



Bawtry Heritage Group

Preserving our Past for the Future

Registered Charity No. 1188945

TALL TALES & HORRID HISTORIES FROM BAWTRY'S PAST

Compiled and edited by John Linsley

7th February 2024

Copyright free

Visit www.bawtryheritagegroup.uk

INTRODUCTION

Bawtry - Tall Tales & Horrid Histories

This paper explores a rather different side of the history of the town and is intended to be amusing and entertaining as well as informative. It covers stories, some of which are fanciful and, maybe, difficult to believe as well as the funniest, yuckiest and most gruesome aspects of the Bawtry's history. There are also a few stories which are just interesting and normally factual.

The curious village name is from Old English Baltry, a tree rounded like a ball.

This paper is based on some initial research so please let us know if you are aware of any other stories to add to the list.

CONTENTS

Page 3	The Saddler of Bawtry
Page 5	The Crown Hotel, Market Place
Page 6	Bawtry and Black Bess the Wonder Horse
Page 8	Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street Conspiracy
Page 12	The Haunting of the Phoenix Theatre
Page 14	References & sources

1. The Saddler of Bawtry – a legendary figure of folklore, whose demise is used for an excuse to never turn down an offer of a drink

“Don’t be like the saddler of Bawtry” is an eighteenth-century phrase warning never to refuse the offer of a drink.

According to the tale behind this particular expression, a saddler from Bawtry fell foul of the law and found himself sentenced to be hanged at the nearby Knavemire gallows in York.

At that time, a tradition was in place that allowed anyone condemned to die at the York gallows the chance of one final fortifying drink of ale at a tavern on the outskirts of the city. But, being abstemious, the saddler of Bawtry turned down the offer and so the grim procession continued from the jail to the gallows, where he was duly hanged. But within a minute or two of the noose tightening, a messenger arrived with a last-minute reprieve from the local justice of the peace – alas too late. Had he accepted the offer, and had only paused to quaff his ‘one for the road’, then the horseman would have arrived in time to save his life. As it was, by turning down the drink, the saddler was somewhat unceremoniously killed.

Whether true or not, this tale has ultimately been used as a proverbial warning not to turn down a drink since the mid-eighteenth century at least.

A slightly different version of this tale of a saddler of Bawtry who was hanged for leaving his liquor is told in a note left by a native of Bawtry who was born in 1732.

The note says:

“A traveller, who had a good deal of cash in his saddle-bags, was robbed soon after leaving Bawtry on his way to Doncaster, viz. near the King’s Wood in Bawtry Lane, a place at that time noted for robberies and even murders. He had had the saddler at Bawtry to stuff his saddle, which hurt his horse’s back. Returning to Bawtry with his pitiable tale, he asked for the saddler; but lo! no saddler was to be found. The traveller had given him part of a tankard of ale, which was untouched standing in a manger in the stable. Now the saddler being a well-known thirsty blade, it was thought surprising that he forsook the friendly draught, and the sagacity of the multitude immediately suspected him to be the guilty person, and on this circumstance the poor saddler was immediately taken into custody, detained, and sent to York Castle, where he lay till the following assizes, when he was tried and acquitted.” Seeing that the saddler was acquitted and not hanged, it would hardly seem as if the old inhabitant of Bawtry had “put the saddle on the right horse”.

According to an online list of those from Bawtry executed at York since the 14th century, none were indicated as being a saddler. However, the records are poor and don’t always record the place of abode or occupation. We also don’t know the crime the saddler committed. The only one recorded as either from Bawtry, and/or a saddler, is:

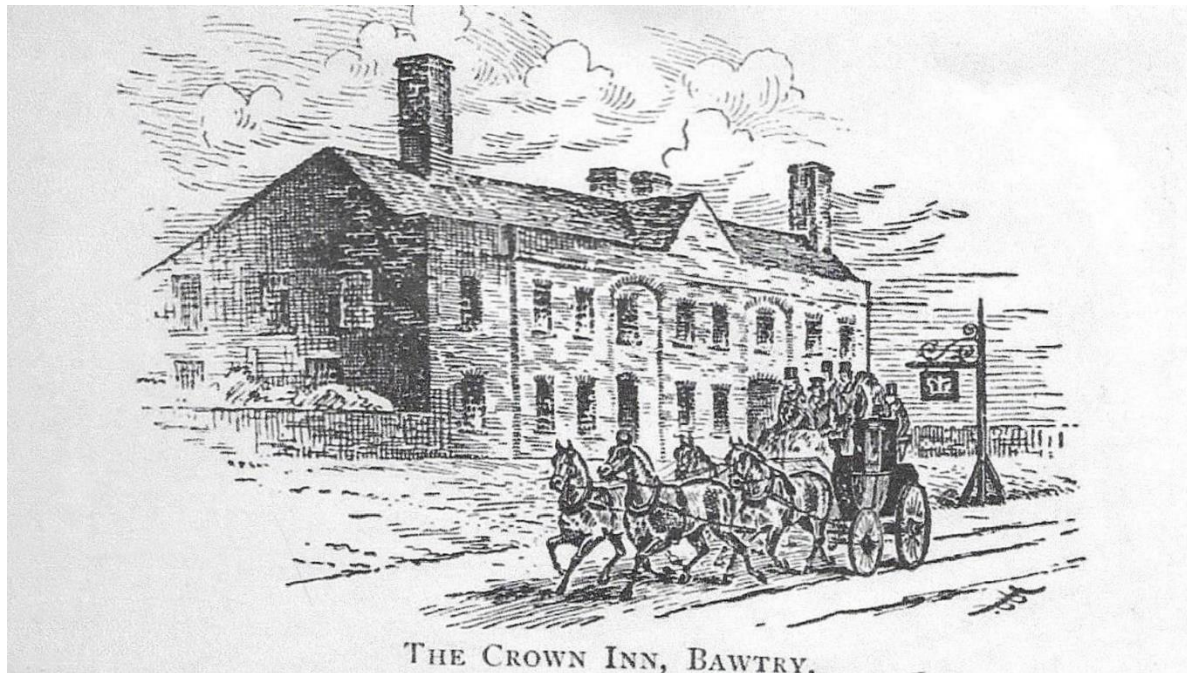
Wednesday 29th August 1797 at Tyburn gallows, without Micklegate Bar (Robert Dyson – aged 35) native of Bawtry who worked in the Post Office – crime Embezzling. His body is buried in Bawtry.

Regardless of which story you choose to believe this should be a fearful moral for teetotallers to ponder.

Make what you will of the tale but certainly never turn down a drink in Bawtry!

2. The Crown Hotel, Market Place – one of the most frightening haunted places in Doncaster being home to quite a bevy of ghosts.

The Crown Hotel is a Grade II listed mid to late 18th century building with extensive 19th and 20th century additions. It was built for the heavy coaching traffic and as a Posting House, has reported a ghostly apparition of a woman in the upper corridors and a figure of a young child lurking hungry in the restaurant. It became Bawtry's main coaching inn after Thomas Fisher moved his business from the Swan, across the road, to Scrooby Top around 1780.



An aged monk, in a belted habit, witnesses see haunting the stables where he died many years ago.

Wandering the corridors and dining room crying is the ghost of a serving girl, recognised by her uniform. She worked at the hotel over a century ago. After she cheated on him, her jealous lover (the chef) murdered her in a fit of pique and rage.

In 2004, a ghost hunting group were called in by the manager to investigate a paranormal phenomenon. They confirmed the reported findings of a woman walking along the upper corridor, with a ghostly young child sitting in the corner of the restaurant. One regular resident was often woken by the ghost of this little girl sitting on her bed.

There is also the Crinoline Lady, who died in a fire many years ago, and haunts the old wing. She is also often spotted in reception, where she may well greet you, when plates go flying and temperatures drop dramatically.

The Hotel additionally has associations with Robin Hood and Dick Turpin. The latter, or at least his horse's hooves, can be heard on the gravel outside. However, it is not explained how Dick's horse, Black Bess, is distinguishable from others. Dick certainly gets about in spirit form!

3. Bawtry and Black Bess the Wonder Horse

You don't have to come from Bawtry to know the legend that is Black Bess and the role she played in the great escape of the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin.

Bawtry certainly stakes a claim to the escapade captured so eloquently in the novel *Rookwood* by William Ainsworth. Today in advertising literature for the Crown Hotel in Bawtry there is mention that residents whilst lying in their beds can hear the sound of Black Bess on the cobbles outside. Although, as the Bawtry Heritage Group website repeats, "It is not explained how Dick's horse is distinguishable from others".

The real problem is that none of it is true. But why let the truth get in the way of a ripping yarn and a little hyped advertising.

Major Mowbray and Mr Paterson pursued the highwayman as he hurtled on Bess over



the Yorkshire border and through the first settlement in the county, heading north on the Great North Road into "Bawtry". Ainsworth writes with much descriptive panache as the epic pursuit towards York gathers pace and excitement. Mowbray and Patterson, the latter being Turpin's most feared assailant, according to Ainsworth, stop in Bawtry. "Holding a council of war for a few minutes, being doubtful which course he had taken". The low road to Thorne was where Ainsworth had sent him, the tension mounting as Bess tired, but maintained her speed with super powers worthy of any mythical creature gone before her. Turpin, Ainsworth notes, "did not dare to check her, fearing that, if she stopped she might lose her force, or, if she fell she would rise no more".

Dick Turpin and Black Bess

Nice that it is for Bawtry to have a small part to play in the epic novel of 1834; nothing is mentioned of Turpin stopping and although his pursuers did for a "few minutes" that was it! How therefore did the Crown Posting House get involved? Ainsworth by the time he wrote the novel would surely have known the Crown which by that time had become the leading Inn and Post House servicing travellers and distributing mail on the Great North Road and adjacent turnpikes that ran out of Bawtry. But mention it, he does not.

It is true that Turpin, an Essex man by birth, fled to Yorkshire having committed two murders in the south. He was eventually arrested under the pseudonym John Palmer for horse theft and hanged at York Tyburn on the 7th April 1739. There is no evidence that he ever came through Bawtry at all, let alone on the back of a wonder horse. Harper in his 1901 book celebrating the Great North Road before the motor car really

brings the fantastical tale of Turpin's overnight ride from London to York crashing down. He cites the ride of Cooper Thornhill, landlord of the Bell at Stilton, who for a bet rode non-stop to London and back again, in 1740. "The distance, 154 miles in all, was done in eleven hours thirty-three minutes and forty-six seconds. He had nineteen horses to carry him, and so is no rival of Turpin's mythical exploit in riding to York on his equally mythical Black Bess".

If the wonder horse never was, our tale struggles to maintain any good measure of credence. However, perhaps its real demise is nailed when one examines the dates. All the records the Bawtry Heritage Group have to hand is that the Crown Posting House was built in the Mid to late 18th century. Turpin was hanged in 1739, before, it would seem, the building came to be. Shame!

4. Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street Conspiracy

Arthur Thistlewood (1774 – 1 May 1820) was an English radical activist and conspirator who resided for 2 years in Bawtry. In 1820, a time of economic distress and radical unrest in England, he organised the Cato Street Conspiracy to assassinate all the members of the British Cabinet. Britain was hideously undemocratic in the early 19th century. A very, very small amount of the population had the vote. People were very angry about this and were inspired by the rhetoric of the French Revolution to try and get a situation where they believed they could redress the serious economic problems, poverty and corruption by getting universal male suffrage in. Initially this was by peaceful means but then, as time went on, things changed!



Arthur was born in Topholme in Lincolnshire, the extramarital son of a successful farmer and stockbreeder. He attended Horncastle Grammar School and was trained as a land surveyor but never seemed to have followed that business. He is said to have become unsettled in mind through reading the works of Thomas Paine who was an English-American writer and political pamphleteer. He travelled to America and then France and returned to England in 1794 obsessed with revolutionary ideas – that the first duty of a patriot was to massacre the government and overturn all existing institutions. Unsatisfied with his job, he obtained a commission in the army at the age of 21. He

Arthur Thistlewood

was appointed ensign in the first regiment of West Riding militia on 1 July 1798 and on the raising of the supplementary militia he obtained a lieutenant's commission in the 3rd Lincolnshire regiment, commanded by Lord Buckinghamshire.

In January 1804 Arthur married Jane Worsley, a lady older than himself, living in Lincoln, and who possessed a considerable fortune. After his marriage he resided in Bawtry, living in one of the Pilgrim Cottages on Church Street, formerly Low Street. After some 2 years or so he then moved to Lincoln. It is uncertain whether this happened in Bawtry or Lincoln, but Jane died two years after their marriage whilst giving birth to their first child. Her fortune reverted to her own family, by whom Arthur was granted a small annuity.

In 1808 he married Susan Wilkinson. Apparently, he was a doting husband and father and she was supportive of him and probably supported him politically as well. He then quit his commission in the army and, with the help of his father, bought a farm. The farm was not a success and in 1811, being obliged to leave Lincoln owing to some gambling transaction which left him unable to meet his creditors, he drifted rather aimlessly to London. It was here that, due to being thoroughly discontented with his own condition, he became an active member of the Spencean Society. The Society of Spencean Philanthropists in London took their name from the British radical speaker Thomas Spence. In 1814 Arthur resided for some time in Paris, returning to England around the end of the year.

By 1816, Thistlewood had become a leader in the Spencean Society, and came under the observation of the government as a dangerous character. The group being known for being a revolutionary organisation, involved in unrest and propaganda and the plotting for the overthrow of the government. Thistlewood's second in command in the group was George Edwards, who was actually a police spy. The group were silly enough to let this man into their ranks and tell him everything quite quickly.

In December 1816 Arthur helped plan an uprising (the Spa Fields Riot) in which the Bank of England and the Tower of London were to be seized. After the rioters were dispersed, Thistlewood and another conspirator were arrested but were eventually acquitted. Thistlewood was imprisoned (1818-19), however, for issuing a challenge to a duel to the 1st Viscount Sidmouth, a former prime minister. As home Secretary, Sidmouth had been chiefly responsible for the Six Acts of 1819, which were intended to suppress radical movements.

Most of the Spencean group members were angered by the Six Acts and the Peterloo Massacre, as well as the economic depression and political conditions of the time. The Peterloo Massacre took place in Manchester on Monday 16 August 1819. Eighteen people died and 400-700 were injured when cavalry charged into the crowd of around 60,000 people who had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation.

Released from prison, Thistlewood learned that the Cabinet ministers had arranged to dine at the Earl of Harrowby's house in Grosvenor Square, London, on February 23, 1820 but, however, this was pure fiction as part of a police trap. So, on the evening of the 23rd, as Thistlewood and several armed accomplices were preparing to leave a room in Cato Street for Grosvenor Square, they fell into the trap as police officers appeared and arrested thirteen of them. Arthur killed one policeman during the scuffle. Thistlewood himself escaped but was captured the next day. Found guilty of high treason, he and four others were hanged outside Newgate prison in London. Five others were transported to Australia.

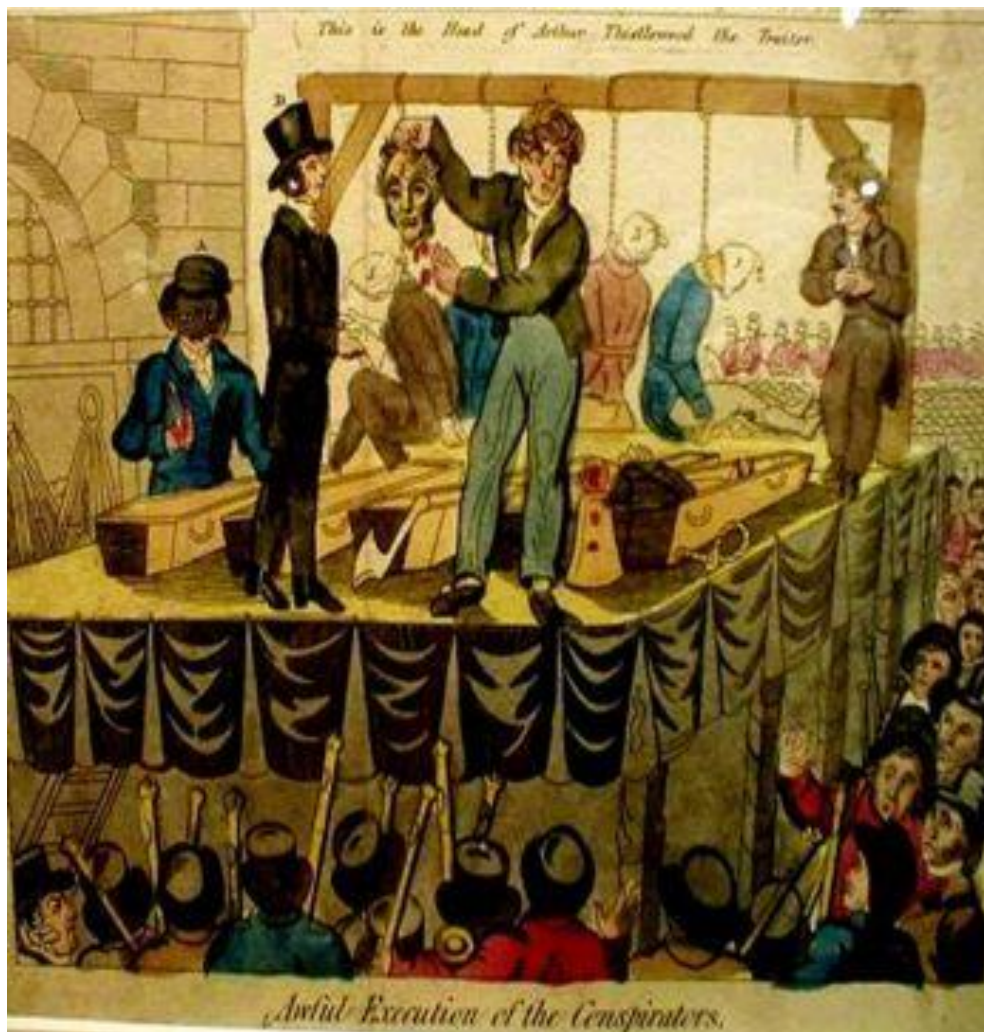


The arrest of the Cato Street conspirators

The intention of the Cato Street Conspiracy, after assassinating the cabinet, was to seize key buildings, overthrow the government and establish a "Committee of Public Safety" to oversee a radical revolution. According to the prosecution at the trial, the group had intended to form a provisional government headquartered in the Mansion House. The audacious plan was scandalous, and as such occupied a large portion of newspapers across the country for some time up until the executions. The conspirators became vilified and infamous in the country.

Beheading, usually by axe, was the customary method of executing traitors in England at the time. The victim was drawn (dragged by a horse to the place of execution, hanged (not to death), disemboweled, beheaded, and then quartered sometimes by trying each of the four limbs to a different horse and spurring them in different directions.

Arthur, and the other Cato Street conspirators, were the last to suffer judicial decapitation by axe in England. After drawing and hanging, Arthur and the other four members, were publicly decapitated. The execution was considered to be so traumatic that the quartering of their bodies was not proceeded with. The execution of these men highlighting the barbaric nature of a legal system that these men sought to overthrow.



The execution of the Cato Street conspirators

How Arthur conducted himself in his last moments before his execution shows the character of the man. On the gallows, in front of a jeering crowd, Arthur Thistlewood recited the words from his Old Bailey speech: "Albion is still in chains of slavery. I quit it without regret....I hope the world will be convinced that I have been sincere in my endeavours and that I die a friend to liberty...My motives, I doubt not, will hereafter be justly appreciated."

Thistlewood was convinced that the future would exonerate him of the charges levied against him, much as it has throughout the course of history to revolutionary figures. He remained steadfast in his beliefs, principally in his Deist faith; he refused repeatedly the offers of the Ordinary of Newgate Horace Cotton to pray, like the majority of men presented to the scaffold that day. Thistlewood refused a hood, and was reportedly sucking an orange until the moment when the trapdoor beneath him swung open, killing him in short order.

The impact of these deaths on the families was massive. Arthur's wife, Susan, along with family members of the other conspirators petitioned the King and the Home Office to "alleviate their acute sufferings and return the mutilated remains", but they received no response. Their graves remained unmarked inside the walls of a prison and they did not really have a way to say goodbye to them.

5. The Haunting of the Phoenix Theatre

The Phoenix Theatre in Bawtry was formerly a Primitive Methodist Chapel built in 1862. The present seating area in the auditorium was the main area for the congregation.



What was the Primitive Methodist Chapel & is now the Phoenix Theatre

Strange events in the theatre may indicate that it might be haunted by the spirit of a former Pastor who is appalled at the performance of plays, the drinking of alcohol and singing and the frequent raffles which constitute gambling. It is rumored that the Pastor hung himself in the south-west corner of the 'now' theatre auditorium because of being accused of misdemeanors with a couple of young women – although no evidence of this has been found.

During psychic presentations at the theatre several mediums have described an angry 'presence' trying to block their activity. One psychic said that the source was from a particular point in the theatre - probably where the pulpit was originally located.

A member of the Dramatic Society was alone in the theatre painting a set. She described how she was taken by the throat and pushed against the wall. She resisted and told the 'presence' to leave her alone and that she wasn't frightened. At that point the seats in the theatre started going 'up and down' on their own.

Some people claim they have been pushed going down the stairs from the upper dressing room.

Another member was working in the control room upstairs. Being alone in the theatre he locked himself in. Suddenly he heard angry, raised voices in the building. He searched the building but there was nobody there and the door was still locked.

Lighting cables have mysteriously been pulled out. They are designed so that they can't be pulled out accidentally. Is the Pastor sabotaging the productions?

Many people do not like being alone in theatre, especially at night. Are they right to worry or is this all a load of hokum? You must decide. Would you spend the night alone in the auditorium in the dark?

REFERENCES and SOURCE MATERIAL

Paper 1 - The Saddler of Bawtry

- i. Haggard Hawks blog – Paul Anthony Jones – article Aug 26, 2017
- ii. Wikisource – Yorkshire local rhymes and sayings
- iii. Amazing True Stories of Execution Blunders by Geoffrey Abbott

Paper 2 - The Crown Hotel, Market Place

- i. Doncaster Free Press
- ii. Confirmed experiences on Facebook
- iii. Geograph
- iv. Timetalk
- v. Planet radio
- vi. Paranormal database

Paper 3 - Bawtry and Black Bess the Wonder Horse

Paper by Mick Maguire - August 2023 based on

- i. William Ainsworth, Rookwood 1834. "Escape" Extract from <https://elfinspell.com/Masterpieces1AinsworthTurpin.html>
- ii. Charles Harper, The Great North Road, Palmer, London 1901 revised 1922.
- iii. Roger Protz, Historic Coaching Inns of the Great North Road, CAMRA Books 2017
<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/4927448>

Paper 4 - Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street Conspiracy

Paper Tony Jones, a Bawtry resident and involved with the Phoenix Theatre – based on actual recorded events - August 2023

Paper 5 - The Haunting of the Phoenix Theatre

- i. Wikipedia
- ii. Britannica
- iii. Dictionary of National Biography
- iv. The Cato Street Conspiracy – *Celebrating the bicentenary of the West End job*
- v. Treason: Betrayal and Deception – The National Archives

Bawtry Heritage Group website: <https://www.bawtryheritagegroup.co.uk>