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LOST AND STOLEN DOGS, REWARD CULTURE, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ENGLAND, 1752-1776

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Abstract

This article examines reward notices for lost and stolen dogs in mid-eighteenth-century England using 504 advertisements from the *Daily Advertiser* (1752–76). It explores how owners employed descriptive language, monetary rewards, and non-financial incentives to recover animals that were not fully recognised as legal property. It argues that such advertisements functioned as practical instruments of recovery and informal justice. The analysis shows how these notices operated within wider cultures of reward advertising and how their language and incentive structures evolved over time, particularly after the 1770 Dog Stealing Act. By situating dog theft within the broader history of reward culture, the article demonstrates how owners pursued recovery and justice in a society where formal policing remained limited and decentralised, and how dogs were understood as socially and emotionally valuable even when their economic worth was limited.

Keywords: Reward notices; Dog theft; Eighteenth-century England; Newspaper advertisements; *Daily Advertiser*

Introduction

On Saturday 5 December 1730, the *Craftsman* newspaper printed a short advertisement for a lost dog. The advertisement described the missing animal as ‘a light colour’d Dutch DOG, with a black Muzzle’, adding that he ‘answers to the name Pugg’. The dog had gone missing from the owner’s home that he shared with his wife, Jane, at the Broad Cloth Warehouse in the Little Piazza, Covent Garden. A reward of half a guinea was offered for his [the dog’s] safe return, and the notice was signed simply ‘Mr Hogarth’ (Paulson, 1974:90). The ‘Mr Hogarth’ in question was the artist William Hogarth, whose

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series *A Harlot's Progress* (1732), *A Rake's Progress* (1735) and *Beer Lane* and *Gin Street* (1751) immortalised the contradictions and corruptions of Georgian London.[1] Although Hogarth used the word 'LOST,' rather than 'stolen' to frame the advertisement, the significant reward offered hints at a more sinister reality. In an era when small pedigree dogs like Pugg were becoming fashionable accessories and visible markers of refinement among the middling and upper classes, dog theft was also emerging as a common and profitable crime. Hogarth's advertisement therefore served both as a personal plea and, in a sense, a public negotiation with the capital's networks of theft (Howard-Smith, 2021; Tague, 2015).

The case of Hogarth and Pugg illustrates a broader truth about eighteenth-century life in England and Wales: without a formal, centralised police force, and with only limited investigative capacity provided by constables, the night watch, and, in London, the Bow Street Runners, victims of theft were often left to recover their stolen property on their own. In the absence of any organised system for investigating crime, individuals like Hogarth often turned to the press, placing advertisements and offering rewards in the hope that public visibility might prompt a return – or at least attract helpful leads. Newspaper advertisements therefore formed part of what historians have increasingly recognised as an important infrastructure of informal justice, operating alongside – if not sometimes in place of – formal legal processes.

Recent scholarship has substantially expanded our understanding of these practices. Kate Smith's work, culminating in *Keeping Hold* (2026; see also Smith, 2022), shows how lost property notices can be used to explore questions of possession, value, and identity in eighteenth-century Britain. Dogs appear in her study as one category of missing property within a wider discussion of recovery and reclamation. Her research establishes the importance of such notices as sources for understanding how ownership was asserted, contested, and articulated in print culture. The present article seeks to build on this work but takes a slightly different approach. Whereas Smith's analysis is primarily concerned with what lost objects – including dogs – reveal about possession, sentiment, and material culture, this study instead examines how reward notices worked in practice. The focus here is less on the meanings attached to lost dogs and more on how owners tried to recover them: the structure of rewards, the use of threats and legal language, and the ways in which advertisements sought to involve the public in recovery and prosecution. More broadly, the article argues that reward notices for lost and stolen dogs offer insight into the everyday workings of informal justice in eighteenth-century England, showing how ordinary people used print, money, and public cooperation to pursue restitution in the absence of professional policing.

[1] Unfortunately, Pugg appears not to have been recovered. Not long after, however, Hogarth acquired another pug, whom he named Trump. Trump would go on to appear in several of his owner's paintings and prints, often serving as a source of visual humour or subtle symbolic commentary within a scene (for discussion, see Paulson, 1974; Uglow, 2002). The two are depicted together in Hogarth's 1745 self-portrait, *The Painter and his Pug*, with an aging Trump prominently placed in the foreground. Trump was later immortalised three dimensionally by Louis-François Roubiliac in his sculpture *Hogarth's Dog, Trump* (1747–50) and more recently l in a statue in Chiswick by James Mathieson entitled *William Hogarth with Trump* (2001).

Despite a growing body of scholarship on animals, pet keeping, and lost property in the eighteenth century, relatively little sustained attention has been paid to these practices in relation to dogs. Studies of the domestic dog, such as Philip Howell's *At Home and Astray* (2015), focus primarily on the nineteenth century, while Harriet Tague's *Animal Companions* (2015) addresses dog theft only briefly within a wider discussion of pet keeping and social change. Kathryn Shevelow (2009) likewise refers to dog theft only in passing in her account of the origins of the animal protection movement.

This article addresses this gap by examining advertisements for lost and stolen dogs as a distinct category of reward notice. Drawing on a structured dataset of more than 500 advertisements published in the *Daily Advertiser* between 1752–69 and 1772–76, it explores how 'lost' and stolen dogs were described, how rewards were structured, and how advertisers sought to mobilise public participation in their recovery. In doing so, it uses these notices to examine the practical operation of restitution and informal justice in mid-eighteenth-century England. To this end, the article is structured in four sections. The first sets the scene for subsequent analysis by exploring the broader system of rewards in eighteenth-century England by outlining how individuals sought restitution or justice in the absence of formal policing. The second section outlines the methodology and sources that underpin the analysis, including describing how advertisements were sampled, categorised and analysed. The third section presents the results of analyses of the advertisements, focusing on both how the dog losses were framed and the incentive structures embedded in the language of the rewards being offered. Also explored is the impact of the 1770 Act for Preventing the Stealing of Dogs on the incentive structure found in advertisements in the latter period. The final section synthesizes the main strands of analysis by reflecting on what the advertisements reveal about how owners sought to use them in recovering their 'lost' or stolen pets.

Before proceeding, however, a brief note on terminology is required. Thus far I have used the phrase 'lost and stolen' and will continue to do so for several reasons. Primarily, looking back over two centuries, it is impossible to determine with any certainty whether a particular dog was genuinely lost, deliberately stolen, or had simply strayed. Owners themselves often appeared uncertain, or at least cautious, in how they described disappearances, frequently using overlapping or compound terms such as 'lost or stolen', 'strayed', or 'taken away'. As will be shown, this rhetorical ambiguity covered multiple possibilities and widened the scope of potential recovery. Many items described as "lost" in advertisements in this period were in fact likely to have been stolen, and advertisers often used the term "lost" as a tactful or legally cautious alternative to "stolen". This allowed them to appeal for the item's return without making a direct accusation when no culprit had been identified (Smith 2022; Smith 2026; Shevelow 2009). Just as importantly, framing an item as "lost" allowed rewards to be offered for return without risking legal complications associated with explicit allegations of theft. The phrase "'lost' and stolen" is therefore used to reflect both contemporary language and the blurred factual, legal, and moral categories at play in these cases. More broadly, its use captures the

uncertainty and negotiation that shaped attempts at restitution in eighteenth-century England.

Valuing the Lost: Rewards, Legal Status, and Emotional Claims

Crime historians have long recognised the important role that rewards played in eighteenth-century systems of justice, particularly in the absence of a formal police force (for discussions see, Hay & Snyder, 1989; Landau, 1999; Godfrey & Lawrence, 2005; Clayton & Shoemaker, 2022). In a criminal justice landscape where victims were largely responsible for initiating prosecutions, monetary rewards became a vital mechanism through which individuals sought to both recover stolen goods and bring offenders to justice. As Peter King (2000:62) has noted, in cases of burglary, robbery, and theft, both handbills and newspaper advertisements '...had a significant impact on a victim's capacity to detect and prosecute offenders', while in incidents such as large animal thefts, a published reward notice often offered '...the best hope of recovering the stolen property as well as some assistance in tracing the offender'. Crone (2011) highlighted increases in the number of crime-related advertisements over the course of the eighteenth century, likely reflecting the broader expansion of newspapers rather than a disproportionate increase in such advertisements.` She interprets this growth as evidence of their increasing prevalence and popularity as a practical tool and as a reflection of their perceived success in helping bring offenders to justice. In support of the latter, she cites how references to such advertisements in court proceedings increased over the period, with nearly a hundred trials at the Old Bailey between the 1740s and 1790s mentioning an "Advertiser" newspaper – whether the *Daily*, *General*, *Public*, or simply using the generic title – highlighting their legal visibility and their role in the prosecution of crime (Crone, 2011). Earlier research by Shoemaker (2004) similarly demonstrated that the proportion of trials for felonies and serious misdemeanours in the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* that mentioned printed notices increased from 51 cases (1.04% of the total) in the 1720s to 285 (6.94% of the total) in the 1750s thus providing further evidence of print's growing significance in the prosecution process.

Regional data reinforce this pattern. In a random sample of 67 newspaper advertisements published in Essex between 1775 and 1795 concerning burglaries, robberies, and thefts, King (2000) found that just over one-fifth (22%) could be clearly linked to a subsequent prosecution. Similarly, in his analysis of advertisements from northern England, Styles (1989) found that in a sample of 75 horse theft cases between 1760 and 1799, advertisements played a decisive role in establishing the charge against the accused in approximately 31 percent of cases. Of the trials that followed, only 12.5 percent resulted in an acquittal, suggesting a relatively high rate of successful prosecution when advertisements played a central role. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that reward notices were not merely tools for recovering lost property; they also proved instrumental in enabling victims to pursue justice through the courts.

Despite their prevalence, however, such notices were not without potential legal complications (King, 2000). Under the law, such notices risked being interpreted as compounding a felony, a common law offence which involved accepting money or offering inducements in exchange for either refraining from prosecuting a known felon or aiding in their escape. According to William Blackstone (1769 [1871]) in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, compounding a felony was considered an obstruction of public justice as it allowed offenders to go scot-free, and was punishable by a fine and imprisonment. Reward advertisements promising that stolen goods could be returned to their owner with 'no questions asked' were particularly suspect as they implied a willingness to prioritise private recovery over the prosecution of the offender. Nevertheless, as Hay and Snyder (1989:38) observe, while compounding was indeed a crime, it was '... one much practised and in practice hardly ever punished'.

While these legal tensions are clear in relation to recoverable property such as horses, watches and other high-value goods, comparatively less sustained attention has been paid to reward notices concerning items that occupied an ambiguous legal status, such as domestic dogs. While, as will be seen below, they were frequently described as "stolen" in advertisements, dogs occupied an ambiguous position under English common law during this period. Traditionally treated as *ferae naturae* - animals considered wild by nature and not fully subject to ownership – dogs were generally excluded from prosecution under larceny statutes (Blackstone, 1766 [2016)]). This led to the paradoxical situation in which a thief could be prosecuted for stealing a dog's collar – provided it exceeded the minimum value required for felony – but not the dog to which said collar was attached.[2] The legal framework began to shift with the 1770 Act for Preventing the Stealing of Dogs (10 Geo. III c. 18), which created a specific summary offence for dog theft, punishable by a fine of between £20 and £30 or imprisonment from six to twelve months for a first offence. However, the Act stopped short of defining dogs as property and did not bring their theft within the scope of common law larceny. That legal recognition lay significantly outside the period under investigation, with the passing of the Larceny Act in 1861 that criminalised their theft as a property offence.

This legal ambiguity makes the presence of dogs in reward notices even more remarkable. Without a clear legal category of property ownership, those placing such notices had to articulate their loss in other terms. What emerged, often implicitly, was a language of personal value and emotional attachment. In this context, the 'worth' of the dog in question was not determined by its market value, which in many cases would have been modest, but rather by its place within the household and the depth of affection it inspired. As Tague (2015:36) argues: 'newspaper advertisements for lost dogs show that

[2] This paradox was highlighted during evidence given before the 1844 Select Committee on Dog Stealing (Metropolis). Police magistrate John Hardwick, Esq., was asked whether it was possible for someone to be "transported for stealing [a dog's] collar, who would have gone scot free for stealing the dog." He confirmed, "Just so," noting that although he had not encountered such a case himself, he had heard of instances where it had occurred (Report from the Select Committee on Dog Stealing (Metropolis), 1844:13).

animals were both loved enough to be sought out and worth paying to retrieve'. Recent work in the history of animals provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. For example, Tague (2015) argues that by the mid-eighteenth century, dogs held a complex status in British society – neither simply animals nor fully legal property, but emotionally significant beings bound up with domestic affection, material culture, and social identity. Drawing on visual and textual sources, she shows how during this period dogs were frequently named, personified, and treated as household members by both elite and middling-class families. Owners frequently spoke of them in familial terms and expected their loss to be treated with seriousness, even if the law did not always recognise their claims. More recently, Howard-Smith (2021) has argued that the eighteenth century:

> ...saw the development of a modern mode of pet keeping as signalled by a growing interest in emotionally and physically intimate relationships between pet and human, the celebration of relationships with individual animals, and the stirrings of the nascent pet services industry meeting the needs of a new breed of dog owner (Howard-Smith, 2021:132).

Together, these interpretations help explain why owners placed reward notices despite the uncertain legal status of dogs.

Kate Smith's (2022) recent article on 'lost things' and her subsequent monograph *Keeping Hold* (2026) provide a useful framework for exploring ambiguity in eighteenth-century newspaper advertisements, particularly in how objects were described and presented and in the often-blurred language surrounding whether items were lost or stolen. Although Smith discusses dogs alongside a wider range of lost or stolen possessions, her analysis is mainly focused on the language of loss, possession, and recovery as well as the emotional and material meanings attached to such objects. This article builds on Smith's insights but shifts the focus of analysis in two ways. First, it concentrates exclusively on advertisements for lost and stolen dogs. Second, it foregrounds the reward incentives offered in these notices, treating them as practical tools within informal systems of justice. By examining dog advertisements specifically, it shows how owners mobilised the language and incentives of reward culture – often associated with high-value, legally protected property – to assert claims over animals whose legal status remained uncertain. In doing so, it brings dogs into the history of crime not as sentimental anomalies, but as part of the wider reward culture of eighteenth-century England through which property was valued, loss was communicated, and informal mechanisms of justice were activated in the absence of formal policing.

Sources and Method

This study draws on a sample of 504 advertisements for 'lost' and stolen dogs published in the London *Daily Advertiser* during two distinct periods: 1752-1769 and 1772-1776. These materials were located using keyword searches for 'dog', 'bitch', and 'puppy' within the *Daily Advertiser* as preserved in the Gale Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

Burney Newspapers Collection. In addition to the results returned by keyword searches, a small number of clearly relevant notices identified through manual inspection of adjacent dog-related advertisements – such as those where dogs were referred to by breed rather than generic terms – were also included. As Hitchcock (2013) has observed, keyword searching in digitised newspaper collections inevitably shapes the evidential base by privileging some forms of language over others. The dataset used here should therefore be understood as substantial but not exhaustive. In addition, while multiple London newspapers carried similar material, the *Daily Advertiser* is particularly well suited to this study due to its high volume of advertising content and consistent inclusion of notices relating to lost property. Focusing on a single title allows for a controlled and internally consistent dataset, although it necessarily limits the extent to which findings can be generalised across the wider press. At the same time, the social profile of those placing such advertisements also inevitably shapes the dataset, tending to skew it toward middling and upper-class owners. With notices in the *Daily Advertiser* costing between two and four shillings – roughly a week's rent for a London artisan (Tague, 2015) – the practice was largely inaccessible to the less affluent. As a result, the analysis that follows necessarily focuses on the experiences and concerns of wealthier dog owners, rather than those of the urban poor, whose losses remain largely undocumented.[3]

Founded in 1730 by the printer Matthew Jenour, the *Daily Advertiser* was one of London's first fully daily newspapers and was distinctive because of its reliance on advertising revenue rather than either political patronage or high cover price. Throughout the period, the paper consistently featured dense columns of advertisements for goods, services, as well as for lost and found property.[4] By the mid-eighteenth century, its daily sales likely ranged between 2,500 and 3,000 copies, rising to around 5,000 by the final quarter of the century, placing it among the most widely circulated newspapers in London at the time (see Werkmeister, 1963; Harris, 1987; Barker, 2000).

The selection of these two periods was dictated by the source material. While it had been initially hoped to survey the full period from 1750 to 1799, this proved impossible due to inconsistent preservation of the newspaper. Several years within that half-century were missing completely, and even within years with surviving issues, many months were incomplete. Although, additional material is available in other digitised collections, the *Daily Advertiser* does not survive as a complete run across these archives, and the use of a single, internally consistent dataset was therefore prioritised.

[3] There is not sufficient space to discuss the social backgrounds of the dog owners in depth here. Suffice to say, most advertisers across both periods were men, posting either on behalf of female family members or themselves (89.9% in 1752–69 and 91.6% in 1772–76). The predominant identifiable social category was the nobility and gentry, comprising 42.5% of identified persons in the earlier sample and 30.7% in the latter one. Other represented groups included professionals, tradespeople, and artisans, although their proportions varied. This confirms the view that reward notices were chiefly advertised by wealthier households rather than the working poor (cf. Smith, 2026: chapter 4).

[4] According to Crone (2011), of the 100 references to an 'Advertiser' in Old Bailey trials between the 1740s and 1790s, just over half (51) named the *Daily Advertiser* specifically - significantly more than the combined total for the *General/Public Advertiser*, as well as other unspecified 'Advertiser' titles. She interprets this as reflecting the *Daily Advertiser*'s greater volume of crime-related advertisements during this period (see Crone 2011: Table 6.2).

Instead, the research adopted two distinct sampling strategies tailored to the source constraints. For the earlier period – 1752-1769 – every extant issue was examined, yielding 121 relevant advertisements. This ensured that all available data for this period were captured, although the overall number remains low due to the fragmentary survival of the newspaper. For the later period – 1772-1776 – a structured sampling method was employed, with the first four issues of every month being sampled across the five-year period. This yielded a larger dataset of 383 advertisements, benefiting from more consistent newspaper survival in this period. This broader and more systematic sampling approach makes it possible to identify patterns in language, reward structures, and frequency across the year, rather than within a single seasonal window. Focusing on this later period also allows for exploration of the potential impact of the 1770 Dog Stealing Act on the language and incentive structures found in advertisements. Together, these two datasets offer a workable – if imperfect – basis for examining shifts in how 'lost' and stolen dogs were advertised in the press in the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

Analysis

This section examines how owners used advertisements in the *Daily Advertiser* to recover their 'lost' and stolen dogs, focusing on the structure of notices, the ways disappearances were described, and the range of financial and non-financial incentives used to secure their return. In doing so, it moves beyond description to show how reward notices functioned in practice as mechanisms of restitution and informal justice, and how their language reflects the legal and social context of eighteenth-century England.

Structure of Advertisements

'Lost' and stolen dog advertisements during this period typically followed a clear structure: a brief account of when and where the dog in question disappeared – such as 'from the Cecil Street Coffee-House' or 'near the Turnpike, Lambeth Marsh'; a detailed physical description (including the dog's name, type or breed, whether (s)he was wearing a collar and any inscription on it, as well as distinctive markings); the location for return (either a private address or a neutral venue such as a coffeehouse); and the reward offered. As discussed in more detail below, most advertisements also included additional incentives or disclaimers, such as that 'no greater reward will be offered', that the dog 'would not be advertised again', or warnings of prosecution against those who detained the dog. Finally, in several cases the name of the owner or the proprietor of the return location was included, sometimes engraved on the dog's collar:

> Lost last Sunday Se'nnight in the Morning, from the Cecil Street Coffee-House, a white Pointer Dog, with a large Liver-coloured Spot on one Side of his Head, a remarkable small sandy Spot on his Eyebrow on the same Side the Liver-coloured Spot is on, with a Leather Collar, inscribed, Capt Adlam. Whoever brings him as above, shall have a Guinea Reward. He will not be advertised any more, and whoever detains him after this Advertisement will be prosecuted (*Daily Advertiser*, 2 Jan 1775:2).

While most advertisements were, for a single dog, 18 adverts in both samples concerned multiple 'lost' and stolen dogs, who either disappeared simultaneously or at different times. One such notice, for example, recorded the loss of three dogs over the span of several weeks: first, in September, 'a small Spanish Dog, all white except one yellow Ear, and some small yellow Spots on his Body' was lost from an undisclosed location; next, on the 21st of October, 'a Liver-coloured and white Pointer Dog' disappeared near Hackney; and finally, most recently, on Tuesday the 25th of October, 'a young Dog of the Pointer Kind, Liver-coloured and white, with a Collar and Piece of Chain about his Neck' also went missing from an unspecified location (*Daily Advertiser*, 2 Nov 1774:2). In such cases, the structure of the advertisements remained consistent, with separate descriptions and rewards typically offered for each animal.

As noted above, 'lost'" and stolen dogs were described in a variety of ways across the advertisements – as lost, stolen, strayed, or using some combination of these terms. Table 1 summarises how the animals were described across both samples:

Label	**1752-69 sample (n=121)**	**1772-6 sample (n=383)**
Lost	106 (87.6%)	314 (82%)
Strayed	8 (6.6%)	20 (5.2%)
Stolen	4 (3.3%)	6 (1.6%)
Other (inc. Taken, Taken Up, Lost or Detained, Ran Away etc.)	2 (1.7%)	7 (1.8%)
Stolen or Strayed	1 (0.8%)	21 (5.5%)
Lost or Strayed	0	10 (2.6%)
Lost or Stolen	0	5 (1.3%)

Table 1: Descriptive Labels Used for 'Lost' and Stolen Dogs in *Daily Advertiser* Notices (1752-69 and 1772-76 samples).

As can be seen, across both periods owners mainly described their animals as 'lost', accounting for 106 of 121 notices (87.6%) in the earlier sample and 314 of 383 (82.0%) in the later one. In contrast, only 4 notices (3.3%) in the 1752-69 sample and 6 notices (1.6%) in the 1772-76 sample described dogs explicitly as 'stolen'. It is particularly noteworthy that after dog stealing became a misdemeanour in 1770, the proportion of

dogs described as ‘stolen’ declined. While counterintuitive, this may reflect a reluctance among owners to make overt legal accusations that could not be easily proven, or a tactical choice to avoid escalating matters into formal legal territory by allowing potential thieves the option to return the dog for a reward under the guise that it had simply been ’lost’ (Crone, 2011; Smith, 2022; Smith, 2026).

At the same time, compound or ambiguous formulations increased in the later period. Notices describing dogs as ’stolen or strayed’, ’lost or strayed’, or ’lost or stolen’ together account for 36 notices (9.4%) in the later sample, compared with only one notice (0.8%) in the earlier one. This shift again suggests a growing preference for deliberately flexible language that allowed advertisers to address multiple audiences simultaneously: reassuring potential finders, avoiding legally risky accusations, and leaving open the possibility of prosecution where appropriate.

Non-financial Incentives

Turning next to the incentive structure found in the advertisements, Table 2 shows the number of non-financial incentives offered in each period.

Number of Incentives	**1752-69 sample (n=121)**	**1772-6 sample (n=383)**
0	48 (39.7%)	226 (59%)
1	53 (43.8%)	116 (30.3%)
2	20 (16.5%)	38 (9.9%)
3	0	3 (0.8%)

Table 2: Percentage of Non-Financial Incentives Offered in ’Lost’ and Stolen Dog Advertisements in *Daily Advertiser* Notices (1752-69 and 1772-76 Samples).

The results in Table 2 reveal a clear shift in the later period away from offering non-financial incentives. In the 1752-69 sample, 73 of 121 advertisements (60.3%) offered at least one such incentive, while 48 notices (39.7%) offered none. By contrast, in the 1772-76 sample, the proportion offering no incentives rose to 59 percent, meaning that only around two-fifths of advertisements included any non-financial inducement. This increase suggests that owners were increasingly focusing on monetary compensation as the primary – if not sole – means of motivating the return of their animals, reflecting a growing assumption that money was the most effective inducement for securing recovery. Compared with the earlier period, then, advertisers were increasingly willing to let the stated sum stand on its own, rather than reinforcing it with additional warnings or assurances. Figure 1 shows the percentage of specific types of non-financial incentives offered in advertisements in each period:

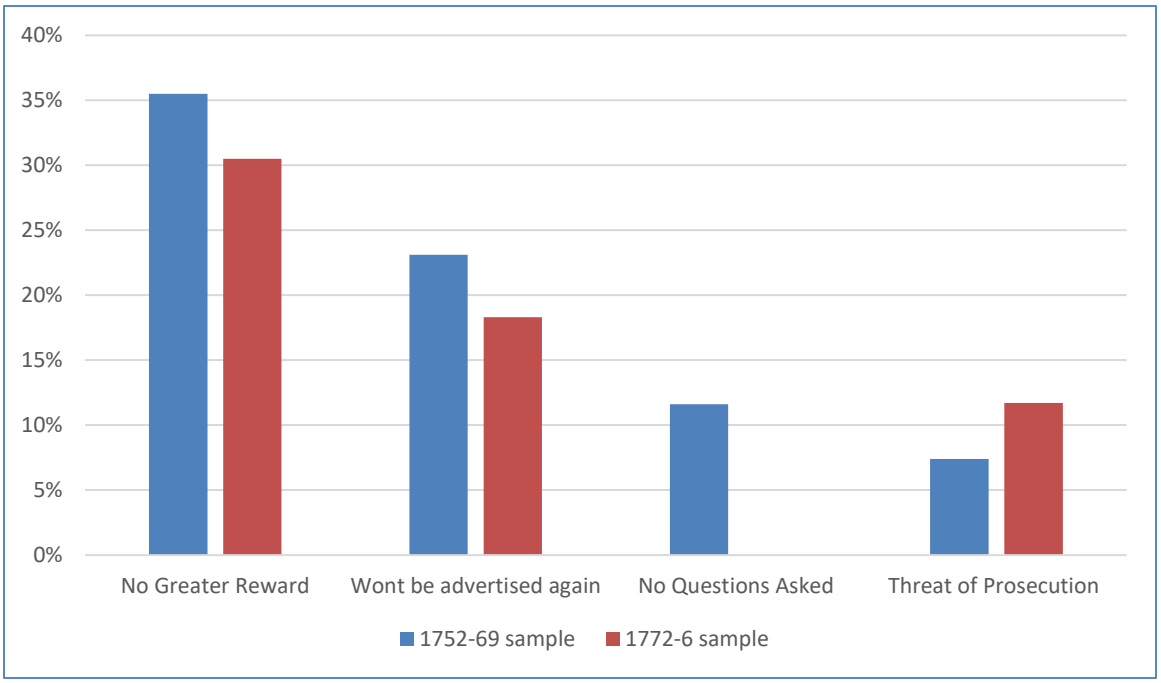

Figure 1: Percentage of Advertisements in the *Daily Advertiser* Offering Specific Types of Non-financial Incentives for 'Lost' and Stolen Dogs (1752-69 and 1772-76 samples).

Across both periods the most common incentive found in the advertisements was that "no greater reward" would be offered, appearing in over a third of earlier advertisements (43 notices, 35.5%) and slightly less frequently in the later sample (117 notices, 30.5%). The next commonly used incentive was the warning that the missing dog 'won't be advertised again', which appeared in just under one-quarter of adverts in the earlier period (28 notices, 23%) and just under one-in-five in the later period (71 notices, 18.5%). Both were important because they signalled to any potential finder that there was no room for negotiation over the reward and that the opportunity to claim it was limited. In effect the finder was being told to act quickly and accept what is offered or lose the chance of the reward entirely. Notably, the phrase 'no questions asked' disappeared entirely in the later period, having appeared in just over one-in-ten advertisements in the earlier sample (14 notices, 11.6%). While the 1752 legislation drew attention to the legal risks associated with compounding, its effects do not appear to have been immediate. The continued use of 'no questions asked' into the later 1760s suggests that such practices remained both common and socially acceptable despite their ambiguous legal status. Rather than representing a direct response to legislation, the decline of such language in the later period is better understood as the result of a gradual shift in

advertising practices, as awareness of the legal risks associated with compounding took time to filter into practice (Styles, 1989; King, 2000; Crone, 2011).[5]

In contrast, the threat of prosecution appeared with increasing regularity in the later period, rising from 9 notices (7.4%) to 45 notices (11.7%) and clearly reflecting the influence of the 1770 Act. One 1772 notice, for example, for 'a large Old Pointer Dog' lost on New Years Day warned that 'Whosoever possession he is found in after this Publication shall be prosecuted with the utmost severity' (*Daily Advertiser*, 8 January 1772:2). Similar phrasing included: '...shall be prosecuted to the utmost Rigour of the Law' and '...whoever conceals her after this Notice may depend of being prosecuted to the utmost Severity of the Law, both for the Bitch and Collar' (*Daily Advertiser*, 3 March 1772:2; 4 Aug 1773:2). However, the most unequivocal example from the sample comes from a 1773 advertisement placed by Mr. Baker, a surgeon in Hertfordshire after the disappearance of his 'Pointing Dog' in October of that year:

> As the Person who stole him is known, he would do well to return him again, Mr. Baker being determined not to encourage Theft, by offering a Reward, but doth hereby give Notice, that whoever shall be found knowingly to detain the Dog after this information, will be treated according to the Law in that Case made and provided: Yet if any Person (who may have it in their Power) will, in a friendly Manner, convey the Dog home again, they may depend on having all reasonable Charges paid them, with Thanks, by the said Mr. Baker (*Daily Advertiser*, 4 November 1773:2).

This shift in tone, from cautious appeals to assertive legal threats, reflects a growing confidence – among at least some owners – in the law's capacity to support restitution.

Along with the increasing use of legal threats, a smaller number of advertisements went further by implying that the owner was actively searching for the dog or possessed information about the person suspected of taking it. One 1772 notice, for example, warned that 'a sharp look-out is kept in the Neighbourhood from whence [the dogs had] stray'd, and where it is supposed he is secreted', while another stated bluntly 'The Person that detains her is well-known' (*Daily Advertiser*, 9 January 1772:2; 4 June 1773:2). Others identified the person suspected to have taken the dog more specifically, such as one that described 'a Woman dressed in a Camblet Gown, and had a Child with her...' (*Daily Advertiser*, 1 September 1773:2). In one particularly direct case, the owner simply wrote: 'The Dog is well known' (*Daily Advertiser*, 5 November 1773:2). By implying

[5] Even in 1844, a Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Richard Mayne Esq., giving evidence before the Select Committee on Dog Stealing (Metropolis), was uncertain whether the crime of compounding applied to rewards offered for stolen dogs. When asked whether he was aware that the current law rendered the practice of offering 'no questions asked' rewards for stolen dogs '...not only penal but felonious," he replied that, in his interpretation, dog stealing was not covered by the law, as dogs were not considered "chattel, money, valuable security, or other property.':

> Is not it property? [*sic*.] - I conceive not, within the legal meaning of the word 'property'. I believe that the original ground upon which it was held to be not a larceny to steal a dog was, that a dog was not an animal in which there could be any property, although there might be such a property in it to form the ground of civil action (Report from the Select Committee on Dog Stealing (Metropolis), 1844:2).

knowledge of the person suspected of having taken or detaining the dog in question, such advertisements moved from general appeals to targeted warnings aimed at pressuring those responsible into returning the dog in question.

In this context, it is notable that the number of Found notices rises sharply in the latter period – from just 2 notices in the earlier sample to 52 in the later one. This suggests strongly that individuals who had picked up stray dogs were increasingly motivated to come forward, possibly out of fear of prosecution as hinted in the more accusatory language of these latter advertisements. Many of the found notices in this period emphasise that the dog had followed someone – often described as a 'Gentleman' to imply respectability - uninvited, often despite attempts to drive it away. For example, one Found notice from October 1774 described how a '...Pointer bitch, which hath lately had puppies...[had]...follow[ed] a Person, who endeavoured to drive her from his House, but without Effect' (*Daily Advertiser*, 3 October 1774:2). Others underscore the finder's neutrality, noting that the dog was simply 'stopt' or 'followed a Gentleman', implying no intent to steal. Some notices also introduced conditions or deadlines, such as Robert Drury's warning that a Newfoundland dog would be sold if unclaimed within 14 days (*Daily Advertiser*, 4 July 1775:2). Such statements reinforced the impression that finders now felt compelled to publicly disclaim any wrongdoing, presenting themselves as reluctant custodians rather than potential thieves.

Financial Incentives

Almost all owners offered financial rewards of some kind, making monetary compensation the most consistent and universal feature of 'lost' and stolen dog advertisements across both periods. Figure 2 shows the distribution of financial reward amounts offered in the 1752–69 and 1772–76 samples:

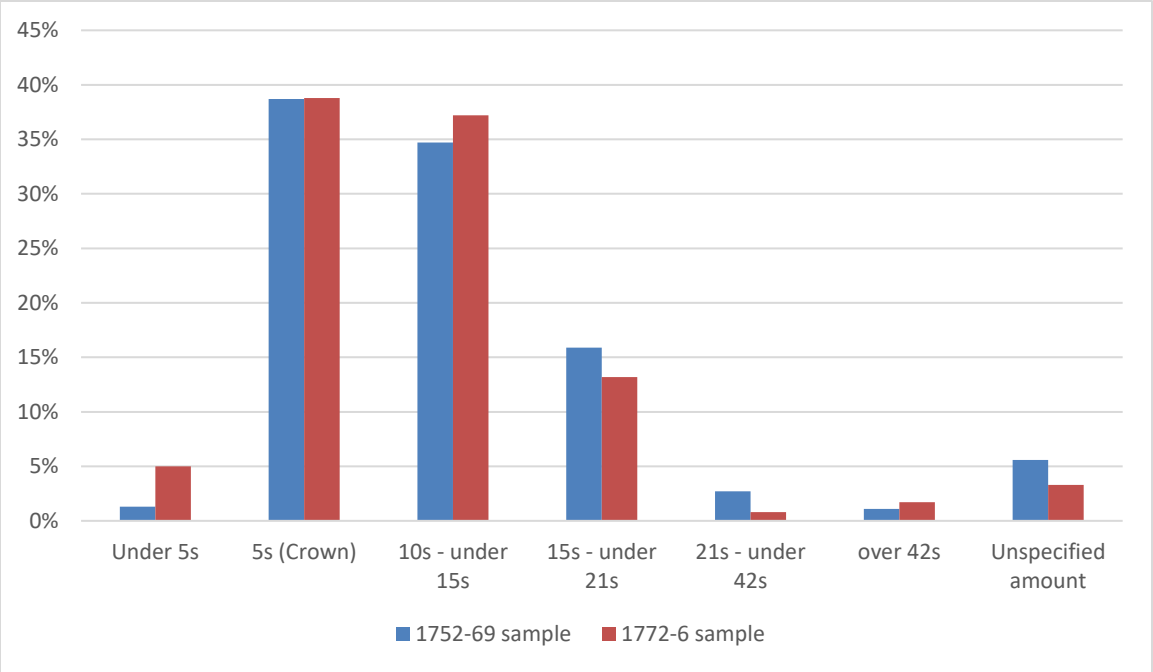

Figure 2: Distribution of Financial Reward Amounts in Advertisements in the *Daily Advertiser* for 'Lost' and Stolen Dogs (1752-69 and 1772-76 samples).[6]

The most common reward amount offered in both periods was 5 shillings, accounting for 38.7 percent of advertisements in 1752-69 and 38.8 percent in 1772-76 (cf. Tague, 2015; Smith, 2026). This was followed closely by rewards in the 10 to under 15s range (roughly half a guinea), which increased slightly in proportional terms from 34.7 percent to 37.2 percent. This suggests that across both periods, owners broadly agreed what constituted a reasonable amount for the return of their dog. Smith (2026) notes that reward levels in lost-property advertisements tended to cluster around recognisable customary sums, although higher rewards were sometimes associated with particular breeds or trained animals. Larger sums – particularly in the 15 to under 21s range – declined proportionally from 15.6 percent in the earlier period to 9.9 percent in the later period, while rewards of 21s and above (a guinea or more) remained rare across both periods. Rewards under 5s were also rare, although their proportion increased between periods from 1.3 percent to 5 percent. The proportion of advertisements offering unspecified rewards declined between both periods from 5.6 percent to 3.3percent, suggesting a growing preference for owners clearly stating their financial offer for restitution. However, in these cases where no specific sum was mentioned, the language – such as 'handsomely rewarded'

[6] This breakdown reflects 18th-century British currency, where £1 equalled 20 shillings and a guinea was worth 21 shillings. Common reward amounts included 5s (a crown) and mid-range sums like 10s or 10s 6d (half a guinea). Higher bands such as '15s–Under 21s' and '21s–Under 42s' capture near-guinea and full-guinea rewards, while 'Over 42s' includes the most generous offers. The data have been grouped into these bands to smooth out variation and capture rewards of similar value. For example, rewards for Five Shillings, One Crown, or Five Shillings and Threepence are categorised together, reflecting their practical equivalence in incentive terms.

and ’rewarded to their content’– suggested that the reward would be a significant amount of money. In other cases, the promised reward was framed in emotional or social terms, such as the August 1774 notice that appealed to the conscience of the finder by stating that:

> ...it is presumed no Gentleman or Lady will keep the Dog after this publick Notice, but on the contrary will secure it, if offered to Sale, or brought to them, and send it as before directed, for which they shall receive the hearty Thanks of a Lady (*Daily Advertiser*, 2 August 1774:2).

Still others implied flexible but fair compensation, offering to reward the finder with an undisclosed amount ’for their trouble and Expense’ or ’above Five Shillings’.

Owners sometimes limited the financial reward and downplayed the value of their missing dog. This strategic devaluation acted as pre-emptive bargaining control – much like saying ‘no greater reward will be offered’ – to deter inflated demands and opportunistic bargaining. For example, in some cases owners would emphasise the dog’s old age, as in the statements: ‘The Bitch is old, and no more will be offered’ or ‘Note, he is an old Dog, and will be no more advertised’ (*Daily Advertiser*, 23 April 1760:2; 7 March 1752:2). In other cases, the dog was described as being both old and in poor physical condition, such as the one described as being '...old and very much battered... now of no Value or Use...[and afflicted with a]...large Swelling under his Tail’ (*Daily Advertiser,* 20 January 1752:2). Still others stressed that the dog had little or no practical or commercial value, using such phrases as ‘...entirely useless and not worth keeping’ (*Daily Advertiser*, 1 December 1773:2), or described animals as ’cast-off’, ’not broke’, or ’never used to any kind of game’. Dogs described in these latter two ways were thereby framed as having no use for either sport or labour. A more emotionally coloured version of this tactic emphasised that the dog held no commercial or practical worth, only sentimental value to its owner. Advertisers sometimes claimed the animal was ‘of no Use but as a House Dog’ or had ‘no value whatsoever to any Body’ apart from the person seeking its return (*Daily Advertiser*, 3 March 1772:2; 1 September 1774:2). Some notices even sought to diminish the resale value of their ’lost’ and stolen dogs by highlighting their undesirable traits or behavioural issues, noting, for example, that ‘...he has faults which must be very disagreeable to strangers’ or, in one case, claiming outright that ‘it is supposed the Dog is mad’ (*Daily Advertiser*, 3 September 1772; 1 February 1772). Together, these various tactics aimed to strip the dog in question of objective market value, thus reinforcing the idea that its recovery was a matter of personal attachment rather than any material worth.[7] At the same time, as Smith (2026) notes of lost-property advertising more

[7] In four advertisements, the loss of the dog was explicitly linked to the potential dismissal of a servant, thus appealing to public sympathy by emphasising the personal consequences of the dog not being recovered. One notice warned that “two Servants are likely to lose their Places by the Accident”, while another pleaded that “the poor Servant will certainly lose her Place” if the dog was not returned before her master’s arrival (*Daily Advertiser*, 1 February 1774:2; 2 January 1775:2). A third stated that “the Servant to whose Care he was consigned will lose his Place if he is not found”, and the fourth explained simply that the dog “was lost by a Servant” (*Daily Advertiser*, 3 February 1776:2; 2 September 1776:2).

broadly, such notices reveal a tension between professed limited value and the labour and expense of pursuing recovery through print. This tension is clearly visible in the above notices, where the advertisers downplayed the usefulness or market value of their dogs while offering relatively significant sums in contemporary terms for their recovery.

Finally, a small subset of advertisements – 16 of the 383 in the sample (4.4%) - in the latter period indicated that owners offered rewards not for the return of their dogs, butfor information leading to their recovery. The sums offered for information leading to recovery were comparable to those offered for a direct return, with 9 notices (57%) offering 5 shillings, 5 notices (28.6%) offering half a guinea, and 2 notices (14.3%) offering a guinea or more. However, what is significant about these advertisements is that they do not rely on the owner passively receiving their dog back from the finder, but, instead, depict an active process in which the owner – no doubt assisted by a constable – follows leads to locate and reclaim the animal. In such cases, then, the purpose of the reward shifted from simple return to the possibility of criminal pursuit, thereby increasing the likelihood the person found with the dog would be identified and prosecuted as the thief.

An even more important shift in tone appears in 20 advertisements (5.2%) of the latter sample from the same period, which offered financial rewards specifically for the successful conviction of the thief. These sums were usually much higher than those offered for either return or recovery, reflecting not only the owner's desire for justice but also their recognition that securing a conviction required greater risk, effort, and public cooperation – and thus justified more substantial compensation (cf. Styles, 1989). Whereas the most common rewards for return clustered around 5s to half a guinea, rewards for conviction frequently rose to several guineas (some reached ten guineas), indicating a clear hierarchy of incentives linked to escalating levels of participation in the prosecution process. In doing so, such advertisements typically followed a clear two-tiered structure: promising a modest sum for the return of the dog, and a substantially larger amount for information leading to a conviction. For example, one notice placed by ‘Mr. Lecount, Sadler, near Egremont-House, Piccadilly’ stated that whoever brought his ‘small black and white Terrier bitch, answers to the name of Fury...[to his home]...shall receive Half a Guinea Reward'. However, ‘...if she should be detained after the above Advertisement, whoever will give Information...of the Persons who stole or detained the aforesaid Pointer, so as he or they may be legally convicted, shall receive Ten Guineas Reward’ (*Daily Advertiser*, 2 December 1775:2). Another similarly declared:

> Whoever brings [the lost dog: “...a large speckled Pointer Dog, answers to the name of Wag”] to Richard Twigg...within 14 Days from the above Date, shall receive One Guinea. If the Dog is not then restored…whoever will give Information… so as he or they may be legally convicted, shall receive Ten Guineas Reward (*Daily Advertiser*, 2 March 1775:2).

Yet another advert, dated 1 September 1774, promised ‘a Guinea Reward’ for the return of ‘a small yellow and white Spaniel Bitch’ that had been ‘lost on Friday last at Newington Causeway, between the Hours of Six or Seven o’Clock in the Evening’. Alternatively, ‘...if

any Person will give Information where the above Bitch is detained...[they would]...on Conviction thereof, receive Five Guineas Reward' (*Daily Advertiser*, 1 September 1774:2). Together, these examples reflect a growing determination not merely to recover 'lost' and stolen dogs, but to pursue legal redress, with rewards carefully tiered to reflect the perceived gravity of theft and the additional burdens involved in securing a conviction. This structure closely resembles the statutory and proclamation rewards used in this period, which similarly incentivised prosecution to conviction (Clayton and Shoemaker, 2022).

Conclusions

In this article, I have explored the culture of reward notices for 'lost' and stolen dogs in mid-eighteenth-century England, using newspaper advertisements as a lens through which to examine broader questions of property, justice, and public participation. In doing so, my analysis has shown how dog owners used reward advertisements to pursue recovery or justice, drawing on established conventions of reward culture to assert ownership, shape public involvement, and respond to shifting legal frameworks. From the analyses, four main points emerge.

First, the advertisements remained relatively consistent by following a clear formula: a brief account of when and where the dog went missing, along with a detailed physical description and a specified return location and reward. Most notices also referred to non-financial incentives, such as assurances that 'no greater reward will be offered', promises of 'no questions asked', or warnings that the dog would 'not be advertised again'. Similarly, across both periods most owners described their dogs as 'lost', with explicit claims of theft remaining relatively rare. This trend became even more pronounced after the passing of the 1770 Dog Stealing Act when the proportion of advertisements explicitly alleging theft fell by more than one-half in proportional terms. This pattern suggests that across both sample periods, owners were keen to keep their options open, encouraging the dog's return in exchange for a set reward and other non-financial incentives. They did not make direct accusations that they either could not be certain of proving or which might risk escalating into a formal legal dispute. In this respect, the language of loss functioned less as a *literal description* of events than as a *pragmatic strategy*, allowing advertisers to balance the possibility of recovery against the risks of accusation.

Non-financial incentives were found in 'lost' and stolen dog advertisements across both periods, although they became slightly less common over time. The most deployed were warnings that 'no greater reward will be offered' or that the dog 'won't be advertised again', both of which implied urgency and a firm limit on any negotiation over the stated reward. In contrast, the phrase 'no questions asked' quickly fell out of use, reflecting growing caution among owners due to the risk of being seen to compound a felony under common law. Reflecting the 1770 Act, owners came to rely somewhat more heavily on threats of prosecution in their advertisements, the proportion of which increased between

the two periods. In a small number of cases, owners went further still, implying knowledge of the perpetrator or that an active search for the missing dog was underway. Such notices marked an important shift in emphasis; from simply offering a reward and non-financial incentives for a return of a 'lost' and stolen dog to threatening formal legal sanctions against the person that had possession of the dog. While both strategies aimed at recovering the lost dog, the latter framed the situation much more explicitly as a criminal matter, invoking the authority of law rather than the appeal of compensation within the existing framework of the advertisements.

In contrast, financial incentives, remained remarkably stable across both periods. Although dogs were often described as having little or no market value, owners nevertheless offered monetary rewards for their return, reflecting their practical and social significance in urban households. In an urban context, dogs could serve as guard animals, as markers of household status, or as companions, helping explain why owners were willing to pay for their recovery despite their limited commercial worth (Almeroth-Williams, 2018). During both periods, almost all owners offered some level of financial reward in their advertisements, most commonly five shillings, closely followed by sums under fifteen shillings (roughly equivalent to the half guinea that Hogarth promised for the return of Pugg in 1730). The two ranges of rewards predominated, suggesting a shared understanding among contemporaries of what constituted a fair or reasonable offer for the return of a 'lost' or stolen dog. More generous sums between fifteen and twenty-one shillings or a guinea were less frequent and declined over time while rewards of more than a guinea remained relatively rare. Meanwhile, advertisements that did not specify an exact amount became less common, apparently reflecting a growing preference among owners for offering clear financial terms for recovery.

Overall, the evidence on financial rewards across both periods points to a striking degree of continuity: owners appeared to know what to offer, thereby drawing on shared assumptions about appropriate compensation and relying on established norms to facilitate return of their 'lost' and stolen dogs. Alongside this consistency, however, some owners adopted subtler rhetorical strategies to reinforce the finality of their offer. While most owners offered financial rewards that conformed to shared expectations, some nevertheless sought to further qualify the offers by deliberately diminishing to the thieves the value of their 'lost' and stolen dog. Similar to stating that 'no greater reward will be offered' such advertisements signalled that the dog in question was of limited market value and, therefore, that the reward offered was final. Owners did this by claiming that the dog was old, in poor physical condition, had sentimental value, or some combination of them. This approach suggests that some owners sought to discourage negotiation or theft by presenting their dog as unworthy of resale but still worth recovering.

Finally, the analyses indicate the latter period witnessed the emergence of more complex and conditional reward structures, signalling a shift from *passive recovery* toward a more *active pursuit of justice*. While advertisements continued to offer straightforward sums for the return of 'lost' and stolen dogs, a small number of owners went further by also promising payment leading to their recovery, suggesting that the owner would undertake retrieval of the dog. A slightly larger group went further still,

offering substantially higher rewards for the successful conviction of the thief. These latter notices followed a two-tiered structure, with a modest sum offered for return and a much larger sum for evidence leading to prosecution. Such advertisements reveal a growing determination among some owners to pursue not just restitution, but formal justice; offering rewards not just to restore missing dogs to their owners, but to apprehend criminals and see them punished.

In sum, the patterns explored in this article reveal how advertisements for 'lost' and stolen dogs functioned not only as practical tools for recovery, but also as structured appeals that articulated *forms of value*: legal, social, and emotional. More broadly, they demonstrate that the history of crime and restitution cannot be understood solely through formal legal records or clearly defined categories of property. Reward notices for dogs show how practices of recovery, negotiation, and prosecution operated in the ambiguous space between property and companionship, where animals were simultaneously economic assets, working partners, and objects of emotional attachment. It is impossible, however, to know how often the advertisements discussed above resulted in the successful return of the dog in question due to the passage of time. However, what can be seen in the adverts is how owners crafted them by drawing on shared conventions and formulaic phrases, adapting them to suit their aims, whether that was simply to recover the dog in question or to pursue the arrest and punishment of the thief. Taken together, these findings highlight the persistence of reward-based strategies for recovery alongside formal legal mechanisms. Even as policing structures developed and legal frameworks evolved, individuals continued to rely on the press and financial incentives to negotiate the return of lost property, suggesting the enduring importance of non-judicial forms of resolution.

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