

YET MORE MURDEROUS WORDPLAY

PETER NEWBY

Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England

William Marwood was the principal hangman of the United Kingdom during the years 1874-83. Such was his fame that a contemporary children's riddle went as follows:

Q. If Pa killed Ma, who would hang Pa?

A. Marwood!

'Sweet Fanny Adams' I have long presumed to be an euphemism for the crude 'sweet eff all' of popular speech, meaning 'nothing at all'. Not so. The crudity desecrates the sadness of the feminine original. On Saturday, 24 August 1867 in Flood Meadow, a hop field just outside Alton, Hampshire, England, a sweet eight-year-old girl, Fanny Adams, was not only murdered but so dismembered that nothing substantial remained. Her killer was hanged to popular acclaim Christmas Eve that same year.

Doctor William Palmer poisoned probably as many as fourteen people--mainly family--in the 1850s, and so intense was the feeling against him that a special law had to be passed for his trial to be held at the Old Bailey in London and not in his home town of Rugeley, Staffordshire. He was returned to Stafford Gaol for execution and it is thought that as many as twenty thousand people gathered for the spectacle of his hanging. The otherwise undistinguished town of Rugeley never lived down the notoriety of being 'Palmer's town' and an attempt to change its name was made by leading townsmen in an appeal to the prime minister of the day. "Why not name it after me?" suggested Lord Palmerston. It is still called Rugeley!

On 3 January 1946, William Joyce, dubbed 'Lord Haw Haw', was hanged at Pentonville Prison for wartime treason for his sneering broadcasts on behalf of the Nazis. His legal defence was a purely technical one that, having been born in America albeit of British stock, he became a German citizen in September 1940 and therefore owed no allegiance to the Crown. This went to the House of Lords for final appeal. However, as his parents had returned to Britain whilst he was a child and resumed their original citizenship and Joyce had used a British passport since 1933, their lordships quoted the word-unit palindromic maxim of that document to repudiate his technical defence.

The passport gives protection to the individual as a British subject in foreign countries and that protection requires allegiance in return. In Latin it reads:

protectio trahit subjectionem et subjectio protectionem
 protection draws allegiance and allegiance draws protection

At the right is a minimal synonymous doublet reflecting an accurate historical spelling progression. GAIL, the pivotal word (apart from other meanings) is an obsolete form of either terminal spelling, both being still current, which is probably unique. Finally, a triplet which exhibits terminal relevance only:

G A O L
 G A I L
 J A I L

JAIL/AIL/AI/AID/AIDS

O IS FOR OCCASIONAL

In June 1993 Nyr Indictor began a monthly logological journal entitled "N is for Newsletter" devoted to alphabetic wordplay, but he abandoned it after only six issues because of lack of time. He suggested that it be replaced with a round-robin letter, issued in turn by Newsletter subscribers ("O is for Occasional"). Nothing happened until July 1997 when Julie Richel started the ball rolling with "J is for Julie's Journal" noting her favorite ABC books (listing duplicates for sale or trade) and assembling an "Alphabet Book Compendium Diary" (one page copied from each of 26 different ABC books of hers). If you would like to participate, call her at 315-682-5483.