

Writing to learn

The Story:

Mary Flora Bell (born 26 May 1957) is a British woman who was convicted in December 1968 of the manslaughter of two boys, Martin Brown (aged four) and Brian Howe (aged three). Bell was 10 years old when she killed Brown and 11 when she killed Howe, making her one of Britain's most notorious child killers.

Early life

Bell's mother Betty (née McCrickett) was a prostitute who was often absent from the family home, traveling to Glasgow to work. Mary (nicknamed May) was her first child, born when Betty was 17 years old. It is not known who Mary's biological father was; for most of her life she believed it to be Billy Bell, a habitual criminal later arrested for armed robbery who had married Betty some time after Mary was born. Independent accounts from family members strongly suggest that Betty had more than once attempted to kill Mary and make her death look accidental during the first few years of her life. Mary herself says she was subjected to repeated sexual abuse, and her mother consistently beat her.

Murders

On 25 May 1968, the day before her 11th birthday, Mary Bell strangled four-year-old Martin Brown in a derelict house. She was believed to have committed this crime alone. Between that time and a second killing, she and a friend, Norma Joyce Bell (no relation), aged 13, broke into and vandalized a nursery in Scotswood, leaving notes that claimed responsibility for the killing. The police dismissed this incident as a prank.

On 31 July 1968, the pair took part in the death, again by strangling, of three-year-old Brian Howe, on wasteland in the same Scotswood area. Police reports concluded that Mary Bell had later returned to his body to carve an "N" into his stomach with a razor; this was then changed using the same razor but with a different hand to an "M". Mary Bell also used a pair of scissors to cut off some of Howe's hair, scratch his legs, and mutilate his penis. As the girls were so young and their testimonies contradicted each other, the precise details of what happened have never been entirely clear.

An open verdict had originally been recorded for Brown's death as there was no evidence of foul play — although Bell had strangled him, her grip was not hard enough to leave any marks. Eventually, his death was linked with Howe's killing and in August 1968 the two girls were charged with two counts of manslaughter.

Conviction

On 17 December 1968, at Newcastle Assizes, Norma Bell was acquitted but Mary Bell was convicted of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility, the jury taking their lead from her diagnosis by court-appointed psychiatrists who described her as displaying "classic symptoms of psychopathy". The judge, Mr. Justice Cusack, described her as dangerous and said she posed a "very grave risk to other children". She was sentenced to be detained at her Majesty's pleasure effectively an indefinite sentence of imprisonment. She was initially sent to Red Bank secure unit in St. Helen Lancashire — the same facility that would house Jon Venables, one of James Blugger's child killers, 25 years later.

After her conviction, Bell was the focus of a great deal of attention from the British press and also from the German Stern magazine. Her mother repeatedly sold stories about her to the press and often gave reporters writings she claimed to be Mary's. Bell herself made headlines when, in September 1977, she briefly absconded from Moore Court open prison, where she had been held since her transfer from a young offenders institution to an adult prison a year earlier. Her penalty for this was a loss of prison privileges for 28 days. For a time, Bell also lived in a girls' remand home at Cumberlow Lodge in South Norwood (in a house built by Victorian inventor William Stanley).

Life after prison

In 1980, Bell, aged 23, was released from Askham Grange open prison, having served 12 years, and was granted anonymity (including a new name) allowing her to start a new life. Four years later she had a daughter, born on 25 May 1984; Bell's daughter did not know of her mother's past until Bell's location was discovered by reporters and she and her mother had to leave their house with bed sheets over their heads. Bell's daughter's anonymity was originally protected only until she reached the age of 18. However, on 21 May 2003, Bell won a high court battle to have her own anonymity and that of her daughter extended for life. Any

court order permanently protecting the identity of a convict is consequently sometimes known as a "Mary Bell order".

In 2009, it was reported that Bell had become a grandmother.

Your task:

To put yourself in the shoes of someone involved in the case, you choose one of the following forms:

Role	Audience	Format	Task
Mary Bell as a child	mother	a letter	explain your crimes
Mary Bell as an adult	friend	a letter	ask for forgiveness for your crimes
News Reporter	TV audience	News Report	Explain what's happening at the time
Jury Member	Great Britain	a letter to the news paper	Reasoning through the jury's decision

Your writing must include:

At least two things from our DOA notes and how they affected you or the case.

Today:

- Choose a role
- Come up with a list of 10 to 15 things you are going to include in your letter or news report
- Show the list to Miss Colaccino
- Begin Rough Draft

Tuesday:

- Complete rough draft
- Show rough draft to Miss Colaccino (must be complete by 20 minutes into the hour)
- Peer Editing

Role I'm picking and why:

10 things I'll include in the assignment: