

'A Fiendish Outrage'? A Study of Animal Maiming in East Anglia: 1830-1870*

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THE study of animal maiming has been, and still is, a subject which social historians have ignored. The standard works on rural protest by Dunbabin, Horn, Hobsbawm and Rudé invariably make a brief reference to this crime but in so doing they create misconceptions.¹ The reader is left with the impression that cattle, in the non-legal sense, more than any other animal, were singled out for maiming, and furthermore, that maiming consisted largely of hamstringing or 'hocking' their forelegs. The purpose of this paper is to examine animal maiming in East Anglia between 1830 and 1870 when the crime was at its peak in order to identify the different types of animals maimed and the diverse methods employed by the maimers. It will be possible then to put forward some explanations for this peculiar, complex and universally condemned activity.

Before endeavouring any further, a word or two needs to be said on the reticence of historians. Without doubt they tend to echo the sentiments of contemporaries. They feel little sympathy with, let alone understand, the perpetrators of such 'abominable acts'. The maimers were and are seen as perverted and inexplicably cruel. It takes little imagination on the reader's part to re-enact, let us say, the stabbing of a carthorse with a dung fork.

Maiming could be a bloody business as well as a noisy and tiring one, especially if the maimer was attempting to subdue the struggling animal within earshot of the farmhouse or the proverbial sleeping guard dog. While it is difficult to conceal a sense of outrage when reading of the many and varied tortures the animals had to suffer, moral outrage on the historian's part does not add to our understanding of this crime. It would be best therefore to restrict moral value judgements to an absolute minimum.

There are other reasons which have kept maiming from historical scrutiny. First, the common assumption that rural people have a certain affinity for animals, either of a sentimental nature, or more commonly of a hard practical kind that would ill-dispose them to harm or maltreat their own or others' sources of profits. Second, maiming was neither as common as incendiarism nor was it so widely reported in the local newspapers. If there was such a thing as submerged crime then animal maiming was the epitome of it. It is possible to state with conviction that the examples cited below formed only a part of what actually took place, how large a part is impossible to tell. Animal maiming remained especially secret because it bore all the semblances of vengeance crime 'par excellence'. It was a more personal act of violence by the maimer on the victim than any other protest crime. One can view it almost as a form of symbolic murder, and the animal's owner was little inclined to publicize the existence of some private feud. In short maiming could be an extreme form of psychological terror

* This article is taken from chapter five of the author's thesis: 'Rural Protest in Norfolk and Suffolk 1830-1870', unpublished PhD, University of East Anglia (1982).

¹ J P D Dunbabin ed., *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1974); *ibid.*, chapter by A J Peacock, 'Village Radicalism in East Anglia, 1800-1850'; P Horn, *The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside* (1980); E Hobsbawm and G Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth 1973).

which could leave the victim appalled and fearful for his own safety.

Despite the obvious difficulties in collecting evidence, a cursory glance at the newspapers, by far the best source material, has shown that nearly every conceivable type of animal from the domesticated cat to the most important working animal, the horse, was a target. One should not be misled by the phrase 'cattle maiming' for this term was sometimes used in the narrow legal sense to include all kinds of domesticated animals and not simply bulls, cows, heifers and so forth.² Another misconception was that animal maiming was an act of social protest rather like incendiarism. It will be shown that maiming was not always committed by the working class against members of the ruling class. Finally, it became evident that in order to understand maiming it was necessary to understand animal care and grooming. Although opposites the two had a close relationship as will be seen below.

I

Animal maiming was never a common crime. In East Anglia, more especially Norfolk and Suffolk, between 1830 and 1870 only 176 separate cases have been documented, eighty-nine in Norfolk and sixty-eight in Suffolk. A further nineteen cases were known to have occurred in the Cambridgeshire villages close to the Norfolk-Suffolk border.³ Reference to Table 1 below shows that the incidence of

² For example see 3 Geo. IV c. 71 1822 Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle; 'Whereas it is expedient to prevent the cruel and improper treatment of Horses, Mares, Geldings, Mules, Asses, Cows, Heifers, Steers, Oxen, Sheep and other Cattle

³ Sources consulted during the course of this research were: *Bury and Norwich Post* (BNP), *Cambridge Chronicle* (CC), *East Anglian* (EA), *Ipswich Journal* (IJ), *Norfolk Chronicle* (NC), *Norfolk News* (NN), *Norwich Mercury* (NM), *Suffolk Chronicle* (SC), Public Record Office (Kew): HO 64/2-3 (Correspondence Rewards and Pardons); HO 27/36, 52, 68, 76, 88 (Criminal Registers); HO 73 (Constabulary Commission 1836-38), PRO (Chancery Lane): Assi 33/12-14 (Norfolk Circuit Gaol Delivery Books); Assi 35/285 pt. 1 (Assize papers South East Circuit). Assize records for Norfolk and Suffolk are not extant and the Quarter Session papers were of very limited value and gave little additional information.

TABLE I
Cases of Animal Maiming in Norfolk,
Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire
1830-1870

Year	No of Cases by County			Total
	Norfolk	Suffolk	Cambridge-shire	
1830	4	2	1	7
1831	0	3	0	3
1832	1	1	0	2
1833	2	3	0	5
1834	5	5	1	11
1835	1	2	1	4
1836	3	6	0	9
1837	1	3	1	5
1838	1	1	0	2
1839	7	1	3	11
1840	2	3	0	5
1841	3	1	0	4
1842	4	2	0	6
1843	0	2	0	2
1844	3	5	1	9
1845	2	1	0	3
1846	2	1	0	3
1847	3	2	0	5
1848	3	1	2	6
1849	8	2	0	10
1850	4	2	1	7
1851	1	1	1	3
1852	1	0	0	1
1853	2	2	1	5
1854	0	3	0	3
1855	1	0	0	1
1856	0	1	0	1
1857	2	0	0	2
1858	2	0	0	2
1859	0	0	1	1
1860	1	0	1	2
1861	2	0	2	4
1862	2	0	2	4
1863	2	4	0	6
1864	2	2	0	4
1865	0	3	0	3
1866	1	0	0	1
1867	0	1	0	1
1868	1	0	0	1
1869	2	1	0	3
1870	0	1	0	1
Total	81	68	19	168
Unspecified Year	8	0	0	8
TOTAL				176

Sources: See footnote 3 for details of local newspapers and PRO documents. Norfolk papers can be found at the Norfolk and Norwich Local History Library (NNLHL); Suffolk papers at Ipswich and East Suffolk Record Office (IESRO) and the West Suffolk Record Office (WSRO) at Bury St Edmunds.

the crime followed no immediately obvious pattern, except to say that in Suffolk it declined after 1854 with the notable exception of 1863. In Norfolk the same general pattern is discernible but to a lesser extent.

Suffolk experienced a more than usual amount of maiming in the three-year period 1834-6, and later in 1844 and 1863. Norfolk had only two peaks in 1839 and 1849; in the latter year there were eight trials. If the figures for the two counties, together with Cambridgeshire, are combined we find peaks in 1834, 1836, 1839, 1844, 1849, thereafter the magnitude dropped off considerably until 1863. Some of these peaks coincided with periods of extreme tension and social protest as in 1834, 1836, 1844 and 1849 when incendiaryism and anti-Poor Law disturbances were frequent.⁴ The 1839 peak is misleading to some extent because one individual was responsible for six separate acts of maiming in the village of Buxton, Norfolk.⁵

Further research may show that animal maiming along with other forms of individual protest expanded in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. Three small yet significant pieces of evidence suggest as much. First, uncompleted research on the 1815-30 period seems to suggest that maiming was becoming a regular, albeit infrequent, East Anglian speciality in the mid to late 1820s.⁶ Second, up to and until 1830 there had been in

existence for many years associations for the prosecution of felons. These self-help societies, made up of farmers and landowners, turned their attention after 1830 to the capture and prosecution of sheep stealers, incendiaries and animal maimers. In 1834, in the Fakenham area of Norfolk, maiming became such a serious problem that a meeting was called to form an association 'for the mutual assurance against loss by the felonious killing or maiming of Horses and Cattle'. Norfolk's leading landowner, Thomas William Coke, presided over this meeting which had pretensions of forming a county-wide association. The newspaper report on the meeting interestingly linked incendiaryism and maiming. A part of the report ran:

... and in the actual commission of several similar outrages just ground for apprehending that the Incendiary, finding his diabolical acts fail to inflict individual injury to any extent in consequence of the protection afforded by the offices established for Insurance against Fire, would probably seek to gratify his malignant passions against Individuals engaged in Agriculture by the even more fiendish outrage of killing or Maiming Horses and Cattle...⁷

A few weeks later all the leading landowners attended another meeting at Fakenham where an association was formed whose subscription was 1/2d/acre.⁸ About fifteen months later in Suffolk another association was called for in the Mildenhall district, after William Poulter of Worlington had two cows and a filly stabbed, a sheep's throat cut and a donkey maimed, and his farming implements cut to pieces.⁹

Animal maiming is commonly referred to as cattle maiming. This was and is obviously a misnomer as the following Table 2 shows. All forms of animals, domestic pets, game and farm animals were targets.

⁴ The number of incendiary fires in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1834 was fifty; in 1844 218 fires; 1849 seventy-eight fires. 1836 was a year of widespread anti-Poor Law rioting in the region. 1839, however, was a very quiet year as there were only five fires. See J E Archer, 'Rural Protest in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1830-70,' unpublished PhD, UEA (1982), chs 3-4.

⁵ See p 154 below.

⁶ Research on the pre-1830 period shows so far that there were six cases in 1825, eight cases in 1826, five cases in 1827 and nine cases in 1828.

⁷ NC 8 November 1834. Peacock, op cit, p 45 also believes the crime increased in the 1830s.

⁸ NC 29 November 1834.

⁹ BNP 13 January 1836.

TABLE 2

Number of Animals Maimed in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1830-70

<i>Animal</i>	<i>No Maimed</i>
Horses (all types)	180 plus
Sheep	157 plus
Game	112
Pigs	82
Cattle (all types)	76 plus
Dogs	23 plus
Poultry (various)	23 plus
Donkeys and Asses	12
Cats	a number
Fawn	1
Others unspecified	47
Total	713 plus

Sources: Table 2 was constructed on the evidence from the local press. For horses, poultry and cats no exact number can be given and therefore the figures quoted represent minima.

It should be pointed out that although the killing of game appears high on the table, there were in fact only two cases, one at Denham, Suffolk, and the other at South Runcton in Norfolk.¹⁰ As a general rule the smaller the animal the easier it was to maim in larger quantities at a single stroke, as in the cases of sheep, pigs and poultry. The larger animals, such as horses, cattle and donkeys were rarely maimed in large numbers, unless a certain method of maiming was employed.¹¹

The method employed by the maimer was as diverse as the number and type of animals he chose to focus his attention on. Again a misconception has grown up that hamstringing was the most frequent form of injuring animals. This was far from the truth as the following Table 3 shows.

Without wishing to go into unpleasant detail some examples of each method would be both helpful and explanatory of the terms used in Table 3. In the first

category; stabbing, a colt belonging to G Holl of New Buckenham, Norfolk, was found on the common with a 10½ inch piece of a rat catcher's spear in its side to the depth of eight inches. The animal died two days later. In a similar case at Denston, Suffolk, in 1848, a pony was seen wandering with its entrails hanging from its belly and dragging along the ground. Sheep were often killed by having their throats cut, as in the case of four owned by King of Gazeley, Suffolk in 1844.¹² Horse poisoning will be dealt with in greater detail later in the paper but one example taken from 1847 is representative of its type. Three horses were found dead at Rattlesden, Suffolk, after eating their bean meal which had been impregnated with arsenic. In other cases of poisoning, cattle, pigs, dogs, cats and game were found dead.¹³ The third category of tail and mane cutting was not as serious as it sounds, in fact it was the only form of maiming which did not seriously injure the animals. For this and the following reasons it could be argued that tail cutting was not maiming at all but theft. In these cases the hairs from the tails and manes of horses and cattle were drawn or cut. Apart from giving the animals a slightly unusual appearance no other damage resulted. The hair was presumably sold by the maimer. This activity was carried out on a large scale, for example at Kilverstone, Norfolk, in 1830 farmer Wright had the tails and manes of nineteen of his horses cut. In the same year Gilding of Tuddenham, Norfolk, had the same done to sixteen of his horses and bullocks.¹⁴ However not all tail cutting was theft as fifteen pigs found to their cost and pain in 1857.¹⁵

The shooting of animals was far less ambiguous. In 1839 at Buxton, Norfolk,

¹² NC 17 July 1841; NM 27 May 1848; BNP 6 March 1844.

¹³ *Ibid* 3 March 1847; *ibid* 3 June 1862, *ibid* 8 February 1863.

¹⁴ NM 20 February 1830; EA 26 October 1830. This type of theft virtually disappeared in the 1830s.

¹⁵ NN 20 June 1857. The pigs belonged to Fyson of Sculthorpe, Norfolk.

¹⁰ Denham — JJ 23 April 1842 when six brace of pheasants were poisoned; for South Runcton see BNP 14 December 1842 in which 100 pheasants died.

¹¹ See below for examples of mane cutting and hair drawing.

TABLE 3
Different Methods of Maiming and Number of Animals Maimed

Type of Animal	horses	cattle	asses	dogs	cats	poultry	pigs	sheep	game	fawn	others	TOTAL
<i>Method of Maiming</i>												
Poison	56	23	0	21+ ^a	1+	19	65	0	112	0	0	296+
Stabbing & throat												
slitting	37+	23	5	1	0	0	1	32	0	0	0	99+
Tails cut	42+	9	2	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	68
Drowning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51+	0	0	0	51+
Shooting	8	5	0	1+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13+
Tongue-cutting	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	8
Hamstringing	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Stick thrusting	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	7
Suffocation	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6
Run over	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	22
Beaten	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	38	0	0	0	40
Bones broken	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	4+
Ears cut off	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Burnt alive	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Savaged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Decapitation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Innards drawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Others unspec.	17+	7+	3	0	0	4+	1	6+	0	0	47	85
TOTAL	180+	76+	12	24+	1+	23+	82	157+	112	1	47	713+

Sources: based on local newspapers as in Table 1. +^a denotes an unspecified number

five leading landowners and farmers had animals shot during three summer months. The Norwich police had to be called in to investigate.¹⁶ Sheep were deliberately drowned in the Fens by being driven into the many ditches, pits and dykes found in that area.¹⁷ Suffocation of animals required rather more personal attention from the maimer than did shooting or drowning since the perpetrator of such acts had to stuff wool down sheep's throats, or block the windpipes with large stones, or construct a complex series of nooses in the stalls which would eventually hang the beasts.¹⁸ Horses were invariably the victims of the tongue-cutting which was carried out in a number of ways. It varied from the slitting of tongues up the middle, the cutting of the tongues in half, to the

even more painful wrenching out of the complete tongue, as occurred at Stowe, Norfolk, in 1866.¹⁹ Moving further down the anatomy we come to hamstringing which is, as the name suggests, the cutting of the leg muscles of horses and cattle so as to make them lame. Three horses were cut at Sporle, Norfolk, in 1841 in this manner, and again a year later, Aldous of Redenhall had two bullocks mutilated in this fashion.²⁰ A horse and a number of sheep had leg and neck bones broken,²¹ whereas donkeys were maimed in rather a peculiar manner. Their ears were cut off at the base where they met the head. An example of this occurred in 1838 at Lavenham, Suffolk, where two donkeys were stolen and later found at Harling mutilated in this manner.²²

¹⁶ NC 18 May 1839 and 24 August 1839.

¹⁷ *Ibid* 23 February 1839.

¹⁸ BNP 10 January 1844; NN 8 May 1869 a horse strangled at Narborough; NM 8 June 1844 at Sotterley, Suffolk.

¹⁹ NN 20 January 1866; see also BNP 13 November 1850 at Wepstead; NM 16 October 1830 at Wimbotsham.

²⁰ NC 1 January 1842; *ibid* 31 December 1842.

²¹ *Ibid* 18 November 1837; BNP 6 March 1844.

²² NC 8 December 1838.

We come now to those acts of mutilation that outraged people's sensibilities more than any other form of maiming. The anatomical region of horses and cattle which held a strange fascination for maimers, who in these instances may have been in need of psychiatric attention, were the genital organs. Maimers resorted to the use of two-foot knotted sticks in the case of mares which they then thrust into the animal's womb and proceeded to vigorously rent it out. A nine-year-old boy was found guilty of such a crime at Nayland in 1842. The same occurred at Bodney, Norfolk in 1845.²³ At Bressingham, Norfolk, in 1840 labourer John Long entered the stable with a knife where he cut the penises of a cart horse and donkey and then cut the 'bearing' of a mare. He was transported for fifteen years.²⁴ In one other case it is difficult to escape an emotive term to describe the form of maiming. The only descriptive term to come to mind is savage. It involved labourer Robert Key of Reydon, Suffolk, who tore out a sheep's entrails with his bare hands from the hind parts of the animal. He was transported for ten years.²⁵

In most of the examples briefly outlined above the maimers played an active part in the maiming or destruction of animals. There was, however, an example where the maimer played a slightly more passive role. Near the Fenland town of Downham someone drove 107 sheep onto a railway line, hurdled them in and left the train to do the rest. Twenty-two were run over.²⁶ There were, however, rarely mass killings where blood ran freely.²⁷ Maiming was on

the whole a fairly bloodless affair unless attention was focused on one particular animal.

II

The method of maiming, the choice of target and the ownership of the animals all provide valuable clues as to the interpretation and nature of this little known and little understood crime. Peacock has argued emphatically that animal maiming was a crime of protest. There was, he said, 'no other way of explaining some of the dreadful incidents that occurred'.²⁸ He had, however, failed to note a number of important features. In the case of donkeys and asses it should be remembered that they were commonly owned by working men. It is therefore not surprising to find the majority of donkey owners were labourers and craftsmen. We find examples of blacksmiths, a cordwainer, a butcher and labourers who suffered such depredations.²⁹ The fact that such cases existed would seem to suggest the maimings were due to personal feuds between members of the same social class. The poisoning of cats and dogs usually indicated that farmers and gamekeepers were clashing over the rearing of game birds. Farmer W Sewell of Caldecote, Norfolk, told the 1846 *Select Committee on the Game Laws* that he had had his dogs shot twice in one year. He presumed the gamekeeper was to blame.³⁰ The same occurred but on a greater scale in the Cambridgeshire villages of Cheveley, Stechworth and Wood Ditton for a number of years. Rewards were offered by farmers but to no avail. The fact that these three villages lay on one of England's most famous game estates, owned by the Duke of Rutland, may have been more than mere

²³ BNP 7 September 1842; *ibid* 2 November 1842; NC 26 July 1845. An interesting case has recently come to light at Dunstable, Beds, in which nine horses have suffered similar attacks, *The Observer*, 8 May 1983. A psychiatrist was called in to help the police investigations. Such cases bring to mind Peter Shaffer's play, *Equus*.

²⁴ NC 11 April 1840.

²⁵ NN 6 August 1853.

²⁶ BNP 24 July 1850.

²⁷ One of the bloodiest examples occurred at Worlington, BNP 13 January 1836, where a filly and two cows were stabbed, a sheep's throat cut and a donkey injured (by unknown method).

²⁸ Peacock, *op cit*, p 45.

²⁹ For examples of blacksmiths see BNP 17 October 1849, NN 7 April 1849; a cordwainer, NC 1 August 1835; a butcher, NM 27 May 1848; and labourers NN 23 October 1852, BNP 24 June 1846.

³⁰ *British Parliamentary Papers* IX Pt 1, 1846, p 440, qu 9052.

coincidence.³¹ There were other examples which appeared to be devoid of class hatred and social protest. At Beccles, Suffolk, two men killed a horse and then went to its owner and asked for the job of flaying the carcase.³² And again at Harling, Norfolk, a horsekeeper lost his patience with a restive horse and cut its tongue out in a fit of temper.³³

In a sizeable number of horse maiming cases, around fifty cases, there may not have been any ill-will intended. The animals' deaths may have been the result of accidents. East Anglia being an arable region had an enormous number of horses on the farms, the care and grooming of which were in the hands of the most skilled and highest paid labourers, the teamsmen or horsekeepers. George Ewart Evans in his oral history studies based on a more recent period has recorded the skills of such men whose pride in their work and the turnout of their teams was a by-word in dedication.³⁴ These men may have been members of secret societies which kept from the uninitiated the secrets of 'horse-magic' and recipes to make the horses' coats shine. Horsemen risked gaol in order to keep their horses up to a high standard of turnout, a standard forced on them not by their employers but through competition with other teamsmen. Lord Leicester's entire workforce of teamsmen was gaoled in 1863 for stealing corn with which to feed the horses. And the local newspapers were filled with other examples of gaoled teamsmen who were over-indulgent at their masters' expense.³⁵ Later in 1893 William Little in his *Royal Commission Report on Labour* wrote:

The regard for his horses and his pride in their appearance leads the horsekeeper into trouble, by tempting him to steal corn or oilcake for his favourites among them. In his code of ethics there is no immorality in taking the master's corn . . .³⁶

We have therefore on the one hand evidence to suggest that teamsmen pampered their horses to such a degree that gaol could often be the result, whilst on the other hand we have the simple fact that over 180 horses seemingly met their deaths or were severely maimed.

There would appear to be a contradiction. The answer may lie in the fact that many of the maimed horses were poisoned to death. One aspect of the teamsman's job was grooming. The end result of grooming was to achieve a 'bloom' or shine on the horse's coat. In order to create a good 'bloom' he needed more than mere brushing to achieve the desired result. Secret recipes or prescriptions were handed down from father to son, head teamsman to junior teamsman, which obtained a good shine on the horse's coat. The trouble with many of the secret recipes was that they often contained poisonous concoctions, which taken in small amounts, may not have seriously harmed the horses but if the measurements were wrong death was often the result. Among the poisonous ingredients two stand out, arsenic and brake root. The last mentioned root was put into the horses' litter by Robert Hewes of Market Weston, Suffolk. Hewes and other were imprisoned or fined for these accidents under the law, 39. Vict. 13.s.³⁷ This would explain those cases where horsekeepers left suddenly after the deaths of their teams. A gaol sentence awaited them whether or not the deaths were the results of accidents.³⁸ We must therefore treat some of the cases of horse maiming with extreme caution for

³¹ BNP 24 September 1861; *ibid* 3 June 1862.

³² NC 1 August 1840. In London gangs killed animals with the view to buying the carcasses for dog meat, see PRO HO 64/6, letter from Atlas Assurance Office 9 March 1836.

³³ NM 28 June 1845.

³⁴ See George Ewart Evans' books, especially *The Horse in the Furrow* (1960).

³⁵ Five teamsmen were gaoled for six weeks for stealing oats and peas. NN 21 February 1863.

³⁶ BPP, *Royal Commission on Labour*, General Report from the Senior Assistant Agricultural Commissioner, Mr W C Little, 1893-94, p 37.

³⁷ BNP 8 April 1835 and 22 April 1835; NC 7 July 1855; NN 3 May 1862.

³⁸ NC 9 December 1837; NM 7 March 1846.

they may have been the result of misplaced care and affection. There was, however, little doubt where mares had their wombs ripped out, or stallions their penises cut off, or where tongues were slit or cut in two. These acts either signified a serious breakdown in social relations between farmers and workers, or else were the result of some private vengeance feud of a more personal nature.

III

It is almost impossible to discover the motivation of animal maimers because over the whole period only forty-nine of them were found guilty, or twenty-eight per cent of all known cases. Their occupations, where known, are listed below in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Occupations of 24 Convicted Animal Maimers*

Labourers	11
Horsekeepers	8
Blacksmith	1
Builder's labourer	1
Farmer	1
Hawker	1
Shoemaker	1

* Sources: taken from local newspapers

Interestingly enough the average age of twenty-eight of those convicted, who were all male, was 18 years old. This is remarkably similar to the age grouping of the convicted incendiaries.³⁹ The most notable feature of the above table is that farm work oriented occupations provided the majority of those convicted maimers. Returning to the question of motivation one has an impossible task since the court cases were never reported in any great detail. How-

ever, significant statements in the press did appear which may lead us to certain conclusions. Only on one occasion did a convicted animal maimer actually state his reasons for committing the crime, and he did this in a defiant manner in the open court room. The case involved William Watts, who on receiving a sentence of transportation (he had already served seven years in the Antipodes) spoke from the dock that:

... he was perfectly satisfied with his sentence but to such a state had they brought the poor of this country by oppressing them with taxes, poor rates, and other things, that it was impossible for a poor man to live by honest means, and all this was to support big-gutted relieving officers, and other folks connected with them and the unions.⁴⁰

Watts had shot six horses and cattle in Buxton in the summer of 1839.⁴¹

In the following cases the motives were, to some extent, obscure, but their actions were the result of real grievances. The first example involved the only farmer suspected of maiming, Thomas Wilson of Cookley, Suffolk, who had been evicted from his farm at Michaelmas, 1835. He sought his revenge on the incoming tenant, a Mr Foulsham, by poisoning and killing seven horses. Wilson, however, skipped bail and fled to America.⁴² Others in official positions of authority in village life were obvious targets. Holmes, a constable at Monks Eleigh, Suffolk, had some animals maimed in 1831 as did an assessor at Wicken, Cambs, in 1859.⁴³ The rector and a preacher of Field Dalling, Norfolk, had one horse stabbed to death and another stolen in 1848.⁴⁴ The majority of cases, as with incendiarism, were disputes between employers and employees. 'Norfolk Jack' was held responsible for the death of seven horses in the Norfolk-Lincolnshire border

³⁹ The average age of convicted incendiaries in Norfolk and Suffolk between 1830-70 was 24 years, Archer, *op cit*, p 275. The average age of farm workers convicted of incendiary offences was 22 years, over one third of them were in the age grouping 17-21 years.

⁴⁰ NC 19 October 1839.

⁴¹ *Ibid* 18 May and 24 August 1839.

⁴² NM 16 January 1836.

⁴³ BNP 13 July 1831; NC 6 August 1859.

⁴⁴ NN 15 July 1848.

village of Elm in 1848. He had been given the sack a few weeks earlier.⁴⁵ Likewise Samuel Bolton jun. wounded his former master's horse after being given the sack.⁴⁶ Others felt aggrieved for a variety of reasons. David Norfolk's master had issued a warrant against him for poor work. Charles Winn's grievance was of much longer duration. After killing a lamb he confessed that Fowl (the owner of the lamb) 'had ill-treated him when a boy, and he had now only repaid a portion of the injuries he formerly received'.⁴⁷

In only one case did a convicted animal maimer leave behind some kind of written testament. Edmund Botwright, a farming blacksmith, left the following note to Watling, his employer, after he had hanged two bullocks.

Mr. Watlin Sir, — This come as a wornin for you and the police it is the entenshun [intention] if an alteration is not made verry quick you shall have a tutch of Carlton [reference to a village where an incendiary fire had recently taken place], for wee hav prepared ourselves for you all. I understand you have got a wheat hoe and wee have got a life hoe prepared for you and not you alone, but will the first if you do not make an altershun [alteration], we will make an exampel of you instead of you making an exampel for the pore to be kept alive, your Exampel is, to hav them all starved to deth you damd raskell. You bluddy farmer could not live it was not for the poore, tis them that kepe you bluddy raskells alive, but their will be a slauter made amongst you verry soone. I shoood verry well like to hang you the same as I hanged your beastes You bluddy rogue I will lite up a little fire for you this first opertunity that I can make, and I shoood lik to have their at the present time. If the pore be not employed different to what they have bin, it shall bee as the promos is made.⁴⁸

The basic grievance of Botwright's powerful letter was concerned with Watling's latest piece of machinery, a scuffling plough, referred to as a 'wheat hoe', which had replaced the labour intensive work of hand hoeing. Botwright was as good as his

word for two days later the barn, stables and four animals were burnt.

Animal maiming was a secretive method of protest. The larger animals were difficult to steal but easy to destroy, and as such, maiming had the added bonus of creating financial hardship for the owners. A good horse was worth anything up to 150 guineas and they were not so often insured as farm buildings were against destruction. Animals should also be regarded as property, farmers' property, and as such, they were also legitimate targets for protesters. It would be wrong to assume that country people had any sentimental attachments towards animals (generally speaking this is a nostalgic urban view of rural life) because the purpose of animals was to create or make profit for the farmers. E P Thompson suggested in his essay, 'Crimes of Anonymity', that animals were 'rarely' burnt in incendiary fires.⁴⁹ The evidence would suggest that this was far from the truth. In some accounts the incendiary went out of his way to work as much havoc and damage among the farming stock as possible. Before a fire at Stonham Aspal, Suffolk, in July 1844 the incendiary locked up six carthorses in a stable and then fired the building. And the events at Little Cornard, Suffolk, in the same year emphasized the country people's lack of regard for livestock. The incendiary in this case fired a sheep pen where 120 sheep were burnt. The newspaper report went on:

A number of labourers after the flames had nearly subsided, were seen cutting off the hind quarters of those less damaged, and afterwards carrying them away for their families to eat, but they were at length prevented from repeating so disgraceful an act.⁵⁰

Concern for animal life came in every case but one from the middle class, whose sentimentality was later to be depicted in Landseer's paintings. One anonymous farmer when writing to the Home Secretary

⁴⁵ *Ibid* 28 October 1848.

⁴⁶ *BNP* 1 August 1849.

⁴⁷ *NN* 28 July 1849; *BNP* 5 August 1846; *NN* 1 June 1850.

⁴⁸ *NM* 8 June 1844.

⁴⁹ D Hay and others (Eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree* (1975), ch 6, p 278.

⁵⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 25 July 1844; *Times*, 17 April 1844.

in 1844 was presumably hoping to move the latter to action when he wrote:

I am sure sir if you had been the spectator of some fires as I have your heart would have been melted to hear the cry and groans of the dying animals burning by inches. I am a small farmer but I darst not put my horse in the stable at night not knowing how soon the hand of the incendiary may visit me.⁵¹

The Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, was, however, made of stronger stuff and remained unmoved by the events or the descriptions. There may well have been a close relationship between maiming and incendiarism as the above examples indicate. There were also two trials where defendants were tried for incendiary offences. In the first, it was reputed that Aaron Wright had declared to his friends that he was going to 'stick' a sheep, but eventually decided on firing a haulm stack much to their amusement. The second case involved three labourers who successfully evaded conviction for a fire at Winfarthing Lodge, Norfolk. The newspaper reported one of them as having confessed to the intention of wanting to cut the throats of twenty-three horses that same night.⁵² Maiming was also carried out in conjunction with other crimes of social protest, especially harness cutting. This occurred at Woodbridge, Suffolk, in 1832; Lavenham, Suffolk, in 1835; and Wacton, Norfolk and Worlington, Suffolk, in 1836.⁵³ In four threatening letters reference was also made to the killing of the stock if the writers' wishes were not carried out. The general tone of the letters ran along the following lines:

... and mind we dont poison your Warter and make ind of you and your stock.

... you are trettened to be burned and as shure as it is spoke it will be done and very soon By your corn

or Cattle and there is a fresh plan laid to distroye your sheep . . .

My intention is to kill your poney and to do you all the mischef I can . . .⁵⁴

IV

It is difficult to know where animal maiming lies in the hierarchy of protest crimes, if indeed a hierarchy existed. However in some instances maiming could have been the response to the most serious breakdown in personal relations between master and men. This was especially true of horsekeepers.⁵⁵ Maiming may therefore have been the nadir of social relations. This point can be further emphasized by interpreting maiming as a kind of symbolic murder of the farmer; Botwright had written, 'I shood verry well like to hang you the same as I hanged your beastes . . .', and the anonymous writer who wrote to Green threatening to ' . . . make ind of you and your stock'. Whether or not the maimer could actually bring himself to commit murder is not really the point. The farmer, when confronted with the carcasses of his dead stock in the early morning, probably did not question the subtleties of the maimer's motives and ultimate objectives. Dead animals meant an act of killing had occurred and it was only a question of time and degree before the maimer turned on him or his family. Maiming, as an act of transferred or symbolic murder and as a weapon of psychological terror, was, one has to admit, a powerful, effective and unequivocal statement.

The epitome not only of animal maiming, but perhaps of all crimes of social protest, was the destruction of small disposable and consumable animals such as poultry and sheep. It was the supreme act

⁵¹ PRO HO 40/59, 222-225. The exception concerned a convicted incendiary named Wodehouse who expressed sorrow at having burnt some pigs, NC 24 July 1858.

⁵² CC 26 July 1851. Wright's friends gave him some matches and asked him not to fire their homes. EA 22 May 1832.

⁵³ NC 27 August 1836; BNP 13 January 1836; *ibid* 16 September 1835; *ibid* 27 June 1832.

⁵⁴ PRO HO 40/29(2) sent to Green of Walpole St Peter, Norfolk, 1831; HO 40/29(2) sent to Oldroyde of Walpole St Peter in 1831; HO 52/10(35-36) sent to W Smythe of Brandon, Suffolk, 1830.

⁵⁵ No horsekeeper was convicted of incendiarism in the region between 1830-70. Shepherds, too, had a propensity to steal sheep rather than start fires.

of hatred and revenge in which an element of self-sacrifice (ie leaving the dead meat) was involved on the maimer's part. In only one form of maiming was there any profit accruing to the maimer and that was the cutting of horses' tails, for horse hair was at this time a valuable and saleable commodity.⁵⁶

To conclude then, animal maiming while never as common as incendiarism displayed similarities but it has to be emphasized that it was not always, as is usually thought, an expression of social or class hatred. In the case of horses, misplaced care and attention could often result in death. In other examples the grievances could be of a more personal and private nature. But where grievances existed maiming was, perhaps, a more successful

method of protest than incendiarism as animals were rarely insured against such attacks. It also had the added force of appearing much more evil and sinister since it involved the killing of living creatures, and not, as in many cases of incendiarism, the burning of inanimate objects. Historians must not lose sight of this fact and they should dwell for a second or two on the outraged sensibilities of Victorian farmers who experienced a mixture of horror and disbelief. The sufferer may also have thought that the death, often by very violent means, of his stock symbolized in some way a death or murder-wish directed at himself. Furthermore, before historians shudder at these violent deaths of animals and pass moral value judgements on the maimers, they should remember that the maimers often had grievances and that the death of an animal was, perhaps, preferable to the murder of a human being.

⁵⁶ However see footnote 32 which suggests that in urban areas animal killing may have been connected to the dog meat trade.

THE WELSH HISTORY REVIEW

Editor: Kenneth O. Morgan, The Queen's College, Oxford

VOLUME 12

NUMBER 3

JUNE 1985

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