

Claude Du Vall (Duval)

Claude Duval was probably the most dashing of the highwaymen.

The source of most of the stories concerning Duval is a book by William Pope written in 1670, shortly after Duval's execution. How much of the book is fact is uncertain.

Duval was born in Normandy in 1643, the son of miller. At the age of fourteen Duval was in Rouen, working as a stable-boy. In Rouen he was hired by a group of English royalists to tend their horses. When Charles II was restored to the throne, Duval returned to England as a footman to a nobleman, from whom he had clearly learned gentlemen's manners. By 1666 he was mentioned by name as a highwayman. He dressed fashionably and was gallant with women.

The best known episode of Duval's career was written by Pope. Duval held up a coach with a nobleman and his lady. Seeing they were about to be captured, and determined not to appear afraid, the lady took out a flageolet (a type of flute) and played. Duval took out one of his own and played as well. Duval commented to the noble that his wife played extremely well, and would, no doubt, dance just as well. Duval then asked her to dance. They danced on the heath and when they were done Duval escorted her back to the coach. There he remarked that her husband had neglected to pay for the music, and stole four hundred pounds from him.

He was captured at the Hole-in-the-Wall tavern in London's Strand when he was drunk and sent to Newgate. He was executed at Tyburn on 21 January 1670

