

= Harris 's List of Covent Garden Ladies =

Harris 's List of Covent Garden Ladies , published from 1757 to 1795 , was an annual directory of prostitutes then working in Georgian London . A small , attractive pocketbook , it was printed and published in Covent Garden , and sold for two shillings and sixpence . A contemporary report of 1791 estimates its circulation at about 8 @, @ 000 copies annually .

Each edition contains entries describing the physical appearance and sexual specialities of about 120 ? 190 prostitutes who worked in and around Covent Garden . Through their erotic prose , the lists ' entries review some of these women in lurid detail . While most compliment their subjects , some are critical of bad habits , and a few women are even treated as pariahs , perhaps having fallen out of favour with the lists ' authors , who are never revealed .

Samuel Derrick is the man normally credited for the design of Harris 's List , possibly having been inspired by the activities of a Covent Garden pimp , Jack Harris . A Grub Street hack , Derrick may have written the lists from 1757 until his death in 1769 ; thereafter , the annual 's authors are unknown . Throughout its print run it was published pseudonymously by H. Ranger , although from the late 1780s it was printed by three men : John and James Roach , and John Aitkin .

As the public 's opinion began to turn against London 's sex trade , and with reformers petitioning the authorities to take action , those involved in the release of Harris 's List were in 1795 fined and imprisoned . That year 's edition was the last to be published ; by then its content was cruder , lacking the originality of earlier editions . Modern writers tend to view Harris 's List as erotica ; in the words of one author , it was designed for " solitary sexual enjoyment " .

= = Description = =

= = = Introduction = = =

The earliest printed editions of Harris 's List of Covent Garden Ladies appeared after Christmas 1756 . Published by " H. Ranger " , the annual was advertised on the front pages of newspapers , and sold in Covent Garden and at booksellers ' stalls . Each edition comprises an attractive pocketbook , " beautifully packaged ... in the modish style of the twelves " . They usually contain no more than 150 pages of relatively thin paper , on which are printed the details of between 120 and 190 prostitutes then working in Covent Garden . Priced in 1788 at two shillings and sixpence , Harris 's List was affordable for the middle classes but expensive for a working class man .

It was not the first directory of prostitutes to be circulated in London . The Wandering Whore ran for five issues between 1660 and 1661 , in the early (and newly liberal) years of the Restoration . Allegedly an exposé of the capital 's sex trade and usually attributed to John Garfield , it lists streets in which prostitutes might have been found , and the locations of brothels in areas like Fleet Lane , Long Acre and Lincoln 's Inn Fields . The Wandering Whore incorporates dialogue between " Magdalena , a Crafty Whore , Julietta , an Exquisite Whore , Francion , a Lascivious Gallant , and Gusman , a Pimping Hector " , with the caveat that it was disseminated only so that law @-@ abiding folk might avoid such people . Another publication was A Catalogue of Jilts , Cracks & Prostitutes , Nightwalkers , Whores , She @-@ friends , Kind Women and other of the Linnen @-@ lifting Tribe , printed in 1691 . This catalogues the physical attributes of 21 women who could be found about St Bartholomew @-@ the @-@ Great Church during Bartholomew Fair , in Smithfield . Mary Holland was apparently " tall , graceful and comely , shy of her favours " , but could be mollified " at a cost of £ 20 " . Her sister Elizabeth was less expensive , being " indifferent to Money but a Supper and Two Guineas will tempt her " .

= = = Content = = =

Each edition of Harris 's List opens with a frontispiece showing a mildly erotic stock image opposite the title page , which , from the 1760s to 1780s , is followed by a lengthy commentary on prostitution

. This preamble argues that the prostitute is of benefit to the public , able to relieve man 's natural inclination towards violence . It describes the customer as a patron supportive of a good cause : " be your purse strings never closed ; nor let the name of prostitute deter you from your pious resolve ! " Prostitutes were generally scorned by 18th @-@ century society , and the 1789 edition 's preface complains " Why should the victims of this natural propensity ... be hunted like outcasts from society , perpetually gripped by the hand of petty tyranny " , continuing : " Is not the minister of state who sacrifices his country 's honour to his private interest ... more guilty than her ? "

At a basic level , the entries in Harris 's List detail each woman 's age , her physical appearance (including the size of her breasts) , her sexual specialities , and sometimes a description of her genitals . Additional information such as how long she had been active as a prostitute , or if she sang , danced or conversed well , is also included . Addresses and prices , which range from five shillings to five pounds , are provided . The types of prostitute the lists present vary from " low @-@ born errant drabs " , to prominent courtesans like Kitty Fisher and Fanny Murray ; later editions contain only " genteel mannered prostitutes worthy of praise " . The charms of a Mrs Dodd , who lived at number six Hind Court in Fleet Street , were listed in 1788 as " reared on two pillars of monumental alabaster " , continuing : " the symmetry of its parts , its borders enriched with wavering tendrils , its ruby portals , and the tufted grove , that crowns the summit of the mount , all join to invite the guest to enter . " In the same edition , a similarly lurid description precedes the latter part of Miss Davenport 's entry , which concludes : " Her teeth are remarkably fine ; she is tall , and so well proportioned (when you examine her whole naked figure , which she will permit you to do , if you perform the Cytherean Rites like an able priest) that she might be taken for a fourth Grace , or a breathing animated Venus de Medicis ... she has a keeper (a Mr. Hannah) both kind and liberal ; notwithstanding which , she has no objection to two supernumerary guineas . " Miss Clicamp , of number two York Street near Middlesex Hospital , is described as " one of the finest , fattest figures as fully finished for fun and frolick as fertile fancy ever formed ... fortunate for the true lovers of fat , should fate throw them into the possession of such full grown beauties . " More characteristic of Harris 's List though , is the 1764 entry for Miss Wilmot , which tells of an amorous encounter with King George III 's brother , the Duke of York :

He gazed on her a while with eyes of transport and fondness , and gave her a world of kisses ; at the close of which , in a pretended struggle , she contrived matters so artfully , that the bed @-@ cloaths having fallen off , her naked beauties lay exposed at full length . The snowy orbs on her breast , by their frequent rising and failing , beat Cupid 's alarm @-@ drum to storm instantly , in case an immediate surrender should be refused . The coral @-@ lipped mouth of love seemed with kind movements to invite , nay , to provoke an attack ; while her sighs , and eyes half @-@ closed , denoted that no farther resistance was intended . What followed , may be better imagined than described ; but if we may credit Miss W @-@ Im @-@ t 's account , she never experienced a more extensive protrusion in any amorous conflict either before or since .

The Duke of York was only one of many famous men to have been mentioned in the lists ; others included James Boswell , Ernest Augustus I of Hanover , the clergyman William Dodd , Charles James Fox , George IV , William Hickey , Francis Needham , 1st Earl of Kilmorey , Robert Walpole and many others .

= = = Commentary = = =

The women 's route into the sex trade , as described by the lists , is usually ascribed to youthful innocence , with tales of young girls leaving their homes for the promises of men , only to be abandoned once in London . Some entries mention rape , euphemistically described as women being " seduced against their will " . Lenora Norton was apparently " seduced " in such fashion , her entry elucidating on her experience , which occurred while she was still a child . The " old urban legend " of young girls being apprehended from the crowd by devious bawds is illustrated by William Hogarth 's A Harlot 's Progress , but although in reality such stories were not unheard of , women entered into prostitution for a variety of reasons , often mundane . Rural immigrants in search of work could sometimes find themselves at the mercy of unscrupulous employers , or manipulated

into the sex trade by underhand means . Some entries in Harris 's List illustrate how some women managed to lift themselves out of penury . Becky LeFevre , once a streetwalker , used her business sense to amass considerable wealth , as did a Miss Marshall and Miss Becky Child , who are each mentioned in several editions . Many of these women had rich keepers , and some married wealthy aristocrats ; Harriet Powell married Kenneth Mackenzie , 1st Earl of Seaforth , and Elizabeth Armistead married Charles James Fox .

Elements of politicisation appear in some entries . The famed prostitute Betsy Cox 's 1773 listing describes how , when refused entry to a gathering of polite society at the newly opened Pantheon , she was helped by , among others , the Duke of Fife , who drew his sword to enforce her entry . Some lists also contain defences of prostitution ; earlier editions claim that the trade guarded against the seduction of young women , provided an outlet for frustrated married men , and kept other young men from " le péche [sic] que la Nature désavoue [the sin that Nature repudiates] " , or sodomy . However , no such views were expressed with regard to lesbianism , which in England , unlike sexual acts between men , has never been illegal . Miss Wilson of Cavendish Square thought that " a female bed @-@ fellow can give more real joys than ever she experienced with the male part of the sex " , and Anne and Elanor Redshawe provided a discreet service in Tavistock Street , catering for " Ladies in the Highest Keeping " and other women who preferred to keep their activities private .

A common complaint regarding street prostitution was the foul language used , and while generally most entries in the lists look favourably on those women who refrained from swearing , the views expressed in the 1793 edition of Harris 's List tend towards equivocation . Mrs Cornish 's genteel nature was , on occasion , interrupted by " a volley of small shot " , and Miss Johnson 's proclivity towards " vulgarity of expression and a coarseness of manner " apparently suffered no shortage of admirers . Mrs Russell , attractive to " a number of clients among the youth , who are fond of beholding that mouth of the devil from whence all corruption issueth " , was admired for her " vulgarity more than any thing else , she being extremely expert at uncommon oaths " . Drinking , intrinsically linked with prostitution , was also frowned on . Mrs William 's entry of 1773 is full of remorse , her having returned home " so intoxicated so as not to be able to stand , to the no small amusement of her neighbors " , and Miss Jenny Kirbeard had , in 1788 , a " violent attachment to drinking " . Not all entries were disapproving though ; Mrs Harvey would , in 1793 , " often toss off a sparkling bumper , " while remaining " a lady of great sensibility ... not a little clever in the performance of the act of friction . " More generally , most entries are flattering , although some are less than complimentary ; the 1773 listing for Miss Berry denounces her as " almost rotten , and her breath cadaverous " . Prostitutes may have paid money to appear in the lists , and in Denlinger 's view such commentary may indicate a degree of annoyance on the writer 's part , the women concerned perhaps having refused to pay . Some listings also imply a degree of dissatisfaction on the part of the customer ; in the 1773 edition , Miss Dean exhibited " great indifference " while entertaining her client , busying herself by cracking nuts while he was " acting his joys " . Others are scorned for wearing too much makeup , and some for being " lazy bedfellows " . A popular view that prostitutes were licentious , hot @-@ blooded and hungry for sex was incompatible with the knowledge that most worked for money , and the lists therefore criticise women whose demands for payment appeared a little too mercenary .

= = = Possible authors = = =

The identity of the lists ' authors is uncertain . Some editions may have been written by Samuel Derrick , a Grub Street hack born in 1724 in Dublin , who had moved to London to become an actor . With little success there , he had turned instead to writing , publishing works including *The dramatic censor ; being remarks upon the conduct , characters , and catastrophe of our most celebrated plays* (1752) , *A Voyage to the Moon* (1753) (a translation of Cyrano de Bergerac 's *L 'Autre Monde : ou les États et Empires de la Lune*) , and *The Battle of Lora* (1762) . Derrick , who lived with the actress Jane Lessingham , was an acquaintance of Samuel Johnson and James Boswell . The latter viewed him as " but a poor writer " , while Johnson admitted that " if Derrick 's letters had

been written by one of a more established name , they would have been thought very pretty letters .
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Hallie Rubenhold 's 2005 book *The Covent Garden Ladies* sets out her interpretation of the story behind Harris 's List . She claims that John Harrison ? otherwise known as Jack Harris , a savvy businessman and pimp who worked at the Shakespear 's Head Tavern in Covent Garden ? was the list 's originator . Born perhaps around 1720 ? 1730 , Harris apparently had expert knowledge of prostitutes working in Covent Garden and beyond , as well as access to rented rooms and premises for his clients ' use . He kept a record of the women he pimped and the properties he had access to , possibly in the form of a small ledger or notebook . Derrick , having previously authored *The Memoirs of the Shakespear 's Head* , and possibly also its companion piece , *The Memoirs of the Bedford Coffee House* , was probably familiar with the Shakespear 's Head . The former book details " Jack , a waiter ... who presides over the Venereal Pleasures of this Dome " , and its author likely studied Harris as he went about his business . Which of the two men first thought to produce Harris 's List is unknown , but probably for a one @-@ off payment Harris allowed his name to be attached to it . With his detailed knowledge of Covent Garden , and with help from various associates , Derrick was therefore able to write the first edition of Harris 's List in 1757 . As an aspiring author and social climber he preferred not to associate himself publicly with such questionable material , and his name therefore does not appear on any editions .

Printed and published by the pseudonymous H. Ranger , responsible for such works as *Love Feasts* ; or the different methods of courtship in every country , throughout the known world , the proceeds from the hugely successful first edition enabled Derrick to repay his debts , thereby freeing himself from a spunging house . His fortunes changed for the better when he became master of ceremonies at Bath and Tunbridge Wells in 1763 . His death on 28 March 1769 followed a protracted illness , but despite a significant income , he died penniless . He left no official will , but on his deathbed he bequeathed the 1769 edition of Harris 's List to Charlotte Hayes , his former friend and mistress , and a madam in her own right . Hayes died in 1813 .

As the self @-@ declared " Pimp General of All England " , the swaggering Harris amassed a considerable fortune , but his indiscretion proved to be his undoing . Prompted by reformers , in April 1758 the authorities began to hunt down and close " houses of ill fame " . Covent Garden was not spared , and the Shakespear 's Head Tavern was raided . Harris was caught , locked up in the local compter , and then imprisoned in Newgate . He was released in 1761 and had some interests in publishing from 1765 to 1766 , printing Edward Thompson 's *The Courtesan* , and later *The Fruit @-@ Shop* and *Kitty 's Atlantis* , but he seems to have given this up late in 1766 . He became the proprietor of the Rose Tavern , not far from the Shakespear 's Head , but by the 1780s had delegated its running to an employee . The Rose was demolished about 1790 , and for a few years Harris ran another tavern , the Bedford Head , with his son and daughter @-@ in @-@ law . He died sometime in 1792 . The Shakespear 's Head closed for business in 1804 , and four years later the empty premises were badly damaged in the same fire that consumed the Covent Garden Theatre . What remained was subsumed by the neighbouring Bedford Coffee House .

= = = Later years = = =

Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz claimed in 1791 that the lists were published by " a tavern @-@ keeper , in Drury lane " , and that " eight thousand copies are sold annually . " There is nothing to suggest that Hayes had any involvement with any edition other than that of 1769 , and the list 's authors following Derrick 's death have not been identified . From the 1770s Harris 's List changes focus , moving away from the women of Covent Garden , to their stories . Its prose becomes more genteel , lacking the euphemisms which had helped make it so popular . These changes are echoed by the front cover , whose frontispiece becomes more gentrified . Material from earlier editions is recycled , and little attention is paid to accuracy . The responsibility for some of these changes can be attributed to John and James Roach , and John Aitkin , who from the late 1780s were the lists ' publishers .

In 1795 the Proclamation Society , created several years earlier to help enforce King George III 's

proclamation against " loose and licentious Prints , Books , and Publications , dispersing Poison to the minds of the Young and Unwary " , and " to Punish the Publishers and Vendors thereof " , brought Roach up on libel charges . In court he highlighted the list 's longevity , and claimed that " nobody had ever been prosecuted for publishing it ; and , therefore , he was ignorant it was a libel . " When Lord Chief Justice Kenyon mentioned that a John Roach had previously been convicted for selling Harris 's List , Roach " assured his Lordship , that he had never been indicted before for this offence . " He was nevertheless sentenced to one year in Newgate Prison , with sureties of £ 150 for three years , to ensure his good behaviour . Lord Justice Ashurst called the List " a most indecent and immoral publication " , and of Roach 's crime said " an offence of greater enormity could hardly be committed . " Aitkin , indicted as John Aitken , may have been fined £ 200 for selling the same edition , although Rubenhold contends that by then he had died . After these trials , the list was no longer published . Only nine editions are extant : those for 1761 , 1764 , 1773 , 1774 , 1779 , 1788 , 1789 , 1790 and 1793 .

= = Modern view = =

Harris 's List was published for a city rife with prostitution . London 's bawdy houses had , by the 1770s , disappeared from the poorer areas outside the city wall , and in the West End were found in four areas : St Margaret 's in Westminster ; St Anne 's in Soho and St James 's ; and most especially , with more than two thirds of London 's " Disorderly Houses " , around Covent Garden and the Strand . The area was noted for its " great numbers of female votaries to Venus of all ranks and conditions " , while another author distinguished Covent Garden as " the chief scene of action for promiscuous amours . " The Scottish statistician Patrick Colquhoun estimated in 1806 that of Greater London 's approximately 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 citizens , perhaps 50 @, @ 000 women , across all walks of life , were engaged in some form of prostitution .

Whether any of these women could confirm their addresses for publication in Harris 's List is something that author Sophie Carter doubts . She views the annual as " primarily a work of erotica " , calling it " nothing so much as a shopping list ... textually arrayed for the delectation of the male consumer " , continuing " they [the women] await his intervention to institute an exchange " , epitomising the traditional male role in pornography . Elizabeth Denlinger includes a similar sentiment in her essay , " The Garment and the Man " : " This varied display of women to satisfy the ' great itch ' ... is a fundamental aspect of the sphere to which Harris 's List offered British men a carte d 'entrée " . Rubenhold writes that the variability in the descriptions of prostitutes over the years the list was published defy " all attempts to categorise it as either exclusively up @-@ market or simply middle of the road . " She suggests that the annual 's purpose was to " conduct the desirous to the embrace of a prostitute " , and that its prose was designed for " solitary sexual enjoyment " (H. Ranger also sold back @-@ issues of Harris 's List) . Sold to a London public which was mostly patriarchal , its listings reflect the prejudices of the men who authored them . They were therefore not representative of women generally , and as she concludes , " it is likely that their stories would have differed quite significantly from those recounted by their customers for the benefit of the List 's publishers . "

Not every commentator agreed with Colquhoun 's estimate , which became " the most widely quoted sum " , but in the opinion of Cindy McCreery the fact that most people agreed there were far too many prostitutes in London is indicative of widespread concern about the trade . Attitudes towards prostitution hardened at the end of the 18th century , with many viewing prostitutes as indecent and immoral , and it was in this atmosphere that Harris 's List met its demise . Books such as the Wandering Whore and Edmund Curll 's Venus in the Cloyster (1728) are often mentioned alongside Harris 's as examples of erotic literature . Along with the anonymously written Fifteen Plagues of a Maidenhead (1707) , Garfield and Curll 's works were involved in cases that helped form the 18th @-@ century legal concept of " obscene libel " ? which was a marked change from the previous emphasis on controlling sedition , blasphemy and heresy , traditionally the ecclesiastical courts ' province . No laws existed to forbid the publication of pornography ; therefore , when Curll was arrested and imprisoned in 1725 (the first such prosecution in nearly 20 years) , it

was under threat of a libel charge . He was released a few months later , only to be locked up again for publishing other materials deemed offensive by the authorities . Curll 's experience with the censors was uncommon , though , and prosecutions based on obscene publications remained a rarity . Although their court action spelled the end for Harris 's List , despite the best efforts of the Proclamation Society (later the Society for the Suppression of Vice) , the publication of pornography continued apace ; more pornographic material was published during the Victorian era than at any time previously .