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A Fiery & Furious People

James Sharpe

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An ambitiously wide-ranging exploration of seven centuries of riot, murder and assault, by England's leading expert on the topic. Anyone who enjoyed Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* or Adrian Raine's *The Anatomy of Violence* will be drawn to this vivid account of our brutal roots.

In *A History of Violence in England* Professor James Sharpe explores the brutal underside of our national life across some seven centuries. And as he looks at the litany of assaults, murders and riots that pepper our history he traces the subtle shifts both in the nature of violence and in people's attitudes to it. How, for example, did popular views of the boys who murdered two-year-old James Burgess in 1861 differ from those expressed when young Jamie Bulger was killed in 1993? Why was it that wife-beating could once be simultaneously legal and so frowned upon that persistent offenders might well end up being ducked in the village pond? What gave rise to particular types of violent criminal medieval outlaws, Georgian highwaymen, Victorian garrotters – and what made them vanish?

Throughout, Professor Sharpe draws on an astonishingly wide range of material, from court records to popular ballads to sermons and detective novels, to paint vivid pictures of the nation's criminals and criminal system from medieval times to the present day. He also seeks to answer perhaps the most fascinating and fundamental question of all: Is a country that has experienced not only constant aggression on an individual scale but also the Peasant's Revolt, the Gordon Riots, the Poll Tax Riots and recent London Riots naturally prone to violence or are we, in fact, gradually becoming a gentler nation?

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