



Crime and Punishment

Woodborough

Trial & Execution of George Maslen – 1838

George Maslen (or Maskelyne) is one of seven prisoners known to have been publically executed before the New Prison in Devizes. The execution of George took place before a crowd of about 10,000 on 6 September 1838.

George Maslen was born in Woodborough in 1805, the son of Robert and Sarah Maslen. It is likely that Robert and Sarah Maslen (nee Tarrant) were married in Stert on 13 May 1899. Although no baptism has been found for George Maslen, we know that George was born and lived in Woodborough until 1822 from a sketch of his life communicated by him to a friend, just prior to his execution, which was reported in the local newspapers¹.

At the time of the crime, George was living at Clack in the Parish of Lyneham. The crime, the attempted murder and shooting a local farmer (Bryan Rumbold), took place just outside Lyneham. On the day of the crime it had been snowing and a local resident had been able to track the movements of the assailant by following their footprints in the snow. In the immediate aftermath of the trial George tried to blame the shooting on another person, but their alibi proved this false. However, shortly before his execution, George confessed to the crime. Although he had described his victim as being “no friend of the poor”, the motive was money, the intention being to rob Bryan Rumbold. It appears that George was suffering from money troubles, which began when a former partner (Ann Guy) had come to live with him. At the time of his arrest George was serving a prison sentence for the theft of fowl from his employer. Ann Guy was to testify for the prosecution.

Following his execution, the body of George Maslen was returned to Woodborough. George was buried at Woodborough on 8th September 1838. In the burial register the Rector of Woodborough, William Wyld, has added the following footnote: “*Executed at Devizes for shooting at Mr. Rumbold of Lyneham, a native of this place, but resident at Lyneham in this County.*” There is no headstone, or marked grave, for George in the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene, Woodborough.

The following transcripts, which are from local newspapers (the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette and Wiltshire Independent), provide full details of the life, trial and execution of George Maslen.

WEDNESDAY

¹ Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette – Thursday, 6 September 1838

SHOOTING AT MR. BRYAN RUMBOLD

GEORGE MASLIN was indicted for maliciously shooting Bryan Rumbold, with intent to murder him.

Mr. SMITH conducted the case for the prosecution, and Mr. BINGHAM defended the prisoner.

Bryan Rumbold – I am a farmer at Lyneham; the prisoner was a labourer in the same parish; I was at Calne market on the 17th January [1838] last, and was returning home on horseback in the evening; I am in the habit of turning through a gate into my grounds, and was about to do so on this evening between 5 and 6 o'clock; I rode up the first field, and when I came to the top of it, some hurdles were placed in the gate way; they were not there in the morning when I went through, but were in another shard. It was an obstruction to my path, and I had put out my left hand to open the hurdle, when a gun went off and my arm immediately drop't; the horse galloped off and went to Lyneham, where I got assistance; I laid in bed 5 weeks; I cannot use my arm. Cross-examined – I never had any quarrel with the prisoner; I was overseer about 8 or 9 years ago.

Thomas Henley – I live near the last witness; I was returning from Calne market that evening, and heard Mr. Rumbold had been shot; I found him at a neighbour's house, and I assisted him home; I then went to the spot where it had happened; some snow had fallen that afternoon at half-past 4; I observed some tracks about 85 yards from the spot where Mr. Rumbold was shot; I traced it half way towards the spot, and came to a plain mark of a footstep; I had a leathern apron put over the mark; it was in the Cow-leaze field; I then traced it to a corner where the person appeared to have stood, there was the impression of a foot in the ditch; I then traced the marks from the spot, and about 50 yards off I found another plain mark, and I had that covered over with a gaiter; the shoe must have had a plate on the toe; I believe it to have been the left foot; at the next corner there was a good deal of trampling; I know the prisoner, he lives at Clack; the near way to Clack would have gone close to the prosecutor's garden; I pursued the track across several fields; the man had not taken any path but had gone across the fields to Lyneham; the tracks were all the same, no other party had passed; I pursued them to the road opposite Manchin's house; I felt convinced then that Minchin must be the man, and I had him taken up, and did not pursue the tracks further as they were now in a turnpike road; we were from 9 to half-past 11 engaged in tracing the marks.

Enos Clarke – I am a labourer in the service of Mr. Rumbold, and accompanied the last witness in tracing the marks; I examined the ditch; there was the mark of a left foot close to the hedge, and a mark of some one having knelt against the hedge; there appeared to be a tip on the left shoe, and the other was nailed; I measured the left impression; it was 10 ½ inches in length; I measured the toe with a stick; I afterwards saw some shoes which were brought to me by a police officer, and from my recollection I can say that they corresponded with the tracks; I counted the number of nails in the heels of the shoes, and they agreed with the number in the impression; the nails were triangular in the heels that corresponded.

Thomas Prior – I am a shoemaker; I went to examine the marks on the day after Mr. Rumbold was shot; the one that was covered with the apron was that of the right foot; there was not any plate, but there were nails; the mark of a left foot had a plate on the toe; it was a distinct mark. I went the next day and measured them; they were rather better than 10 ½ inches in length; and I cut a pattern of the entire impression. This is the pattern of the impression of the right foot; I have compared it with a shoe produced by Eve. I believe the impression to be exactly the same as the shoe shown me. Cross-examined – I often make many shoes from the same last.

Samuel Eve – I am a London police officer; I took the prisoner into custody between 8 and 9 o'clock on the evening of 6th February, at his house; when I went in he was cutting a piece of wood; I told him I came to take him into custody, but he did not say on what charge; behind the door of the kitchen, I found a gun; on the shelf I found a powder horn and shot belt, and some copper caps; I was about to take a small box, when the prisoner said "You need not take that as it is only tobacco;" upon looking into it, I found one bullet and some slugs but no tobacco. Under some wood in the kitchen, I found a pair of old shoes; I looked at them, and put them under the

wood again; they appeared to have been recently worn; I found two other pairs of shoes in the house, not concealed; the prisoner did not say anything to me then; I took him to a public house and sat up all the night with him; about 6 in the morning, he said, If any person says I shot Mr. Rumbold they are liars. I had not told him, on what charge I had apprehended him; and he added, If I did shoot him, no one did not see me; that was all he said. I searched the house 4 or 5 days, and always saw the old shoes; in about a month afterwards, I took these old shoes, and compared them with the pattern, the shoemaker had made; I saw the prisoner on the 19th February, he told me he had left home between 11 and 12 o'clock the day Mr. Rumbold was shot, and had taken the gun with him, and fired it off once against some larks; that he left work between 5 and 6 o'clock and went as far as Henry Lewis's, and returned home about 8 in the evening.

Ann Guy – I was living with the prisoner; he came home at 8 o'clock that evening; he brought the gun home with him; he appeared to be in very low spirits; I asked him where he had been? he said to Henry Lewis's, and that he heard a gun go off towards the Goat-acre road; I remember Shackell, the Bow-street officer, coming into the parish; I don't suppose he knew Mr. Shackell was there till he saw him go up the field; the prisoner came home after he had seen him, and said he was ill, and went to bed at 11 that morning, and kept his bed till the next afternoon; he was not ill during that time because he could eat and drink as usual; on the 16th January the prisoner told me to get him some bullets; I got 6 and gave them to the prisoner.

Sarah Cole – The last witness came to me for some bullets the day before Mr. Rumbold was shot.

Jane Wilkins – I live at Clack; the prisoner came to the house two days before Mr. Rumbold was shot, and borrowed a gun to shoot rabbits.

Hannah Henley – I was present when King examined Mr. Rumbold's clothes; he took part of a bullet from his flannel waistcoat; I gave it to my husband Thomas Henley; in a day or two afterwards, I took some shot from his coat sleeve.

Joseph Shackell – I am a Bow-street officer; I observed where the impression of the knee was, and that the shot had cut through the leaves of the trees.

Eve recalled – I produce the shoes and the bullet and shot.

William Odey – I am a labourer. I was in Marlbro' Gaol, for taking a bit of rotten wood in the hard weather; I was in the same cell with the prisoner; I asked him what he came in for? And he said for stealing wood, but not altogether for that, for they thought he had shot Mr. Rumbold; I asked him how they came to think that? And he said because he was out late that night in the wood; he said several had been taken up, and all could clear themselves but him, but he had no one to clear him. I asked him how they came to think it was him? And he said because of the shoes he had on that night; that it was on the 9th of February; he said the pair he had on that night he had not worn for 12 months; I asked him what sort of man Mr. Rumbold was? and he said he was a d-d bad sort of man to the poor. I asked him where it was they shot Mr. Rumbold? he said there were some hurdles put across a road for him to stop to open, and that the man who shot him could touch him within half a lug; I said it was a wonder he had not been killed? he said they were in too big a hurry, they shot too quick; and that if it was him, no one ever saw him; and he was sure it was but one man who did it, and he did not care if they did not find the bullet-mould; and as for his woman, he was sure she would not split; they had found half a bullet in his house.

Cross examined – William Harper and a boy were present at the time of this conversation; I heard of a reward when the police-officer came to me; I had told my brother of it before I heard of the reward.

James Franklin – I was in Marlborough gaol for wood stealing, and had a conversation with the prisoner; he told me he was put in on suspicion of shooting Mr. Rumbold, because he was out late that night with a gun; and he

had no one to clear him; and that if he had shot him, no one ever saw him; and no one could hurt him; and that they that shot him could touch him with half a lug stick. I had not then heard of any reward being offered, nor did I hear of it for a month afterwards. I told it to Eve's brother before I heard of the reward.

William Eve, police officer – I saw the last witness; nothing was said about a reward, till after he made the statement to me.

Joseph Smith – I am a labourer, and sometimes work with the prisoner; I remember his telling me many times, that Mr. Rumbold was an ill man, and that if he saw him in a ditch, he would not help him out. In cross-examination, he said it was more than two years ago.

Henry King, surgeon – I attended Mr. Rumbold; I found his arm dropping by his side; I found his arm was broken and wounded; the ball had passed quite through his arm just above his elbow; the bone was broken and splintered; I found the bullet in his flannel sleeve; it was half a bullet; he will not have the use of his arm again.

Cross-examined – In all compound fractures there is some danger to life; I did not consider his life in danger.

This was the case for the prosecution.

Mr. BINGHAM then submitted, that as the first count stated “that the prisoner with a bullet inflicted a wound, that wound being a bodily injury dangerous to life, with intent to murder,” it was necessary to prove that the wound was dangerous to life, whereas the proof was that it was not actually so.

The learned JUDGE, however, said he thought differently.

Mr. BINGHAM then addressed the jury for the prisoner, urging that there was neither any proof of the prisoner entertaining malice towards the prosecutor, nor of his having any reason for having an ill feeling with regard to him. He also pressed upon them that they could not believe the two witnesses who had pretended that they had heard declarations of the prisoner in Marlborough gaol, and that the deposition of Ody taken before the Magistrates varied with his statement here to-day; and that if they threw aside these declarations, the case was very much weakened, and left only with the evidence of the shoe-tracks; and upon that evidence alone he submitted they could not convict the prisoner. The learned Counsel then submitted that in all but the first count the word “wound” was omitted, and that the statute required that a wound should be inflicted.

Mr. Baron PARKE having consulted Mr. Justice Coltman, proceeded to sum up. It was a case of the most serious kind that had yet come before them at these Assizes; and they would give to it the same dispassionate consideration they had hitherto displayed, afor their verdicts appeared to him to have been founded on good sense and sound judgment. If they were satisfied the prisoner was guilty, they would convict him, whatever might be the result to the prisoner; if they entertained any reasonable doubt, they would give the prisoner the benefit of it. Notwithstanding the late humane alterations in the law, the charge against the prisoner was one deemed by the legislature to be worthy of death; it was a charge of having wounded the prosecutor, having at the time an intention to murder him. The statute provided, that any person who stabbed another, cut another, or wounded another, although such wound &c. should not be dangerous to life, should suffer death.

The first count of this indictment had been framed upon the supposition, that it was essential to the capital offence, that the cut should be such as to be dangerous to the life of the person injured; but it was not necessary that it should be so in order to bring it within the statute; and it was unnecessary to be proved. If they were of opinion that the wound was inflicted with intent to murder, that would support the capital charge, but if it was inflicted only with the intention to do some grievous bodily harm, the punishment would be transportation for life. The learned Baron then read over the evidence with the greatest minuteness, and then said the first question

was whether any person had shot the prosecutor, and with what intent; and then whether the prisoner was the party who had committed the act.

The Jury having consulted together for a short time, returned a verdict of Guilty.

Mr. BARON PARKE, then, having put on the black cap, addressed the prisoner- George Maslin – The crime of which you have been found guilty, and justly found guilty – for your own conscience tells you that you have committed it – upon a patient investigation of your case, is of a deep moral dye, and shows as much disregard to your religious duties' as if you were guilty of the crime of murder itself; for you acted from a malicious motive, and of malice afore thought – from free determination and spite, and with an intention to take the life of the prosecutor. The legislature, though it has made alterations in the law, has left your crime as worthy of death; and it is my bounden duty to tell you, that you are to entertain no hope of your life being spared; for your crime is of the most dreadful kind. It is almost unheard of in this part of the country. It is only known in another part of the United Kingdom. You have attempted to assassinate the prosecutor. I exhort you to employ the remainder of your time in endeavouring to repent for that great crime of which you have been found guilty, and for others you must have committed; and endeavour to bring your mind into such a state that you may hope for forgiveness – that forgiveness you must ask for God. You will have assistance from the Chaplain of the gaol, and I hope you will improve, by earnestly begging for pardon of your sins, for it is only through the mediation of Jesus Christ the Saviour that you can expect to obtain mercy. The awful sentence of death was then pronounced upon him.

The prisoner was taken from the bar, apparently unmoved, but the learned Judge cried bitterly.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette – Thursday, 16 August 1838

Soon after sentence of death had been passed upon Maslen, convicted of shooting at Mr. Bryan Rumbold, a most pressing application was made through Counsel, at the request of the prosecutor and his friends, to the Judge, to commute the sentence to transportation; but his Lordship would not for a moment listen to it: to accede to the application would, in his opinion, be holding out an inducement to murder; and the unhappy man is left for execution. On Thursday, at his particular solicitation, the highly respectable attorney who conducted his defence, had an interview with him in the New Prison. At this interview, after protesting his own innocence, he asserted that Charles Compton, of Clack, was the person who shot at Mr. Rumbold, and said that when Enos Clark's pig was shot for, Compton told him he would not go there, as he feared that the police officers, who knew his description, would find him out; and that Compton promised him 20 sacks of potatoes, or the value of them, if he would not let it be known. He also stated that Compton told him he owed Mr. Rumbold some malice, in consequence of a dispute about some potatoes; and further that he (Compton) had burnt the shoes he wore on the occasion, when his wife was from home. Mr. Tanner exhorted him, not to add to his other offences, by implicating his neighbour in such a charge, without grounds for it. Maslen, however, persisted in his statement; and it was immediately forwarded to the attorney for the prosecution. Highly to that gentleman's credit he took great pains, and made the most minute enquiries to ascertain whether it was correct or not. It turns out to be a most wicked and unfounded statement – false from beginning to end. Maslen was NOT at the shooting for Clark's pig – the Bow-street officer left the neighbourhood BEFORE the shooting for the pig took place. Mr. Rumbold never had a dispute with Compton either about potatoes or anything else; and Compton, was on the evening that Mr. Rumbold was shot at, two miles off. Through the indefatigable exertions of the Chaplain to the prison, Maslen has at length been brought to a sense of his awful situation; although he has not made a direct acknowledgement of his guilt, he no longer persists in his innocence: and with fervour he appeals for pardon to that Throne, where alone pardon can be obtained. Maslen is in his 32nd year of his age, and is unmarried, but

we fear he has [liv]ed a very profligate life. His execution is ordered to take place in front of the Prison, on Tuesday the 4th September.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette – Thursday, 23 August 1838

EXECUTION

George Maslen, alias Maskelyne, convicted at our Assizes of maliciously shooting at Mr. Bryan Rumbold, with intent to murder him, was executed this forenoon, pursuant to his sentence, in front of the New Prison near this town.

We stated in our last that a petition had been signed by several inhabitants of Devizes, praying that her Majesty would be pleased to commute the sentence to transportation for life, and that Mr. Tanner, the solicitor, had proceeded to the Isle of Wight, for the purpose of presenting it, in person, to Lord Russell. Mr. Tanner obtained an interview with Lord John on Wednesday evening, when his Lordship said, that if, in communicating with Mr. Baron Parke, he found there were any mitigating circumstances in Maslen's case, he would most cheerfully recommend him to royal mercy. On Tuesday last, however, the following letter was received by the Rev Mr. Phipps, (whose signature was the first on the petition,) from the Home Office: -

“Whitehall, 3rd Sept., 1838.

“Sir, - Lord John Russell having carefully considered the Petition to which your name is affixed in behalf of George Maskelyne, a Convict under sentence of death in the Gaol at Devizes, I am directed to express to you his Lordship's regret that there is no sufficient ground to justify him, consistently with his public duty, in advising her Majesty to grant the prisoner any mitigation of his sentence.

I am,

Your most obedient humble servant,

T.M. PHILLIPS.

The Rev. E.J. Phipps, Devizes.”

The Rev. Mr. Young of Lyneham visited Maslen in his cell a few days since, and in the course of conversation, Maslen spoke of transportation (as many of the lower class of people do) as a “very light affair;” but when the Rev. gent told him of the hardships and privations which the convicts in the penal settlements were compelled to submit to, and which he would be obliged to undergo, should his sentence be commuted, he said if that were the case he would much rather be executed, and perhaps he should never be better prepared to die than he was at the moment.

Yesterday morning, the Governor of the Prison visiting him as usual, asked him how he was? to which he replied in the most easy and indifferent manner – “quite well !” “But (he said) I could not go to sleep until four o'clock – I felt so funny – so much pleasure – it was a pleasure like that felt on going to a fair, that I could not close my eyes – it was real pleasure that kept me awake; since four, however, I have had a comfortable nap.” He appeared free from all anxiety, and looked forward to his execution as a most happy event. He did not seem to entertain the least doubt of the pardon of the Almighty for all his sins. The Governor suggested to the Chaplain, that some

one should sit up with him the night previous to his execution – conceiving that it might in some small degree relieve the horrors of the last few hours of his life; but on the Chaplain submitting it to him, he earnestly begged that he might be left alone, as he expected to have a good night's rest; besides, he would on no account (he said) put any person to the inconvenience of tarrying up all night. As the only dread that Maslen had expressed since his condemnation, was a dread of the public exhibition, on the scaffold, the Governor was apprehensive that his extreme anxiety to be left alone in the cell, might arise from a desire to terminate his own existence, he (contrary to Maslen's wish) therefore directed a person to sit up with him.

He conversed composedly during the night, and towards morning slept soundly. His appetite since his condemnation has been most voracious, eating double or treble the prison allowance; and even this morning he was anxious for his breakfast long before it was ready. The first time he showed any thing like feeling was when the Governor went to take leave of him a few hours before his execution. Perceiving the tears trickling down the Governor's cheek, he burst into a flood of tears himself: but after this he submitted with the greatest composure to have his arms pinioned, and coolly asked the executioner when he was to give the fatal signal.

On the road to the scaffold, however, his whole manhood forsook him: - he appeared in mental agony – and groaned aloud. No one could behold him, and at the same time listen to the solemn and affecting manner with which the humane Chaplain read portions of the burial service, without being moved to tears. In the room, a few steps from the scaffold, the Chaplain prayed with him, but at times was so overcome by his feelings, that he could scarcely articulate. Maslen threw himself prostrate, and sobbed most piteously; and on the scaffold, he was obliged to be supported by the executioner. He repeated the Lord's prayer, and as soon as the rope was adjusted, he gave the fatal signal, and after struggling hard for a minute or two, was launched into eternity.

Nothing could exceed the quiet and decorous manner with which the arrangements were made – nor the kind and humane conduct of the excellent Governor towards the culprit. The efforts and attentions too of the worthy Chaplain to bring the mind of the unhappy man to a proper and religious tone, deserve the highest praise. The spectators amounted to about 10,000.

Few men have quitted life on the scaffold with so little of public sympathy. Except among those who think that executions ought, under no circumstances, to take place, the general feeling was, that "he deserved his fate." He had for a long time cohabited with a woman with two or 3 children. One of those children died some months since, under very suspicious circumstances. It was indeed thought at the time that laudanum had been administered to it, for the purpose of procuring its death; but, whatever opinions might be entertained, no evidence was adduced at the Coroner's inquest to warrant a verdict to that effect. Shortly after his condemnation, Maslen was questioned on the subject; but, he gave the most solemn assurances, that he was not aware but that the child died a natural death.

The last Execution in Devizes (and we believe the only one within memory) took place on the 20th April, 1824, being Easter Tuesday, and Devizes Green Fair-day, when Edward Amor and John Goodman, for robbing and brutally assaulting Mr. Thos. Alexander of Allcannings on the highway, were executed on the same spot, on which Maslen has just expiated his crimes. The number of persons assembled to witness the awful scene, upon that occasion, amounted to from 20,000 to 30,000 persons. Those men had been convicted by evidence, which left no doubt of their guilt upon the mind of a single individual; yet, from the period of their condemnation to the last moment of their lives, they uniformly, and in the most solemn manner, persisted in their innocence. On the scaffold, and when the rope was round their necks, the Chaplain thus addressed them: - "John Goodman, and Edward Amor! I now require of you, and each of you, as you will in a few moments have to answer at the dreadful bar of the Almighty, are you guilty of the crime of which you have been charged, or are you not guilty! Goodman immediately replied, in a voice that could be distinctly heard throughout the immense crowd, "Not

Guilty!” Amor faintly said – “I say so too!” upon which Goodman urged him to speak out. He then said, in a louder tone, “I say so too! Not Guilty!” and in a few moments they were launched into eternity. On the previous Sunday, after they came out of chapel, upon being pressed by the Chaplain to confess their guilt – Goodman replied – “If any thing would make a man speak the truth, it would be seeing his coffin before him (which he had just done in chapel) and the certainty that within a few hours he would be laid in it,” – and then in the most solemn manner, he protested his innocence. Yet, as we have stated, there was not a single being, who heard the trial, but believed both the men to be guilty.

The following sketch of Maslen’s life is from a friend, to whom it was communicated by Maslen:

He was the son of Robert and Sarah Maslen, (both of whom are dead) and was born at Woodborough in the year 1805 – he has a brother and two sisters living. His father was an honest and industrious farm-labourer, and a constant attendant at church, where he was accompanied by his children. At the age of 17, Maslen went to live with his uncle, a baker at Hillmarton, with whom he remained 4 years, during which time he generally attended the service of the church on a Sunday with his uncle and aunt, by whom he was strongly reprovved when he absented himself. He left Hillmarton, in consequence of his attachment to a girl, to which his uncle objected, and lived at Compton rather more than 12 months, when he again went to Hillmarton; after which he lived with a Mrs. Hinton 5 years and 8 months. For 3 months afterwards he lived in idleness – he could obtain no work, and the parish would not find him any. He then, for the first time, became acquainted with Anne Guy, who had been seduced at the early age of 14 years, and had had a child by a shoemaker. About Christmas he went to work at a farmer’s named Freegard, with whom he continued five years and four months. During this time his intimacy with Anne Guy ceased, after an acquaintance of 6 months, in consequence of her taking up with a young farmer, by whom she had a child. In the last year of his service at Freegard’s, he left Lyneham and went to live at Clack, for the purpose of being nearer to his work. Here Anne Guy – being deserted by her former companion – came to live with him again. Soon after this, her child died, and his troubles began. She grumbled, because he lived better than she did – having beer, and occasionally a dinner at the farmers, whilst she was obliged to put up with bread and potatoes. To keep peace, he was induced to commit the first act of dishonesty – he stole three fowls from his master, and Ann dressed them for dinner. He then began to make free with the wood, and has taken home large bundles during a night. After this, to satisfy the demands of the woman, and to free himself from debt, into which he was fast falling, he made the attack upon Mr. Rumbold. The constable, in searching his house relative to Mr. Rumbold’s affair, found the feathers of fowls secreted; upon a charge of fowl stealing, he was committed, convicted, and sentenced to 12 months hard labour. Whilst he was undergoing this sentence, circumstances came out which led to his committal for shooting at Mr. Rumbold. The following are the words of his confession, taken Aug. 25, 1838.

“On the Monday evening, two days before I shot at Mr. Rumbold, I borrowed Mr. Freegard’s gun, for the purpose of destroying rabbits. On the Wednesday following, I was working in the wood for Mr. Freegard. A little after dinner I made up my mind to shoot Mr. Rumbold, as he came from the market, and rob him of his money. I charged the gun a little before it was dark, and waited in the wood until it was dark; and then I went and placed two hurdles across the gate, through which Mr. Rumbold had to pass, and waited at the corner until he came up. In about 10 minutes he came up to the place, and I immediately shot at him; it was dark, I could not see him clearly. I think he was about four yards from me when I fired the gun. Mr. Rumbold’s horse jumped around, and went down the ground at a smart pace, and I went round the wood to go home. I got home about eight o’clock that night.

The mark X of George Maskelyne;

Witness – Thomas Haywood, Governor.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette – Thursday, 6 September 1838

We are glad to find the public will have an opportunity of reading the Sermon preached at the House of Correction, near this town, on Sunday last, relating to George Maslen, as we hear it is to be published.

We were incorrect in stating last week that the brother of George Maslen, who was executed, was drunk when the body was conveyed to Woodborough; in justice to that individual we beg to say that he was not drunk on that day, neither was he in Devizes.

The Wiltshire Independent – Thursday, September 20, 1838

OPC Postscript:

Sixty five years after the death of George Maslen a short account of the crime and execution appeared in a publication "A history of the Borough and Town of Calne", written by A.E.W. Marsh and subsequently included in the parish publication of Lyneham Church History. Although originally written within the living memory of witnesses to the execution, and the author infers that he has seen contemporary newspaper reports, it is clear that this account was inaccurate on a number of counts. It is possible that the original newspaper reports exaggerated the number of witnesses to the execution but contemporary reports of 10,000 witnesses are materially different to a figure of 1,000 reported 62 years later. However, the reference to the demands of a paramour named Lucy being the motive for the crime is more surprising, given her absence from the Court reports (perhaps this was meant to be Ann Guy). It also suggests a poorly researched account, details of which are reproduced below:

Attempted Murder

Wednesday January 16th 1838 saw a man named Maskelyne shoot and wound a Mr. Bryan Rumboll, then residing at Lyneham Court. For his offence Maskelyne was tried, condemned and executed at Devizes.

From the newspaper accounts of this case it would appear that the prisoner committed the crime to satisfy the demands of his paramour, a girl named Lucy, who was then base enough to betray him. We are informed by one who remembers the circumstances and was present at the trial, that much sympathy was felt for the unfortunate man, and particularly so when it became known that Mr. Rumboll, who suffered but little injury, had refused to act on an intimation that a petition from him would save the man's life. The newspapers go on to say that whilst lying under sentence of death Maskelyne's appetite was "most voracious, often eating double and treble the prison allowance." At an interview that the Reverend Julian Young of Lyneham had with him a few days before his execution, he wept so bitterly that the clergyman thought he had thawed at last and said to him, 'You sorrow I trust for your past sins; you seek for pardon?' The reply was 'No Sir, I don't. I wasn't thinking about my sins. It is as I am so dreadfully hungry; I'd give all the world, if 'twas mine, for one good bellyful afore I die. I do assure you that I feels as if I could eat a Jackass!'

He was executed in the presence of 1,000 spectators.

History of Lyneham Church and A History of the Borough and Town of Calne by A. E. W. Marsh 1903