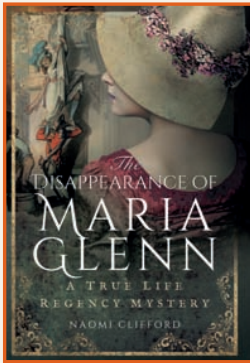


The Disappearance of Maria Glenn

Author: Naomi Clifford
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In 1817, a young, naïve, woman went missing from her uncle's home in Somerset in the dead of night. When



eventually found, it was said that she had been abducted by a local family intent on forcing her to marry a farmer's son, thus making him the legal owner of the fortune she was said to be likely to inherit. In a case that attracted the attention of the newspapers, a court case ensued, in which the young girl's reputation was placed in the dock.

It is this once notorious case, centring round the 16-year-old Maria Glenn, that Naomi Clifford deftly investigates in her new book. Combining first-hand accounts, newspaper and trial reports, archival sources and a wide range of secondary texts, she creates a page-turning tale of crime, gossip and relationships.

As Clifford recognises, it is difficult, after two centuries have elapsed, to know for sure who was telling the truth and who wasn't in this case. However, she clearly has a lot of sympathy for Maria Glenn, and this infuses her book; yet she also notes possible inconsistencies and alternative histories to the one she hopes is the truth.

The book sheds light on gender roles, property ownership and community relations in late-Regency England, and thus is recommended to anyone interested in this period. ■

Read it for: A well-researched, dramatic tale of greed, abduction and reputation in early 19th century England



Naomi Clifford

We talk to Naomi about the complexities of establishing the truth about historical affairs of the heart

Naomi Clifford mines old newspapers for glimpses of everyday Georgian life for her blog naomiclifford.com and has been researching 18th century elopements and abductions for the past four years. She has also written *These Were Our Sons: Stories from Stockwell War Memorial*, published under the name Naomi Lourie Klein. She is a former journalist and lives in London.

How did you originally find out about the case of Maria Glenn?

I was browsing the British Newspaper Archive looking for information about my local area in south London and came across an extraordinary story of an elopement that took place in 1829. A man had been tricked into coming to the rescue of a woman, an heiress, being ill-treated by her uncle. His reward was to marry her. Only when he was arrested did he learn it was a set-up.

I was intrigued and started searching for more elopement stories. It occurred to me that elopement was a big issue 200 years ago, partly because women were regarded as commodities, to be bought and sold on the marriage market. Of course, at that time, everything a married woman owned belonged to her husband, unless it was protected by trusts. For unscrupulous men, marrying a rich woman was a ticket to financial and social success.

It soon became apparent that there was another dimension to some of the reports of elopement. There were plenty

of examples of abduction dressed up as romantic elopement. Some did not even bother to pretend: in 1772 Robert Morris kidnapped his ward, Frances Harford, who had just inherited £30,000. She was 12 years old and the marriage was later annulled.

One case stood out for me – that of 16-year-old Maria Glenn. I saw from reports in the newspapers that a number of prosecutions had arisen, and that Maria's uncle had published pamphlets about it, so I knew there would be a lot of material.

How unusual (or common) was this kind of abduction for money, do you think? Did you find many other cases during the course of your research?

It is impossible to estimate how frequently abduction for forced marriage occurred as many of the affected families tried to keep it out of the newspapers. Reputation was everything, as a bad one could affect the social standing of the family and especially the marriage prospects of siblings. It was somewhat surprising to find that once a couple returned from Gretna Green, or wherever they had fled to, the girl's family would insist they marry again – to ensure the marriage was legal. The mother of Clementina Clerke, a 14-year-old who had inherited a vast West Indian fortune and was abducted by a Bristol apothecary, was made to marry him again in England. He was prosecuted by Clementina's schoolteachers but she refused to testify against him as she already had two children by then. He abandoned her and lived the high life. She died in poverty.

I found plenty of other examples of stalking, threats and deception. Some of the victims had special needs and were especially vulnerable, and although young women were usually the targets for fortune-seekers, there were a few cases of young men being pressurised into eloping. Of course, elopement for love took place, and often crossed the class and race divide. Newspapers delighted in reporting those too. You just have to read Jane Austen to get an idea on what a big theme it was, particularly for genteel families.

How did you go about researching the case, and what were your main sources?

I am a huge fan of the British Newspaper Archive and was able to get a lot of first-hand information from it, both about Maria and about many other 18th and 19th century elopement/abduction cases. There was also a lot of material in the county archives at Taunton and Dorchester – mostly letters written by Maria's uncle's solicitor, including some written from within the courtroom. I also accessed material in the British Library and the National Archive.

Ancestry was also invaluable. It's how I made contact with Maria's descendants, but also it allowed me to find her on the census.

The transcript of the main trial was available free on the Harvard University 'Studies in Scarlet' microsite (http://vc.lib.harvard.edu/vc/deliver/home?_collection=scarlet), and one of the pamphlets – which included Maria's affidavit – was available on a fantastic law resource called heimonline.org.

The Library of Congress in the US had one of the rarest pamphlets connected with the case; it had crucial details of the last part of the story. It was scanned and sent to me for a mere \$25.

Did you find the differing accounts of what happened to Maria problematic, or did it help you create your narrative, in that you as the author, and the readers, have to decide whether they think Maria is telling the truth or not?

When I first discovered the story in the BNA and, still, after reading the trial transcript, I was pretty convinced Maria was making the whole thing up. I honestly didn't think so many people could all be lying about her all at once. It was when I began to dig deeper and read her uncle's pamphlets, which outlined some of the conspiracy against her, that I began to have misgivings. My own feeling is that both sides were, perhaps, both lying and both telling the truth. However, there is no definitive answer, so readers will indeed have to make up their own minds. For this reason I included Maria's long affidavit – her account of what happened to her. Although it was certainly influenced by her uncle, it is where we can hear her true voice.

The wealth of illustrations really help to let readers 'see' Maria and her environs – how

did you go about tracking these down, and did any come from unexpected sources?

The picture research was such fun. I had to pay for a few images but like any other author I had no real budget so I was looking for free or cheap. I took a few photos at locations featured in the story but if I found better ones on Flickr I messaged the photographers and offered a copy of the book in exchange for use. I also bought copies of contemporary prints of Taunton on eBay and scanned them myself. Maria's descendants supplied the photographs of her in later life.

Similarly, do you feel it helps your storytelling by visiting the locations you're writing about – does it help bring the case to life for you?

Visiting the locations was key. The town of Taunton is almost like a character in itself in the book and I needed to understand the distances and routes the characters took walking around the town. Although we don't know exactly where she lived, we know it was in North Town, close to French Weir, a large open space, where she was alleged to have assignations. In Dorchester, I took time to walk around the courtroom in the Shire Hall and imagine everyone in their places. I was struck by how intimidating it must have been – with enemies sitting in close proximity to each other.

Towards the end of the research I went to the Church of St Martin in Canterbury to find Maria's grave. The minister there took an enormous amount of trouble to track it down (the original plans were missing) and eventually, once we had swept away the leaves, it was revealed. I sat for a while just thinking about how Maria was only feet away and wondering what she would have made of the book.

How long did the research and writing of the book take you?

I started the research when I was working full-time so it took me quite about four years end to end. Also, although I have always written, I had not completed a book-length piece of writing of this kind before, so it took me a long time to find the right voice and to work out how to 'plot' it. I gave it to lots of friends to comment on and rewrote it several times.

Now that Maria Glenn is out, what will you be working on next?

Currently I am writing a book about the women who were executed in England and Wales at the beginning of the 19th century, to be published by Pen & Sword in 2017. Most of the women committed murder (many were infanticides) but a fair few hanged for forgery crimes or other property crimes. And I am beginning to think about the next one, which concerns a rape-murder during the Regency period which changed legal history. ■

Bodysnatchers

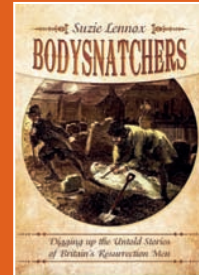
Author: Suzie Lennox

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w. www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

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Price: £12.99 (PB)



Former archivist Suzie Lennox has been covering tales of bodysnatchers – otherwise known as Resurrection Men – on her blog and on social media for a while, but this is her first full-length book on the subject. It's a well-constructed, fascinating read and Suzie's knowledge and enthusiasm shines through.

There are so many cases retold here, covering both England and Scotland, from the earliest known stories of bodysnatchers to the mid-19th century – for, as Suzie explains, the passing of the 1832 Anatomy Act neither got rid of the grim occupation immediately, nor did it enable others to forget about it; it was too ingrained into the public consciousness. Burke and Hare are, inevitably, included, but it is to Suzie's credit that she devotes only a short part of the book to them, and puts their part in bodysnatching history into much-needed perspective.

There's plenty of gory detail here about the bodies themselves (the press at the time seemed to glory in this). However, there's also a welcome and successful attempt to contextualise the acts of the Resurrection Men, to place them within a society that placed more value on the possessions a body was buried with, than on the body itself. ■

Read it for: An enthralling, disturbing, account of a dark part of our history