

Account of Purley on Thames

Murder most Foul

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The Murder of William Langspey 1489

In 1409 on the feast day of St Paul the Apostle (29th June), William Langspey was murdered in Purley. On the Monday after the feast of the Conversion of St Paul (25th January 1410) the coroner, Thomas Blankpayn held an inquest into his death. The jury was made up of men who in modern terms would have been regarded as the witnesses, they were Adam atte Hache, Thomas Liddard, Roger atte Mulli, William Skynner, William atte Rasshe, John Hoteday, John Cowpere, Geoffrey Mulleward, William Gerard, Thomas Cole, William atte Welle and P...is Lylye (his name is difficult to decipher). They avowed that on this particular Sunday John and Gilbert Percy lay in wait like highwaymen, 'after the setting of the sun' and killed William with two sticks worth two pence. They robbed him of eight pence and then escaped. At the time John Percy had a horse with saddle and bridle worth 12s 4d and a bundle of cloth stockings with blue thread worth 40s and Gilbert Percy had a horse with saddle and bridle worth 10s. The coroner ruled that all these chattels should remain in the custody of the bailiff of the Abbot of Reading.

This information is gathered from a document in the National Archives reference C258/39 no 9 and was transcribed and translated for us by Dr Steve Clark. It throws some interesting sidelights on the way justice worked in the early 15th century. The severity of the crime appears to be related to the total value of the goods and chattels of the criminals, rather than what they did! In this case it totals £3-2-6 plus the amount stolen, but this 8d has to be doubled as there were two assailants so the final total comes to £3-3-10. It is also interesting to have the names of twelve ordinary local men as documents of the period usually refer only to persons of rank.

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