

From *The Courier* (London) of Mon 3 Apr 1826 p4, in a report of the Taunton Spring Assizes:

*William Clarke*, alias *William Taylor*, was indicted for stealing four dead bodies from the church-yard of Walcot, in Bath.

It appeared partly from the evidence, and partly from the prisoner's own confession, that he had been accustomed to the resurrection business since he was six years of age; and, from that time to the present, had assisted in the procuring of two thousand bodies for anatomical purposes. For these, when subjects were scarce, he had been paid as high as ten guineas a-piece. He had been tried twenty-eight times for this description of offence, but, from various causes, had escaped from all but two of the indictments: on those he was convicted and punished. The particular offence in question was only one of a class committed by the prisoner, as a part of his system. He, with an understrapper, hired a small house in a yard which commanded a view of Walcot burial-ground, so that when people were buried he and his companions were fully aware of time, place, and subject; and they had acted with such industry and regularity, that between October and February, they had plundered Walcot burial-ground of at least 45 bodies. These were packed up in hampers, and forwarded to London by the Bath coaches. On a discovery being made, the prisoner's house was searched; and three bodies were found packed in hampers for conveyance by the coach; and a fourth in a closet, covered with straw. In the cellar, there was found an

immense quantity of human bones, admittedly in a state of preparation to make skeletons.

The prisoner, in his defence, did not deny the charge; but complained bitterly of the medical gentlemen not coming forward in his support as they had promised.

He was found guilty, and before judgment begged very hard for mercy. He represented that subjects must be had for purposes of medical science; that the obtaining and acting upon them was very advantageous to the living; and he even drew some connexion between his profession and loyalty to the Sovereign; for he assured the Court that when his Majesty (God bless him) had a complaint which rendered surgical operation necessary, he (the prisoner) had procured four *subjects* for a *preliminary operation*, two of which were for the exclusive use of Sir A. Cooper.

Mr. Justice BURROUGH, in passing judgment, expressed his disgust at the conduct of the prisoner. He (the Judge) cared not who were of opinion that such practices ought to be tolerated: the law forbade them; and his own feelings entirely accorded with the law. He was sorry if inconvenience was sustained by the practisers of medical science; but it could not be endured that such conduct as that of the prisoner, denounced as it was by the existing law, should pass unpunished. His Lordship then sentenced the prisoner to pay a fine to the King of 100/.; and be imprisoned for the space of twelve calendar months.

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The Anatomy Act of 1832 gave doctors and medical students the right to dissect donated bodies for education and research purposes. However, it did not stop the practice of bodysnatching as demand outstripped supply.

The 'Sir A. Cooper' referred to is Sir Astley Cooper (1768-1841) who was a surgeon to King George IV (1762-1830).