

*Crisis of Confidence: The Public  
Response to the 1862 Sheffield  
Resurrection Scandal*

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# *Crisis of Confidence: The Public Response to the 1862*

## *Sheffield Resurrection Scandal*

*'Grave-looters at my coffin, before my body's even cold'<sup>1</sup>*

**- Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds**

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Cave, *Knockin' on Joe*, Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds, (Mute, #61783, 1985) [on CD].

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### *Introduction*

On the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1862 a riot broke out at Wardsend Cemetery in the Hillsborough district of Sheffield. The disturbance was a direct reaction to rumours that the Reverend John Livesey and his sexton Isaac Howard were involved in the practice of bodysnatching - the illegal exhumation of the dead and subsequent sale to medical schools for use in anatomical study. Though such accusations were later proven false, and both Livesey and Howard were prosecuted for lesser crimes, during the initial retaliation the angry crowd destroyed much property belonging to the suspects and escaped without penalty.<sup>2</sup>

Although the incident described above may sound unusual, bodysnatching was almost commonplace in nineteenth century Britain, as was consequent popular reaction - usually taking the form of riots. On the surface the entire phenomenon seems relatively straightforward - the public were angry that the deceased were being denied the right to rest in peace and thus turned their disapproval into action. Yet, by examining just the one incident described above in detail reveals a much more complex series of events that displays evidence of restraint, organisation, traditionalism, and a group identity - closely linked with the emergence of the industrial working class - far deeper than what may be immediately apparent from reading a newspaper report.,

The remainder of this dissertation will take the Wardsend scandal as a microstudy, applying a series of influential theories and frameworks of the crowd in history to the occurrence. The thesis will present evidence to suggest that this particular incident of rioting featured many of the recognisable traits as described by the crowd historians who have

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<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862 and *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 15 November 1862.

conducted such studies, and by association will hope to add a new casestudy to the subdivision of popular protest against the practices of anatomy and bodysnatching.

The study will largely be founded in primary sources, relating to the riot that occurred at Wardsend Cemetery. Newspapers prove invaluable as they often offer the only recording of events available. For example, June 1862 editions of the local Conservative newspaper the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* are particularly useful in providing both narrative and editorial content of the event, as is the Scottish *Dundee Courier & Argus* of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1862. The wider context of bodysnatching and anatomy is also explored, to which the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1828 *Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy* and the anonymous experiences documented in *The Diary of a Resurrectionist, 1811-1812*, edited by James Blake Bailey, and published in 1896 prove essential.<sup>3</sup> All primary source material has been used with a degree of caution and an acknowledgement of its possible biases and limitations.

Revised examinations of the crowd, which will form the framework for this thesis, first came to prominence in Britain during the late 1950s and 1960s and have since established themselves as a central subdivision of studies related to the lower classes. Prominent Marxist historians, including E.P. Thompson, George Rudé and Eric Hobsbawm, were instrumental in the revisions made to studies of the poor, and their historiographical analyses of the crowd remain both ‘theoretically important’ and ‘influential’ to this day.<sup>4</sup> Thompson’s 1963 *The Making of the English Working Class* offers an in depth examination of the development of class consciousness amongst the poor, that serves a particular

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy, 22 July 1828’ in *Boston Public Library, Internet Archive*, <<http://archive.org/details/reportfromselect00grea>> [accessed 26 February 2013] and James Blake Bailey (ed.), *The Diary of a Resurrectionist, 1811-1812, to Which Are Added an Account of The Resurrection Men in London and a Short History of the Passing of the Anatomy Act*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1896).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 1-2.

relevance to this subject.<sup>5</sup> His 1971 article *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* is also central to such theories. The article analyses the eighteenth century English food riots, applying revised theories to previously dismissed ‘rebellions of the belly’ and warning against the loose application of terms such as ‘mob’ and its connotations of an uncivilised and destructive collective. He instead claims that almost every example of crowd action from the period displays evidence of some form of ‘legitimising notion’ - or belief amongst participants that their actions were justified, supported by the wider community, and represented a defence of traditionalism and custom.<sup>6</sup>

Such reinterpretations of the crowd have most prominently focused on the early modern era, yet there are also notable attempts to apply such framework to more recent periods - Rudé’s seminal work *The Crowd in History* for example features an examination of the 1848 Springtime of the Peoples revolt in France, and Nicholas Rogers attempts to transpose similar themes to popular culture, class consciousness and politics in Georgian Britain.<sup>7</sup> Thompson’s statement that ‘all... major types of crowd action will, after patient analysis, reveal a similar logic’ to that of his original study of eighteenth century food riots certainly gives much justification to such expansionism, and offers an open invitation for historians to apply such theories to their own areas of interest within the broad subject of popular mobilisation.<sup>8</sup> Thompson seems to further encourage such studies with the publication of a revised article, *The Moral Economy Reviewed* in 1991, in which he announces the term ‘moral economy’ has ‘long forgotten its paternity...[and] has come of age’ - effectively inviting the use of his original framework to form modified analyses of

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<sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Penguin Group, 1988 ed.), pp. 781-915.

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’ in *Customs in Common*, (London: The Merlin Press, 1991), pp.185-258 (p. 185 and p. 188).

<sup>7</sup> George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbance in France and England, 1730-1848*, (London: Serif, 2005 ed.), pp. 164-78 and Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain*, pp. 1-20.

<sup>8</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘Patricians and Plebs’ in *Customs in Common*, pp. 16-96 (p. 66).

crowd behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

The quality and quantity of previous literature on the specific subject of anatomy and bodysnatching is varied and many historians have chosen to focus on the practices themselves, rather than the reactions they provoked. Though a book such as Brian Bailey's *The Resurrection Men* thoroughly examines the history of anatomy and bodysnatching, its coverage of subsequent popular disturbance is confined to narrative descriptions of such incident, largely reproduced from contemporary newspaper reports.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Sheffield historian Ivor Haythorne's *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield* (1986), though it provides a complete narrative history of the events which occurred at Wardsend Cemetery, does little to satisfy curiosity regarding the real objectives and moral outlook of those who rioted.<sup>11</sup>

By comparison, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* by Ruth Richardson provides a sophisticated and comprehensive study into the practices of anatomy and bodysnatching as well as associated disturbances. In her analysis of an incident of rioting in Aberdeen in January 1832 Richardson applies many of the characteristics and traits as described by Rudé.<sup>12</sup> Microstudies on similar incidents, including a *Lancet* article focusing on the Liverpool cholera riots of 1832, and F.K. Donnelly's synopsis of an 1835 riot against the medical school in Sheffield also draw influence from Rudé's work.<sup>13</sup> Yet, none of the above historians have felt the need to apply such framework to the 1862 Wardsend Cemetery

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson, 'The Moral Economy Reviewed' in *Customs in Common*, pp. 259-351 (p. 351).

<sup>10</sup> Brian Bailey, *The Resurrection Men: A History of the Trade in Corpses*, (London: Macdonald, 1991), pp. 159-62.

<sup>11</sup> Ivor Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, (np, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, (London: Penguin Group, 1989), p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Gill, Sean Burrell & Jody Brown, 'Fear and Frustration: The Liverpool Cholera Riots of 1832' *Lancet*, 358, (2001), 233-37 and F.K. Donnelly, 'The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy in 1835: A Popular Response to Class Legislation', *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, 10, (1975), 167-72.

incident, despite the parallels and comparisons available for exploration.

In bridging the gap in this niche historiography this dissertation aims, above all, to analyse the incident in such a manner in order to explain how appropriate such a framework is. The study is presented thematically and consists of this *Introduction* chapter, which thus far has outlined the specific incident that will be examined, and what the study will achieve, as well as providing a summary of the wider and more specific historiographical debates into which it will fit. The remainder of the study is presented as follows:

*Chapter I* will provide a mostly narrative summary of the history of anatomy and bodysnatching, in order to provide a greater understanding of the context in which the events took place, before specifically focusing in on the events which took place at Wardsend Cemetery on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1862.

*Chapter II* consists of an analysis into the identity of the people who felt compelled to riot, as well as the response of the local and national press.

*Chapter III* capitalises on this, examining the specific actions the rioters took, why they may have done so, and how this compares to other examples of crowd action, both within the context of anatomy and bodysnatching disturbances and in the wider historiography of popular disturbance.

*Chapter IV* serves as a conclusion in which the findings of the previous chapters are collected and summarised in order to review the study, and argue to what extent previous generalised analyses of rioting are applicable to it.

*Chapter I: History and Narrative*

*A Brief History of Anatomy and Bodysnatching*

By the 1900s bodysnatching already had a long and varied history. The societies of Ancient Rome, and especially Egypt - where dissection of any kind was strictly forbidden - suffered such problems, mainly for occult interests, and during the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612 witnesses swore an oath that the accused had disinterred corpses from a graveyard in order to steal teeth and scalps.<sup>14</sup>

Peter Linebaugh however, claims it was only in the eighteenth century that ‘teaching and clinical experience’ became truly important. For whereas institutes such as the Royal College of Physicians and the Company of Barber-Surgeons had pioneered research in the sixteenth century, the 1700s saw the emergence of a series of privately owned medical schools including Westminster (1719), London (1740), and Middlesex (1745), which preferred a much more practical and involved method of teaching than had previously been seen.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, as more institutes were established cadavers to be used in demonstration and practice became scarcer, and as a result the prices necessary for bribing hangmen and the constabulary for the corpses of executed criminals significantly increased. The introduction of the Murder Act 1752 saw a chartable decrease in such costs – the new legislation allowing anatomists to obtain the bodies of executed criminals as additional punishment for their crimes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, pp. 2-3 and C.G Cumston, *The History of Medicine: From the Time of the Pharaohs to the end of the XVIIIth Century*, (London: Routledge, 1996 ed.), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Linebaugh, ‘The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons’ in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, (London: Verso, 2011 ed.), pp. 65-117 (pp. 69-70).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 76-7.

The nineteenth century saw the establishment of further medical institutes including new schools in Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Nottingham, and Liverpool. Yet, a combination of accelerating medical research and a decrease in the number of executions throughout Britain gave rise to an increasingly severe shortage of cadavers.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, there was an growing tendency to turn towards illegitimate methods of obtaining subjects once again, this time largely through the use of entrepreneurial bodysnatchers - or ‘resurrectionists.’

The 1828 Select Committee on Anatomy debated the implementation of a bill that would allow for wider access to cadavers for dissecting surgeons. Astley Paston Cooper of the Royal College of Surgeons addressed the Committee, warning that an inexperienced surgeon ‘must mangle the living if he has not operated on the dead.’<sup>18</sup> In a testimony to the same Committee, Scottish anatomist Granville Sharp Pattison claimed that dislike of dissection generally stemmed ‘in part from exhumation, in part from its being part of the penal law that the bodies of murderers should be dissected, and in part from the great mystery that is thrown about dissection... when the public comes to know the nature of dissection, the prejudice which exists against it is removed.’<sup>19</sup>

Surprisingly, respected medical journal *Lancet* was hostile towards proposed revisions to the guidance regarding cadavers permitted for dissection - an 1828 editorial declared ‘It is disgusting to talk of anatomy as a science, whilst it is cultivated by means of practises which

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<sup>17</sup> Helen McDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and its Histories*, (London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy’, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

would disgrace a nation of cannibals.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, while anatomists in countries including France, Germany, Holland, Italy and Portugal already permitted legal entitlement to bodies - usually supplied by suicides, prostitutes, unclaimed relatives and high infant mortality rates - British parliament continued to debate and dispute the issue and students often opted to study in post-revolutionary France, where resources were far more easily obtained.<sup>21</sup>

A breakthrough materialised later in 1828 with the trial of William Burke and William Hare in Edinburgh. The two Irish immigrants stood accused of 17 murders in the West Point district of the city, between November 1827 and October 1828, and the subsequent sale of their victims’ bodies to Dr. Robert Knox of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.<sup>22</sup> The events were immediately capitalised upon by members of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, including Astley Cooper and G.J. Guthrie, who insinuated that the current laws on obtaining cadavers had created the perfect circumstances for murder with the intention of supplying the victims’ bodies to medical science, and claimed that such practice was rife throughout Britain.<sup>23</sup>

Along with the verb ‘to burke’ - to describe a method of murder involving suffocation, so as to leave no external evidence of trauma - Burke and Hare’s legacy was directly reflected in the passing of the Act for Regulating Schools of Anatomy (or Anatomy Act) on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1832.<sup>24</sup> The new Act overruled the previous legislation of the Murder Act, most significantly by allowing medical dissection of any corpse, unless the deceased had

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<sup>20</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, pp. 13-14 and Roger French ‘The Anatomical Tradition’ in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine, Volume 1*, ed. by W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 81-101 (p. 100).

<sup>22</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline McCracken Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected: A Cultural Autopsy of the Burke & Hare Murders*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16 and Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity From Antiquity to the Present*, (London: Fontana Press, 1999), p. 317.

expressed a conscientious objection to it, or was too impoverished to afford a funeral – making workhouses and poor hospitals particularly substantial sources.<sup>25</sup> Brian Bailey claims that 1832 should be celebrated as a year in which ‘Britain took a few tiny steps in its progress toward civilization, in bringing an end to aspects of its natural life that were both callous and barbarous.’<sup>26</sup> Yet, contemporary public opinion was generally less favourable and accusations against immoral practise continued - reaching climax in a series of public riots and demonstrations.

Within a year of the new legislation being passed riots were witnessed throughout Britain, Manchester’s Bridge Street medical school was heavily damaged in one such disturbance just months after the passing of the Act.<sup>27</sup> The 1832 cholera epidemic gave rise to many more serious disturbances in major towns and cities throughout Britain. Crowds often rioted with the belief that the disease was an imaginary tool of oppression, used to force the poor into hospitals for use in ‘vivisection experiments, for dissection after death, or to keep down the population’, and Ruth Richardson argues that the authorities’ insensitivity to such fears meant that a disturbance could be triggered off ‘at a moment’s notice.’<sup>28</sup>

Some of the most serious cholera disturbances occurred in Liverpool in May and June of 1832. The riots saw angry crowds targeting doctors and medical staff of the city, whom they believed were deliberately burking patients to help overcome the shortage of cadavers.<sup>29</sup> 1835 saw a similar incident directed against the medical school of Dr. Hall Overend of Sheffield. Violent crowd activity erupted from rumours that the newly established school was involved in murder in order to obtain subjects for dissection - and the school was smashed

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<sup>25</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 156 and Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, xv.

<sup>26</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Richardson, *Death Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 226-27.

<sup>29</sup> Gill, Burrell and Brown, ‘Fear and Frustration’ pp. 235-36.

and burned by a large gathering.<sup>30</sup>

Such incident eventually abated as the public came to accept medical experimentation. Pattison's previous claim that by taking time to teach the public about anatomy would see a marked decrease in hostility gradually began to occur.<sup>31</sup> Noting that tensions had settled Dr. Henry Gray published *Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical* (more commonly *Gray's Anatomy*) in 1858, and the book, which remains in print today, soon became 'the anatomist's bible.'<sup>32</sup>

### ***The 1862 Wardsend Cemetery Riot***

In June 1862, around thirty years after the surge in anatomy related riots had decreased to the point of non-existence 'the last resurrection scandal of the nineteenth century' erupted at Wardsend Cemetery in the Hillsborough district of Sheffield, serving as grounds to dismiss generalised assumptions that the Anatomy Act had put an end to public fears of bodysnatching and anatomical research.<sup>33</sup> The remainder of this chapter provides a concise history of Wardsend Cemetery, and a narrative description of the events of the night of 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1862.

The origins of the cemetery can be traced back to June 1857, when incumbent Reverend John Livesey foreseeing the closure of St. Philip's churchyard due to overcrowding, purchased five acres of land at Wardsend, as well as the erection of a chapel

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<sup>30</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 31 January 1835.

<sup>31</sup> 'Report from the Select Committee on Anatomy', p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind*, p. 318.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 162 and David Bentley, *Crimes & Misdemeanours: Tales from Sheffield & Beyond*, (Sheffield: ALD, 2005), p. 31.

and lodge house for his sexton, for £2600 – mostly of his own money.<sup>34</sup> The new premises were consecrated by the Archbishop of York, Thomas Musgrave, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1859.<sup>35</sup>

On the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1862 rumours began circulating that the cemetery's sexton Isaac Howard was exhuming bodies for the purpose of selling them to Sheffield's medical schools. The rumours had originally spawned from a man called Dixon who had previously rented a house on the cemetery's land from Howard. When the two men fell out of each other's favour over an unrelated incident, Dixon told his employer Mr. Oxspring of his suspicions about Howard and the situation escalated rapidly.<sup>36</sup>

The result was the descent of an angry crowd on the cemetery, who exhumed the graves of their relatives and uncovered a pit in which it was alleged 'disinterred bodies and coffins were put once they had served the sexton's purpose'.<sup>37</sup> The crowd entered the cemetery coach house, destroying doors, windows, furniture and other property belonging to Reverend Livesey, including his surplice. They then advanced to Howard's own house in the Burrowlees district of the city, almost a mile away, and finding he had fled, assured his wife they did not wish her harm and proceeded to destroy the building - firstly through the breaking of furniture, and then by arson. The arrival of the police and fire services put an end to the destruction, although few arrests were made as many of the troublemakers were able to blend into the gathering of spectators.<sup>38</sup>

Formal investigations later proved accusations of resurrection with the intent to sell

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<sup>34</sup> Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> W. Odom, *The Story of St. Philip's Church, Sheffield: A Centenary Record, 1828-1928, with Views and Portraits*, (Sheffield: W Townsend & Sons, 1928), p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>37</sup> David Bentley, *Crimes & Misdemeanors*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>38</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

cadavers to the medical school were inaccurate. However, it was revealed that Livesey had been making false burial records and Howard was convicted of ‘digging up the coffins of children which lay in unpurchased graves and burying them in the pit’, as a way of saving space in the overcrowded cemetery.<sup>39</sup> Following his imprisonment Howard was paid £200 in compensation for his house by the county of West Riding and Livesey was reinstated as Reverend of St. Philip’s Church.<sup>40</sup>

Although Wardsend Cemetery was closed to legal burial in 1988 and the site has largely fallen into neglect, save for the efforts of a local volunteer organisation, the Friends of Wardsend Cemetery, to this day the events of 6<sup>th</sup> June 1862 remains the subject of local legend, often largely misunderstanding or exaggerating the situation.<sup>41</sup> The only public commemoration to the occurrence is an undated memorial stone laid in the Walled Gardens at the nearby Hillsborough Park, bearing the badly weathered inscription;

*‘To the affectionate remembrance  
of Frank Bacon,  
who departed this life April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1854,  
aged three years.  
Also Louis Bacon, aged four months, buried in Wardsend Cemetery  
April 12<sup>th</sup> 1858, and was one of the many  
found in 1862, who had been so ruthlessly disinterred.’<sup>42</sup>*

## ***Chapter II: Who Were the Rioters?***

Unfortunately, concrete evidence of the social composition of the Wardsend rioters is unavailable - a trend recognisable throughout many popular disturbances in England around

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<sup>39</sup> Bentley, *Crimes & Misdemeanours*, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 15 November 1862 and Odom, *The Story of St. Philip’s Church*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> Friends of Wardsend Cemetery, <<http://www.friendsofwardsendcemetery.btck.co.uk/>> [accessed 26 February 2013] and Haythorne, ‘Extraordinary Events in a Cemetery in Sheffield’, iii.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, Jordan Lee, ‘Bacon Memorial Stone’, 2013. JPEG file. [See Appendix Fig 2.].

the period, largely due to the scarcity of arrests and subsequent formal reports made.<sup>43</sup> Although what follows is far from a complete or definitive picture of the rioters and their sympathisers, the difficulty in obtaining reliable sources to study the crowd in detail is a problem well documented by several of its prominent contributors.<sup>44</sup> Yet, while Rudé's statement that it is more often than not impossible to name, or otherwise identify, all of the 'faces in the crowd' stands true in the case of the Wardsend riot, this chapter attempts to recognise the most likely candidates without making over generalised assumptions.<sup>45</sup> The only factor that can be ascertained is that the people who felt impelled to turn their disapproval into active demonstrations against the accused resurrectionists shared feelings that an injustice had been done, and that collective action was the best method of showing their anger.

Generalising about the typical collective involved in riots against bodysnatchers or anatomists Ruth Richardson describes 'a fair cross-section of the working population in any given locality.'<sup>46</sup> From 1830 onwards a sense of class consciousness amongst the working class people of England had certainly begun to develop. Around the time many poorer people had begun to see themselves as a part of a collective group, bound by their shared experiences as part of a 'general history of conflict' against the upper hierarchy of their nation.<sup>47</sup> Although disturbances related to anatomy are, for the most part, apolitical riots - that people would use their developing class consciousness to express their anger collectively in other situations is certainly credible.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 88 and John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870*, (London: Longman Group, 1979), pp. 11-12.

<sup>44</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, pp. 3-16 and Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 ed.), pp. 3-31.

<sup>45</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 782.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 87.

Many years before the emergence of a working class, the lower orders were falling victim to the rich and powerful. There is certainly evidence to suggest that nineteenth century medical professionals continued this trend of manipulating the poor, who in turn rebelled against the unfair treatment, almost in a display of traditionalism and class solidarity.

An 1828 report from the *Westminster Review* recognises the indignant attitude towards dissection, most common amongst the lower orders. The powerful image of poor men and women ‘dragged from what should be their last bed, to show, in common with the murderer, how the knife of the surgeon may best avoid the rich man’s artery, and least afflict the rich man’s nerve’ represents a clear acknowledgement of social distinctions.<sup>49</sup> A contemporary illustration (1836) expresses a similar pessimism - displaying a team of porters loading a coffin labelled ‘For Dissection’ onto a handcart, amidst the sarcastic captions ‘The Poor Man’s Convoy’ and ‘A Variety of Subjects Always Ready for Medical Students’.<sup>50</sup> Dr. Henry Gray, although he does not explicitly identify the poor, almost certainly alludes to their use as ideal candidates for dissection in his seminal work *Gray’s Anatomy*, which expresses a preference for fat free subjects - a physique common amongst the London poor, impelled to riot for bread in the midst of the Crimean War (1853-1856).<sup>51</sup>

However, that all available evidence seems to suggest the 1862 Wardsend Cemetery disturbance was largely the work of the lower orders does not fully explain why the middle, or even upper classes, would not feel similarly threatened. The late eighteenth and early

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Anatomy’, *Westminster Review*, 10, (1829), 116-48 (p. 128).

<sup>50</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *Contrasts: Or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day Shewing the Present Decay of Taste. Accompanied by Appropriate Text*, (St. Marie’s Grange: A.W. Pugin, 1836), p. 115. [See Appendix Fig 1.].

<sup>51</sup> Henry Gray, *Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical*, (New York: Bounty Books, 1977 repr.), p. 1041 and Ruth Richardson, *The Making of Mr. Gray’s Anatomy: Bodies Books, Fortune, Fame*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 131.

nineteenth centuries saw an ongoing conflict between ‘alternative ways of life’ – and as the working class developed an identity and consciousness of its own, its specific ‘political theory’ and ‘moral rhetoric’ manifested themselves in ideas and problems specific to its collective.<sup>52</sup> While fears of bodysnatching were a significant threat to the working classes, wealthier members of the community could afford to take measures against such practice, including the employment of paid guards for their own recently buried, and the use of devices such as reinforced lead or iron coffins, or the ‘mort-safe’ - a temporary iron-grille cage to be placed around interred coffins using block and tackle or machinery, and removed after eight weeks when the body was too decomposed to be of medical interest.<sup>53</sup>

Recognition of the poor as the primary victims to such practice, by the wealthy and educated, as well as amongst the lower orders themselves, provides convincing reason to suggest why their increasing contempt would eventually spark mass reaction. The Liverpool cholera riots of 1832 were presented in the press as the actions of ‘misguided’ and ‘ignorant’ poor Irish immigrant mobs, unable to understand the benefits of the work conducted by the medical professionals they targeted in their disturbances.<sup>54</sup> Further example is found in an 1832 incident in Paisley, which saw a cholera hearse pelted with stones and the looting of the medical school. Consequently, there was a backlash by the ‘rational and unprejudiced part of the community’ who defended the doctors and denounced the riotous citizens of the town as an ‘unprincipled’, ‘lawless’ and ‘ignorant’ drunken mob, caught in the heat of ‘brutal and savage passions.’<sup>55</sup> Such attitudes, often strongly conveyed in the press, serve as biased generalisations of the crowd that fit perfectly into assumptions of pre-Marxist history, often portraying working class crowds as ‘criminal elements’ or ‘the slum population’ - a violent

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<sup>52</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 463.

<sup>53</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 50 and p. 53 and James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (London: David & Charles, 1972), p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> Gill, Burrell and Brown, ‘The Liverpool Cholera Riots of 1832’, p. 236.

<sup>55</sup> *Paisley Advertiser*, 31 March 1832.

and immoral collective with ‘no ideas or honourable impulses of its own.’<sup>56</sup>

Thus even in 1862, when the majority of comparable disturbance had disappeared - arguably due to a better informed working class regarding the benefits of medical research - an editorial in the Scottish Conservative newspaper, the *Dundee Courier & Argus*, still presented a scathing denunciation of the Wardsend Cemetery rioters based largely on assumptions founded in class prejudice.<sup>57</sup> The writer suggests that ‘in the districts where minerals form the staple, there is a greater tendency than in other places to resort to violence’ - an overt reproach to men employed in the thriving Sheffield steel industry for inciting the riot.<sup>58</sup> The stereotyping of the Sheffield working class as ‘a rough and ready set of fellows, full of impulse, and somewhat prone to use their hands without sanction of law’ reduces them to tumultuous, animalistic subhuman beings, who it is claimed would respond best to the introduction of a ‘Lynch Law’ to the city.<sup>59</sup> In the court hearings over the scandal Mr. Maule, on behalf of his defendant Isaac Howard expressed similar disapproval of the crowd’s response to Howard’s perceived wrongdoing, claiming he hoped the jury ‘would not act as the vulgar populace of Sheffield had done, but that they would give a calm and cool consideration to the case.’<sup>60</sup>

The working class population of Sheffield were certainly no strangers to popular disturbance by the 1860s; the early 1790s saw rise to a ‘streetwise popular radicalism’, and the city became well known as a ‘tempestuous hotbed of the revolutionary underground’ into

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<sup>56</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 163.

<sup>58</sup> *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 7 June 1862.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> ‘The Newspaper Report of Part of Mr. Maule’s Speech to the Jury’ in ‘Appendix F.’ in Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, p. 34.

the nineteenth century, with Chartist protests erupting throughout the 1840s.<sup>61</sup> Amidst these political uprisings, in 1835, Sheffield city centre had also been the grounds of a turbulent backlash against the dissecting surgeons of the recently established medical school, again, with little indication to whom the insurgents may have been.<sup>62</sup> However, it is entirely plausible that participants in this earlier riot, as well as in the Chartist demonstrations, could have played a part in the events unravelling at Hillsborough in 1862. Models of custom and tradition would certainly support this view, with the defence of traditional rights often being supported by the wider consensus of the community.<sup>63</sup> That the people of Sheffield had felt strongly enough to defend their beliefs on comparable issues through riot before would certainly suggest they would be willing to do so again. This was certainly the perception of the medical schools of the city themselves, who, despite their reputation as a respectable establishments by 1862, were still supplied with cadavers in ‘sacks and wooden boxes, which bore no resemblance to coffins.’<sup>64</sup>

Yet, despite the implied protection of the middle classes it would be inaccurate to claim that the Wardsend Cemetery riot did have a noticeable impact on the wider community of the Hillsborough district, regardless of social class. An 1829 editorial from the medical journal *Lancet* - certainly aimed at the educated middle class, usually medical professionals themselves - argued that anatomical science was an immoral and repulsive discipline, and there is indeed evidence of sympathy for the poor’s maltreatment present in the Wardsend incident.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Baxter, “Passing the Torch of Liberty” - James Wolstenholme’s “Second Coming” and the 1839-40 Chartism Postscript to the Sheffield Revolutionary Tradition’, (Handout given at Chartism Annual Convention: Society for Study of Labour History, Newcastle University, 2005) and F.C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), pp. 23-24.

<sup>62</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 31 January 1835.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd’, p. 188.

<sup>64</sup> Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Lancet*, 1, (1829), 818-21.

Correspondence from the wider community published in the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* in the days and weeks following the disturbance at Hillsborough suggests that, even if more educated, middle class citizens of the area were not directly involved in the riots, they certainly extended their support or sympathies to those who were. While the first letter to be printed - submitted anonymously and published in the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1862 issue - highlights the 'disgusting and disgraceful management of the Wardsend Cemetery' a letter from an A. Burgess in the 19<sup>th</sup> June issue states 'I am not surprised at the indignation felt, and not sparingly expressed by the inhabitants of St. Philip's district of the gross mismanagement of Wardsend Cemetery.'<sup>66</sup> Such opinionated correspondence certainly bares the mark of respectable, educated individuals - one example drawing a comparison between the excellent management of cemeteries in America and Canada - places it would seem unlikely many working class individuals would have opportunity or reason to visit - and another is signed only as 'Economist' - a likely hint at the profession of its author.<sup>67</sup> Patrick Joyce argues that the developing consciousness of the working class saw the emergence of a distinct, dialect and language, certainly not present in any of the letters printed in the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, and although many working class men could read in some fashion by this point, the ability to write was far less common.<sup>68</sup>

That the middle classes were conscious of, and evidently affected by, the grievances of the lower orders reveals the continued presence of traditionalist paternalism, described by E.P. Thompson in relation to eighteenth century food riots, in which the more powerful, respectable or influential amongst a particular society would offer direct aid, or voice their support for the poor.<sup>69</sup> That such practice can be observed in the middle classes well into

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<sup>66</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 19 June 1862.

<sup>67</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 9 June 1862 and *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 20 June 1862.

<sup>68</sup> Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 279 and Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 783.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd' p. 193.

Britain's age of industrialisation rejects Thompson's own assumption that 'no lingering obligations of mutuality – of paternalism or deference' were evident by this point.<sup>70</sup>

Yet, despite evidence of such sympathy and support, Pat Jalland warns against 'assuming that the behaviour and beliefs about death of the middle and upper classes automatically filtered down to the working classes.'<sup>71</sup> By 1862 the distinctions of society were often much less ambiguous than they may have been during early periods of transition.<sup>72</sup> As a result the middle classes may, in writing to the press, have been just as intent on defending their own respectability by disassociating themselves from the mob, or indeed be the victims of a metaphorical prison, created by the working class to hold them to their inherited obligations of protection and support – the consequent of neglecting such duties being undesired or even feared.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Chapter III: Techniques, Methods and Justification***

Since its emergence as a historical discipline in its own right studies of the crowd have often insisted on a set of common traits, methods and morals that are apparent in all incidents of rioting and popular disturbance, and have used such evidence as an attempt to justify such movements and to dismiss assumptions they represent little more than unruly individuals acting in an antisocial manner with little regard for the interests of the community or its rights and customs.<sup>74</sup> Rudé claims that a crowd's motives are often a complex amalgamation of factors that require more detailed analysis to uncover a true understanding.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 222.

<sup>71</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 782.

<sup>73</sup> Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd', pp. 188-89.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

<sup>75</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 217.

Richardson, in her analysis of anatomy related riots, argues that most incidents of this nature share an ‘overt intention... to inflict injury or destruction upon those responsible for the exhumation and sale of the buried dead’ and that violent rebellious action towards bodysnatchers was spawned from ‘an inability to express anger in more traditional and less violent ways, an active defence of traditional funerary custom, and a bitter sense of class betrayal.’<sup>76</sup> F.K. Donnelly supports this claim, stressing that ‘violent protest seemed to have been the only channel for popular hostility to the use of the bodies of paupers for medical research’<sup>77</sup> Yet, as both of these historians have observed, the actions of the participants are often much more complex than such observations may suggest.

This intricacy and sophistication is often present very early in the development of a riot. The presence of an initial ‘triggering incident’, or catalyst, present in most examples of mass mobilization and public disturbance was first suggested by Rudé, who observes that most incidents are founded in ‘comparatively small beginnings’ such as ‘chance word or act of provocation’ that would gradually build in momentum, reaching climax in riot.<sup>78</sup> Donnelly identifies the trigger incident in his study of the 1835 destruction of the Sheffield medical school as being the national attitudes towards anatomy being exacerbated by the circulation of a pamphlet condemning the practice of anatomy in the city, published by Samuel Roberts, a local self-proclaimed champion of the working man.<sup>79</sup> Thus Donnelly argues that public suspicion was already on the brink of ‘violent outburst’ by the night of the riot when an additional trigger incident presented itself as the wife of the school’s caretaker screamed ‘murder’ from a window in the building as she was beaten by her drunken husband and an

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<sup>76</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>77</sup> Donnelly, ‘The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy’, p. 171.

<sup>78</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 242.

<sup>79</sup> Donnelly, ‘The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy’, pp. 170-71.

accomplice.<sup>80</sup>

Although the Sheffield medical school's practices were later proven legitimate, following the 1835 riot the city's public remained suspicious of the medical profession, and even by 1862 licensed practitioners were noticeably more cautious than was the norm throughout Britain.<sup>81</sup> Mr. Jackson and Inspector Crofts of the West Riding Constabulary - to whom an initial report about Dixon's suspicions regarding the conduct of Wardsend Cemetery were made - exercised extreme caution in handling the complaint, being well aware that it pertained to a 'subject on which the public feeling is extremely sensitive.'<sup>82</sup>

Thus it can be argued that tensions were already high prior to the disturbance at Wardsend, and a minor incident could quickly escalate into a major insurgence at any time. The incident that eventually sparked the riot presented itself in the form of a malicious rumour spread by Dixon, a labourer, who at the time was renting a house on the cemetery ground from Isaac Howard. That Dixon and Howard had been involved in a dispute over the cultivation of a gardening plot on the land prior to the incident raises the issue of whether or not Dixon knew at the time that the claims he was spreading were false, and was simply intended to incite outrage amongst the public as his own revenge.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless Dixon passing on information to his employer Mr. Oxspring is the first identifiable catalyst in the incident, and once the information somehow reached the people of Sheffield it quickly developed into an investigation, and subsequent riot.

The rapidity of the public response to the rumours can easily be interpreted as hasty,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

and by association the work of an unruly, disorganised collective. Many contemporary newspaper reports describe the rioters as a ‘mob’ - implying a bunch of violent hooligans. The editorial opinion of the *Dundee Courier & Argus* for example suggests that the Wardsend disturbance was unprovoked chaos that could perhaps be expected from a city of primitives, for which the only suitable treatment would be the introduction of a ‘Lynch Law.’<sup>84</sup> Similar interpretation was expressed during the scandal’s court proceedings in which Mr. Maule, on behalf of his defendant Isaac Howard, claimed he hoped that the jury ‘would not act as the vulgar populace of Sheffield had done, but that they would give a calm and cool consideration to the case’<sup>85</sup> and referred to the destruction of Howard’s house as a violation of ‘the sacred home of the living.’<sup>86</sup> Coupled with the fact that both targets of the crowd’s destruction were later cleared of the more serious of their suspected crimes, the above may indeed suggest the crowd were a hastily assembled mob of troublemakers.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, by studying the narrative in detail it is possible to derive a display of moral restraint and orderliness in the crowd’s actions, comparable to Thompson’s earlier study of eighteenth century English food rioters and his concept of a ‘moral economy’.<sup>88</sup> The best example of this is that, in the midst of the disturbance at Wardsend, the rioters engaged in the almost decorous act of ‘pulling down’ Howard’s house. A report of the mob’s activities printed in the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* on 4<sup>th</sup> June, one day after the disturbance, describes the damage in detail;

*‘The mob went forward and commenced an attack by throwing stones at the windows and tearing down the palisades. They then broke into the house by kicking in the panels of the back door and demanded to see Mr. Howard. Mrs. Howard told*

<sup>84</sup> *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 7 June 1862.

<sup>85</sup> ‘The Newspaper Report of Part of Mr. Maule’s Speech to the Jury’, p. 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 15 November 1862.

<sup>88</sup> Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, p. 188.

*them he was not within but they insisted on making a search. They required her to leave the place as they did not wish to do her any injury... They said they did not want to do any harm and she might take away what she liked... In the meantime furniture was being rapidly broken up and stones were flying through the upper windows in showers... The mob continued to break up the furniture in the lower rooms, and then set fire to a great pile of it by hot cinders from the kitchen fire. They then withdrew from the house... [and] stood at a short distance to prevent any interferences to save the premises.*<sup>89</sup>

Although the report uses the term ‘mob’ - conjuring up associated negative connotations - the methods of destruction described are of a very organised and restrained nature. Such methods can be traced back at least as far as 1780 and the anti-Catholic, Gordon Riots in London, which saw furniture and personal possessions removed from property and burned separately.<sup>90</sup> Rudé suggests such activity was founded in a tacit agreement to focus exclusively on the target, ensuring minimal damage to neighbouring buildings, and to limit violence to inanimate objects only.<sup>91</sup> The destruction of Howard’s house by the Wardsend rioters saw his wife allowed to collect valuable belongings before fleeing the building unharmed, save for being accidentally struck on the neck by a stone.<sup>92</sup>

An anatomy related disturbance in Aberdeen in January 1832 demonstrates similar practice, with the authorities avoiding interference in the riot, confident in the traditionalist restraint and legitimate objectives of the participants and observers, who following the destruction of the medical school dispersed and returned peacefully to their homes, satisfied that justice had been served.<sup>93</sup>

While it is unclear at what point such traditionalist crowd activity emerged in Sheffield it appears in several preceding incidents, linked by the common trend of being a

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<sup>89</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>90</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 60.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>93</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 92-3.

response to situations in which there was a feeling that justice under the law had not been properly served. For example such methods were used in 1790 against an individual whose false court testimony had resulted in the execution of two innocent men.<sup>94</sup>

Just as it is conceivable to suggest that participants from the 1835 destruction of the Sheffield medical school were again involved in the 1862 Wardsend Cemetery riot it is possible that the methods used were bequeathed from the early incident. The *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* of 4<sup>th</sup> June 1862 recognises this, claiming the incident of the day before ‘resembl[ed] in its origin the attack upon the Medical School in Eyre street many years ago.’<sup>95</sup> The 1835 riot had seen acts of destruction and arson directed exclusively against the offending institution and its contents, including the burning of furniture, papers, books and other apparatus in the street.<sup>96</sup> Despite the damage inflicted however, an eyewitness account described the atmosphere as calm and disciplined, and compared the attitude of the participants to that of ‘day-labourers’ engaging in lawful employment.<sup>97</sup>

Donnelly argues that such methods represented ‘a dispensation of popular justice, rather than a politically orientated attempt to overthrow or modify existing relations of power.’<sup>98</sup> Such logic is also equally applicable to the riot at Wardsend. Rather than challenge the official authorities, on hearing news that the police were arriving the rioters dispersed, and it was believed that ‘a considerable number of the guilty parties mingled in the crowd that collected’ to watch Howard’s house burn.<sup>99</sup> By 1862 the practice of bodysnatching had largely disappeared from Britain, and the scandal at Wardsend Cemetery was perceived as a

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<sup>94</sup> *Sheffield Register*, 23 April 1790.

<sup>95</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>96</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 31 January 1835.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Donnelly, ‘The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy’, p. 171.

<sup>99</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

matter to be resolved on a local level, without a need to confront the system of government itself.<sup>100</sup>

That on arrival the police were unable to identify any of the suspects or draw any valuable information from the crowd that had gathered was perceived by a *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* report from the following day as being the result of intimidation deterring potential witnesses. Yet, the same article also presents evidence to suggest there was in fact great support for the actions of the rioters from the community. The newspaper itself is careful not to condemn the rioters for taking the law ‘into their own hands’ and suggests that there may have been much support for the burning of Howard’s house amongst the community of Hillsborough, claiming that ‘The alleged misconduct of Howard has excited the greatest indignation in the neighbourhood and the feelings of some of the bystanders were evinced on the arrival of the fire-engines by cries of “Let the bastard’s den burn; he’s built it by selling the dead.”’<sup>101</sup> The police’s belief that they had been alerted to the incident only after a ‘great delay’ serves as further evidence to suggest the community supported the actions of the arsonists.<sup>102</sup>

Such evidence arguably represents a system of solidarity and paternalism present in the locality of Hillsborough. By neglecting to intervene with the actions of the rioters the wider community was protecting those involved, and demonstrating widespread feelings of outrage against the allegations against Howard, as well as a lack of confidence in the police system and the official methods of justice and law.

Further evidence is available in the aftermath of Livesey’s trial – the Reverend was

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<sup>100</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 163.

<sup>101</sup> *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 4 June 1862.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

granted a free pardon, reinstated in office at St. Philip's Church and was able to hold office for a total of 39 years, for which he was praised for being 'a very worthy and estimable character... genial, benevolent and kind hearted.'<sup>103</sup> It is important to remember that the influence of the local church was still central to the lives of many Victorian working class people, and they would maintain an allegiance to church or chapel, making the incumbent clergymen figures of prestige and authority amongst their local community.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, even following the scandal it is possible many maintained their respect for Livesey in accordance with religious traditionalism, influenced by the symbolism of his position.

It is also possible that the community felt Livesey's actual offences were little more than harmless misdemeanours, and that the rioters had overreacted in the heat of the moment. Although respectful burial was still of central importance to many Victorian people, denying dissected cadavers rites of burial was essentially not a legal requirement and overcrowded cemeteries were a widely publicised problem in many large towns throughout Britain. As the community could not offer a valid alternative to intramural burial it is possible that they accepted the Reverend's plight.<sup>105</sup> With 'popular feeling... so bitter against [alleged resurrectionists]' mistaken identity, misinterpreted intentions and overreaction in relation to anatomy and bodysnatching scandals were certainly not uncommon.<sup>106</sup> In Edinburgh in 1823 the violent destruction and incineration of a horse drawn coach and empty coffin, spawned from erroneous suspicions it was intended for the smuggling of a medical cadaver from a churchyard.<sup>107</sup> The violent protest against the Sheffield medical school in 1835 also proved a false alarm, with evidence showing that all human remains on the premises had been obtained

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<sup>103</sup> Odom, *The Story of St. Philips' Church*, p. 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, (Houndsmill: MacMillan Press, 1996), pp. 6-7 and p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, pp. 131-33.

<sup>106</sup> Bailey (ed.), *The Diary of a Resurrectionist, 1811-1812*, p. 69.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

in accordance with the Anatomy Act's guidance.<sup>108</sup>

However, lacking this hindsight, even if mistaken it can at least be argued that the rioters were acting in defence of a series of traditionalist religious beliefs in accordance with Victorian society, and their actions were strongly founded in custom, representing a genuine attempt to serve justice. Christian traditionalism maintained that uninterrupted natural decay of the physical body was necessary for guaranteed acceptance into Heaven, and burial in consecrated ground was viewed as a sign of 'natural death' and a mark of 'respectability' for the family of the deceased, well into the Victorian era.<sup>109</sup>

It has even been suggested that popular faith contributed largely towards the delay in the passing of an Anatomy Act, and that the abandonment of Christian sentiment such a move would be interpreted as amongst the general public would represent an unforgivable crime on behalf of the government.<sup>110</sup> Such creed was evidently adhered to in Sheffield, where the unmarked burial of 339 victims of the 1832 cholera epidemic were still honoured with full Christian rites in preparation for Judgement Day, and further celebrated with the erection of a striking remembrance monument in 1835.<sup>111</sup> To void the promise of an eternal afterlife, by instead being involuntarily dissected as a medical cadaver, would undoubtedly have prompted anger amongst friends and relatives of faith. Thus it is easy to understand why initial assumptions regarding the incident would spark such extreme reaction.

#### ***Chapter IV: Conclusions***

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<sup>108</sup> Donnelly, n' 'The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy', p. 171.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty: Politics and Poor Relief in Late Victorian England, 1870-1900*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 196-97.

<sup>110</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, p. 170.

<sup>111</sup> *Sheffield Iris*, 10 February 1835.

The riot that occurred at Wardsend Cemetery on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1862 is evidently a much more complex event than initial observations may suggest. The disturbance displays a distinct sense of class consciousness, and the social status of those involved is arguably central to the methods and justification exercised - a view adopted by many contemporary newspaper reports. However, this is not definitive, and there is indeed some blurring of the ideological perspectives expressed by the local community. Middle class citizens, although they may have expressed their discontent in different ways, were equally outraged by the scandal. This can in turn be used to suggest that, although the industrial revolution had undeniably resulted in a refashioning of the societal hierarchy, it was still possible for certain events to transcend or temporarily penetrate, class barriers, and manifest themselves in a display of traditionalist paternalism.<sup>112</sup> Yet, it is also arguable that dominance through sheer numbers allowed the lower orders to hold influential and educated members of the community as ‘prisoners’ in which the middle classes felt bound by their duty to support the poor.<sup>113</sup>

Traditionalism and custom is indeed a central feature of the Wardsend Cemetery riot, extending to the methods employed by its participants. The crowd displays many of George Rudé’s common traits of rioting, including a clearly defined trigger incident, and use of the technique of ‘pulling down a house’, despite the context being entirely different from the ones in which the phenomena were originally observed.<sup>114</sup> Many of the frameworks applied to crowd activity by E.P. Thompson are also present in the incident, which certainly serves to represent a popular response to the breakdown of ‘norms and sanctions both of law and neighbourhood pressures.’<sup>115</sup> The crowd’s conduct is uncannily similar to that observed by Thompson in line with his moral economy thesis, and the Wardsend Cemetery rioters

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<sup>112</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 598.

<sup>113</sup> Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd’, pp. 188-89.

<sup>114</sup> Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, pp. 244-45.

<sup>115</sup> Thompson, ‘Custom Law and Common Right’ in *Customs in Common*, pp. 96-184 (p. 102).

represent much more than an irrational mob - demonstrating a distinct sense of restraint and organisation in their actions.<sup>116</sup>

More specifically focused analyses of crowds involved in demonstrations against anatomy and bodysnatching have also proved directly applicable to the Wardsend riot. Ruth Richardson's statement that such collectives would often reflect a traditionalist response to perceived injustices is certainly true, again a parallel to the work of the more general crowd historians cited above.<sup>117</sup> Comparisons between the 1862 incident and other similar occurrences further confirm the riot's sense of traditionalism - the 1835 Sheffield medical school disturbance being particularly analogous, both in its motivations and the methods employed by its participants.<sup>118</sup>

However, the incident is not completely without its own paradoxes and anomalies, and some elements of this analysis have revealed a sense of individuality that perhaps help to explain why academics studying such phenomenon - most notably Ruth Richardson and F.K. Donnelly - have chosen to neglect mention of the incident in their own theses. That the riot occurred three decades after the majority of comparable activity had decidedly abated - later earning itself the nickname 'the last resurrection scandal of the nineteenth century' - is one of the most obvious reasons for this.<sup>119</sup> Several historians have claimed that a gradual change in attitude following the passing of the 1828 Anatomy Act represented an acceptance of the profession, exemplified in a June 1833 letter from a Mr. William Williams to Astley Cooper, which expresses a newfound understanding of 'the benefit derived from anatomy' and an approbation of experiment being carried out on 'the body graciously bestowed by me by my

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<sup>116</sup> Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd', p. 188.

<sup>117</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 89.

<sup>118</sup> Donnelly, 'The Destruction of the Sheffield School of Anatomy', p. 171.

<sup>119</sup> Bentley, *Crimes & Misdemeanours*, p. 31.

Maker when my hereafter desertion of that body by its animated tenants of spirit and soul takes place...'<sup>120</sup> That the riot at Wardsend occurred so many years after such views were perceived as well established provides an obvious contradiction.

Yet, on these grounds the Wardsend Cemetery rioters should not be dismissed as ignorant primitives, lacking an understanding of the benefits of anatomy that were widely accepted amongst the British population by 1862. That the riot was directed against those accused of bodysnatching, rather than the medical schools believed to have accepted the cadavers, is of particular significance. For while the historiography surrounding the phenomenon of anatomy rioters is largely founded in the feelings of discontent expressed by the poor against the medical profession, the decision of the Wardsend Cemetery rioters to instead target the alleged bodysnatchers arguably represents a progression beyond Peter Linebaugh's summary of seventeenth century attitudes - that continued into the 1830s - in which 'except for a minority of surgeons and sympathetic observers, dissection was considered less as a necessary method for enlarging the understand of homo corpis than as a mutilation of the dead person.'<sup>121</sup> In this way the Wardsend Cemetery riot arguably represents a completely unique case study into disturbance related to medical dissection in which the legitimate practice was accepted, its benefits to mankind were understood and medical schools openly showed their appreciation for cadavers donated by the community, but bodysnatching itself was still seen as a major injustice - initiated by the resurrectionists themselves, rather than the medical schools they aimed to supply.<sup>122</sup>

Ultimately this dissertation represents the first historiographical study of the 1862

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<sup>120</sup> Bailey, *The Resurrection Men*, pp. 162-63 and Jacalyn Duffin, *History of Medicine: A Scandalously Short Introduction*, (Houndsmill: MacMillan, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>121</sup> Linebaugh, 'The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons', p. 76.

<sup>122</sup> Duffin, *History of Medicine*, p. 35.

Wardsend Cemetery scandal, salvaging it from its previous confinement to local myth and folklore used to frighten local children.<sup>123</sup> Its introduction as a new microstudy of anatomy and bodysnatching riots provides ample opportunity for further development, and should lead to a reassessment amongst historians of public attitudes towards medicine subsequent to the 1832 Anatomy Act, and the dangers of being too generic. The dissertation also serves as a valuable study into this niche occurrence, and provides further evidence that more general studies of the crowd and their analyses of its identity, methods and motives are directly applicable to the nineteenth century phenomenon of disturbances arising from anatomy and bodysnatching.

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<sup>123</sup> Haythorne, *Extraordinary Doings in a Cemetery in Sheffield*, iii.

*Appendix*

*Fig 1.*



- Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore, 'The Poor Man's Convoy', 1836. Illustration, in Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore, *Contrasts: Or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day Shewing the Present Decay of Taste. Accompanied by Appropriate Text*, (St. Marie's Grange: A.W. Pugin, 1836).

*Fig 2.*



- Smith, Jordan Lee, 'Bacon Memorial Stone', 2013. JPEG file.

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