

# 1953: Derek Bentley hanged for murder

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teenager Derek Bentley has been executed at Wandsworth Prison in London for his part in the murder of Pc Sidney Miles.



The 19-year-old was hanged at 0900 hours after last-minute appeals for **clemency** were rejected. Bentley was **sentenced** to death on 11 December for killing Pc Miles during a bungled break-in at a warehouse in Croydon, Surrey.

The court was told his co-defendant, Christopher Craig, fired the fatal shot but because he was still a **juvenile** in the eyes of the law he escaped the death sentence and was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure.

## Bentley must not die

A large crowd began gathering outside Wandsworth jail from early this morning. Some sang the hymn 'Abide with me' and the 23rd Psalm.

Others began booing when a prison warden came out carrying a glass-covered board containing the execution notice. Bentley's sentence was sealed last night when the Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, said he could not see any reason for **intervening** in the case.

A **deputation** of MPs had earlier gone to see the home secretary with a petition, said to have been signed by about 200 members. They urged him to ask the Queen to exercise her royal prerogative of mercy. They pointed out Craig was the ringleader of the two and that Bentley's mental age was probably younger than his partner - a fact that had not been disclosed to the jury. They also claimed big public support for a **reprieve**.

But the home secretary said he could see no grounds for modifying the sentence. Earlier, he had written to Bentley's parents saying the same thing. A crowd of up to 300 gathered outside the Houses of Parliament last night, chanting "Bentley must not die!" The demonstrators marched to the Home Office and later to Downing Street.

The crowd eventually dispersed in the early hours of this morning after handing in a **petition** at Deputy Prime Minister Anthony Eden's home.

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Bentley's execution comes just three months after the warehouse break-in in Croydon in which Pc Miles died.

Bentley was convicted on the basis of police evidence. Three officers told the court they had heard him encourage Craig to shoot by shouting "*Let him have it*". Bentley's defence claimed he was already under arrest at the time the shots were fired and was simply urging Craig to give up his gun.

Derek Bentley's family began a **campaign** to clear his name.

His sister, Iris, claimed her brother had learning difficulties and had a mental age of an 11-year-old and was also an epileptic, unable to read or write.

For years she kept his case in the public eye, writing letters to politicians, giving interviews and talks and writing a book.

In 1991 a film *Let Him Have It* was made of Bentley's story highlighting the **injustice** of the case.

Eventually, in 1993 the then Home Secretary Michael Howard granted Bentley a partial pardon, saying it was clear he should never have been hanged but he remained guilty of taking part in the murder.

In 1998 the Appeal Court **quashed** Bentley's conviction on the grounds the original trial judge was biased against the defendants and misdirected the jury on points of law.

Scientific evidence also showed the three police officers who testified about Bentley shouting "*Let him have it*" had lied under oath.

Iris Bentley died in 1997 before the case was referred back to the Appeal Court.

Craig served 10 years before being released.



**Wandsworth Prison at the execution of Derek Bentley in January 1953**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where was Derek Bentley executed?

.....

2. How old was he and at what time was he executed?

.....

3. Who was he convicted of killing and where did this take place?

.....

4. Who was his co-defendant and why was he not sentenced to death?

.....

5. Where did a large crowd gather and what did they sing?

.....

6. Who was the Home Secretary, who could see no reason to intervene?

.....

7. What was Bentley supposed to have said at the time?

.....

8. Who was Derek Bentley's sister who campaigned for a posthumous pardon for many years?

.....

9. When was the film released?

.....

10. When and who granted a partial pardon for Bentley?

.....

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What is the exact meaning of the following words taken from the text?

**clemency**.....  
.....

**sentenced**.....  
.....

**juvenile**.....  
.....

**intervening**.....  
.....

**deputation**.....  
.....

**reprieve**.....  
.....

**petition**.....  
.....

**campaign**.....  
.....

**injustice**.....  
.....

**quashed**.....  
.....

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Find synonyms for the following words:

booing.....

bungled.....

escaped.....

modifying.....

public eye.....

remained.....

Find antonyms for the following words:

rejected.....

sealed.....

mercy.....

dispersed.....

encouraged.....

referred.....

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Find a proper noun in the text

.....

Find a verb in the text

.....

Find an adverb in the text

.....

Find an adjective in the text

.....

Find a pronoun in the text

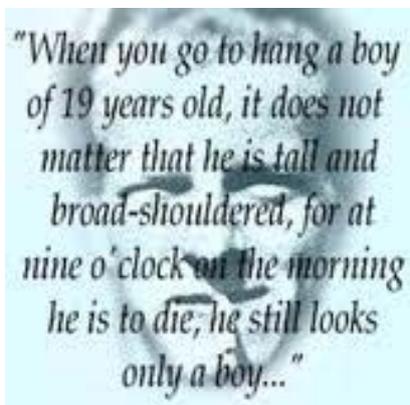
.....

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- You are a newspaper reporter of the day. You will now write a piece for a newspaper covering the story of Derek Bentley.
- Use the text from this sheet as a basis for your article.
- Use at least three good sized paragraphs for the exercise and you may use written language to convey your view-point on the case.
- Think and plan your work using persuasive language to get your views across. This was and remains a landmark case in British legal history. An interesting and descriptive piece of writing is the minimum it deserves.



*"When you go to hang a boy of 19 years old, it does not matter that he is tall and broad-shouldered, for at nine o'clock on the morning he is to die, he still looks only a boy..."*