

Document A: Thomas Preston

On Monday Night about Eight o'Clock two Soldiers were attacked and beat. But the Party of the Towns-People in order to carry Matters to the utmost Length, broke into two Meeting-Houses and rang the Alarm Bells, which I supposed was for Fire as usual, but was soon undeceived. About Nine some of the Guard came to and informed me, the Town Inhabitants were assembling to attack the Troops, and that the Bells were ringing as the Signal for that Purpose and not for Fire, and the Beacon intended to be fired to bring in the distant People of the Country. This, as I was Captain of the Day, occasioned my repairing immediately to the Main-Guard. In my Way there I saw the People in great Commotion, and heard them use the most cruel and horrid Threats against the Troops. In a few Minutes after I reached the Guard, about an hundred People passed it and went towards the Custom-House where the King's Money is lodged. They immediately surrounded the Sentinel posted there, and with Clubs and other weapons threatened to execute their Vengeance on him. I was soon informed by a Townsman their Intention was to carry off the Soldier from his Post and probably murder him. On which I desired him to return for further Intelligence, and he soon came back and assured me he heard the Mob declare they would murder him. This I feared might be a Prelude to their plundering the King's Chest. I immediately sent a non-commissioned Officer and twelve Men to protect both the Sentinel and the King's Money, and very soon followed myself to prevent (if possible) all Disorder; fearing lest the Officer and Soldiery, by the Insults and Provocations of the Rioters, should be thrown off their Guard and commit some rash Act. They soon rushed through the People, and by charging their Bayonets in half Circle, kept them at a little distance. Nay, so far was I from intending the Death of any Person that I suffered the Troops to go to the Spot where the unhappy Affair took Place without any Loading in their Pieces; nor did I ever give Orders for loading them. This remiss Conduct in me perhaps merits Censure; yet it is Evidence, resulting from the Nature of Things, which is the best and surest that can be offered, that my Intention was not to act offensively, but the contrary Part, and that not without Compulsion. The Mob still increased and were more outrageous, striking their Clubs or Bludgeons one against another, and calling out, "come on you Rascals, you bloody Backs, you Lobster Scoundrels; fire if you dare, G-d damn you, fire and be damn'd; we know you dare not," and much more such Language was used. At this Time I was between the Soldiers and the Mob, parleying with, and endeavouring all in my Power to persuade them to retire peaceably; but to no Purpose. They advanced to the Points of the Bayonets, struck some of them and even the Muzzles of the Pieces, and seemed to be endeavouring to close with the Soldiers. On which some well-behaved Persons asked me if the Guns were charged: I replied, yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the Men to fire; I answered no, by no Means; observing to them that I was advanced before the Muzzles of the Men's Pieces, and must fall a Sacrifice if they fired; that the Soldiers were upon the Half cock and charged Bayonets, and my giving the Word fire, under those Circumstances, would prove me no Officer. While I was thus speaking, one of the Soldiers having received a severe Blow with a Stick, stept a little on one Side, and instantly fired, on which turning to and asking him why he fired without Orders, I was struck with a Club on my Arm, which for sometime deprived me of the Use of it, which Blow, had it been placed on my Head, most probably would have destroyed me. On this

a general Attack was made on the Men by a great Number of heavy Clubs, and Snow-Balls being thrown at them, by which all our Lives were in imminent Danger; some Persons at the same Time from behind calling out, "Damn your Bloods, why don't you fire?" Instantly three or four of the Soldiers fired, one after another, and directly after three more in the same Confusion and Hurry.

The Mob then ran away, except three unhappy Men who instantly expired, in which number was Mr. Gray, at whose Rope-Walk the prior Quarrel took Place; one more is since dead, three others are dangerously, and four slightly wounded. The Whole of this melancholy Affair was transacted in almost 20 minutes. On my asking the Soldiers why they fired without Orders, they said they heard the Word "Fire," and supposed it came from me. This might be the Case, as many of the Mob called out "Fire, fire," but I assured the Men that I gave no such Order, that my Words were, "Don't fire, stop your Firing:" In short, it was scarce possible for the Soldiers to know who said fire, or don't fire, or stop your Firing.

Source: *The Case of Capt. Preston of the 29th Regiment*, Public Advertiser (London), April 28, 1770

Document B: Samuel Drowne

Samuel Drowne, of Boston, of lawful age, testifieth and saith, that bout nine of the clock of the evening of the fifth day of March current, standing at his own door in Cornhill, saw about fourteen or fifteen soldiers of the 29th regiment, who came from Murray's barrack, some of whom were armed with naked cutlasses, swords, or bayonets, others with clubs, fire shovels, or tongs, and came upon the inhabitants of the town, then standing or walking in Corhill, and abused some and violently assaulted others as they met them, most of whom were without so much as a stick in their hands to defend themselves, as the deponent very clearly could discern, it being moon-light, and himself being one of the assaulted persons. All or most of the said soldiers he saw go by the way of Cornhill, Crooked lan, and Royal Exchange lane into King street, and there followed them, and soon discovered them to be quarrelling and fighting with people whom they saw there, which the deponent thinks were not more than a dozen, when the most of them were gentlemen, standing together a little soldiers came there first, armed as aforesaid. Of those dozen people, the Town-house upon the Exchange. At the appearance of those soldiers so armed, the most of the twelve persons went off, some of them being first assaulted. After which the said soldiers were observed by the deponent to go towards the main guard, from whence were at the same time issuing and coming into King street, five soldiers of said guard a corporal armed with firelocks, who called out to the fore-mentioned soldiers armed with cutlasses, &c., and said to them, "Go away," on which they dispersed and went out of King street, some one way and some another — by this time were collected together in King street about two hundred people and then the deponent stood upon the steps of the Exchange tavern, being the next house to the Custom-house; and soon after saw Capt. Preston, whom he well knew, with a number of soliders armed with firelocks, draw up near the west corner of the Custom-house; and at that instant the deponent thinks so great a part of the people were dispersed at the sight of the armed soliders, as that not more than twenty or thirty remained in King street; those who did remain being mostly sailors and other persons meanly dressed, called out to the armed soldiers and dared them to fire, upon which the deponent heard Capt. Preston say to the soldiers, "Damn your bloods! why don't you fire?" The soldiers not regarding those words of their captain, he immediately said, "Fire." Upon which they fired irregularly, pointing their guns variously in a part of a circle as they stood: during the time of the soliders firing, the deponent saw the flashes of two gunes fired from the Custom-house, one of which was out of a window of the chamber westward of the balcony and the other from the balcony, the gun which he clearly discerned being pointed through the ballisters, and the person who held the gun in a stooping posture, withdraw himself into the house, having a handkerchief or some kind of cloth over his face. After this the deponent assisted in carrying off the dead and wounded, as soon as the soldiers would permit the people so to do, for at first they were cruel enough to obstruct the carrying them off.

SAMUEL DROWNE.

Source: Summary of the sworn testimony of Samuel Drowne, March 16, 1770.