

JOSEPH GRIMALDI AND FINCHLEY

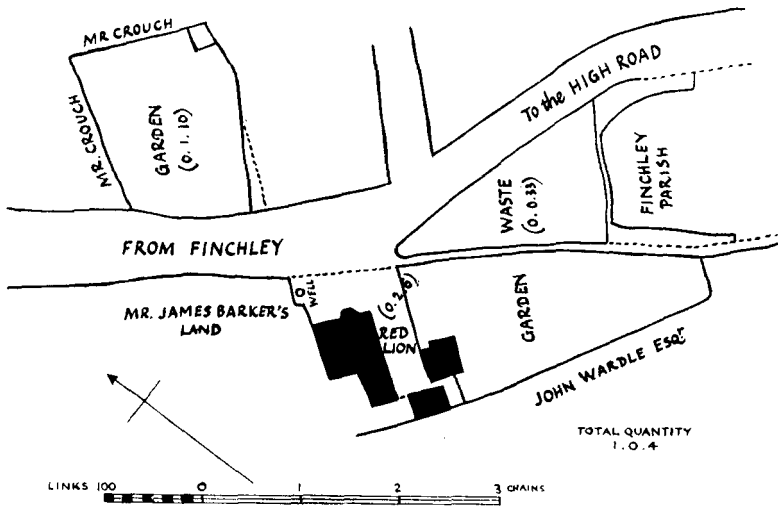
BY FRANK MARCHAM.

THE knowledge of Grimaldi, the celebrated clown, at present available, is derived from the *Memoirs* edited by Charles Dickens. Grimaldi left a manuscript account, evidently rambling and faulty in many ways, which Egerton Wilks "revised" and Dickens edited. The finished product shows, where it can be checked, the failing of Dickens for over-emphasis amounting almost to caricature: at the same time it must be mentioned that when this particular piece of work was being carried out, Dickens was also writing *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist* and some other papers.

Dickens says of Grimaldi: "At this time he had a cottage at Finchley, to which he used to drive down in his gig after the performances. If there were no rehearsal he remained there until the following afternoon: if there were, he returned to town immediately after breakfast." In the revised edition by Charles Whitehead, published in 1866, p. 154, a note is added stating that the cottage was "on the edge of the common between the seventh and eighth mile stone, on the left hand side of the road from town." On page 167 it is suggested that Grimaldi gave up this cottage in 1811. No writer has added to these facts.

Grimaldi lived at Fallow Corner, Finchley, from 1806 to 1827, in a house on the land in Granville Road, next the home for children. His landlord, William Drummond, bought the house in 1801, as "all that messuage cottage or tenement erected and built with the pightle of land at backside of the said house containing one rood . . . at Fallow Corner."

Mr. Grimaldi was on the jury of the Manor Court held at Highgate on 1st May, 1809, 14th May, 1810, and 20th April, 1812. The trial reprinted below proves that his "man servant" (of whom Dickens tells a story of being asleep on his master's return from town) was aged seventeen years. The trial also suggests a more sinister reason for inattention on the part of the unfortunate youth.



John Claridge was elected headborough at the Manor Court held 9th May, 1808, being followed on 1st May, 1809, by William Skelton and John Bennet. William Wilson was petty constable for Finchley, 1809-10. An account of the "Red Lion" appeared in the *Barnet Press*, 2nd March, 1935, of which there is a copy in the Bishopsgate Institute. Decamp lived a few yards away from Grimaldi. The trial, hitherto unknown to local writers, tells, with one or two misprints, the rest of the story. A newspaper of the 18th May, 1809, after reporting the case, adds: "The calendar for this Session has few or no crimes of any atrocity—not one

charge for murder." The trial and the sentence, of this youth, were not then considered atrocious crimes.

Backwards and forward to work every day for twenty years, like many a dweller in Finchley to-day, such was Grimaldi's life, and rightly enough, when he passed the seventh milestone, he was nearly home, he had to go down the hill and over a water-splash, and then climb a steep pitch up what is now Bow Lane. The road where the new road now crosses the North Road by the "Green Man" has been raised over twenty feet since 1809. The "Green Man" is the spot named Brownswell in plate 4 of *Roads Out of London* from Ogilby's *Britannia*, 1675, London Topographical Society, 1911.

THE TRIAL.

At the Old Bailey. On Wednesday the 17th of May, 1809, and following Days; before Mr. Baron Graham and

Abraham Simmonds	James Ashman
Joseph Christian	James Dudgeon
Michael Ashley	John Picket
James Simpson	Thomas Ball
William Parr	Sandey Staunton
Richard Silvester	William Stanfield

Richard Watts was indicted for feloniously stealing on the 31st of March, a sheep, value 10s. the property of William Matthews.

William Matthews. I live at Coneyhath, I am a labouring man.

Q. Did you keep any sheep on Finchley common.—A. I keep about twenty or thirty; sometimes more and sometimes less.

Q. Sometime before the 31st of March did you miss any sheep.—A. Yes; one sheep from the common; I missed it several days before I heard of it; I found it at the Red Lion, at Mr. Claridge's.

Q. Do you recollect when that was.—A. No; I cannot say that I took particular account of it; they had got all the skins there when I found my skin; I saw it [at] Hatton Garden, and I swore to the mark of it.

Q. What do you mean by saying it was at Mr. Claridge's.—A. It was there then.

Mr. Bolland. You do not know that.

Court. You saw it first at the police office in Hatton Garden.—

A. Yes.

Q. Can you tell me as near as you can what time that was.—
A. No; I did not set it down; I came up when the other gentlemen came up.

Q. How do you usually mark your sheep.—A. Of the near side with a pitch mark, W. M. with the brand this way or other; it was made on purpose because I should know it.

Q. Did you see any skins so marked at Hatton-garden.—A. Yes, and that I swore to it there, and there is a reddle mark from the neck down to the chine, and then crossed; that is marked with oker [ochre] and oil.

Q. Had the skin that you saw at Hatton-garden that mark with oker as well as W. M.—A. Yes.

Q. Was the sheep that you lost a ewe or a wether.—A. It was a pug lamb; a yearling ewe; to the best of my knowledge it was a ewe lamb.

Q. Are you sure that at the time you saw this skin it was one of your sheep.—A. Yes.

Q. Do you know the prisoner at the bar.—A. No; I might have seen him on the common; I took no notice of him till I saw him at Hatton Garden.

Mr. Bolland. The initials of any man, W. M. would mark it the same way.—A. No; there is no other name on the common marked like that.

Q. I will ask you, whether there were any marks at all upon this skin.—A. Yes; when I saw it the marks were visible and distinct, the pitch marks and likewise the reddle and oil.

Thomas Kirby. I live nigh the seven mile stone on Finchley Common; some time the first week in April the prisoner came to my house.

Q. Had you known him before.—A. Yes; he is a servant to Mr. Grimaldi; he asked me if I knew any body that bought sheep skins; I told him I did; he said he had two or three to dispose of; I saw the person that did buy them. I never saw the skins till I saw them at Hatton-garden office.

Q. What was his name that purchased them.—A. Goodall.

Q. I suppose you told Goodall.—A. Yes; the next thing was the constable came to my house and informed me that Goodall had bought six. It was on a Friday the first week in April that I told Goodall.

Q. Then the next Saturday the constable came to you.—A. No; I understood they were purchased on the Saturday; the constable came to me in the week after he was apprehended; I told the prisoner I would send a person to buy the skins.

Q. When did you see the prisoner.—A. Not till I saw him at Hatton-garden.

Q. What passed then.—A. I told the same exactly as I told you, I believe.

John Goodall. I am a breeches maker, a fellmonger, and a dealer in skins and wooll.

Q. Do you remember Kirby mentioning to you that there was a man wanted to sell some skins.—A. On the 2nd of April I was at the Red Lion at Finchley; Kirby was then there; he asked me if I bought skins, I told him I did; he then told me if I went to Mr. Grimaldi, his servant had got some to sell; I went on the 8th of April, I saw the prisoner in the garden, I asked him if he had got any skins to sell; he asked me if I belonged to the boy that collected skins; I told him no I was sent there by the shoemaker that lived near the Green Man (that is Kirby); he then took me into Mr. Grimaldi's Chaise-house.

Q. Is Mr. Grimaldi's house on the common.—A. Yes. He then set a ladder up, he went into a hayloft, and while he was in the loft I heard him say he had six skins; he began to throw them down out of his loft, and threw them all down; I looked at them as he threw them down; he came down the ladder; I asked him if they did not keep a good many sheep here, seeing so many different sorts, some Welsh, some Southdown, and some Dorsets; he then said his master bought many different lots of sheep; I asked him who took the skins off, they appeared to be taken off very indifferently which I told him; he told me he took this skin off the day before yesterday; then I looked at a small lamb's skin, he told me it was a very small lamb and weak when it was lambed, he knocked it on the head, because it did not thrive. I then agreed with him for the skins for eight shillings altogether.

Q. Was that the price of six skins.—A. Yes, such as they were, they were only pieces, small lambs some of them, with the heads cut off, and many holes cut in many of them; one lamb skin, and the rest were sheep nearly full grown; some of them Welch small sheep, and others of the larger kind. When I had agreed for the skins I was putting them together to bring them away; he wished me to have a sack to put the skins in, saying that I could carry them better than without a sack; I told him that I never made a practice of carrying skins in a sack: he pressed upon me again to have a sack, and that I might leave it at any time at Mr. Kirby's; he gave me a sack, and I told him I would leave it at Mr. Grimaldi's; he wished me not to do that, he did not wish his master to see anything about it. I then took the skins and carried them to the Red Lion.

Q. Before you put any of the skins in the bag did you perceive that any of them had marks.—A. All the skins had marks, and all different, except two; they were nearly alike, they belonged to Decamp.

Q. Did you see the letters of Decamp on them.—A. I saw the reddle marks; some were marked with pitch marks; I did not look at them particular. I took the skins to the Red Lion and threwed them down in the yard; a shepherd came up of the name of Rose, I told him I had bought a lot of skins; he looked at them; the first skin that he looked at he said was Fitzwater's.

Mr. Bolland. You must not tell what he said. In consequence of what passed between you and the shepherd—what did you do with the skins.—A. After he looked them all over, I left the skins at a house just by, where I locked them up myself and carried the key back to a person of the name of Baldock; he was the person who lent me the key.

Court. How long did they remain there.—A. A few hours; I sent Rose to Decamp and Fitzwater; they did not come while I was there, that was on a Saturday; the next week I was taken ill; I did not arrive at Finchley till the Saturday following; then they had taken the skins and the man to Hatton-Garden. I saw them at Hatton Garden.

Q. Can you take upon yourself to swear that the skins you saw at Hatton-Garden, or any of them, were the skins that you bought of the prisoner.—A. Yes, the whole of them; them six are those that I bought of the prisoner; I know them by the look of the skins, being bred and born to the business; if I look at a thing once or twice, I know them immediately for seven years.

Q. Among those that you saw at Hatton-Garden, did you see this little lamb.—A. Yes; it was not a little lamb, it was what they call a cuckoo lamb; they had all marks on them; it was the 17th that I went to Hatton-Garden, the Monday sen'night after I bought them. On Sunday the 16th I went to Finchley. Mr. Grimaldi sent down to the Red Lion that there was a discovery of some meat; the officer of Finchley went with me to Mr. Grimaldi; we went into the hayloft, we found a sack under some loose hay.

Q. Was that the same loft from which the prisoner had thrown down the skins.—A. No, it was another loft, I believe there was only a partition between, there was two doors, one went in one way and the other another way; both the lofts are over an out house of Grimaldi's; we found a sack, and two legs, two shoulders, part of the scrag of a neck, and some part of a back.

Q. Were they cut up as a butcher would cut up.—A. No; the sheep appeared not to be chined down; they were not cut as a butcher would cut them.

Q. Then that part of the back was not cut like a saddle of mutton.—A. No, there was only a part of the back and a part of the aitchbone.

Q. Either part, the bones and flesh you mean, I suppose.—A. Yes.

We then brought it down from his house; we went immediately to Mr. Bacon, of Colney Hatch,¹ we asked him if he should bring the meat to Hatton-Garden, he said no, as the meat was in a bad state, which it really was; the next day, after the examination was over, Mr. Turton desired me to go to Finchley, and pick out the skin that I thought the meat belonged to; I picked it out; the skin was marked with a reddle mark. It belonged to Fitzwater.

Q. Did you see Matthews at Hatton-Garden on Monday.—A. Yes; I saw all the owners of the skins on the Monday.

Q. Did you observe any of these owners pick out skins that they claimed.—A. Yes; I saw Matthews pick out a skin that he claimed as his own. Matthews' was the lamb skin, that he owned; called the cuckoo lamb.

Q. Had Mr. Grimaldi any other servants but the prisoner.—A. I saw nobody else there but the prisoner, when I bought the skins.

Q. You do not know whether Mr. Grimaldi kept any sheep on the common, do you.—A. I know no more than seeing two skins that Mr. Grimaldi claimed, one he was sure to.

Mr. Bolland. You say you was bred and born to this business, and if you saw a skin once or twice, you should know it again for seven years.—A. I was brought up a breeches maker, and fell-monger; I should know it again if it was not altered for seven years.

Q. Have you not gone by the name of Johnson.—A. I have been called Johnson; I was victorious in the florist line; by some people I was called a Johnson; I was the first florist in the known land.

Q. You gave eight shillings for these skins.—A. Yes.

Q. They had the wooll on.—A. Yes; they were a good deal disfigured, or they would be worth more.

Q. I suppose at the time you bought them, you supposed they belonged to Mr. Grimaldi.—A. I did; he told me his master had bought different lots of sheep.

Q. I suppose there were no particular marks that led you to believe the boy came dishonestly by the sheep.—A. At the time I thought it was odd he should have so many different sorts.

Q. If you had suspected him, would you have bought them.—A. I do not suppose I should; if I had known them to be stolen, I should never have bought them.

Q. This mutton you found upstairs—this was ten days after you bought the skins.—A. No, eight days; I look upon it that the mutton had not been killed less than ten or twelve days.

William Rose. I am a shepherd.

Q. Tell me what you know about Matthews' sheep.—A. I was going to my labour, past the Red Lion at Finchley, on the 8th of April; the man who bought the skins called to me, asked me if I would have part of a pint of beer with him.

Q. You drank some beer with Goodall, did you.—A. Yes; as we had drunk the beer, he went and fetched me a skin, it was Fitzwater's skin, I knew it; then we went out; I looked at another, it had Decamp's mark very plain; I did not examine the others, till I let Fitzwater and Decamp know; afterwards I examined the others on the Sunday following, at the Red Lion at Finchley.

Q. Upon this second examination of the skins, did you know any of the marks on the other skins.—A. I did not, till they came out and owned them; Mr. Milne came to the Red Lion and owned his skin, and Mr. Matthews came to Hatton-Garden; he looked at the skins, he owned his own skin. The skins were left at the office.

Mr. Bolland. You say the skins were left by Goodall at the Red Lion.—A. Yes.

Q. You do not know that the skins that you saw there, were the skins that were bought by Goodall.—A. Yes, three I am certain of.

Q. You do not know of the others.—A. No, I cannot pretend to say; three of the skins are very remarkable; they were all reddle marked but one; three of them were pitched marked, and reddle marked both. Some were so bad I could not see.

John Claridge. I am headborough of Finchley. On Sunday, I think the 9th of April, Mr. Fitzwater ordered me to go to Mr. Grimaldi's to take up a man; he asked him if he had sold the skins to this man, he said he did. I took him before Mr. Bacon. I, by the order of Mr. Bacon, locked him up for that night, and brought him to Hatton-Garden office the next day. I brought one skin only that day; I brought the rest on the Thursday following.

Q. What day of the month was that.—A. The 13th I fancy; we brought five more on the Thursday following.

Q. Where did you get these skins from.—A. We got four from the Red Lion; the other two we got from a small house below.

Q. Did you observe what the marks were of the two that you took from the small house.—A. Yes.

Q. Do you know what were the marks.—A. I did not then.

Q. Then you took two skins from the small house, and four from your brother's at the Red Lion.²—A. Yes, at my brother's house the people saw these two skins, they knew them; Matthews was not at the Red Lion when I brought them, and they looked at them.

Q. Were you at Hatton Garden when Matthews did look at them.—A. Yes.

Q. When they were at Hatton-Garden, I suppose the six were all together, were they not.—A. Yes.

Q. Do you remember Goodale looking at them at Hatton Garden.—A. He looked at them on the Monday following.

Q. Did you observe whether Matthews picked out any of these

skins.—A. I saw him pick out one, and claim it as his own. The skins were left at Hatton-Garden.

William Read. I am a police officer of Hatton Garden. I saw the skins at Hatton Garden. I have had them ever since locked up.

Q. Did you see Goodall examine them.—A. Yes.

Q. Did you see Matthews examine them.—A. Yes. Matthews looked at his, and said it was his by the mark. This is the skin that Matthews claimed.

Q. *to Matthews.* Look at that skin, can you swear to that skin.—A. Yes, there is the reddle round there, and here is the W. M.

Q. Is there any other person on the common that marks in that way.—A. No.

William Milne. What is the difference between your mark and Matthew's mark.—A. Mine is a real W. M. that is two M's, one reversed; this is a reddle, and mine is not.

Q. Is there any mark of a W. M. there.—A. It appears to me a W. M. the same as Mr. Matthews marks his, not in the same way that I mark.

Jury. We are not able to perceive the W. M. as described by Matthews—we would wish the shepherd to look at it, and to say if he could swear upon his oath that the W. M. is there.

Court to Rose. Look at that sheep skin, and say whether you can see satisfactorily the mark of W. M.—A. I could not take my oath to the mark.

Q. *to Milne.* Can you see there any mark of a W. M.—A. I have no doubt but it is the same mark, but I cannot swear to it by this sky light; when I saw the skin at the Red Lion, the headborough called upon me and said it was mine; I examined the skin, I told the headborough that the skin belonged to Matthews; I saw the mark distinctly then, and I saw the mark distinctly before the magistrate; I cannot see the marks distinctly now; the skins have been all over lime.

The prisoner left his defence to his counsel; called two witnesses, who gave him a good character.

Guilty—Death, aged 17.

The prisoner was recommended to His Majesty's mercy by the jury, on account of his youth and good character.

End.

NOTES.

1. John Bacon, of Friern House, Friern Barnet Lane. The house is now in Friary Park, Friern Barnet.
2. Edward Claridge was the "landlord" of the Red Lion, and from the plan of the place in 1821 a small house may be seen at the bottom of the yard.