

August 17 1844

THE LATE CATASTROPHE AT NOTTINGHAM The public anxiety created by the painful occurrence on Wednesday has subsided in but a very slight degree, although the verdict of the jury has given general satisfaction. The first execution which took place on the High Pavement was that of Daniel Diggle, who was found guilty at the Lent Assizes of 1817, for shooting, with intent to murder, one James Kerry. Before that time the last penalty of the law was inflicted on a mound in the forest, just outside the town, called "Gallows Hill", which was a sort of local Tyburn. The place of execution was changed because it was feared that the "Luddite" trials being then prevalent, an attempt might be made to rescue the prisoner if he were taken on the usual mournful journey to the suburbs. While, however, the necessary arrangements were being made, Lord Rancliffe wrote to Lord Sidmouth pointing out the impropriety of the proposed alteration, and stating that in the event of any extraordinary excitement, the lives of numbers might be endangered, as the street was much too narrow to hold the multitudes who generally assemble on such occasions. His lordship's caution was unfortunately disregarded, and the fatal proceedings of Wednesday have proved how well founded it was. The coroner in his opening address to the jury stated that the accident was more dreadful than any which had happened in Nottingham since the memorable explosion of gunpowder at the Canal Company's wharf on the 28th of September 1818. That horrid calamity was caused by the imprudence of a boatman named **Joseph Musson**, who taking it into his head to have "a flash", procured a quantity of powder from a cask and made a train; this he set fire to, and by some means ignited also the contents of 21 barrels, each containing above 100lb weight of the destructive material. The effects of the terrific explosion which followed may readily be conceived; the spacious buildings were instantly swept from their foundations, and everybody in the immediate vicinity was killed or wounded. Ten persons were instantaneously destroyed, their bodies in several cases being literally blown in pieces, and numbers of others were maimed for life. The damage in the neighbourhood was immense, scarcely a house on that side of the town, in fact, escaped without having its windows broken, and those of the Castle, St Nicholas's Church, and of whole rows of dwellings near the spot, were utterly demolished.

The inquest on the bodies of the unfortunate persons who perished in so melancholy a manner at the Nottingham execution concluded in the following verdict, "The jury are of opinion that the deceased individuals were accidentally thrown down in and by a crowd of people who had been attending a public execution in the town of Nottingham, and were then and there trampled to death, or suffocated." It was then unanimously added that "the Jury are of the opinion that the front of the County Hall is a most improper place for a public execution, and they trust the persons who have the authority to fix upon a place for that purpose will not allow another execution to take place there".

[The next article shows how much things had changed in 54 years.](#)

December 22 1898

EXECUTION AT DERBY **John Cotton**, aged 66, a boatman, who was sentenced to death at the recent Derbyshire assize for murdering his wife at Bugsworth, near Stockport, on October 26th, was executed in Derby gaol yesterday morning. The deceased woman was 36 years of age, and the evidence tendered at the trial showed that jealousy was the cause of the crime. Cotton beat his wife about the head with a poker, fracturing the base of her skull. The defence was that the prisoner had received provocation. Since his conviction the culprit has exhibited the utmost contrition and has paid deep attention to the ministrations of the prison chaplain, to whom he has more than once admitted the justice of his sentence. He received the Holy Communion on Tuesday, and throughout the day the chaplain was in frequent attendance in the condemned cell. Cotton retired to rest early on Tuesday night, but his sleep was constantly disturbed, and early yesterday morning he again welcomed the presence of the chaplain. He partook sparingly of breakfast, and just before eight o'clock the Sheriff's representatives presented themselves to summon him to his doom. The usual procession was quickly formed, and halfway to the scaffold the party was met by Billington, the executioner, who was assisted in the preliminary process of pinioning prisoner's arms by his son. Cotton, who remained perfectly silent, walked firmly to the scaffold, where the younger Billington strapped the culprit's legs, while the executioner placed the noose around the prisoner's neck. All this was accomplished in a most expeditious manner, and while the chaplain was repeating the words "Remember not the offences of Thy servants" the bolt was drawn and the body disappeared from view. Subsequent examination showed that death had been instantaneous. Although it was not completely light, a large crowd gathered outside the prison to watch the hoisting of the black flag, but no sympathy was exhibited for the prisoner, who boasted that he had killed two previous wives.