



Prince Albert Victor.

Cleveland Street Scandal

by Craig Kaczorowski

Encyclopedia Copyright © 2015, glbtq, Inc.

Entry Copyright © 2005, glbtq, inc.

Reprinted from <http://www.glbtq.com>

In July 1889, a male brothel was discovered to be operating in a residence on Cleveland Street, in London's West Side. The press insinuated that prominent aristocrats, including Lord Arthur Somerset, equerry to Prince of Wales, and Prince Albert Victor, Queen Victoria's grandson, were regular and frequent customers. Intensifying the scandal were allegations of a government cover-up to protect these "distinguished" and "highly placed" gentlemen.

The scandal fueled a growing perception of sex between men as an aristocratic vice that corrupted working-class youths. It was a highlight of a period of national abhorrence for homosexuality that culminated in the sensational trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895.

A Male Brothel on Cleveland Street

On the morning of July 6, 1889, police inspector Frederick Abberline set out for 19 Cleveland Street, with the intention of arresting 35-year-old Charles Hammond. The arrest warrant Abberline carried stated that Hammond and an 18-year-old accomplice named Henry Newlove "did unlawfully, wickedly, and corruptly conspire, combine, confederate and agree to" procure teenage male prostitutes "to commit the abominable crime of buggery."

However, when the inspector arrived at the house he learned that Hammond had run off, evading arrest. Abberline next went in search of Hammond's accomplice and around 1:30 in the afternoon found Newlove hiding at his mother's house and promptly arrested him.

The police had originally learned of Hammond's operation of a male brothel during an unrelated investigation into the pilfering of cash at the London Central Telegraph Office. In the course of that investigation a telegraph boy named Thomas Swinscow was discovered to have 18 shillings in his pocket--a surprisingly large sum of money for the boy, amounting to several weeks' wages.

Afraid of being implicated in the Telegraph Office theft, Swinscow explained that he had earned the shillings working for a man named Hammond. When the police pressured him for more information, Swinscow reluctantly revealed that he got the money "from going to bed with gentlemen" at Hammond's house, for which he received four shillings in payment. The telegraph boy further divulged that he had been introduced to Hammond by an acquaintance, Henry Newlove.

Swinscow would only admit to being paid for sex with two gentlemen in total, but supplied the police with the names of two other telegraph messenger boys who he claimed worked for Hammond on a regular basis.

Allegations of Aristocratic Involvement

Police coerced Newlove, Swinscow, and the other messenger boys to disclose the names of the men they had serviced. Newlove immediately implicated such prominent men as the Earl of Euston and Lord Arthur

Somerset, a major in the Royal Horse Guards and equerry to the Prince of Wales, whose stables he supervised.

As the investigation advanced, the three other youths grudgingly corroborated Newlove's contention that Lord Somerset was a regular client. They also insinuated that Prince Albert Victor (commonly known as "Prince Eddy"), grandson of Queen Victoria and the eldest son of the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII), and therefore the second in line to the throne, was involved as well.

Newlove's cooperation with the police earned him a reduced sentence. In September 1889 he was found guilty of gross indecency and procuring, and sentenced to four months of hard labor; the other less cooperative youths were incarcerated for nine months of hard labor.

The government, however, was much more lax in responding to the boys' allegations about Lord Somerset's involvement in the male brothel. Before charges could be brought against him, Somerset fled London, traveling first to the spa town of Homburg, Germany, and later settling in the south of France where he lived the remaining thirty-seven years of his life with a male companion.

The Press Uncover a Cover-up

In the beginning, the London press paid little attention to the affair, brothel closings being, at the time, routine police procedures. However, Ernest Parke, editor of the radical weekly *The North London Press*, took the story on as a cause and built it into a high profile public scandal.

Parke had first learned of the Cleveland Street affair when a reporter on his staff told him about Newlove's conviction for gross indecency and procuring. Parke wondered why Newlove and the other telegraph boys had received such light sentences. (An amendment to the Criminal Act of 1885 had made "gross indecency"--any sexual contact between men, whether in private or in public--illegal and punishable by two years of prison with or without hard labor.)

Moreover, Parke questioned how Charles Hammond knew the police were looking for him and had managed to escape arrest. Parke also learned that several prominent aristocrats had been implicated in the matter and that those gentlemen had never had charges brought against them.

Parke sensed a cover-up and a conspiracy. He published a story on September 28 that "the heir to a duke and the younger son of a duke" were involved in the scandal. He followed up that story on November 16, naming Lord Somerset and the Earl of Euston, and asserting that both men had been allowed to leave the country in the government's attempt to conceal the involvement of a gentleman "more distinguished and more highly placed." It was widely understood by his readership that this protected public figure was none other than Prince Eddy.

Although Parke was correct in his assertion that Somerset had fled the country, he was misguided about the Earl of Euston. The Earl was still in England and had no intention of leaving; instead, he sued Parke for libel. When the case went to trial, Parke was unwilling to reveal his sources and therefore could not produce the witnesses needed to prove his allegations. Consequently, Parke was found guilty of libel, and sentenced to twelve months in prison.

However, another trial began on December 12, 1889 that to some extent proved Parke's contention of a conspiracy in the Cleveland Street scandal. Newlove's defense attorney, Arthur Newton, was charged with obstructing justice by warning Charles Hammond of his imminent arrest, and assisting Hammond to leave the country in an effort to evade having to testify against his prominent clientele. The attorney was easily convicted of the charge and sentenced to six weeks in prison.

Parliament Member Henry Labouchère, an ardent homophobe who had four years earlier successfully

campaigning to have the "gross indecency" amendment added to the Criminal Act of 1885, closely watched the Arthur Newton trial. He suspected that the cover-up went far beyond a lawyer's mere efforts to protect his clients. He believed that a principal member of the government, perhaps even the Prime Minister himself, had arranged for Lord Somerset to be forewarned of an impending arrest and given an opportunity to escape.

Labouchère first expressed his suspicions in Parliament on February 28, 1890 and requested that a committee be formed to investigate the actions of the government in the scandal. A particularly voluble debate ensued. Labouchère was so confrontational during it that he was suspended from Parliament for a week.

His efforts to expose the alleged cover-up failed, and by a vote of 204 to 66 his motion to form an investigative committee was rejected.

Consequences of the Scandal

The Cleveland Street scandal gradually faded from public interest, but had a lasting impact on the general perception of homosexuals in Britain. The scandal helped to fuel a belief that sex between men was an aristocratic vice that corrupted working-class youths. It also helped to highlight a period of national abhorrence for homosexuality that eventually climaxed in the three sensationalistic trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895.

The release of Public Record Office police documents in 1975 regarding the case, and more significantly, the publication of the private letters of Lord Somerset, have since confirmed the involvement of Prince Eddy in the Cleveland Street scandal beyond a reasonable doubt.

Officially, Prince Eddy died of pneumonia on January 14, 1892. Several rumors and conspiracy theories, however, have emerged suggesting alternative fates. One theory suggests he actually died of syphilis, while another claims that he died of a morphine overdose, deliberately administered to him. A third theory claims that he actually survived until the 1920s in an asylum on the Isle of Wight, and that his death was intentionally faked in order to remove him from the line of succession.

Bibliography

Hyde, H. Montgomery. *The Cleveland Street Scandal*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1976.

Robb, Graham. *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Norton, 2004.

Simpson, Colin, Lewis Chester, and David Leitch. *The Cleveland Street Affair*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976.

About the Author

Craig Kaczorowski writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.