

Clophill through the years

Real Highwaymen at the Flying horse.

The legend of Dick Turpin may be a myth but there were highwaymen at the **Flying Horse** in 1751. On the day of Ampthill Fair, 21st April, three men came to the **Flying Horse** where the publican was Abraham Perrin. They pretended to be horse dealers who travelled from fair to fair. They spoke of their fear of highwaymen. They spent a total of twelve shillings on themselves, including malt liquor and hot punch before going to bed, and stabling for their horses.



After staying the night, they rode off at six in the morning for Ampthill where they probably stayed for a few hours. By eleven o'clock they had reached a public house in Houghton Conquest, probably the **Butcher's Arms**, later the **Knife and Cleaver**. There they had cold roast beef for breakfast and enquired what they could have for dinner. The landlady told them that she had a sheep hanging up in the shop but as her husband, the butcher, was away at Ampthill fair she was unable to cut it up. One of the three men said that he would take off a shoulder which he did very skilfully.

About four o'clock they left and starting robbing travellers on the Ampthill to Bedford road near Houghton Conquest. One of them had a blunderbuss with which he threatened people and they robbed four people of a total of £37 14s.

When the robbed people arrived at Bedford they reported the crimes and a hue and cry reached Silsoe at six o'clock the next morning.

In the meantime the robbers had ridden to the Ampthill – Woburn road near Millbrook and robbed two farmers of about £30 and a joiner of few shillings and his watch. At about nine o'clock they called at an ale house in Maulden and each drank a glass of gin. Then on to the **George** at Silsoe where they stayed on horseback whilst they drank three pints of wine and ate a crust of bread.

When they had travelled about a quarter of a mile, the one who had butchered the sheep was shot in the back with the blunderbuss. He was then dragged through a gate and shot in the head with a pistol. A farmer from Barton who rode by reported that he had heard the gun shots but had thought that it was somebody shooting pigeons.

The Toll-Gate man say the farmer had not passed two minutes before the highwayman came. The first horse that came was the horse of the man shot, which the Toll gate man would have turned back, but the men bade him let pass, they would pay for him. They seemed in much haste, but stayed to take their change.

The horse was later found in Luton. The owner said that the man who had stolen the horse, and later died, had been a servant of his. Why the other two highway men had killed him or whether they were captured is not known.

The above is based on a transcript of a letter from Philip Birt, vicar of Flitton, to Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, husband of Jemima, Marchioness Grey by Mary Phillips (the author of The Clophill Story) held in the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Office.