all over London . By early 1731 he had arrived at St James , where some residents of Park Place reported " a Notorious Disorderly House in that Neighbourhood " . In truth , Needham 's house was hardly unknown , having served the upper echelons of society for years , but she was arrested by Gonson and committed to the Gatehouse by Justice Railton .

On 29 April 1731 , Needham was convicted of keeping a disorderly house , fined one shilling , and sentenced to stand twice in the pillory , and " to find sureties for her good behaviour for 3 years " . On 30 April she was taken to the pillory near Park Place to stand for the first time . Perhaps because of her connections , she was allowed to lie face down in front of the pillory and a number of guards were paid to protect her . Despite this she received such a pelting that it was thought likely she would die before her punishment was completed . The crowds that had gathered to see her pilloried were so large that one boy fell on an iron fencing rail while trying to get a better look and was killed .

Needham was taken from the pillory alive , but died on 3 May 1731 , the day before she was due to stand in the pillory (this time at New Palace Yard) for the second time . With her last words she apparently expressed great fear at having to stand in the pillory again after the severe punishment she had received the first time . The Grub Street Journal , the satirical journal allied with Alexander

Pope and others of Hogarth 's friends , sardonically reported that the populace " acted very ungratefully , considering how much she had done to oblige them " . Her demise was celebrated in a mocking rhyme :

Ye Ladies of Drury , now weep
Your voices in howling now raise
For Old Mother Needham 's laid deep
And bitter will be all your Days .
She who drest you in Sattins so fine
Who trained you up for the Game
Who Bail , on occasion would find
And keep you from Dolly and Shame
Now is laid low in her Grave ...

Hogarth was still at work on A Harlot 's Progress when she died , so she never saw herself immortalised . There were other madams ready to step into her shoes , but it was not until Mother Douglas took over the King 's Head in Covent Garden in 1741 that a brothel reappeared with a reputation to match that of Needham .