The shocking true story of a diamond theft gone wrong

PLAYBOYS AND MAYFAIR MEN
Crime, Class, Masculinity, and Fascism in 1930s London

by Angus McLaren

In December 1937, four respectable young men in their twenties, all products of elite English public schools, conspired to lure to the luxurious Hyde Park Hotel a representative of Cartier, the renowned jewelry firm. There, the “Mayfair men” brutally bludgeoned diamond salesman Etienne Bellenger and made off with eight rings that today would be worth approximately half a million pounds. Such well-connected young people were not supposed to appear in the prisoner’s dock at the Old Bailey. Not surprisingly, the popular newspapers had a field day responding to the public’s insatiable appetite for news about the upper-crust rowdies and their unsavory pasts.

In PLAYBOYS AND MAYFAIR MEN, Angus McLaren recounts the violent robbery and sensational trial that followed. In his gripping depiction of Mayfair’s celebrity high life, McLaren describes the crime in detail, examines the origins and cultural meanings of the playboy, and includes in his cast of characters such well-known figures as Noel Coward, Evelyn Waugh, the Churchills, and Edward VIII.

The trial is fascinating, not simply because of its four young louts but because it revealed for the first time in the media, troubling aspects of British society which had escaped serious scrutiny. An original and exciting cultural history of 1930s Britain, this innovative book and the exploits of its dissolute playboys will appeal to true-crime readers and historians alike.

Angus McLaren is emeritus professor of history at the University of Victoria. He is the author of Sexual Blackmail: A Modern History, Impotence: A Cultural History, and A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream.

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Media contact: Gene Taft • 410-516-4162 • GAT@press.jhu.edu