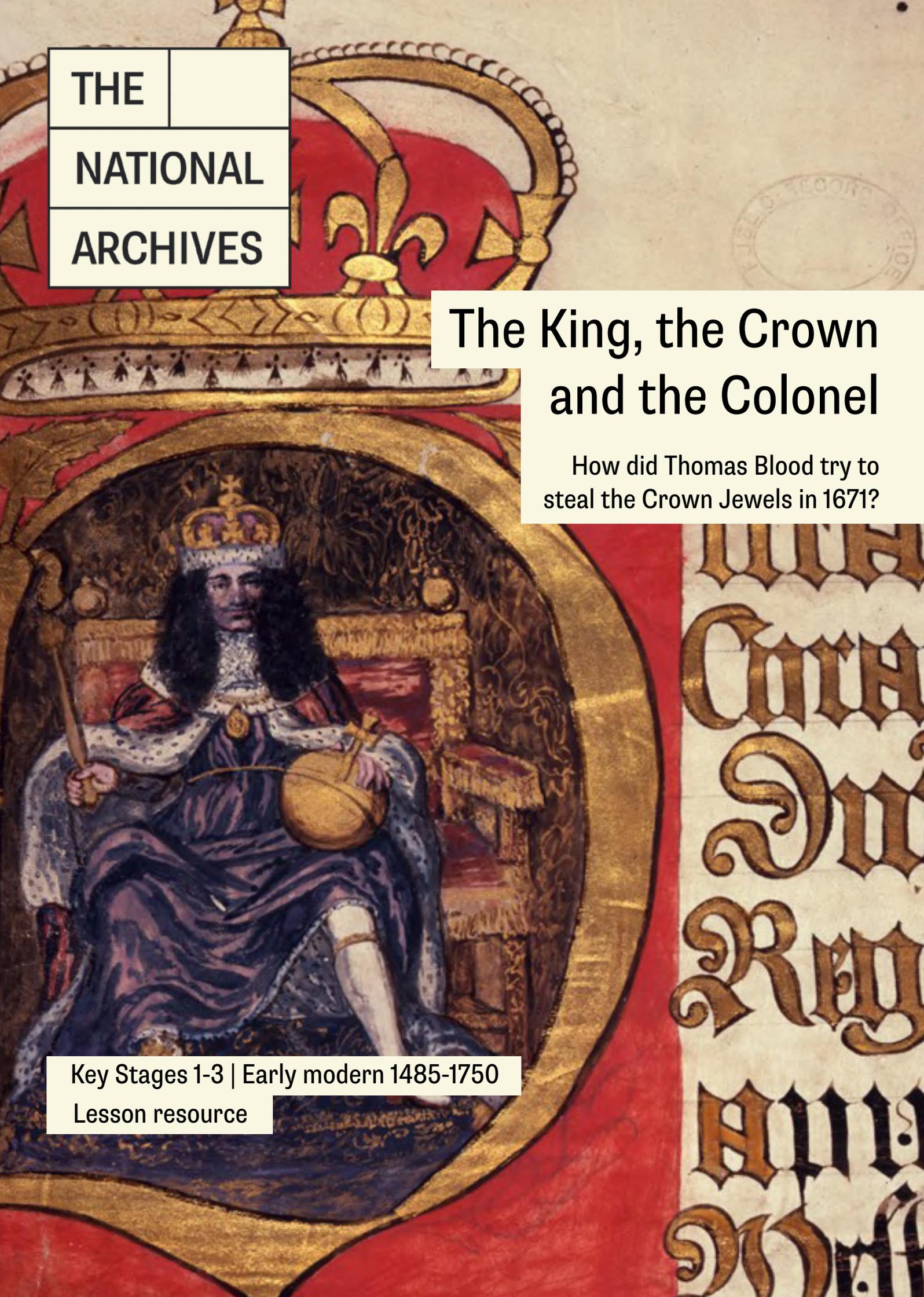# The King, the Crown and the Colonel

How did Thomas Blood try to steal the Crown Jewels in 1671?

Key Stages 1-3 | Early modern 1485-1750

Lesson resource

Introduction

After the execution of Charles I in 1649 many of the Crown Jewels were sold or destroyed. Oliver Cromwell ordered that the orb and sceptres should be broken as they stood for the 'detestable rule of kings'. All the gemstones were removed and sold and the precious metal was used to make coins.

When the monarchy was restored in 1660, two new sceptres and an orb costing £12,185 were made for the coronation of Charles II in 1661. Can you spot any of these items in the picture above?

During the ceremony, the new King held the Sceptre with the Cross in his right hand and the Sceptre with the Dove in his left. The sceptre was a rod or staff which represents royal power and the dove refers to the Holy Spirit. The King was crowned with St Edward's Crown. At some point the King also held the orb, a hollow golden sphere decorated with a band of jewels and a jewelled cross on top. The orb refers to the King's role as protector of the church.

Charles II allowed the Crown Jewels to be shown to members of the public for a viewing fee paid to a custodian (keeper) who looked after the jewels in the Martin Tower at the Tower of London. In 1671 Thomas Blood was the first and only man who attempted to steal them.

After that, the Crown Jewels were kept under armed guard in a part of the Tower known as the Jewel House.

Use the sources in this lesson to find out more about Thomas Blood's life of crime and his dramatic attempt to steal the Crown Jewels.

Suitable for:

KS 1-3

Time period:

Early modern 1485-1750

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 1 & 2:

Significant Events; Significant People, Thomas Blood, Charles II

Key stage 3:

The development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745: the Restoration, 'Glorious Revolution' and power of Parliament

Key stage 4:

Any thematic study on the history of crime and punishment

Contents

Teachers' notes

The lesson uses original documents to provide information about Thomas Blood's criminal activities and how he was pardoned. Students investigate how and why Blood tried to steal the Crown Jewels. The first source is a proclamation calling for the apprehension of Thomas Blood and others in the County of York for assaulting and killing various guards and removing a prisoner, John Mason from the Tower of London while to he was being escorted to attend trial in York. The second source consists of two short extracts from a 'newsletter' which describes how the crown jewels were stolen by Thomas Blood. The third source is Thomas Blood's pardon as listed in the records of Lord Arlington, Secretary of State. The last source is another short extract from a 'newsletter' about Blood's pardon.

Students can study the sources in pairs or groups and report back to the whole class. Alternatively, students can work individually. All sources have transcripts and simplified transcripts.

Other activities

• Students could use the sources as stimulus material for to a piece of creative writing on the story of Thomas Blood and the crown jewels.
• Create a drama or role-play activity on Thomas Blood.
• Students could use the following extract from John Evelyn's Diary 1641-1706 as a stimulus to discussion as to why Thomas Blood was pardoned:

'How he came to be pardoned, and even received into favour, not onely after this, but severall other exploits almost as daring both in Ireland and here, I could never come to understand. Some believed he became a spie of severall parties, being well with the Sectaries and Enthusiasts, and did his Majesties services that way, which none alive could do so well as he; but it was certainly as the boldest attempt, so the onely treason of this sort that was ever pardon'd. This man had not onely a daring but a villainous unmercifull looke, a false countenance, but very well spoken and dangerously insinuating.' (Edited by William Bray, published 1819, p437)

• Students could discuss this poem by Andrew Marvell (1621-1681), written in August 1672, and compare this version of events with Source 2:

Whilst valiant Blood, his rents to have regain'd
Upon the Royal Diadem distrain'd,
He chose the cassock, surcingle and gown,
The fittest mask for those who robb the Crown;
But his lay pity underneath prevailed,
And while he sav'd the Keeper's life, he failed
With the Priests vestments had he but put on
A Bishop's cruelty, the Crown was gone.
Andrew Marvell, Complete Poetry (London: JM Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1984)

Teachers' notes

Glossary for poem:

Distrain'd: to seize the property of (a person) in order to compel payment of debts
Lay pity: brotherly love, compassion, fellow feeling, humanity, kindness, sorrow, sympathy
Prevailed: to be in force, use, or effect; triumph
Royal Diadem: a crown worn as a sign of royalty
Surcingle: the fastening belt on a clerical robe
Vestments: a garment, especially a robe or gown worn a by priest

External links

Historic Royal Palaces: See the Crown Jewels[1]
Take a look at the British Crown jewels in the Tower of London.

Background

Thomas Blood (c1618-1680) was a rebel, a republican (supporter of government without a king) and a master of disguise. His adventures had involved him dressing as a priest, a doctor of divinity and a Quaker. He took part in numerous plots.

Blood was called both 'Captain' and 'Colonel' at the time. After his attempt at stealing the Crown Jewels, Blood even acted as a spy for Sir Joseph Williamson, an important politician in Charles II 's government, and he often attended court.

Thomas Blood was born in Ireland. He fought in the Civil War on the side of Parliament and served as an officer in Cromwell's army in Ireland. He was granted land in Ireland for his services.

After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Thomas Blood lost all his lands. He took his revenge when he tried to kidnap James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at Dublin castle in 1663. The plot was discovered and Blood fled to Holland.

In 1666 Blood fought on the side of the Scottish Covenanters at Rullion Green to resist changes in the law about the conduct of church services made by Charles II. He returned to England and, not long after, rescued his friend John Mason whilst on his way to trial at York under armed escort.

Thomas Blood made a second attempt to kidnap the Duke of Ormonde in London. The plan failed and Blood and his accomplices got away. It has been suggested that the Second Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, was behind the plan.

In 1671, as part of his attempt to steal the Crown Jewels, Blood and his son had got friendly with the keeper. He even arranged a marriage between his 'nephew' and keeper Edward's daughter. However, Blood and his son were caught and imprisoned in the Tower.

Several petitions were sent from Blood, his wife Mary and their son, to the Secretary of State, Lord Arlington. They claimed that their health was 'much impaired by close confinement in the Tower'. King Charles II visited Blood in the Tower in private.

Father and son were pardoned and Blood was given a pension in August of that year. It is not clear why Thomas Blood was treated with such generosity. Perhaps it was a reward for previous services. The poet Andrew Marvell even wrote a poem at the time about Blood's attempt to steal the Crown Jewels.

Blood's body was dug up after he died in 1680 because of stories that he had faked his own death.

Tasks

1. This is a Proclamation by Charles II made in 1667.

Source 1: Proclamation by Charles II made in 1667. Catalogue ref: SP 45/12/246

- According to this proclamation, what was Thomas Blood commonly called?
- What did Thomas Blood and others do?
- What does the proclamation tell us about Stuart methods for capturing criminals or solving crimes?
- Do you think these methods may or may not have been effective? Give your reasons.

2. These are extracts from a newsletter to Mr Kirke, 9 May 1671.

Source 2: Extract from a newsletter to Mr Kirke, 9 May 1671. Catalogue ref: SP 29/289/187

- How many men were involved in these events?
- Who was Mr Edwards?
- Who surprised the men during the robbery?
- What happened in the end?

3. This is Thomas Blood's pardon as listed in the records of Lord Arlington, Secretary of State, 1 August 1671.

Source 3: Thomas Blood's pardon as listed in the records of Lord Arlington, Secretary of State, 1 August 1671. Catalogue ref: SP 44/34/110

- Why do think that Thomas Blood was described as 'the father of Treasons'?
- What were the terms of Thomas Blood's pardon?
- Why was Thomas Blood pardoned? Give your own reasons

4. This is an extract from a newsletter to Walter Tucker, 8 August 1671.

Source 4: Extract from a newsletter to Walter Tucker, 8 August 1671. Catalogue ref: SP 29/292/30

- Can you find the error in this source?
- Can you find any differences in the terms of Blood's pardon in this source?
- Can you explain why source 3 and source 4 give different versions of the pardon?

Source 1: Proclamation by Charles II made in 1667.

Catalogue Ref: SP 45/12/246

By the King.

A PROCLAMATION

For the Discovery and Apprehension of *John Lockier, Timothy Butler, Thomas Blood*, commonly called Captain *Blood, John Mason*, and others.

CHARLES R.

Hereas We have been informed, That the said John Lockier, Timothy Butler, and Captain Blood, with several other persons did lately in a most riotous and Rebellious manner, at Darrington near Went-Bridge in the County of York, violently set upon and assault the Guard intrusted with the care of Conducting one John Mason, a Prisoner for Treason, from Our Tower of London to Our City of York, in order to his Tryal there; and they having killed and desperately wounded several of the said Guard, and others, did Rescue and carry away the said Mason, and do lurk in secret places, and not submit themselves to Justice; We therefore have thought fit (with the advice of Our Privy Council) to publish this Our Royal Proclamation, And do hereby straitly Charge and Command all and singular Lords Lieutenants, Deputy-Lieutenants, Justices of the Peace, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bayliffs, and other Our Officers, Ministers, and Subjects whatsoever, to be diligent, and use their best endeavours to Search for and Apprehend the said Lockier, Butler, Blood, and Mason, and all others who were any way instrumental in the said Rescue or Escape, in all places whatsoever; and upon the Apprehension of all or any the said persons, to cause them to be safely conveyed to the Goal of the City or County where they shall be so Apprehended, and forthwith to give notice thereof to one of Our Principal Secretaries of State, that such further course may be taken, as We with the advice of Our Council shall direct. And We do hereby further Declare, That One hundred pounds Sterling shall be given and paid by Us to any person or persons, as a recompence for their good Service, who

Source 1: Transcript

By the King

A PROCLAMATION

For the discovery and Apprehension of John Lockier, Timothy Butler, Thomas Blood, commonly called Captain Blood, John Mason, and others. CHARLES R

Whereas we have been informed, that the said John Lockier, Timothy Butler, and Captain Blood, with several other persons did lately in a most riotous and Rebellious manner, at Darrington near Went-Bridge in the County of York, violently set upon and assault the Guard intrusted with the care of Conducting one John Mason, a Prisoner for Treason, from Our Tower of London to Our City of York, in order to his Tryal there; and they having killed and desperately wounded several of the said Guard, and others, did rescue and carry away the said Mason, and do lurk in secret places, and not submit themselves to justice; We therefore have thought fit (with the advice of Our Privy Council) to publish this Our Royal Proclamation, And do thereby straightly Charge and Command all and Singular Lords Lieutenants, Deputy Lieutenants, Justices of the Peace, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bayliffs, and other Our Officers, Ministers, and Subjects whatsoever, to be diligent, and use their best endeavours to Search for and Apprehend the said Lockier, Butler, Blood, and Mason, and all others who were any way instrumental in the said Rescue or Escape, in all places whatsoever; and upon the Apprehension of all or any the said persons, to cause them to be safely conveyed to the Goal of the City or County where they shall be so Apprehended, and forthwith to give notice thereof to one of Our Principal Secretaries of State, that such further course may be taken, as We with the advice of Our Council shall direct. And We do hereby further Declare, That One hundred pounds Sterling shall be given and paid by Us to any person or persons, as a recompence for their good Service...

Glossary

Apprehension: capture or arrest
Bayliff: bailiff, an official who helps the sheriff and who has the power to deliver writs and arrest people
Diligent: active, tireless
Endeavours: efforts, attempts
Instrumental: helpful, assisting to do something
Lord Lieutenant: a nobleman responsible for military matters in the county on behalf of the King
Proclamation: announcement, notice
Recompence: payment, reward
Riotous: disorderly, unruly, wild
Sheriff: an officer in the county who dealt with the law
Singular: certain, particular
Straightly: absolutely, directly
Submit: surrender, obey, give in
Treason: disloyalty to one's country or king by purposely acting to aid its enemies
Tryal: trial

Source 2: Extract from a newsletter to Mr Kirke, 9 May 1671.

Catalogue Ref: SP 29/289/187

Source 2: Transcript

The 5th, 5 men coming on horseback to the Tower at about 6 in the morning 3 allighted whilst the other 2 held their horses these 3 went into the Tower to see the Crowne, one a Clergy habit & when admitted two of them who went in to the rooms whilst the other 3rd stayed at the door bound wounded and gagged Mr. Edwards who had the custody of it and carried away the Crowne, Mr. Edwards son coming in and finding his father in that condition pursued, one of the villains shot at him but mist him, as also the sentinels but they were soe closely followed that 2 were taken about the Iron Gate old Blood who went under the name of Ailoffe, the priest disguised & one Perot & afterward young Blood by a fall from his horse about Gravell Lane who went under the name of Hunt and was the same that seized the Duke of Ormond. They were brought to Whitehall & sent to Custody the other 2 escaped.

Simplified transcript

The 5th: Five men on horseback came to the Tower at about 6am. Three [men] got off and went into the Tower to see the Crown whilst the other two men held their horses. One had on a clergyman's robes, when let in two of them went into the rooms and the third stayed behind the door, bound, wounded and gagged Mr Edwards who was the keeper [of the Crown] and carried away the crown. Mr Edward's son coming in and finding that his father had been hurt ran after [them]. One of the villains shot at him but missed, as were the guards but they kept up with them and captured two near the Iron Gate, old Blood who was disguised as a priest called Ailoffe and one called Perrott. Afterwards Blood's son [was captured] when he fell from his horse near Gravel Lane, he was named Hunt and was the person who had kidnapped the Duke of Ormonde. They were brought to Whitehall and taken into custody, the other two escaped.

Source 3: Thomas Blood's pardon as listed in the records of Lord Arlington, Secretary of State, 1 August 1671. Catalogue Ref: SP 44/34/110

Blood's Pardon.

Pardon to Thomas Blood, the father of [...]

[...] Murder, Homicide [...]

Treason, Misprision of Treason [...]

felony, attaint, [...] offences whatsoever

at any [...] 29 day of May 1660 committed [...]

by him alone, or [...] to any [...] County

August 1° 1671.

Source 3: Transcript

Pardon to Thomas Blood the Father of all Treasons, Misprisions of Treason, Murders, homicides, Felonyes, assaults, batteryes, & other offences w[ha]tsoever at any time since the 29th day of May 1660 com[m]itted by himselfe alone, or together w[it]h any other p[er]son or p[er]sons with the usuall Clauses. August 1st 1671.

Glossary

Assaults: violent physical attacks

Batteryes: beatings, the unlawful striking of one person by another

Felonyes: serious crimes

Homicides: the killing of one person by another

Misprisions of Treason: keeping quiet about a treasonable act

Source 4: Extract from a newsletter to Walter Tucker, 8 August 1671

Catalogue Ref: SP 29/292/30

Source 4: Transcript

On the 8th John (sic) Blood senior (one of the Crown stealers) had a pardon passed by Privy Seal of all treasons, misprisions of treason &c., committed by him since 1660 to this present, and also a restitution of all his lands in England and Ireland

Glossary

Misprisions of treason: keeping quiet about a treasonable act

Privy Seal: A stamp, used for marking an impression in wax to be attached to a document used to show that the document is authentic and has royal approval

Treason: disloyalty to one's country or king by purposely acting to aid its enemies

Restitution: return

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