

# EXECUTION OF THE REBEL LORDS

General Adam Williamson (1676–1747), Lieutenant-Deputy of the Tower (1722–1747)

Monday, 11 August 1746 [OS]

Received from Mr. Sharp, the Solicitor of the Treasury, two orders with the seal in yellow wax enclosing them for the delivering the bodies of the Earl of Kilmarnock<sup>1</sup> and Lord Balmerino<sup>2</sup> to the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex at the usual place, for execution on Monday next, the 18<sup>th</sup> instant, between the hours of nine in the morning and one in the afternoon.

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Sunday, 17 August 1746 [OS]

The Sheriff's deputies came to me to settle the time for delivering the Lord Kilmarnock and Balmerino to the Sherriffs tomorrow, and we set our watches and agreed to deliver them to them precisely at ten o'clock in the morning.

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Monday, 18 August 1746 [OS]

The stage, rooms of the house, and the stairs leading to the scaffold being covered with black, all prepared at the expence of the Sheriffs. They came at 10 o'clock precisely and knocked at the Outward Gate,<sup>3</sup> which with all the others were kept close shut, and demanded the prisoners. I had appointed the Major to be there to attend their call and the Lords to be ready to go at the shortest notice, and went to them to wait for the Major's summons from the gate, which came exactly at the hour appointed.

We immediately set out from their apartments, and I had the doors locked after them and the keys given to me, that if any valuable thing was left in them I might secure it as my perquisite. When we came into the street, we went on foot in the following manner.

First went their four warders two and two, then I followed singly. After me followed Lord Kilmarnock, the prisoner, with the Major, then followed the chaplains and two friends; then Lord Balmerino, attended by the Gentleman Gaoler. After him two friends, but no chaplain, his non-juring chaplain having taken leave of him the night before. Then followed an officer and fifteen men; after them the two hearses with the coffins for the two Lords, then a sergeant with fifteen men more, all with their bayonets fixed.

Thus we marched to the gate, which, being opened, we delivered the Lords there to the Sheriffs, who conducted them in the same order on foot to the house of the scaffold. I stayed in the Tower, but ordered the officer who attended the prisoners and their hearses, as soon as they arrived at the scaffold to let the undertaker, who was Allingham of the Tower, take the coffins out of the hearses and lay them together on the stage or scaffold, and after the execution was over to lay the bodies in the coffins, then to put them in the hearses, and he with his guard to take care to conduct them back to the Tower in order for their immediate interment in the Tower chapel. Which he did and they were interred the same day together, just by the Marquis of Tullibarden<sup>4</sup> in the west end of the chapel.

By the Lords' direction the block was desired to be two feet high, and a piece of red baize to be had in which to catch their heads and not to let them fall into the sawdust and filth of the stage, which was done. And the Earl of Kilmarnock had his head severed from the body at one stroke, all but a little skin which with a little chop was soon separated. He had ordered one of his warders to attend him as his valet de chambre and to keep down the body from struggling or violent convulsive motion, but it only flounced backward on the separation of the head and lay on its back, with very little motion.

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<sup>1</sup> William Boyd (1704–1746), Earl of Kilmarnock

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Elphinstone (1688–1746), Lord Balmerino

<sup>3</sup> Bulwark or Lion Gate

<sup>4</sup> William Murray (1689–1746), Marquess of Tullibarden. Executed on 9 July 1746 for his participation in the 1745 rising.

Lord Balmerino's fate was otherwise, for though he was a resolute Jacobite and seemed to have more than ordinary courage and indifference for death, yet when he laid his head on the block it is said by those on the scaffold that when he made his own signal for decollation, he withdrew his body, so that he had three cuts with the ax before his head was severed, and that the bystanders were forced to hold his body and head to the block while the separation was making.

After all was over and I had dined, I sent my servants with the keys to open their prisons, and bring all their effects to me, as of right I ought, they belonging to my office as commanding officer on the spot, but being little worth and no plate or things of dignity, I gave them all to the warders that attended them, and they took them as my gift with thanks.

On this occasion of the decollation, the Gentleman Gaoler came to me to beg I would give leave for the building sheds or scaffolding from which to see the Lords beheaded. I consented, provided he took it as a favour from me and not as a right in him to do it, which he accepted and made a good hand<sup>1</sup> of it and gave my servants a Guinea for each scaffold, in all five.

It was observed by those of the scaffold that Lord Kilmarnock's head being at one stroke separated from the body, all but a little flesh and skin, the body at the stroke sprung backwards from the block and lay flat on its back dead and extended, with its head fastened only by that little hold which the executioner chopped off or separated on the scaffold. So that it is probable whenever the head is severed from the body at one stroke, it will always give that convulsive bounce or spring.

N.B.—The block was at the desire of the prisoners made two feet high, and I desired a good stiff upright post to be put just under it. I had ordered the day before no port liberty for the soldiers until the execution was over and the gates to be kept shut, and during the execution the whole garrison to be under arms. I gave leave to some officers of the ordnance to erect scaffolds for themselves and families on the opposite bastion to the scaffold, which they took as a favour.

John Charles Fox, ed. *The Official Diary of Lieutenant-General Adam Williamson* (London: Camden Society, 1912):128–131. [modernized]

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<sup>1</sup> profit