

Winner of the 2011 Article Prize

Simon Devereaux, "Recasting the Theatre of Execution: The Abolition of the Tyburn Ritual," *Past and Present* 202, no. 1 (2009)

Devereaux's subject is the removal of the late 18th-century site of execution from the spectacle at Tyburn to the enclosed area of Newgate. He uses that incident to examine contemporary 18th-century views about punishment; the uses of urban space; public order; the theater of execution and deterrence; commercialization; architecture and morality; the destruction of Newgate and the Sessions House by the Gordon Riots; and, the emergence of new mentalities. In full command of the scholarly literature that touches on these phenomena, he introduces a novel and rich context for their discussion. He finds that official opinions to move the site and reduce the large numbers of viewers were prompted by the self-evident failure of Tyburn executions to deter criminality as well as by growing metropolitan commerce which suffered the loss of working days among the general populace who attended the processions and execution. Persuasively, he concludes that the growth of more humanitarian impulses towards punishment and criminality were tempered by the attempts of authorities to make executions more immediate and shocking deterrents. He has attempted, with considerable success, to correct a standard and too widely accepted assumption about the nature of mid-late Georgian execution rituals and to challenge old paradigms. This is an ambitious, provocative, and original essay.