



## “Blacking” in Berkshire.

*G. A. Kempthorne.*

THE following extracts from a document of 14 pages preserved among the Treasury Papers in the Public Record Office\* throw some light on the state of Windsor Forest in the eighteenth century. They refer to the capture and dispersal of a notorious band of poachers; who, making Wokingham their headquarters, for some years infested the Forest country under the leadership of a farmer named William Shorter.†

In the early part of this century the pursuit of other people's deer by bands of men with blackened faces, seems to have been a favourite amusement. An association of young bloods known as the Waltham Blacks who made Hampshire their hunting ground acquired considerable notoriety in this way. As was inevitable, however, such a form of sport attracted also men of the criminal class, with the result that “blacking” became associated frequently with the less fashionable vices of blackmail, robbery with violence, and even murder.

The author of the document appears to have been one of the minor Forest officials. In 1728, possibly as a reward for his services on this occasion, he was holding the office of Janitor of Windsor Castle.‡

An acc<sup>t</sup> of disbursm<sup>ts</sup> and expenses made by Bap<sup>t</sup> Nunn in apprehending the Blacks from y<sup>e</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1722, at w<sup>ch</sup> time the said Nunn took up a greyhound w<sup>th</sup> the night before Shorter and gang had used in killing his M<sup>ts</sup> deer in the Forest of Windsor as appears by the oaths of several persons since apprehended.

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\* Treasury Papers, Vol. CCXLIV. No. 63.

† Some account of this gang was given in the Berks Archæological Journal, Vol. XV., p. 118.

‡ Calendar of Treasury Papers, 1720—1728.

			£	s.	d.
1722.					
May 24.	Persons in the night to demand the dog and threatened to burn the house down and kill the s <sup>d</sup> Nunn by w <sup>ch</sup> he was oblidge <sup>d</sup> in out <sup>wd</sup> show to send three messengers to the neighing town to cry the dog and make in w <sup>th</sup> some persons to inform himself from w <sup>ch</sup> quarter they came to meet y <sup>m</sup> a <sup>bt</sup> it	...	2	10	0
27.	Message again w <sup>th</sup> fresh threats and forct to goe to Lond <sup>n</sup> to Col. Negus <sup>1</sup> and made an affid <sup>t</sup> before Mr. Blackerby ...	...	1	18	0
	Insuring my house and barns from burning		1	13	4
31.	A fresh surprise. One appeard disguised w <sup>th</sup> a message of destruction, lay out y <sup>t</sup> night				
June 5.	Beset in Heath, forct to fly back and lay at Hertford Bridge upon w <sup>ch</sup> I went to Lond <sup>n</sup> to Col. Negus for relief and mist him	...	1	10	0
6.					
10.	A message here from Blacks to demand 5 gs. and a buck to be sent to Crowthorne <sup>2</sup> or damage.				
11.	To London to Col. Negus who gave me 5 gs. to give them ...	...	1	0	0
13.	To Oakingham manageing a person to discover y <sup>e</sup> persons who were to have the money and at last agreed ab <sup>t</sup> a discovery, if performd to pay 5 gs. more to discoverer and gave him there and expenses ...	...	1	18	10
21.	A L <sup>ve</sup> from Blacks for 5 gs. and a buck and sent to my Oakingham correspond <sup>t</sup> to meet me y <sup>e</sup> 24 <sup>th</sup> at Colnbrook.				
24.	Met correspond <sup>t</sup> at Colnbrook who told me they were determind to kill me if they had not the money and we agreed the managem <sup>t</sup> of the discovery expenses ...	...			
				13	0

1. Col. Negus was keeper of Bigshot and Sandhurst Walks.

2. A point on the Roman road at the junction of Sandhurst, Bigshot and Easthampstead Walks now known as Brooker's Corner. The tree was standing in 1607 (see Norden's Survey of Windsor Forest).

27. Blacks came in the night shot at me three times two bullets into my cham<sup>r</sup> window and agreed to pay y<sup>m</sup> 5 gs. at Crowthorne y<sup>e</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> in<sup>st</sup>
29. Sent two fawns one to Oakingham one to Hartford Bridge w<sup>th</sup> a guinea each and a spye to each place thinking they might drop in ... .. 2 2 0
30. Met correspond<sup>t</sup> who assured me the prsns. would meet and black at Shorter's to take my 5 gs. Got three persons who met, view<sup>d</sup> a place, planted themselves and saw W<sup>m</sup>. Cooke, J<sup>no</sup>. Cooper, W<sup>m</sup>. Shorter and another person since known to be J<sup>no</sup>. Hawker goe into Shorter's and come out disguised and went to Crowthorne paid correspond<sup>t</sup> by agreement more ... .. 5 5 0
- July 1. The persons who saw the Blacks disguise themselves met at my house, gave their information and I paid them ... .. 1 11 6
3. To Windsor with Mr. Owen<sup>s</sup> a<sup>bt</sup> this affair w<sup>th</sup> the three persons. No success. Expenses 6 0
6. To Lond<sup>n</sup> to Col. Negus from him to Mr. Owen. No success yet waited three days ... 10 0
9. Met my correspond<sup>t</sup> at Hertford Bridge gave me an acc<sup>t</sup> of dividing my money killing the great deer at Hannington's<sup>4</sup> and that they began to threaten me afresh. His expenses and spent there ... .. 1 17 4
17. Sent a g. to be spent at Oakingham by my correspond<sup>ts</sup> advice, they being shy of him 1 1 0

3. Steward of the Court.

4. Hannington was under-keeper at Bigshot Rayles where he lived in a small house adjoining that of Col. Negus. The latter's residence appears at this time to have been in a ruinous condition. It was probably from the under-keeper that it acquired the name of Hannican's Lodge by which it was known later. There was an under-keeper known as Hanykyn, no doubt an ancestor of this man, dwelling there in 1607. The house is now called "Ravenswood."

21. Beset in the Heath coming from Hannington's forct. to fly back and lay at Finchampstead ... 3 6
24. Ordered and attended with affid<sup>t</sup> in Lond<sup>n</sup> and there resolved I should lye out of my house to ground a matter of law ag<sup>nat</sup> them 1 10 0
26. Blacks at my house again shot and neare my death for endeavouring to detect them, forsook my house a fortnight ... 2 10 0
31. To Lond<sup>n</sup> to Col. Negus rec<sup>d</sup> directions to take informations upon oath ag<sup>t</sup> Shorter and at Country Justices. No oaths taken ... 1 10 0
- Aug. 4. To Lond<sup>n</sup> to give acc<sup>t</sup> of their resolutions w<sup>th</sup> lawyers ordered to take care of myself for some time ... 1 10 0
6. Gave correspond<sup>t</sup> 2 gs. to make peace and got some venison and sent to y<sup>m</sup> met some of them and expenses w<sup>th</sup> y<sup>m</sup> ... 2 18 6

[After this there is no entry for over 2 months.]

- Oct. 21. A<sup>bt</sup> Michaelmas fresh ravages nightly committed and fresh threatenings from all parts, deer killed everywhere in day time and keepers insulted.

Up to Lond<sup>n</sup> to L<sup>d</sup> Cobham<sup>5</sup> who ordered me to bring up the evidences to swear in Lond<sup>n</sup> ... 1 10 0

[The witnesses were all taken up and affidavits made before Messrs. Chocke and Blackerby at Westminster.]

- Nov. 14. Assaulted by two persons in disguise.

- 16 & 17. Before two justices. No warrant granted.

Exp<sup>a</sup> ... 8 0

[Other journeys to London followed with the result that the writer was ordered "to observe motions and get fresh information." A regular system of spies was then instituted.]

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5. Ld. Cobham was keeper of Cranbourn Walk.

1723.

- Feb. 25 Visited spyes at Frimley, Hartford Bridge,  
& 26. and at Oakingham. Fresh mischief and  
dayly threatenings gave y<sup>m</sup> for their care and  
intelligence w<sup>th</sup> expenses ... .. 1 19 0

[The legal aspect of the case seems to have given rise to considerable difficulty, and there were constant consultations with lawyers in London. On April 25th a special Act of Parliament had to be brought in known as the "Black Act," which made the offence of "blacking" a felony.

Meanwhile things were becoming intolerable. Attempts were made to intimidate the magistrates, and in April a murder was committed. Miles, a keeper at New Windsor, arrested a poacher named Hughes. The man's guns were seized and he was fined £10 in the Forest Court. The churchwarden to whom the money was paid was at once compelled by threats of arson to hand it back again, and the Blacks visited the keeper's house, maltreated him, and would have shot him but the guns aimed at him flashed in the pan. His young son, however, who put his head out of a window to remonstrate with them was shot dead.<sup>6</sup>]

- April 25. Journey to Lond<sup>n</sup> with L<sup>r</sup> to L<sup>d</sup> Cobham a<sup>bt</sup>  
y<sup>e</sup> discovery of the murder of young Miles  
and other things ordered that day. Back  
by him w<sup>th</sup> instructions to act herein from y<sup>e</sup>  
R<sup>t</sup>. Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Rob. Walpole, E<sup>sq</sup>. and L<sup>d</sup>. Sun-  
derland, went the same night to Virginia  
Water as directed by letter, person gone ... 1 10 0
27. M<sup>r</sup>. W<sup>m</sup>. Cox came to me, askt about y<sup>e</sup> l<sup>re</sup> 8  
and freely owned it and made him at that  
time a present of ... .. 5 5 0  
Spent at y<sup>e</sup> same time at Windsor ... .. 7 6
29. To Lond<sup>n</sup> with Cox his horse hire expenses  
upon the road and with M<sup>r</sup>. Owen by L<sup>d</sup>.  
Cobham's order giving in his information  
upon oath and night ... .. 1 14 6
30. Attended M<sup>r</sup>. Owen again, dined together at  
y<sup>e</sup> Rose tavern at night again at tavern and  
coach hire ... .. 1 6 0

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6. London Journal, May 4th.

May 1.	At Temple again, M <sup>r</sup> . Owen cold, dined together again had M <sup>r</sup> . Mason L <sup>d</sup> . Chief Justice's clerk to assist, sup <sup>d</sup> together paid all charges ... ..	18	0
2.	Sent Cox out of town having got his affid <sup>t</sup> least it might create a jealousy and gave him 5 gs. for encouragement ... ..	5	5 0
	Attended M <sup>r</sup> . Owen who still raised scruples notwithstanding all M <sup>r</sup> . Walpole's kind promises and my treats spent ... ..	12	4
	Attended House of Lords and had promise of L <sup>d</sup> . Sunderland's warr <sup>ts</sup> to apprehend Blacks w <sup>th</sup> L <sup>rs</sup> to officers w <sup>ch</sup> I had from Sec <sup>ry</sup> of War by Rob <sup>t</sup> . Walpole, E <sup>sq</sup> . had that night warr <sup>ts</sup> and spent in coach hire and upon messengers and clerks in settling our meeting in y <sup>e</sup> forest, days expenses and bought 8 <sup>lbs</sup> . gunpowder 12 <sup>lbs</sup> . ball ... ..	2	7 0
3.	Home early set 4 spyes to observe more on and gave them 10/6 <sup>d</sup> each and expenses 2/6 each ... ..	2	12 0
	Own expenses with officers at Maidenhead and meeting y <sup>e</sup> keepers at 2 o'clock at my house ... ..	14	0
	Paid in y <sup>e</sup> night taking y <sup>m</sup> at Warfield Church w <sup>th</sup> all y <sup>e</sup> troopes ... ..	16	0
	To Oakingham party ... ..	5	6
4.	At y <sup>e</sup> Squirrell in Winkfield plain y <sup>e</sup> place of rendezvous of officers, soldiers, prisoners and keepers horses etc. refreshments ...	4	10 9
	At Bishopsgate with 2 prisoners some guards and keepers ... ..	19	8
5.	At Staines where they lay all night at Red Lyon w <sup>th</sup> guards and two waggons ... ..	5	18 0
	Two waggons to Lond <sup>n</sup> 3 days and servants ... ..	3	6 6
	To two troopers fetching Ann Hughes from Windsor ... ..	5	0
	To the keepers and assistants expenses ... ..	2	14 7

Spent upon y <sup>e</sup> road troops and prisoners	
wagons                    ...                    ...                    ...                    ...                    ...	2 18 0
Expenses that day with troops in town and	
paid y <sup>e</sup> 2 officers attending at 5/- per day,	
each £1 1 0 and 20 gov <sup>t</sup> soldiers 2/6 <sup>d</sup> per	
day each, £5 0 0                    ...                    ...                    ...                    ...	6 0 0

[Arrests were now made daily, and by May 21st there were 40 men in custody, who were lodged either in Newgate or in the care of different messengers. Among the latter was William Shorter the ringleader, but after a few days he effected his escape by cutting through the wainscot of the wall with a knife. An unsuccessful raid was made on a house in Wokingham on June 4th where he was reported to be with some of his followers.]

July 4. Search blow<sup>d</sup> in Oakingham some went away  
with part cloaths on, spent upon y<sup>e</sup> keepers  
for their expenses all wet to ye<sup>e</sup> skinn                    ...                    1 18 10

From the reports of spies Shorter seems to have taken up his abode with a few followers in Hampshire after this. He was still at large in September.

Supplementing Mr. Nunn's account with those of the newspapers, it appears that a "Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer" was ordered to assemble at Reading on June 6th, the judges being Mr. Baron Page, Mr. Baron Gilbert and Mr. Justice Denton. Meanwhile Nunn was busily engaged in collecting evidence. Sums of money were expended also among certain of the prisoners on several occasions with the result that four of them, Tom Hambleton, Stedman, Bassett and Bunce "consented to give evidence necessarye at the assizes, and to appear like men."

At the trial four were indicted for murder and convicted; Leonard Thorn, Thomas Gilbert, Thomas Hatch and John Hawthorn. The last had, while in Newgate, vainly endeavoured to save himself by revealing some of the secrets of the gang. Their defence was that they only meant to frighten young Miles, and that his death was an accident. They were all four hung in chains in the Forest ten days later. One, it was said, was so weak from illness contracted in prison that he was unable to stand on his legs.

Six men, Collier, Hughes, Grout, Magnar, Mercer and Chapman, were transported for deer stealing and assault under the new act. A man named Dibbs was convicted of assaulting Mr. Hannington, and Thomas Shorter for breaking down the head of Mr. Hancock's

fish-pond. Several more were remanded to the next ordinary assizes, and George Wynn, clockmaker of Wokingham, was honourably acquitted.

One of the spectators at the trial was the notorious thief-taker Jonathan Wild, who was himself hung at Tyburn two years later. On this occasion he recognised among the audience a well known street robber named Humphrey Anger who was wanted for murder, and effected his arrest.

When the account closes on September 24th, 1723, Mr. Nunn was still engaged in the pursuit of the leader of the gang in Hampshire. The expenditure up to date was £468 7s. 6d.

## Notes and Queries

### RELATING TO BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON.

*Communications are invited upon all subjects of Antiquarian or Architectural interest relating to the three counties. Correspondents are requested to write as plainly as possible, on one side of the paper only, with REPLIES, QUERIES and NOTES on SEPARATE SHEETS, and the name of the writer appended to each communication.*

### Notes.

UFTON COURT.—I observe in the October number of the "Berks Archaeological Journal," page 71, a reference to myself in connection with this house, which has not my authority and is not altogether in accordance with my wishes. I shall be very much obliged therefore if you will kindly insert in your next issue an intimation to your subscribers that Ufton Court is not shewn to the public except by an order obtainable by written application to me and previous notice.—A. M. SHARP, Nov. 14th, 1911.

A DEED ABOUT ABINGDON ABBEY: FEB. 6, 1449.—The records of Abingdon Abbey are so few that the following indenture which is preserved in MS. 255, p. 53, in the library of C.C.C., Oxford, is worth notice. In any case an English document of so early a date as Feb. 6, 1449, is interesting. After the Mortmain Act of Edward I, monasteries and all corporations were discouraged from investing their savings in the purchase of land; and if monasteries had any balance, which was not often the case, they preferred to spend it on plate or vestments, as in the present deed. Of the men mentioned in the deed,