



The Old Bailey: Eight Centuries of Crime, Cruelty and Corruption

Theresa Murphy

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This is the history of the Old Bailey, an institution as flawed as all man-made attempts at justice are doomed to be. In the beginning there was barbarity and injustice. The court was thronged with a restless, muttering mob eager for the verdicts of "guilty" so they could enjoy public executions, hurling abuse and missiles at those with the noose around their neck. Today we fool ourselves that we have evolved beyond barbarism, but are made uneasy by the continuing exposure of miscarriages of justice. The Old Bailey has since seen its usual parade of misfits. With a mixture of racist murderers, road-rage killers, and lying and cheating top politicians, it is as difficult as ever to separate the good from the bad, but the ugly are easily recognisable. Ugliness is the theme here as we tour the courts of long ago, meeting the Dracula-garbed court chaplains, drunken, brutal judges, cold-blooded hangmen, through to the new breed of pseudo-respectable criminals of today.

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