

PRESS RELEASE

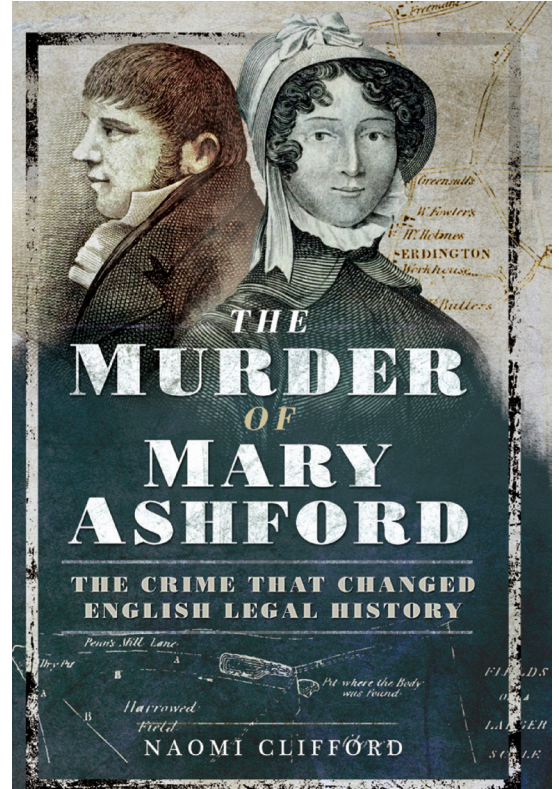
The Murder of Mary Ashford by Naomi Clifford The Crime That Changed English Legal History

After 200 years, the identity of the killer is finally revealed!

The mystery surrounding the brutal killing of a young farm servant in Birmingham 200 years ago has finally been solved.

Author Naomi Clifford's new book *The Murder of Mary Ashford* sheds new light on how Mary Ashford came to die, and why the truth about her death has remained hidden in plain sight for two centuries. The case involved a bizarre legal move by the prime suspect which led to change in the murder laws of England.

On a warm evening in late May 1817 Mary Ashford left a party in an pub in the company of Abraham Thornton, a local bricklayer with a bad reputation. A few hours later Mary's body was pulled from from a pit of stagnant water. Although almost everyone was convinced Thornton was guilty of her rape and murder, he vehemently denied it, and found witnesses to back him up. Even so, to the surprise and outrage of many in the area, he was acquitted.



Mary's brother was persuaded to start a civil prosecution against Thornton, only to find himself confronted with an extraordinary challenge. In court in London, Thornton threw down a gauntlet and demanded his right to trial by battle. Shockwaves went through the legal system. Was it really possible that Mary's brother and her alleged attacker would be allowed to fight it out in hand to hand combat at dawn?

Meanwhile, rumours were spreading about Mary's death. Mary killed herself, it was said, because she was overcome with guilt to having sex with Thornton on their walk home. It was a theory that was eagerly supported by a growing number of Thornton's supporters. But was it true? And was Thornton innocent of her murder?

Now, in a case that has foxed previous researchers, Naomi Clifford has pieced together Mary's disputed last movements and has conclusively identified her killer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naomi Clifford is happiest rooting around in libraries and archives for human stories from the late Georgian era. Her previous books include the well-reviewed *The Disappearance of Maria Glenn* (2016) and *Women and the Gallows 1797–1837* (2017). She blogs at naomiclifford.com and tweets as @naomiclifford.

PRESS QUERIES

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