

Clipping and Counterfeiting

Cases from the Old Bailey

Adapted from Old Bailey court records

(www.oldbaileyonline.org)

Cases 1-3: Clipping

Cases 4-6: Counterfeiting

Case Number 1

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Who was accused?

Three women were tried for High Treason. They were accused of clipping 8 half-crowns of Charles I and 10 half-crowns of King James, taking sixpence off each of them.

How were they caught?

A shopkeeper noticed that a little girl would often come into his shop on Fleet Street and ask to swap five or ten shillings in small money into half-crowns. She would not take any coins from him that she saw had already been clipped. The shopkeeper was very suspicious so he watched the girl go back to her mother. He watched as the mother then sent the little girl into other shops on the street to do the same thing.

The shopkeeper was so suspicious he followed the girl and her mother to a house in Sho Lane. When they went inside he went to find one of the constable's officers.

What evidence was there?

The officer searched the shopping basket the mother had been using and found in it coin clippings and filings wrapped in paper.

Another woman, who also lived in the house, was not there but in her room the officer and the shopkeeper saw:

- filings on the floor and found clippings under the bed.
- a pair of cutting shears under the wardrobe which had silver stuck to them.
- a melting pot that was still a bit warm.

The officer asked the little girl where she took the half-crowns she got from the shopkeeper and she said she took them to another woman who lived in Golden Lane.

What happened next?

The three women were put before the court.

The third woman (who the little girl said she took the coins to) pleaded not guilty and as no evidence had been found in her house she was allowed to go free.

The mother of the little girl said she did not know anything about the clippings in her basket.

The second woman said that the tools found in her room were not hers and that they actually belonged to a man called Benjamin Smith who had recently been executed for coining.

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The court decided that these two women were lying and that the evidence they had found in the house proved that they were guilty.

The two women were sentenced to death by burning.

Case Number 2

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Who was accused?

A shoemaker was brought to court for High Treason. He was accused of clipping coins.

How was he caught?

The shoemaker shared his house with a woman who many people suspected of clipping coins. One day while she was out the landlord brought some people who wanted to buy the house to see it. They wanted to see in the woman's room but it was locked. The shoemaker had a key.

What evidence was there?

When the door was opened the shoemaker went in first. The landlord saw the shoemaker take something off the table and hide it under a cushion. The landlord called for the constable.

The constable and the landlord searched the shoemaker's room and found a metal file. In the woman's room they looked under the cushion and found:

- some clippings of silver.
- a sixpence that had recently been clipped.
- a pair of shears for cutting metal.
- three crucibles (melting pots) for melting metal in.
- some melted silver.

What happened next?

The shoemaker was put before the court.

He said that he didn't know about what the woman had been doing.

The court decided that he was lying because he had a key to the woman's room and because he knew where the things were and had tried to hide them.

The shoemaker was sentenced to death.

Case Number 3

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Who was accused?

Mr George Clark and his wife, and Mr Richard Pepper and his wife, were accused of clipping coins.

How were they caught?

The greengrocer became suspicious as Mrs Clark regularly came into his shop with clipped money. She used to buy cheap items and would pay with a large clipped coin so that she got lots of non-clipped coins as change. The greengrocer thought this was strange and called the constable's officers. He also thought that the Clark's next door neighbours Mr and Mrs Pepper were doing the same thing.

What evidence was there?

When the constable searched Mr and Mrs Clark's house he found several rubbing stones, files and melting pots. In Mrs Clark's purse they found some clipped coins and some clippings. In Mr and Mrs Pepper's house he found a bag full of money at the bottom of a pot that was filled with pickled meat. There was 11 pounds worth of coins in the bag and 9 pounds worth of those coins were clipped.

What happened next?

In court Mr and Mrs Clark and Mr and Mrs Pepper denied that they had clipped any coins.

The court decided that there was not enough proof that they had been clipping coins and they were released.

Case Number 4

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Who was accused?

John Johnson and John Lawson were tried for High Treason. They were accused of having moulds that could be used to make fake shillings.

How were they caught?

They were caught by Thomas Gates, Joseph Gates and William Miller. Thomas Gates saw them with fake coins and counterfeiting equipment.

What evidence was there?

Inside the room the witnesses found flasks containing sand used for making moulds of coins. They also found crucibles for melting metal, some metal, a pair of tongs, and some aqua fortis (nitric acid). There were also some fake coins found that John Johnson had thrown out of the window.

What happened next?

At the trial an expert witness from the Mint called John Clarke explained how the equipment found at the house could have been used for coining. He stated that the accused had all the equipment needed to be able to make fake coins. The metals found were silver and copper, which when melted together with arsenic (a poison) form a strong metal for making coins.

John Johnson insisted that he was only staying at the place for a few days.

John Lawson stated that he had been in bed at the time of the alleged offence.

Both men were convicted and sentenced to death.

Case Number 5

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Who was accused?

John Carwick was tried for High Treason for possessing a mould made of sand featuring the impression of a shilling.

How was he caught?

He had been reported to the constable's officers by someone who suspected him of counterfeiting. The officers visited his house and found some evidence of counterfeiting in a back room but John Carwick and his friend had climbed over the roof into the house next door. The men were arrested when they came outside.

What evidence was there?

In a room in the house the officers found two flasks that were warm, some sand, some candles, some dies and a number of genuine coins. There were some shillings and a large piece of metal.

What happened next?

At the trial John Carwick denied that he had been counterfeiting and claimed that he was visiting the house when the officers arrived. He escaped across the roof because he was afraid that the men were a press gang (people who came to take men away to join the navy).

The prosecution decided that there was not enough evidence to convict Mr Carwick and he was declared not guilty.

Case Number 6

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Who was accused?

Thomas Condon and John Collins were accused of having moulds that could be used to make fake half-crowns and fake shillings.

How were they caught?

A woman had reported Thomas Condon to the constable. The constable's officers visited Thomas Condon's house a little after 5 o'clock in the evening. The door was bolted shut but believing those inside to be committing a crime, the officers broke down the door. Thomas Condon was caught with a spray and pair of tongs in his hand and tried to escape. John Collins was arrested peacefully.

What evidence was there?

The officers stated that they had caught Thomas Condon in the act of counterfeiting. A mould was found close to his feet and there were hot flasks, some aqua fortis (nitric acid), sand paper and copper. He also tried to run away. Collins was standing close to Condon and his hands were dirty with sand. There were crucibles by the fire.

What happened next?

At the trial an expert witness from the Mint called John Clarke showed the jury how the flasks would have been used to make fake coins. He said that the mould had already been used. After coins are made this way they are edged and scoured and put into aqua fortis (nitric acid). Everything needed to make fake coins was there.

Thomas Condon said that it was not his house and that even though the tools were there to make coins he had not made any himself. Collins said that he worked as a bricklayer and that this was not his house – he had lived somewhere else for three years and had witnesses to prove it.

The court found Thomas Condon guilty of coining and sentenced him to death. The court found that there was no real evidence against John Collins and he was found not guilty.