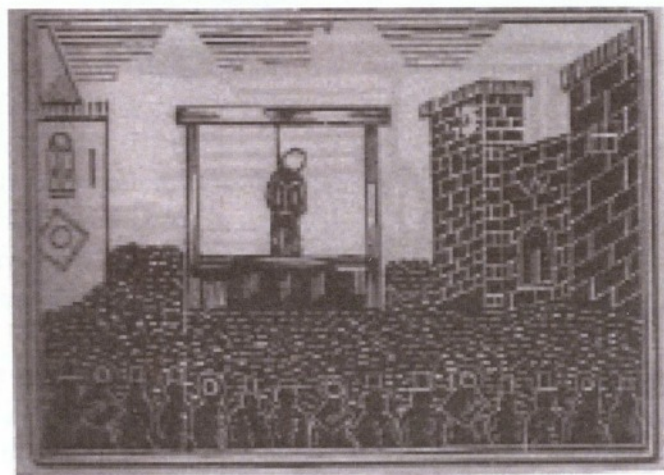


HIGHWAY ROBBERY

A contributor to Suffolk Review quoted a piece from the Ipswich Journal of 1725 to demonstrate how hazardous roads were at that time due to their poor condition and the presence of highwaymen. In November that year, when the Honourable Price Devereux and his wife were travelling from Ipswich to Sudbourne Hall, they were attacked by two highwaymen near Staverton Park. Devereux was the son of the ninth Viscount Hereford, and married to Elizabeth Martin. See the family tree in Issue 16 of this publication, dated Summer 2011. In 1740 he became the tenth Viscount and sold both Christchurch Mansion and the Sudbourne estate a few years later. The couple were in their coach and four accompanied by a servant on horseback. The two highwaymen jumped out and demanded they stop, but being refused they dismounted the servant by knocking him down, discharged their pistols at the coach, missed and rode off stealing the servant's mare. Devereux offered a handsome reward for the apprehension of the two men and the recovery of the mare, which was described in detail. The quotation ends with a note that one of the highwaymen, Thomas Watts was found guilty and sentenced to be executed. However the story of his capture in the next edition of the newspaper makes good reading. Thomas Curtis, alias Watts, was captured at Brockford near Wetheringset just off the road between Ipswich and Scole in Norfolk (today's A 140). The two highwaymen left one of their horses at Melton and rode that night to Brockford and lodged at a public house there. The next morning Curtis was ordered by his accomplice, who reputedly was named Howard, to feed the stolen mare, but Howard perceived that they had been discovered, ran to the stable, took out his horse and cried to the Constable who was in pursuit of them, 'That's the man that stole the mare' and made his escape. Curtis, greatly surprised to see the Constable at his heels, drew a pistol, fired and narrowly missed, whereupon an old woman seized 'the skirts of his coat' and held him fast until the Constable closed with him. Curtis then brought out a knife and in the ensuing struggle wounded the Constable in the head and foot, but Devereux's servant and others present soon mastered Curtis and took him before a Justice who committed him to goal. Curtis was aged about nineteen and had been born in Chelmsford. He seemed to lament his unhappy condition and wished the Assizes were imminent so his life would soon be at an end. The horse left at Melton had also been stolen so there were two indictments against him. At Bury Assizes in March 1726 Thomas Watts was found guilty and sentenced to be executed at Ipswich on 9th April. William Younger was suspected to have been his accomplice but was cleared only to be tried on another indictment for horse stealing, found guilty and sentenced to be hanged at Bury. The last mention of the case was on 9th April 1726 when the newspaper announced that the execution of Watts was to take place that day and afterwards an account of his death, with his last dying speech and confession would be published, price three-half-pence.



typical image seen on broadsheets of the time

Lamentations of a Sinner (first and last verses)

*O Lord, turn not they face from me,
Who lie in woeful state,
Lamenting all my sinful life
Before thy mercy-gate.*

*Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask
This is the total sum;
For mercy, Lord, is all my suit:
Lord, let they mercy come.*