

2018

Burke and Hare: The Ghoulish Duo that Advanced the Study of Human Anatomy

Jennifer Wells

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wells, Jennifer (2018) "Burke and Hare: The Ghoulish Duo that Advanced the Study of Human Anatomy," *Vulcan Historical Review*. Vol. 22, Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol22/iss2018/8>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

BURKE AND HARE: THE GHOULISH DUO THAT ADVANCED THE STUDY OF HUMAN ANATOMY

by Jennifer Wells

Fear permeated the streets and stalked the residents of the West Port community in Edinburgh, Scotland during the 1828 trial of William Burke and Helen McDougal. The ghastly murders of sixteen innocent victims carried out by William Burke and William Hare seemed more like an Edgar Allen Poe narrative than reality. The Burke and Hare duo murdered men, women, and even a child, not for any transgressions committed by the victims, but rather to sell their bodies to the anatomist Robert Knox for dissection. As information regarding the murder trial spread to the citizens of Edinburgh, the news sparked a public outcry for reform through Parliamentary legislation. Before the trial, Europeans and Americans viewed Edinburgh as a scientific pillar and hub for medical training and progress. However, the nefarious deeds committed by William Burke and William Hare tainted the city's pristine image and underscored the need to regulate the distribution of cadavers for anatomical study.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the need for more cadavers became evident as the number of newly established medical schools increased. Anatomists legally received cadavers for dissection from executed prisoners sentenced to death by hanging. Unfortunately, demand outstripped supply and anatomists implored Parliament to pass legislation that would broaden the scope of cadavers available for dissection to include unclaimed bodies of those in charity hospitals and workhouses.¹ In 1824, William Mackenzie, an anatomist working in Edinburgh, Scotland, wrote *Use of the Dead to the Living*. The book emphasized the importance of anatomical knowledge for medical practice. *Use of the Dead to the Living* stressed the need of knowledgeable physicians, stating, "ignorant physicians and surgeons are the most deadly enemies of the community."² Parliament disregarded the frequent requests made by anatomists and physicians for reform and new legislation.

THE LIMITED SUPPLY OF LEGALLY OBTAINABLE CADAVERS FORCED ANATOMISTS IN GREAT BRITAIN TO FIND MORE CREATIVE MEANS TO PROCURE SUBJECTS FOR DISSECTION. ENTER RESURRECTIONISTS, BODY SNATCHERS, OR "SACK-EM UP MEN."

Resurrectionists were men that worked in groups to exhume recently buried bodies from cemeteries. The men unearthed cadavers and sold them to anatomists throughout Edinburgh.³ Two distinct resurrectionists groups emerged. The first included men of science such as anatomists, medical students, and those genuinely interested in the pursuit of medical knowledge.⁴ The second group, the majority of resurrectionists, procured cadavers and sold them to medical schools for profit. The general public viewed the latter as "human ghouls" and "thieves of the lowest grade" who belonged to "the most abandoned and desperate class of the community."⁵ While their abhorrent actions deserved this reputation, some felt they had no choice but to turn to disreputable trades. Many men became resurrectionists because they lived on the margins of an increasingly industrial society with few opportunities for education or economic advancement.

Resurrectionists banded together to form gangs of self-professed criminals that roamed graveyards in search of recently buried bodies. Fierce competition for cadavers caused rival gangs to sabotage one another. A body purloined from the territory of one gang by an outside group provoked the defrauded gang to seek the location of the body and mutilate it. If the body could not be found, the gang would inform the police of the rival gang's illegal actions. Many resurrectionists often bribed cemetery custodians and grave diggers for access to newly buried graves. If

denied, resurrectionists offered alcohol to caretakers and stole the bodies once the men were inebriated.⁶

The notorious reputation of resurrectionists and the stigma associated with human dissection caused many living during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to take precautions against those who would exhume bodies. Newspapers advertised iron coffins that were said to be impenetrable. Additionally, some cemeteries created burial plots that were outfitted with iron guards placed over graves. Other cemeteries advertised locked houses that safeguarded cadavers until they were no longer viable for dissection and could be buried.⁷

The easy money provided from selling bodies attracted two very unsavory characters, William Burke and William Hare. The two were Irish immigrants in their mid-thirties that lived in the tenement community of West Port in Edinburgh, Scotland. The unscrupulous men preyed on individuals marginalized by society and became notorious throughout Europe and America.

William Burke abandoned his wife and two children in Ireland and moved to Scotland after a land dispute with his father-in-law. He met his common-law spouse, Helen McDougal, once he arrived in Scotland. McDougal, a Scottish native, had been with Burke for ten years prior to meeting Hare. The two resided in Grindlay's Close, a squalid tenement house in the West Port community. Burke worked as a cobbler and sold used clothing to Edinburgh's poor.⁸ Burke had a history of domestic violence that worked to undermine reports of his even-tempered and amiable personality.⁹

William Hare lived with Margaret Laird, a widow in the Tanner's Close tenement house. Laird's deceased husband was the landlord of Tanner's Close, and after his death Hare moved in with Laird and assumed the position of landlord.¹⁰ Hare had the reputation as "a ferocious and tyrannical character, always ready for a fight, especially when drunk, which was often."¹¹ Margaret Laird, referred to in trial documents as Mrs. Hare, was known to terrorize others under her control.

Often "brutally" intoxicated and prone to violence, records indicate that she "was seldom without a pair of black eyes."¹² Unsurprisingly, Tanner's Close had the reputation in the community as a "riotous and disorderly house" for "beggars and other wanderers."

¹³

In November 1827, William Burke and William Hare began the lucrative business of selling cadavers to the Edinburgh Medical School. The venture began when Donald, a military veteran and tenant at Tanner's Close, died indebted to Hare. Donald owed Hare four pounds, and rather than forgive the unpaid debt Hare

decided to recover his losses by selling Donald's body to "the doctors," as he called them.¹⁴ Hare enlisted the help of Burke and the two worked together to remove Donald's body from its coffin and replace it with a bag of tanner's bark for weight.¹⁵ That evening, Burke and Hare went to Surgeons' Square and sold Donald's body to an assistant of the anatomist



Illustration of William Hare at trial

Robert Knox. The assistant paid a generous sum for the cadaver and told the two "that [Knox] would be glad to see them again when they had another [subject] to dispose of."¹⁶ Burke and Hare did not want to burden themselves with the strenuous labor necessary to unearth recently buried graves. Instead, the two concocted the idea to scout out victims ostracized by society, murder them, and sell their bodies to Knox.

Burke and Hare developed a pattern for murdering their victims. The men sought and befriended people living on the margins of society. Once targeted, the



Illustration of William Burke at trial

men invited their victims to drink copious amounts of whiskey and waited for them to fall asleep. The duo would then asphyxiate their victims through a process that later became known as “burking.” The method required one person to block airflow by covering the mouth and nose of the victim while the other laid across the body to prevent arms and legs from flailing. The process was widely successful as it left no visible marks on the body.¹⁷

Mary Paterson, a young prostitute known in Edinburgh for her physical beauty and audacious personality, was one of the earliest victims of the duo. In April 1828, Burke invited her and a fellow prostitute, Janet Brown, out for a drink. Burke took the women to his brother’s dilapidated one-bedroom tenement apartment. Paterson drank herself to unconsciousness and slept in a chair. Brown remained awake and even went with Burke to a nearby tavern for “pies and porter.”¹⁸ The two eventually returned to the house. An unexpected visit by Helen McDougal led to complete chaos. McDougal was furious when she caught Burke with two prostitutes. McDougal did not want Burke romantically linked to anyone, especially potential victims. McDougal began to assault Burke, but he countered her attack by hurling a drinking glass at her forehead. The squabble ended only after Burke locked McDougal out of the home. Burke escorted a frightened Brown outside and returned to the room with Hare. Paterson was still unconscious when the two suffocated her.¹⁹

men invited their victims to drink copious amounts of whiskey and waited for them to fall asleep. The duo would then asphyxiate their victims through a process that later became known as “burking.” The method required one person to block airflow by covering the mouth and nose of the victim while the other laid across

Brown came later to search for her friend Mary Paterson but to no avail. That afternoon, the two murderers delivered Paterson’s body to Dr. Knox in a tea chest. A few medical students recognized Paterson and inquired as to her death. Burke and Hare claimed Paterson died from alcohol poisoning and that they had bought the cadaver from an old woman. A student of Knox stated that Paterson’s body, “could not fail to attract attention by its voluptuous form and beauty; students crowded around the table on which she lay and artists came to study a model worthy of Phidias and the best Greek art.”²⁰ Dr. Knox was so captivated by Paterson’s body that he preserved it in whiskey for three months prior to dissection.²¹

James (Jamie) Wilson was another notable victim of the Burke and Hare murder spree. Recognized throughout Edinburgh for his happy disposition and “tuneful voice in singing,” Wilson was well-liked in the community.²² Intellectually and developmentally disabled, Wilson lived as a beggar on the streets of Edinburgh. His precarious position rendered him a target for the nefarious plan of Burke and Hare. According to Burke, Mrs. Hare targeted Jamie and led him to her house as a “lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep to the shearers.”²³ Burke and Hare coaxed Jamie to drink whiskey, but he resisted and only consumed a small amount. The two then urged him to rest. Once asleep the duo attempted to suffocate Jamie, but he possessed unmatched strength. According to Hare, Wilson “fought like a hero.”²⁴ The two assailants worked together to subdue and murder Wilson. After Wilson’s death, the criminals sold his body to Dr. Knox in Surgeons’ Square.²⁵ An assistant of Dr. Knox and several medical students instantly recognized him. When news reached Dr. Knox that Jamie was reported missing, Knox amputated his head and his distinct feet. He also worked quickly to dissect Jamie’s body, so as to render him unrecognizable.²⁶ Hare pocketed Jamie’s snuff box and spoon and Burke’s nieces and nephews divided Jamie’s clothes amongst themselves.²⁷ Dr. Knox’s unquestioning and prompt dissection of Jamie illustrates the desperation rampant among anatomists for cadavers regardless of

their source or untimely death.

On Halloween night in 1828, Burke and Hare committed their most infamous murder. The death of Margaret Campbell, commonly referred to in court documents by her maiden name of Docherty, occurred nearly a year after the two started selling cadavers to Knox. This plot began when Burke noticed Docherty begging for charity at a local tavern. An Irish native, Docherty came to Edinburgh to search for her son, who had moved to the city in search of work. Burke befriended Docherty and gained her confidence by falsely stating that his mother's maiden name was also Docherty and concluding that they must be related. He invited Docherty to his house with the promise of shelter and a warm breakfast. Docherty, elated with her perceived luck, agreed to go with Burke.²⁸

After Burke left Docherty in McDougal's care, he went to search for Hare. He told Hare about Docherty and referred to her as a "good shot" for "the doctors."²⁹ The duo employed the term "shot" to mean "potential victim." The men frequently used the phrase and court documents report that their wives knew it as well.

During the day, Docherty's clothes were washed and her shoes were taken, under the guise of repairing them. McDougal encouraged her to nap and plied Docherty with alcohol, refusing to let her leave the house.³⁰ Eventually, McDougal had to run errands and asked her neighbor, Ann Connaway, to watch the door to ensure that Docherty remained in the room. When the intoxicated Docherty attempted to search for her son, Connaway told her to stay inside because she would get either lost or arrested.³¹ In reality, the ultimate goal was to keep Docherty confined to the apartment in order to turn a fast profit for Burke and Hare.

While Burke befriended Docherty, he and McDougal also hosted McDougal's step-daughter and her family. Elizabeth Gray, McDougal's step-daughter, was a guest at Grindlay's Close for five days before Burke's chance meeting with Docherty. The day Burke met Docherty, however, he told the Gray family they

needed to sleep elsewhere for the night as he did not want extra people privy to the murder he planned to commit. Burke paid the Grays' lodging expenses and arranged for them to spend the night with William and Margaret Hare in Tanner's Close. Prior to leaving, the Gray family met and spent time with Docherty.³² Gray's presence proved to be essential in the eventual capture and arrest of Burke and Hare.

As day turned to night, alcohol flowed freely and merriment abounded with sinister undertones.

**"DR. KNOX'S UNQUESTIONING
AND PROMPT DISSECTION
OF JAMIE ILLUSTRATES THE
DESPERATION RAMPANT AMONG
ANATOMISTS FOR CADAVERS
REGARDLESS OF THEIR SOURCE
OR UNTIMELY DEATH."**

Docherty, McDougal, and the Hares enjoyed a Halloween party at Ann Connaway's house. The group sang, drank, and danced late into the night. McDougal later invited everyone to continue the party at her house. The Hares readily took McDougal's offer and exited Connaway's apartment.³³ According to trial documents, Docherty refused to leave Connaway's residence without Burke. Connaway needed to wake up early the following morning and pleaded with Docherty to go, but Docherty did not want to be without her perceived protector, William Burke. When Connaway told Docherty that Burke lied about his name, Docherty admonished Connaway and refused to believe her. Around ten or eleven, Burke arrived and escorted Docherty to his home.³⁴

The Halloween party went on at Burke's apartment until a fight broke out between Burke and Hare. Hugh Alson, a neighbor that lived above Burke, testified in court that he heard "two men quarrelling and fighting, making a great noise" and that a woman's scream of

murder “attracted [his] particular attention.”³⁵ The quarrelsome nature of the Burke household fostered Alson’s hesitancy to seek immediate outside help for its occupants. Instead, he decided to investigate the matter himself. As he listened closely, he heard “two men making a great noise, as if wrangling or quarreling.”³⁶ Additionally, he heard “a woman crying murder, but not in that way as [he] could consider her in imminent danger.”³⁷ He later heard someone sound as if they had been strangled. Alson reluctantly decided to search for the police unsuccessfully and returned to Grindlay’s Close. When the noise ceased, he determined that the situation was resolved and retired to his apartment for the night.³⁸

In court, William Hare testified that he had a major altercation with Burke on Halloween night. Hare



Illustration of William Hare at trial

claimed the fight escalated after Burke punched him in the mouth. Docherty came between the two men and begged Burke to stop. Hare also testified that Docherty screamed “murder,” and left the apartment twice to seek help, but was ushered back to the room by McDougal.³⁹ During the struggle, the men knocked Docherty down. Her drunken state rendered her unable to stand, but she continued to plead with Burke to end the conflict.⁴⁰ Burke approached Docherty after the brawl. Both Helen McDougal and Margaret Hare briskly exited the room and Burke “got on the old woman with his breast on her head, and kept in her breath.”⁴¹ Hare reported that “[Docherty] gave a kind of cry and moaned a little after the first cry.”⁴² Burke

suffocated Docherty for ten to fifteen minutes until she died. Burke then stripped Docherty’s body and buried it in the room under a bed of hay.⁴³

The following morning, All Saints’ Day, Elizabeth Gray and her family returned to Burke’s apartment and inquired as to Docherty’s whereabouts. McDougal dismissed the situation and told Gray that the “too impudent” Docherty had to leave.⁴⁴ During the course of her return, Burke poured whiskey on the roof and around the straw bed and yelled at her to “keep out of there” when she searched around the bed for her child’s missing stocking.⁴⁵ Burke’s strange behavior aroused Gray’s curiosity and her suspicion was confirmed when she accidentally grabbed Docherty’s limp right hand under the hay.⁴⁶ James Gray, Elizabeth’s husband, confronted McDougal. McDougal begged the couple to remain quiet. She offered them ten pounds a week for their silence. Elizabeth Gray responded, “God forbid that I would be worth money [got] with dead people.”⁴⁷ The Grays, although poor and in desperate need of funds, showed enormous bravery by refusing to be bribed into submission.

On their departure, they confronted Mrs. Hare. She invited them for drinks at a local tavern and, surprisingly, they accepted her offer. Meanwhile, McDougal crept out and told Burke and Hare that Elizabeth had uncovered Docherty’s body. Although Mrs. Hare begged the Grays to keep Docherty’s death a secret, they refused and went to the police.⁴⁸ As soon as Burke and Hare heard that Docherty’s body had been discovered, they hastily made plans to sell it to Knox. The men enlisted the help of a porter named John McCulloch. They packed Docherty’s body into a tea box and tied it with ropes. Hair hung from the box and McCulloch stuffed the loose strands inside the box as he said it was “bad to let it hang out” as it could arouse unwanted attention.⁴⁹ The men went to Surgeons’ Square and left the tea box in a cellar.

Dr. Knox’s assistant, David Paterson, handled the transaction. He paid Burke, Hare, and McCulloch at a local tavern.⁵⁰ During the trial, Paterson admitted that Docherty’s face was bloody and “livid [in] color.”⁵¹

Paterson also stated that Docherty's appearance "indicated evident marks of strangulation, or suffocation from pressure."⁵²

Police arrived at Burke's residence that evening and found Burke and McDougal scrambling to pack their

"NEWS OF THE BURKE AND HARE MURDERS OUTRAGED THE CITIZENS OF EDINBURGH. PEOPLE FEARED FOR THEIR PERSONAL SAFETY AND HARBORED UNABASHED HATRED FOR THE PERCEIVED CRIMINALS."

belongings to leave town. The pair gave conflicting accounts about Docherty and were arrested. The police also arrested William Hare and Margaret Hare.⁵³ The following day, officers went to Surgeons' Square to locate Docherty's body. They ordered David Paterson to open the tea box he had purchased from Burke and Hare. James Gray was there and confirmed Docherty's identity.⁵⁴ Dr. Black, the medical doctor assigned to determine Docherty's cause of death, stated that in his "private opinion," Docherty died violently, but that he "could not give a decided medical opinion on the subject."⁵⁵ The four prisoners vehemently denied any wrongdoing. The lack of hard evidence needed to convict the group worried the prosecuting Lord Advocate and he feared the criminals would be acquitted. Therefore, the desperate prosecutor offered king's evidence, or immunity, to the Hares if they testified against Burke and McDougal. The Hares readily agreed and the trial was set for Christmas Eve.⁵⁶

News of the Burke and Hare murders outraged the citizens of Edinburgh. People feared for their personal safety and harbored unabashed hatred for the perceived criminals. To ensure that the prisoners

remained safe and justice was upheld, Edinburgh police enlisted three hundred men as temporary police reinforcements. When the court opened for trial on Christmas Eve, people swarmed inside and "every available inch of space was crowded to suffocation."⁵⁷

The Lord Advocate initially charged Burke with the murders of Mary Paterson, James (Jamie) Wilson, and Margaret Docherty. On the day of the trial, the court decided not enough evidence existed to prosecute Burke for the murders of Paterson or Jamie as their bodies had long been dissected and discarded. The Lord Advocate subsequently resolved to charge Burke solely with Docherty's murder.

The trial lasted a grueling twenty-four hours. Key witnesses set the stage for the events surrounding Docherty's death. Ann Connaway discussed the Halloween party and Docherty's unwillingness to be without Burke. Hugh Alson spoke of the fight and shrieks of "murder" he heard from his apartment above Burke's residence. John McCulloch admitted to carrying Docherty's body in a tea chest to Surgeons' Square.⁵⁸ David Paterson confirmed buying Docherty's body but insisted he knew of no foul play. James and Elizabeth Gray testified that they had discovered Docherty's body under a bed of hay at Burke's apartment, and of the bribes offered by McDougal for their silence.⁵⁹ The testimonies against Burke proved to be devastating for his case, but could not provide incontrovertible proof without Hare.

The courtroom waited in anticipation for William Hare to testify against his one-time accomplice. Immediately after Hare was sworn in, the prosecutor asked him to discuss Docherty and the events surrounding her murder. Hare boldly responded, "[The old] woman, sir?"⁶⁰ Hare testified that Burke murdered Docherty on Halloween night after the two men fought. Hare claimed he sat motionless in a chair while Burke suffocated Docherty. When questioned as to his involvement in other murders, Hare refused to answer. He also stated that he never personally delivered bodies to Surgeons' Square, but often "saw [others] doing it."⁶¹

Margaret Hare followed her husband into the witness box. She held an infant sick with whooping cough and rattled the child to induce coughing when asked a question she wanted to avoid.⁶² She admitted to intentionally leaving the room just before Burke murdered Docherty.⁶³ She also suspected that Burke killed Docherty as she had “seen a little trick of it done before.”⁶⁴ Additionally, she admitted to purchasing the tea chest used to transport Docherty’s body to Surgeons’ Square.⁶⁵

William Burke and Helen McDougal had no witnesses for their defense. On Christmas morning 1828, the jury deliberated for fifty minutes. At nine twenty they read their verdict to a suspenseful crowd. The jury found William Burke guilty of Docherty’s murder. The jury determined Helen McDougal’s guilt as “not proven.”⁶⁶ When Burke heard McDougal’s outcome he leaned toward her and said, “Nelly, you are out of the scrape!”⁶⁷

One of the judges, Lord Meadowbank, admonished Burke by stating that his crimes had to be the “most monstrous exhibitions of atrocity ever disclosed in the annals of the criminal jurisprudence in [Scotland] or any other country.”⁶⁸

THE COURT SENTENCED BURKE TO DEATH BY HANGING AND SET THE EXECUTION FOR THE MORNING OF JANUARY 28, 1829. THE SENTENCE ALSO STATED THAT HIS CADAVER WOULD BE PUBLICLY DISSECTED BY DR. ALEXANDER MUNRO, A PROMINENT ANATOMIST WORKING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.⁶⁹

While awaiting execution Burke made two separate confessions. The first taken on January 3, 1829 stated that Helen McDougal, not Docherty, screamed “murder” and “police” on Halloween night. According to Burke, McDougal feared for Burke’s safety during the brawl and temporarily sought outside help. Burke

also confessed to suffering a visceral guilt for the murders. He admitted that he “could not sleep without a bottle of whiskey by his bedside, and a two-penny candle to burn all night beside him.”⁷⁰

Heavy rain did not prevent large crowds from developing on the morning of January 28, 1829. At least 20,000–25,000 people lined the streets of Edinburgh to catch a glimpse of the execution of the notorious William Burke. Curious onlookers paid five to ten shillings for the opportunity to view the scaffold from various vantage points. The spectacle even attracted individuals from Edinburgh’s neighboring cities and towns, as the case of Burke and Hare had gained considerable infamy.⁷¹

Struck with the realization of his fast-approaching execution, Burke reportedly exclaimed, “Oh that the hour was come which shall separate me from this world!”⁷² Burke drank a final glass of wine and went to the scaffold. The unruly crowd shouted, “Hare! Hare! Bring out Hare!” and “Burke him!”⁷³ As the executioner adjusted the rope, Burke took one glimpse at the gallows and assumed his place under the drop. Burke signaled his readiness to the executioner at a quarter after eight and died without incident. Gathering masses attempted to steal Burke’s body, but were held back by reinforced barricades and police.⁷⁴

The following day, Dr. Munro publicly dissected Burke’s body at the University of Edinburgh. Dr. Munro described Burke’s brain as “unusually soft.”⁷⁵ Large crowds gathered to view Burke’s body and his skin was flayed, tanned, and sold to the public. The University of Edinburgh exhibited Burke’s skeleton in their Anatomical Museum where it remains today.⁷⁶

The fates of William Hare, Margaret Hare, and Helen McDougal remain murky at best. Crowds throughout Edinburgh supposedly mobbed each one on separate occasions. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Mrs. Hare moved to Ireland after a mob suspended her over a bridge.⁷⁷ An unruly crowd recognized William Hare in London. The mob threw his body in a lime pit and he was rendered blind. Reports claim he ended his days as a beggar on the streets of London. Other

accounts indicate that Hare traveled to Dumfries and later Ireland.⁷⁸ As for McDougal, a tabloid printed in 1829 revealed that a crowd of mill workers near Doune recognized and killed her. Additional theories entail a move to Australia or the Western Isles.⁷⁹

Before news of William Burke and William Hare spread to the public, Robert Knox had been a

"THE FOLLOWING DAY, DR. MUNRO PUBLICLY DISSECTED BURKE'S BODY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH. DR. MUNRO DESCRIBED BURKE'S BRAIN AS "UNUSUALLY SOFT."75 LARGE CROWDS GATHERED TO VIEW BURKE'S BODY AND HIS SKIN WAS FLAYED, TANNED, AND SOLD TO THE PUBLIC. THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH EXHIBITED BURKE'S SKELETON IN THEIR ANATOMICAL MUSEUM WHERE IT REMAINS TODAY."

renowned anatomist at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. Knox routinely taught in a lecture hall filled to capacity with students that revered him. At the height of his success from 1828-1829, he had over five hundred pupils. To attract even larger classes, he regularly advertised an "ample supply of Anatomical Subjects."⁸⁰ Unfortunately for Knox, his name was firmly connected with Burke and Hare during the trial. One of the most popular songs of the time chants:

Down the Close and up the Stair

But and ben wi' Burke and Hare.
Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,
Knox the man that buys the beef.⁸¹

Was Knox truly ignorant of the foul play involved in the untimely deaths of his many subjects? His innocence on the matter appears dubious at best. Knox had been an expert anatomist at the height of his career. He continually paid the duo for curiously fresh cadavers. He deliberately rendered Jamie unrecognizable as soon as medical students identified him. His willingness to exploit those less privileged than himself for the sake of scientific progress and professional gain speaks to a greater flaw in the under-regulated, under-funded system of medicine.

Interestingly, police did not file charges against him. Knox had the opportunity to select a committee of his medical peers to investigate his involvement in the ordeal. The official "Report of the Committee of Investigation as the Dealings of Dr. Knox with the West Port Murders" concluded there to be "no evidence that Dr. Knox or his assistants knew that murder was committed in procuring any of the subjects brought to his rooms."⁸² Although not officially charged with a crime, Knox's life after Burke and Hare fell into a downward spiral. Students stopped attending his lectures, his colleagues shunned him, and he moved to London to locate work. He died with little fanfare on December 20, 1862.⁸³

The trial of William Burke and Helen McDougal caused a public firestorm that resulted in the draft and passage of the Anatomy Act of 1832. The knowledge of the brutal murders of sixteen innocent victims led the public to demand action from Parliament. In 1828, the first attempt to pass an Anatomy Bill, which would help regulate the cadaver market, failed. However, as a result of the notorious Burke and Hare murders, a new Anatomy Bill was introduced in 1831.⁸⁴ The passage of the bill in 1832 significantly expanded the available cadavers for dissection by including individuals that died and were unclaimed in charity hospitals and public workhouses. Thus, the Anatomy Bill helped to end both the

resurrectionists' practice of obtaining bodies from graves and the temptation of sinister characters like Burke and Hare to murder for profit.

THE TRIAL OF WILLIAM BURKE AND HELEN MCDUGAL PROFOUNDLY ALTERED THE STUDY OF HUMAN ANATOMY IN GREAT BRITAIN AND EUROPE.

Before the trial, the field required a symbiotic

relationship between distinguished men of science and shadowy individuals living on the fringes of society. The trial exposed the numerous failings of Parliament to pass suitable legislation that would regulate anatomy. News of the Burke and Hare murders led the public to demand action from a previously ambivalent Parliament. Great Britain's passage of the Anatomy Act of 1832 both heralded the end for desperate criminals like Burke and Hare and facilitated the study of anatomy for modern medicine.

¹ Sanjib Kumar Ghosh, "Human Cadaveric Dissection: A Historical Account from Ancient Greece to the Modern Era," *Anatomy and Cell Biology* 48, no. 3 (2015): 153-169, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4582158/>.

² William Mackenzie, *Use of the Dead to the Living*, (1827; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 1.

³ P.D. Mitchell, C. Boston, A. T. Chamberlain, S. Chaplin, V. Chauhan, J. Evans, A. Witkin, "The Study of Anatomy in England from 1700 to the Early 20th Century," *Journal of Anatomy* 219, no. 2 (2011): 91-99, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3162231/>.

⁴ James M. Ball, *The Sack-'Em-Up Men: An Account of the Rise and Fall of the Modern Resurrectionists* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1928), 71.

⁵ *Ibid*, 75.

⁶ James B. Bailey, *The Diary of a Resurrectionist: 1811- 1812* (1896; repr., Fairford: Echo Library, 2010), 20-25.

⁷ *Ibid*, 32-36.

⁸ William Roughead, ed., *Burke and Hare*, (Edinburgh and London: William Hodge & Company, 1921), 12, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/burkehareOOburk#page/n9/mode/2up>.

⁹ Molly Lefebure, "The Blind Beggar and the Discharged Soldier: A Partnership," *The Wordsworth Circle* 26, no.2 (1995): 75, accessed

November 10, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24044422>.

¹⁰ Roughead, *Burke and Hare*, 12-13.

¹¹ Lefebure, "The Blind Beggar and the Discharged Soldier," 73.

¹² *Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal*, High Court of Justiciary (1828): xiv, Hathi Trust Library, accessed October 13, 2017, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075956627>.

¹³ Roughead, *Burke and Hare*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 262.

¹⁵ Ball, *The Sack-'Em-Up Men*, 83.

¹⁶ Roughead, *Burke and Hare*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 263.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 27-29.

²¹ *Ibid*, 28.

²² *Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal*, vii.

²³ Roughead, *Burke and Hare*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁶ Lefebure, "The Blind Beggar and the Discharged Soldier," 90.

²⁷ Roughead, *Burke and Hare*, 30-35.

²⁸ West Port Murders: Or an Authentic Account of the Atrocious Murders Committed by Burke and His Associates, containing a Full Account of All the Extraordinary Circumstances Connected with Them, also a Report of the Trial of Burke and M'Dougal with a Description of the Execution of Burke, His Confessions and Memoirs of his Accomplices, including the Proceedings Against Hare, (Edinburgh: Thomas Ireland, 1829): 2, Hathi Trust Library, accessed October 10, 2017, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b268799](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b268799).

²⁹ Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal, 88.

³⁰ Lefebure, "The Blind Beggar and the Discharged Soldier," 91.

³¹ Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal, 54-55.

³² Ibid, 73-74.

³³ Ibid, 55-56.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 62.

³⁶ Ibid, 63.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 63-64.

³⁹ West Port Murders, 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 54-55.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 55.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal, 75.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 75-77.

⁴⁸ West Port Murders, 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 47.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 39-40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁶ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 45-46.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 47.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 49-53.

⁵⁹ Trial of William Burke and Helen M'Dougal, 88.

⁶⁰ West Port Murders, 53-61.

⁶¹ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 52.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ West Port Murders, 63.

⁶⁴ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 53.

⁶⁵ West Port Murders, 92.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 102.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 94.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 96.

⁶⁹ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 265-270.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 273.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 274.

⁷³ Ibid, 274.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lefebure, "The Blind Beggar and the Discharged Soldier," 96.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "William Hare," University of Edinburgh: Anatomical Museum, last modified June 5, 2017, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/biomedicalsciences/anatomy/anatomicalmuseum/exhibits/people/hare>.

⁷⁸ Denise Glass, "Murder Burke's Mistress Killed by Mob, Claims Paper," BBC News, last modified January 23, 2010, accessed November 1, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/tayside_and_central/8472759.stm.

⁷⁹ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 80-81.

⁸⁰ Henry Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox*, (1870; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 78.

⁸¹ Roughead, Burke and Hare, 277.

⁸² "Robert Knox, The Anatomist," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 517 (1870):581, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25220094>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Helen MacDonald, "Procuring Corpses: The English Anatomy Inspectorate, 1842 to 1858," *Medical History* 53, no. 3 (2009): 379-396, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2706054/>.