

## Highwayman account @ Sourton 24<sup>th</sup> September 1750

That this stretch of the highway was formerly the haunt of real highwayman there can be no doubt, and it might have been somewhere on the road in this general vicinity that an agent of the Duke of Bedford was attacked and robbed one day in the late summer of 1750, as reported by the *Sherborne Mercury* on 24th September of that year —

On Thursday last a Servant of his Grace the Duke of Bedford, going from Oakhampton to Tavistock, was attack'd on the Road by two Fellows, who were indifferently mounted, one in a Sailor's Habit, the other like a Husbandman; they robb'd him of his Money, which 'tis said was five Guineas, and two Half Guineas in Gold, 18 Shillings in Silver, and his Watch; after that one of the Villains said to the other, that if they did not kill the Dog he would discover them, and they might be hang'd; so one of them clapp'd a Pistol to his ear and snapped it, but it did not go off; he snapp'd it a second time and then it only flash'd in the Pan; then the Rogue put fresh powder in the Pan and it went off, but providentially, either by the shaking of his Hand, or the Concern the poor Man was under, it happen'd that the Ball only graz'd on the side of his Face, and took off part of his Chin: However, the poor Man dropp'd, and the Villains thought he had been killed, and so went off. A Hue and Cry is out after them, but they are not yet taken.

The report of the incident is of interest for another reason, for it reveals the origin of the turn of phrase "**flash in the pan**". The agent was obviously lucky to escape with his life, and a few weeks after the incident a substantial reward was offered for the apprehension of the perpetrators of the crime, notice of which was published in the *Sherborne Mercury* on 15th October 1750 —

### REWARD OFFERED

Whereas Thomas Moore, of Illford in the County of Essex, was robb'd on Thursday the 13th day of September last, near Oakhampton...by two Persons on Horseback...This is to give NOTICE, That if any Person or Persons can find out who the Villains were, that committed this Robbery, and can apprehend them, so that they may be brought to Justice, shall receive ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD, upon their Conviction; or if but one of them can be apprehended, shall receive FIFTY POUNDS, upon his Conviction, of Mr Wynne, Steward to his Grace, the Duke of Bedford, at Tavistock, in Devonshire. By Order of his Grace the Duke of BEDFORD, Bedford-House, this 2d of October, 1750. R. Butcher, Steward to his Grace.

Whether either or both of the culprits were eventually brought to justice I know not, for I could discover nothing further on the matter from any subsequent editions of the newspaper.

In the year of 970 . . . SOURTON was known as SWURAN TUNE

which meant back then . . . THE FARM by the HILL.

The lane, just passed the Church is called HALL LANE and the former as Drift Lane.



Singed by

*Tom Soby*

