Angus McLaren’s
PLAYBOYS & MAYFAIR MEN

In Brief

- The book focuses on the fact that in the 1930s there were upper-class males who not only exploited their class, gender, and educational advantages; their explicit and unapologetic sense of entitlement inevitably tipped some over into criminality.

- The book is based on a fascinating 1938 trial. Historians have turned to police and court records as a way of exploring working-class society; such sources also tell us a lot about the perceived decadence and moral decay of the upper classes.

- Countless studies of working-class London exist; this book focuses on wealthy Mayfair. As the setting of the crime is London’s West End several famous figures make an appearance: including Noel Coward, Evelyn Waugh, Winston Churchill, Robert Graves, Oswald Mosley, and Edward VIII.

- Accounts of the 1930s typically center on the workers’ humiliating experience of unemployment and the dole, but this study juxtaposes their fate with that of the wealthy, the self-satisfied, and their hangers-on

- The debate occasioned by the flogging of the playboys serves as a reminder that although it is commonly assumed that corporal punishment was ended by the late nineteenth century, judges still defended the use of the “cat” and class preoccupations continued to color its employment.

- Whereas studies of 20th century British masculinity have looked at the imperial manliness of the upper-classes and the domestication of middle-class men, this book provides the first scholarly account of the “playboy,” provocatively arguing that he was the male equivalent of the rebellious young flapper of the 1920s.

- In examining the argument that the playboys and Mayfair men were fascists, the book locates the discussion of radical right wing politics in the context of the 1930s perceived narrowing of career options of ruthless young men.

- In the depths if the depression films, popular novels and cheap newspapers both reported on and help to create the figure of the playboy, at best an entertaining and escapist creature; at worst a moral and social threat. With the outbreak of the Second World War the media ceased to chronicle his excesses. Such a self-serving character had no place in the nationalist myth of a nation united in its willingness to make whatever sacrifices necessary to defeat the aggressor.