

Race, gender and bourgeois respectability: The Execution of Percy Clifford, 1914

Lizzie Seal and Alexa Neale

Abstract

This article is a microhistory of the capital case of Percy Clifford, a man of colour who was hanged for the murder of his wife Maud in England in 1914. It examines both what this case reveals about his life as a man of colour in Edwardian England and the racialised ways in which he was portrayed in the criminal justice system. It argues that understandings of bourgeois respectability, which were interwoven with notions of race, gender, class and sexuality, were significant to how the case was portrayed and interpreted.

Keywords

Microhistory; capital punishment; execution; race

INTRODUCTION

In April 1914, Percy Clifford, 32, and his wife Maud, 23, left London for a weekend in Brighton. The couple, who had married in 1909, had been living apart since 1913 owing to their constant quarrelling when they were together. Maud had returned to her parents' house in Brixton. Recently, they had been going around together again and seemingly getting along better. The weekend away was, as far as Maud understood it, meant to be a happy occasion and she had bought a new dress. She and Percy stayed in a lodging house in the centre of Brighton and went out drinking with a friend of Percy's. At Percy's request, tea was brought up to their room the following morning and left outside the door; Maud called out 'thank you'. The boarding house keeper heard two loud bangs around noon, but assumed they were from a backfiring motorcar. By afternoon, the tea was still on its tray, undrunk. The boarding house keeper and his wife entered the room and discovered Maud and Percy lying on the bed; both had been shot in the head. Maud was dead but Percy was still alive and was treated in Royal Sussex County Hospital.

After around ten days in a coma, Percy regained consciousness and recovered sufficiently to be arrested by the police for Maud's murder—although he was left with blurred vision and slurred speech as a result of his head wound. He was tried at Sussex Assizes in Lewes on 8 July. Percy's counsel put forward the insanity defence but he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. An application for leave to appeal against the verdict was refused later that month. He was hanged at Lewes Prison on 11 August 1914.

This is the author's accepted manuscript of an article published in the Irish Jurist, Vol 60, November 2018

Percy was born in Bloomsbury, London, in 1882³. His father was Jamaican and a British subject who had settled in London, working as a valet and butler before becoming a clerk. His mother was a white British woman born in Kent. Percy served in the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa in the Second Boer War during which he was injured and pensioned out. Back in London, he worked variously as an electrician, engineer, cab-driver and bookkeeper. He was also imprisoned for six weeks in 1903 for keeping a brothel and for two months in 1905 for attempting to steal. He worked on a poultry farm for eight months in 1907 and this was his last legitimate paid work before the murder. Since then, according to the Home Office report on the case, he "lived on his pension and the earnings of prostitution of women including his wife".¹

Percy Clifford's murder of Maud Clifford and his subsequent execution were not unusual or high-profile events. They were reported in the newspapers as would be expected but the details of the case were fairly prosaic—perhaps made a little more intriguing than most by the trip to Brighton and use of a gun as the ~~weapon. Men killing their wives was, however, an everyday occurrence.~~ Spouse-killing had become a more significant percentage of homicides in England by 1900, and husbands killing wives outnumbered cases of wives killing husbands by 12 to 1.² What distinguishes Percy Clifford is that he was of mixed race and British—and one of 56 men of colour sentenced to death in England and Wales in the twentieth century. These cases offer a means both of researching the significance of race in the criminal justice system from the turn of the twentieth century, and of learning more about the history of communities of colour in England and Wales.

Communities and individuals of colour in the pre-*Windrush* era, in particular, remain under-explored. As Bressey argues, there is a misperception of a "white and pleasant land of white British people" until the 1950s and '60s. White British history not only gains by far the most attention, "it is considered the only history of the British Isles".³ Although Britain is regarded as "static and insular" before the 1950s, in 1881 colonial and foreign national migration to England and Wales outnumbered that of the Scottish, and outnumbered the Irish migration by 1901.⁴ This includes white European migrants, not only those of colour, but serves to illustrate that England and Wales were more culturally diverse in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than is frequently recognised.

¹ Report by Ernley Blackwell, Permanent Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 29 July 1914, TNA/HO144/1323/253968.

² Martin J. Wiener, "Judges v Jurors: Courtroom Tensions in Murder Trials and the Law of Criminal Responsibility in Nineteenth Century England" (1999) 17(3) *Law and History Review* 467–506 at 489.

³ Caroline Bressey, "Forgotten Histories: Three Stories of Black Girls from Barnardo's Victorian Archive" (2002) 11(3) *Women's History Review* 351–374 at 351, 352.

⁴ Laura Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England, 1841–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), p.2.

Commented [LS1]: Deleted the sentence as the point that spouse killing wasn't unusual is perhaps clear enough anyway

Commented [L2]: Everyday sounds like hyperbole. ...not an unusual ... ?

Cases of murder provide a window onto the place and time in which they occurred, making them very suitable microhistories. Documents held in Home Office and court files, such as medical reports, trial transcripts and civil servants' memos and reports, enable access to the views and practices of criminal justice professionals. Ann Laura Stoler has described this as reading "along the grain"—when the records of the bureaucratic state are interpreted for what they reveal about the views of the privileged and the workings of power.⁵ Such records also contain details about the life of the condemned and his/her victim, making them useful sources of social history. Witness statements and depositions, as well as trial transcripts, to a circumscribed extent provide access to the voices of "ordinary" people—although these sources do not offer verbatim records and what witnesses said was heavily shaped by the demands of the prosecution process. Nevertheless, such sources do shed light on people's everyday lives, especially people about whom there is relatively little in the written record, even by the twentieth century, including working class men of colour such as Percy Clifford. Historians have argued that official records such as court documents can be read "against the grain" for what they reveal about the histories of the less powerful.⁶

In reconstructing Percy Clifford's case as microhistory it is necessary to read the archival material both along and against the grain. Microhistory entails "small-scale observation of historical events and individuals" through focus on a specific community, event or individual. This attention to the particular involves drawing bigger lessons about general experiences and the wider culture.⁷ Crime historians have turned their attention to microhistories of specific cases, placing them in their social and cultural contexts. Court cases are especially apt for examining social and cultural norms as they provide examples of instances where these have been breached.⁸

Murder is on the one hand an exceptional crime but on the other is generally committed by ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. As microhistory, cases of murder are examples of the "normal exception"—people living lives typical for their time and social position, but who come to the attention of the authorities and leave a more detailed written record than they otherwise would.⁹ Microhistory has been particularly fertile for exploring historical norms of femininity, with cases of

⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶ Ramachandra Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁷ Victoria M Nagy, *Nineteenth-Century Female Poisoners: Three English Women Who Used Arsenic to Kill*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), p.52.

⁸ David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday, 'Introduction' in David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday (eds) *Law, Crime and Deviance Since 1700: Micro-Studies in the History of Crime* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), Kindle edition.

⁹ Nagy, *Nineteenth-Century Female Poisoners*, 2015, p.55.

women accused of murder serving as the lens through which these can be examined.¹⁰ Individual cases of murder are also potentially highly revealing about race—both in terms of bringing overlooked lives into view and in identifying the significance of ideologies of race. Crime historians have so far paid less attention to race than to gender in microhistories of particular cases.

The most commonly known figures from Black British history prior to the mid-twentieth century are “exceptional” individuals such as the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Microhistories drawing on sources such as case files enable attention to individuals leading more typical lives and consideration of “a continuous black presence in Britain”.¹¹ As a British-born mixed-race man who was married to and murdered a white woman, Percy Clifford’s case is an instructive means through which to examine the imbrication of race, class and gender in Edwardian England. In particular, the significance of prostitution as a theme during the trial demonstrates the constitution of bourgeois Edwardian respectability against disreputable others. This can be more widely situated in relation to colonial understandings of respectability and appropriate sexuality as these manifested in the metropole.

Contextualising the Clifford case

In 1914, black and minority ethnic communities in England and Wales were mainly concentrated in London and port cities such as Cardiff and Liverpool. Black people in late-Victorian Britain were usually from the West Indies, Sierra Leone or the United States and arrived as students, sailors and migrants.¹² Percy Clifford’s father, a Jamaican man who settled in London, was an example of such migration. The end of slavery and an economic downturn in Jamaica dating from the mid-nineteenth century may have spurred him to seek employment in England. Putnam notes that migration from Jamaica was driven by island elites’ “unwillingness to adjust to free labour—to offer high enough wages, to bargain instead of impose conditions”.¹³

Black men such as Percy Clifford served in the army and navy during the Victorian and Edwardian eras and so played a role in Britain’s imperial mission.¹⁴ He volunteered to fight in the Imperial Yeomanry in the South African War. Miller notes that this war was a focus for the patriotism

¹⁰ Anne-Marie Kilday, “Constructing the Cult of the Criminal: Kate Webster – Victorian Murderess and Media Sensation”, in Nash and Kilday, 2017, Kindle edition. See also Lizzie Seal, ““She killed not from hate, but from love”: Motherhood, Melodrama and Mercy Killing in the Case of May Brownhill” (2018) 27(5) *Women’s History Review* 669–687.

¹¹ Bressey, “Forgotten Histories” (2002) 11(3) *Women’s History Review* 352.

¹² David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, 2016), pp.407, 420.

¹³ Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p.32.

¹⁴ Olusoga, *Black and British*, 2016, p.421.

of the late-Victorian "New Imperialism" and that more than 100,000 British men fought in the auxiliary forces; many others volunteered but were rejected as unfit.¹⁵ What motivated Percy Clifford to volunteer cannot be known, but there was a variety of possible factors. Military service offered a competitive wage to working class men, although even the unemployed had alternative options for sources of income and did not need to risk their lives. Yearning for excitement and new experiences was important, as was the psychological fulfilment of enacting patriotic feelings.¹⁶

Tightening of laws and policing of offences related to prostitution in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that arrest and conviction rates for women were high.¹⁷ Suppression of brothels via the criminalisation of two or more women who worked as prostitutes living together made pimping (referred to as "bullying" or "poncing") more common, as living with a man offered a solution to accommodation, and pimps could help women to avoid arrest, or lend them money when they were fined. Men who lived with women who worked as prostitutes had legal liability for living off their earnings, even if they were not actually receiving money from them. Laite notes that pimping "challenged norms not only of manliness but also of monogamy", which was significant in portrayals of Percy Clifford.¹⁸

Racialised portrayals of Percy Clifford

This section addresses the ways in which Percy was constructed as a racialised subject and the importance that this had in relation to his case and treatment in the criminal justice system. Green notes that when the crimes of black people were reported in Edwardian newspapers, their race was always mentioned.¹⁹ This was true in relation to Percy in news reports as well as case file material, which is from the Home Office file. The report summarising the case, by Ernley Blackwell, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, describes Percy as "half-caste".²⁰ News stories designated him "a man of colour" or "coloured man", usually in the headlines, and noted his mixed parentage through use of the term "half-caste".²¹ In keeping with other cases of men of colour sentenced to death in twentieth-century England and Wales, however, news reports and case file documents do not make overt reference to scientific racism or mobilise eugenics-based discourses. It

¹⁵ Stephen Miller, "In Support of the "Imperial Mission"? Volunteering for the South African War 1899–1902", (2005) 69(3) *Journal of Military History* 691–711 at 699–701.

¹⁶ Miller, "In Support of the "Imperial Mission" (2005) 69(3) *Journal of Military History* 708–711.

¹⁷ Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), pp.75–79.

¹⁸ Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, 2012, pp. 93–97.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901–1914*, (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p.53.

²⁰ 29 July 1914, TNA/HO144/1323/253968.

²¹ See for example "Brighton Shooting Affray: Coloured Man Sentenced", *East Sussex News*, 10 July 1914 and "Young Wife Murdered", *Sussex Daily News*, 9 July 1914.

was clearly understood to be important to identify and classify Percy as “a man of colour” and “half-caste” and this may well have resonated with popular contemporary notions influenced by scientific racism, but his race was not explicitly constructed through discourses of biological difference and inferiority.

An article headlined “Murdered Wife: Tragedy of Black and White” that appeared in *The People* described the case as “A tragedy of a coloured man and a white woman”, implying that the problem stemmed from the cross-racial relationship, and to an extent that the marriage itself was a “tragedy”.²² Disapproval of sexual relationships between men of colour and white women was a longstanding colonial anxiety. The so-called “Black Peril” in South Africa—the term used in the press for a series of rapes (described as “assaults” or “outrages”) by black men of white women—was widely and sensationally reported in Britain in 1911–12 and heightened anxieties about the dangers black men posed to white women.²³ Black men’s sexuality was stereotyped in the era as less restrained and more potent than that of White Europeans.²⁴ “Mixed marriages” between black men and white women were regarded as threatening racial degeneracy and as breaching boundaries of Empire. Percy was, of course, himself the product of an “interracial” marriage and there were negative contemporary perceptions of “half castes” as inheriting the “worst” features of both races.²⁵ Nevertheless, this perception of genetic inferiority was not explicitly articulated in relation to his case.

The *Sussex Daily News* reported that defence counsel Stormonth Darling “began his address to the jury on the prisoner’s behalf by warning them against prejudice because his client was a man of colour”.²⁶ This indicates both that there was a perceived need to warn against prejudice, but also that “colour prejudice” was a concept with wide recognition. It originated in the abolitionist movement of the early and mid-nineteenth centuries to refer to negative white attitudes to black people in slaveholding societies and had a well-established meaning by 1914.²⁷

Edwardian respectability: Percy and Maud Clifford

A more nuanced understanding of the different factors that contributed to how Percy Clifford was perceived can be gained from examining how the details of his life and of the crime were interpreted

²² “Murdered Wife: Tragedy of Black and White”, *The People*, 12 July 1914.

²³ Gareth Cornwell, “George Webb Hardy’s *The Black Peril* and the Social Meaning of ‘Black Peril’ in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa” (1996) 22(3) *Journal of Southern African Studies* 441–453.

²⁴ Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp.101, 116.

²⁵ Lucy Bland, “White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War” (2005) 17(1) *Gender and History* 29–61.

²⁶ “Young Wife Murdered” *Sussex Daily News*, 9 July 1914.

²⁷ Douglas A Lorimer, *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain 1870–1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.171.

Commented [L3]: Should there be more to this footnote?

Commented [LS4R3]: Yes, now added

and narrated. This approach reveals that racialised understandings of the case were interwoven with perceptions of social class, masculinity and respectability, and also entailed negative portrayals of his victim Maud Clifford. Percy was not in paid work and had a previous conviction for brothel-keeping. The police report states that "Clifford is well known as an associate of bullies [pimps] and prostitutes [...] he has been living for years on prostitutes, including his wife who was a well known and convicted prostitute".²⁸ A note in the Home Office file by Chief Inspector Henry Brooks further explains that Maud's mother, Augusta Walton "contends that Clifford never contributed anything towards his wife's support, who kept both herself and her husband who spent his pension entirely upon himself".²⁹

This depiction of Percy as disreputable and "living off" prostitution rather than earning his own wages also emerged from Augusta's testimony in court as a witness for the prosecution. She asserted that Maud had to go "on the streets" to "keep" Percy and that while they were separated Maud "led a quiet life", having become "tired of the life she had to live with her husband".³⁰ Augusta's evidence implied that Percy coerced Maud into prostitution in order to provide him with an income. Ernley Blackwell's report dismissed Percy's own explanation for shooting Maud and himself—that she associated with other men—stating "it would probably be more correct to say that he resented not having the benefit of his wife's earnings".³¹ Blackwell described Percy as "a man of bad character" and this counted against him in terms of being suitable for clemency. Chadwick's study of the use of mercy in Victorian England highlights the importance of the condemned person's respectability to reprieve decisions and the reference to "bad character" suggests its ongoing relevance into the twentieth century.³²

In themselves, brothel-keeping and running prostitutes were disreputable. However, the stress placed on Percy's lack of legitimate paid work and the assertion that he "lived off" women meant that he did not meet contemporary norms of masculinity. Levine explains that work defined Victorian respectability and shaped appropriate gender roles. In the case of a married couple, paid work should be carried out by the man and unpaid domestic work by the woman. Of course, many working class married couples could not meet this standard. Norms of Victorian masculinity emphasised the virtue of independence and being able to financially support oneself and one's family

²⁸ Report by Henry Brooks, Chief Detective Inspector, Metropolitan Police, 15 July 1914, HO144//1323/253968.

²⁹ 2 August 1914.

³⁰ Augusta Walton's testimony, Trial Transcript, 8 July 1914.

³¹ Blackwell's report, 29 July 1914.

³² Roger Chadwick, *Bureaucratic Mercy: The Home Office and the Treatment of Capital Cases in Victorian England*, (Rice University, USA, 1989), p. 465.

This is the author's accepted manuscript of an article published in the Irish Jurist, Vol 60, November 2018

was crucial to this. Independence was a hallmark of both Britishness and manliness; it distinguished white British men from the "dissipated" unmanliness of colonial subjects.³³

Prostitution has historically "been denigrated as work's opposite, a haven for those who will not work".³⁴ In the nineteenth century, it was also associated with primitivism and the need to control prostitution was cited as a reason in support of colonialism.³⁵ Such views persisted in the Edwardian era. This discourse of racialised sexuality had purchase in the metropole as well as in the colonies. Howell argues that the British bourgeois self was defined against racial, sexual and class others, with these three categories overlapping one another.³⁶ Percy Clifford was of "bad character" because he embodied disreputable masculinity, a gender identity that was raced and classed. He was racialised primarily through this otherness from bourgeois respectability rather than through direct discussion of his racial identity or through scientific discourse of racial difference.

During the trial, Percy's defence counsel sought to disparage Maud and her family, presumably to cast doubt on evidence given by her mother, Augusta, and to bolster the insanity defence by portraying Maud as an unsatisfactory and troublesome wife who had tested her husband's endurance. By the late-nineteenth century, the scope of the insanity defence had grown relative to the constricting of provocation as a defence to murder. Provocation-style arguments were woven into making the case for insanity.³⁷ Stormonth Darling's cross-examination of Augusta involved asking her if Maud was "playing about with three men" while married. Seeking to refute that Percy had introduced Maud to prostitution, Stormonth Darling implied that Augusta lived off Maud's earnings from prostitution and that she had put Maud on the streets first. He asked "Is it true that you encourage prostitution?" and inquired if "either you or your eldest daughter are procurists?" His line of questioning painted the Walton family as disreputable and debased. He suggested that the family was incestuous, "your eldest son seduced and continually seduced this dead woman [Maud]" and enquired whether "your dead daughter's eldest sister was at one time with nearly every black man in the west-end of London?" (The West End was well known as an area of prostitution.) Via his cross-examination of Augusta, it was also revealed that Maud spent time in a home for girls at Burgess Hill

Commented [L5]: White, presumably!

Commented [LS6R5]: Yes, good point

³³ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Diseases in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.186, 259.

³⁴ Levine, *Prostitution*, 2003, p.178.

³⁵ Levine, *Prostitution*, 2003, p.194.

³⁶ Philip Howell, "Prostitution and Racialised Sexuality: The Regulation of Prostitution in Britain and the British Empire before the Contagious Diseases Acts" (2000) 18(3) *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 321–339 at 335–336.

³⁷ Wiener, "Judges v Jurors" (1999) 17(3) *Law and History Review* 500–502.

because “[s]he stopped out and did not know where she was” and had also been imprisoned in Holloway.³⁸ The judge’s summing up described Maud as “a thief and a prostitute”.³⁹

A letter sent to the Home Office on Percy’s behalf from a friend of his stated that “knowing the class of woman” that Maud was made Percy “wish the ground would open so that he could creep in and hide” or that he could die. It also alleged that Maud had given Percy “venereal disorder”, meaning that he had to walk with sticks (although his lack of mobility likely related to his war injuries).⁴⁰ This was the only letter to the Home Office petitioning on Percy’s behalf, which suggests either that there was a lack of local sympathy for him, or that his friends and acquaintances did not possess the educational or cultural capital to write to the Home Office. Denigrating women who were the victims of male violence as sexually dissolute and worthless was a familiar representation (and one that of course persists).⁴¹ Maud was also portrayed as outside of bourgeois respectability and the negative perceptions of white women who had sexual relationships with men of colour can be gleaned from Stormonth Darling’s allegation that Maud’s elder sister had slept with lots of black men. As Percy was himself a man of colour, such assertions perhaps did not ultimately strengthen his defence. Despite being born in London he was not truly English, an identity understood to connote whiteness.⁴²

Disparaging Maud did not help to make Percy more sympathetic to the jury or the Home Office. Neither did other aspects of his defence, such as emphasising his debilitation from injuries received fighting in the South African War—wounds to his hand and leg, fits and an “excitable” temper. The fits meant that he had to give up working as a cab driver. It is notable that attempts to appeal to the jury (and implicitly to the Home Office in terms of considering mercy) via reference to Percy’s war service was unsuccessful in terms of persuasively making the insanity defence and in combating the perception of his “bad character” and disreputable masculinity. This reflects the “contested and conflicted” place of the soldier at the time.⁴³ Although the social status of soldiers improved in the second half of the nineteenth century, and there were favourable portrayals of those who fought in the South African War, there was still a perception that the army attracted the disreputable and that

³⁸ Defence cross examination of Augusta Walton, Trial Transcript, 8 July 1914, HO144//1323/253968.

³⁹ Summing Up, Trial Transcript.

⁴⁰ Letter from George Pohl to the Home Office, London, 14 July 1914.

⁴¹ Wiener explores how Victorian official and popular views differed on how far culpability for murder should be reduced by evidence of a wife’s bad behaviour, with juries being more sympathetic than judges or the Home Office to such claims. He notes that juries’ tolerance for men’s violence was lower by the turn of the twentieth century, “Judges v Jurors” (1999) 17(3) *Law and History Review* 505. Chadwick, however, identifies a persistent Home Office belief that “wifely delinquency” was a threat to men’s self-control, *Bureaucratic Mercy*, 1989, p.457.

⁴² David Linton, “New Insecurities, New Formations, New Identities—National Identity and Raciologies in *Eightpence a Mile* (1913)” (2013) 7(1) *Studies in Musical Theatre* 9–22.

⁴³ Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills, “Soldiers of the Queen: Reading Newspaper Fiction of the South African War 1899-1902” (2018) 23(3) *Journal of Victorian Culture* 381–404 at 386.

men who were already violent could be further brutalised by the military.⁴⁴ Recognition of the psychological effects of the stress of battle deepened after the First World War with the attention paid to shellshock—in 1914 this had less purchase in terms of making an argument for insanity—and Percy's war service was also several years in the past.

In shooting himself in the head, Percy had clearly intended murder-suicide and he claimed not to remember the crime at all. A letter from prison doctors reporting on his medical inquiry asserted "we regard the acts as having been premeditated" and also disputed Percy's claims to have been very drunk on the night in question, pointing out that he had ordered tea for the next day from the landlord.⁴⁵ The judge, in sentencing him to death, suggested that "you attempted to take your life, knowing it was already forfeit, no doubt".⁴⁶ That the murder was "long premeditated and treacherously carried out", along with Percy's bad character, was stated by Blackwell as reason not to reprove him.⁴⁷ Premeditation was perceived as exacerbating the heinousness of a murder and the Home Office held fast to this in Percy's case even though he had also intended to kill himself. Cultural attitudes to suicide were complex, informed by both secular views that stressed the role of insanity and mental illness, and longer-standing religiously influenced moral disapproval.⁴⁸ Exhibiting the former would have given credence to the defence's argument that Percy was insane, favouring reprove. The emphasis on rationality—suicide to escape hanging—and premeditation underlined the interpretation that he was a bad, immoral man who committed a bad murder (even if of a worthless victim), and not deserving of mercy.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Attention to Percy Clifford's murder of Maud Clifford as microhistory enables understanding of both the everyday lives of people of colour in England and Wales on the eve of the First World War and also the construction of racial difference at this time. Percy was executed at the beginning of the War, during which men of colour would fight for Britain, leading to an increased number of them settling in the country as a result. In the interwar period, racial difference was reconstituted and there was a

⁴⁴ Rawlinson-Mills, "Soldiers of the Queen" (2018) 23(3) *Journal of Victorian Culture* 384–387 and Clive Emsley, "Violent Crime in England in 1919: Post-war Anxieties and Press Narratives" (2008) 23(1) *Continuity and Change* 173–195 at 190.

⁴⁵ 5 August 1914.

⁴⁶ Judge's summing up, Trial Transcript, HO144/1323/253968.

⁴⁷ Blackwell's report, 29 July 1914, HO144/1323/253968.

⁴⁸ Ian Miller, "Representations of Suicide in Urban North-West England c. 1870–1910: The Formative Role of Respectability, Class, Gender and Morality" (2010) 15(3) *Mortality* 191–204.

⁴⁹ Gates highlights the prevalence of Victorian broadsides about murderers who were able to escape hanging through suicide: Barbara Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.47.

This is the author's accepted manuscript of an article published in the Irish Jurist, Vol 60, November 2018

renegotiation of the political and economic status of people of colour in both the colonies and the metropole.⁵⁰ This case provides a window onto a less considered era of Black British history and indicates that discourses of race at the time showed strong continuities with Victorian notions of bourgeois respectability. It demonstrates some of the links between colonial understandings of race and national identity as they manifested in the metropole—and in murder trials specifically. Percy Clifford's case illuminates how perceptions of bourgeois respectability conditioned by discourses of racialised sexuality and class underpinned Edwardian Englishness as a white, masculine imperial identity.

Dr Lizzie Seal (e.c.seal@sussex.ac.uk) is Reader in Criminology at the University of Sussex. Dr Alexa Neale (a.neale@sussex.ac.uk) is Research Fellow in Historical Criminology at the University of Sussex.

⁵⁰ Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.4–18.