

The Crown Jewel Robbery

It was spring in 1671. An Irishman named Colonel Thomas Blood visited the Tower of London. He said he wanted to look at the crown jewels. Have you ever seen the crown jewels? They are still kept in the Tower of London. Anyone can pay to see them.



Colonel Blood was dressed as a parson. He had a lady with him who he *said* was his wife. Did he just want to *look* at the crown jewels? No! He had something else in mind.

The crown jewels were looked after by a man called the Custodian. He had to keep them safe. His name was Mr Talbot Edwards. He was 77 years old. He had only just been given the job of Custodian. He lived at the Tower of London. His wife and family lived there too.

To see the crown jewels you paid the Custodian a fee. Mr Talbot Edwards went with visitors to the basement of the Martin Tower. Here the jewels were kept. They were behind a metal grille. Mr Talbot Edwards lived in the Martin Tower too. He and his family lived on the floor above the jewels.

Colonel Blood and his “wife” were looking at the jewels. Suddenly Colonel Blood's “wife” began to groan. She clutched her stomach.

“I have stomachache,” she gasped. “Please could you fetch something to make me better?”

“My home is just above,” said Mr Talbot Edwards. “Come upstairs. I will find you something to make you better.”

Up they went. “Mrs Blood” soon felt better. They thanked Talbot Edwards and his wife and family very much. Then they went away.

A few days later, Colonel Blood was back. He came to see the Edwards family. He brought with him some gloves. They were a thank you present for their kindness. He came again. He brought more gloves. They were beautiful white ones. He came again and again. He gave a pair to everyone in the family. They all chatted together. They became very friendly. Colonel Blood visited them often. Then one day Colonel Blood told them about his “nephew”. He said he was a very rich young man. He said he was

looking for a wife.

“Your daughter would be just right for him,” said Colonel Blood. “if she married him she would be very rich.”

The Edwards were pleased. They had done a good turn to Mrs Blood. Now they would be rewarded. That is what they thought!

On 9 May, Mrs Edwards was cooking dinner. It was for Colonel Blood, his “nephew”, and two of his friends. They waited for the dinner to cook. Colonel Blood asked if they could all go and look at the jewels.

Colonel Blood's “friends” carried walking canes. Many people did so in those days. But these were special walking canes. They had things hidden inside them. What sort of things? Sword blades, daggers, and small pistols!

One of them said he would stand outside the tower door. He would keep watch. This was not a proper paid for visit. The Tower warders were not there. He would keep guard. The rest went in with Mr Talbot Edwards. The door was closed. Quickly a cloak was thrown over Mr Edwards. Then someone hit him with a mallet. Quickly the men bound him up. Quickly they gagged him.



Quickly Colonel Blood took away the grille. What did he do next? He took the mallet. He smashed the beautiful St. Edward's Crown! He flattened it. Then he could hide it under his coat. You can see this crown in the picture. It has been mended now!

The “friends” had been busy too. One sawed the Sceptre with the cross into two pieces. That made it fit into his bag. The third “friend” took the Orb. He hid it down his trousers.

All this time Mr Edwards was struggling. He tried to get out of his gag and bonds. Suddenly he began shouting, “Treason! Murder! The crown is stolen!”

Colonel Blood and his gang of robbers ran away. Off they ran to St Catherine's gate. They had horses waiting there. As they ran they dropped the sceptre. The warders tried to stop them. They shot at the warders. One was wounded. There were guards on the drawbridge. One was so afraid he could not fire his gun! The thieves ran along Tower Wharf. People shouted “stop thief”. Colonel Blood and his “friends” cried “stop thief” too. Then people thought they were men running after the thief. They did not know they were the thieves!

Captain Beckman ran up. He was a relative of Mr Edwards. He managed to catch Colonel Blood. He hung on to him. By then the crown had been dropped too. It had been squashed flat. Many of the jewels had fallen out. Colonel Blood did not give up easily. He still struggled. He shouted, "It was a good try! It was for a crown!"

The crown was found. The orb was found. The sceptre was found too. They were badly smashed. Some of the gems had fallen out.

And now comes something strange!

Colonel Blood would not talk. He kept saying, "I will only talk to the king." So they took him to the king. The king was His Majesty, King Charles II.

The king talked to him. Then he asked, "What if I let you go?"

"I would try to deserve it, Sire!" said Colonel Blood.

Charles II let him go. He gave him a farm in Ireland!

Why did the king do such a strange thing? Was it just that he loved a daring crime? Some people say so. But some people wonder. Charles was an evil king. Charles wasted his money. He could get money if he asked parliament. He did not like calling parliament. If he did, parliament asked him to do things. They were things the king did not want to do. He was very short of money. He was always short of money. He could not sell the crown jewels *himself* and take the money. The crown jewels belonged to the kingdom. They did not belong to the king. They had to be there for the next king. But if they were stolen? If they were sold by someone else? If the king had a big share of the money? Hmmm... I wonder!