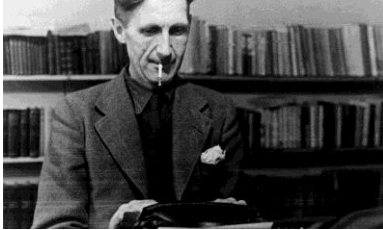


GEORGE ORWELL'S JAIL TIME CONFIRMED BY UNSEEN COURT RECORDS

AUTHOR'S WILFUL ARREST FOR DRUNKENNESS IN ORDER TO EXPERIENCE PRISON WHILE RESEARCHING DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON HAD BEEN QUESTIONED, BUT RESEARCH CONFIRMS TRUTH



THE BALANCE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION IN GEORGE ORWELL'S INVESTIGATIONS OF POVERTY HAS BEEN QUESTIONED EVER SINCE AN ANONYMOUS REVIEWER OF HIS 1933 MEMOIR, DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON, WONDERED "IF THE AUTHOR WAS REALLY DOWN AND OUT". BUT NOW AN ACADEMIC HAS DUG UP COURT RECORDS WHICH PUT ONE OF ORWELL'S EXPERIMENTS ON FIRMER GROUND: THE AUTHOR'S ARREST FOR BEING "DRUNK AND INCAPABLE" IN THE EAST END OF LONDON WHILE POSING AS A FISH PORTER NAMED EDWARD

BURTON.

ORWELL'S UNPUBLISHED 1932 ESSAY CLINK DESCRIBES A COLOURFUL 48 HOURS IN CUSTODY IN DECEMBER 1931 AFTER DRINKING "FOUR OR FIVE PINTS" AND MOST OF A BOTTLE OF WHISKY. HIS INTENTION WAS TO BE ARRESTED, "IN ORDER TO GET A TASTE OF PRISON AND TO BRING HIMSELF CLOSER TO THE TRAMPS AND SMALL-TIME VILLAINS WITH WHOM HE MINGLED", ACCORDING TO BIOGRAPHER GORDON BOWKER.

"WHEN THE CHARGE SHEET WAS FILLED UP I TOLD THE STORY I ALWAYS TELL, VIZ THAT MY NAME WAS EDWARD BURTON, AND MY PARENTS KEPT A CAKE-SHOP IN BLYTHBURGH, WHERE I HAD BEEN EMPLOYED AS A CLERK IN A DRAPER'S SHOP; THAT I HAD HAD THE SACK FOR DRUNKENNESS, AND MY PARENTS, FINALLY GETTING SICK OF MY DRUNKEN HABITS, HAD TURNED ME ADRIFT," THE AUTHOR OF ANIMAL FARM WROTE IN A POSTHUMOUSLY PUBLISHED ESSAY. "I ADDED THAT I HAD BEEN WORKING AS AN OUTSIDE PORTER AT BILLINGSGATE, AND HAVING UNEXPECTEDLY 'KNOCKED UP' SIX SHILLINGS ON SATURDAY HAD GONE ON THE RAZZLE."

NOW DR LUKE SEABER OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON HAS DISCOVERED COURT RECORDS IN THE LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES WHICH HE CLAIMS, IN A PAPER PUBLISHED IN NOTES AND QUERIES, OFFER "UNAMBIGUOUS EXTERNAL CONFIRMATION THAT ORWELL DID INDEED CARRY OUT, MORE OR LESS AS DESCRIBED, ONE OF HIS 'DOWN-AND-OUT' EXPERIMENTS".

ACCORDING TO SEABER THE VERACITY OF ORWELL'S REPORTAGE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT STAKE, WITH HIS ESSAYS A HANGING AND SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT "REPEATEDLY QUESTIONED AND INVESTIGATED".

"WE HAVE ORWELL'S OWN NOTES IN THE COPY HE GAVE TO BRENDA SALKELD TO BEAR WITNESS THAT PART IS FICTION RATHER THAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON," SEABER TOLD THE GUARDIAN. "WE ALSO KNOW THAT THERE ARE VARIOUS OTHER HALF-TRUTHS AND FALSEHOODS IN THAT WORK".

THE MYTHOLOGISING OF ORWELL AS "HONEST" AND HIS "SELF-PRESENTATION AS A 'PLAIN SPEAKER', AS ONE RECOUNTING LIVED EXPERIENCE" MAKE THE TRUTHFULNESS OF HIS REPORTING A "CENTRAL QUESTION", SEABER CONTINUED.

THE RECORDS ALSO CONFIRM A NUMBER OF OTHER DETAILS OF ORWELL'S ESSAY, PARTICULARLY HIS DESCRIPTIONS OF THE OTHER PRISONERS WITH WHOM HE WAITED IN THE OLD STREET CELLS. ORWELL'S LINES ABOUT AN "UGLY BELGIAN YOUTH CHARGED WITH OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC WITH A BARROW" CORRESPONDS TO "PIERRE SUSSMAN, AGED 20, WHO PLEADED GUILTY TO OBSTRUCTING SHOREDITCH HIGH STREET WITH A COSTERBARROW", WRITES SEABER IN HIS ARTICLE, WHILE ORWELL'S "YOUTH WHO HAD STABBED HIS 'TART' IN THE STOMACH - SHE WAS LIKELY TO RECOVER, WE HEARD" - IS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN "JOSEPH WILLIAM MCGOWAN, A 20-YEAR-OLD FRENCH POLISHER, ALTHOUGH ORWELL AND HIS CELLMATES WERE SADLY WRONG ABOUT HIS CRIME. HIS ACCUSATION WAS NOT OF WOUNDING OR ATTEMPTED MURDER, BUT OF MURDER, OF ONE FLORENCE EMILY GAMMAN," WRITES SEABER.

ACCORDING TO SEABER, THE NEWLY DISCOVERED DOCUMENT "DEMONSTRATES THAT HIS WRITING ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE IS AS NEAR TO 100% ACCURATE REPORTAGE AS POSSIBLE - THE FEW MINOR MISTAKES SEEM HONEST, AS THEY ARE EXACTLY THE SORT OF THING ONE MIGHT GET WRONG WHEN LISTENING TO PEOPLE IN A CELL".

Continued Remands. IN THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DISTRICT.
 Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction sitting at *Old Street* Police Court.
Monday The *21st* day of *December* 192*1*

Number.	Name of Indictment or Complainant.	Name of Defendant, Age, if known.	Nature of Offence or Matter of Complaint.	Date of Offence.	Time when Charged.	Time when Taken.	Doctor's Fee, (if any).	Pen.	Minute of Adjudication.	Time allowed for Payments and Instalments.
5	<i>66 Dept. Bldg. 14th Rec</i>	<i>Joseph William Green 20 "French Blackie"</i>	<i>Deliberately and fully and of malice aforethought did kill and murder Florence Emily Gannon age 20, on 13th at 21 Rynders St, Shoreditch</i>	<i>13 31</i>	<i>2 20</i>	<i>2 22</i>			<i>7 days</i>	
6	<i>1236th East</i>	<i>Mary Linden 36 "Showerman"</i>	<i>Drunk & Incapable</i>	<i>13 12</i>	<i>1 12</i>	<i>1 20</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>20/4 of 2 R 12 min 00 act.</i>	
	<i>1236th Adams</i>	<i>Mary Butler 37 "maimed"</i>	<i>Drunk & incapable</i>	<i>13 12</i>	<i>1 10</i>	<i>1 20</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>20/- or 11 days</i>	<i>7 days</i>
	<i>1236th Miller</i>	<i>Thomas O'Rourke 50 "Labourer"</i>	<i>Drunk & incapable</i>	<i>13 12</i>	<i>1 25</i>	<i>1 30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>1/- or 5 days</i>	<i>7 days</i>
9	<i>1236th Ganton</i>	<i>Edward Burton 39 "Fish Porter"</i>	<i>Drunk & Incapable</i>	<i>13 12</i>	<i>1 20</i>	<i>1 30</i>		<i>S</i>	<i>1/-</i>	
10	<i>1236th Ganton</i>	<i>Frederick Henry 37 "Sailor"</i>	<i>Drunk & Incapable</i>	<i>13 12</i>	<i>1 20</i>	<i>1 30</i>		<i>S</i>	<i>1/-</i>	<i>7 days</i> <i>W. Carter Hall.</i> <i>Magistrate Adjudicating.</i>

'EDWARD BURTON "FISH PORTER", DRUNK & INCAPABLE' ... OLD STREET COURT RECORD FROM 21 DECEMBER 1931.

BOWKER CALLED SEABER'S FIND AN "INTERESTING DISCOVERY" BUT SAID IT DID NOT SURPRISE HIM. "ORWELL'S REPORTAGE IS SO VIVID IT IS OFTEN TEMPTING TO ASK WHETHER EVENTS HE DESCRIBED REALLY HAPPENED OR WERE INVENTED. BUT IN CASE AFTER CASE I FOUND THAT WHERE DOUBT WAS CAST ON HIS CLAIMS, OTHER EVIDENCE EITHER PROVED THEY WERE ACCURATE OR GAVE THEM CLEAR SUPPORT," SAID BOWKER.

THE BIOGRAPHER SAID THAT SUSPICION ORWELL HAD NEVER ACTUALLY SHOT AN ELEPHANT IN BURMA, AS A CELEBRATED ESSAY DESCRIBES, "WAS DISPELLED WHEN BERNARD CRICK FOUND A WITNESS WHO CONFIRMED THE STORY", AND HE HIMSELF "FOUND THAT ORWELL'S SEEMINGLY FANCIFUL SUSPICION OF BEING SURROUNDED BY SPIES IN BARCELONA WAS WELL FOUNDED. KGB RECORDS SHOW THAT AT LEAST TWO BRITISH COMMUNIST AGENTS, FRIENDS OF HIM AND HIS WIFE, WERE SPYING ON HIM FOR THE RUSSIANS."

"ORWELL WAS NOT A FANTASIST BUT A BRILLIANT AND HONEST REPORTER WHO PLACED HIMSELF IN UNUSUAL SITUATIONS," SAID BOWKER.

True record ... George Orwell. Photograph: Mondadori via Getty Images

Alison Flood

Thursday 4 December 2014 12.46 GMT

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/04/george-orwell-jail-time-unseen-court-records>