

HIGHWAYMEN ON SHOTOVER

In days gone by, highway robbery was regarded as a natural hazard of travelling and was so common that it often went unrecorded unless the sum involved was particularly high or the person robbed was well-known. The following two instances fall into this category.

About 1660 John Cottington, a 20 year old highwayman, got to hear that an army pay wagon was to travel from London to Oxford and on to Gloucester with d&,000 for the troops quartered there. He lay in wait alone behind a hedge where the road began its steep climb up to Shotover (probably about where Acremead Road joins Old Road now), and, as the wagon rolled slowly past, leapt out, pointing pistols at the heads of the waggoner and the escort of three soldiers. They assuming that no one would be mad enough to try to rob them single handed and that there must therefore be a whole gang of highwaymen behind the hedge, fled for their lives and left John Cottington to help himself to the £4,000 and to make his escape unhindered.

In October 1739 Charles Wesley, the Methodist hymn writer, was travelling alone on horseback from Oxford to London when, on top of Shotover, his horse went lame and he was forced to proceed very slowly. A highwayman appeared and demanded his money, so Wesley handed over his purse, contain Ing thirty shillings. "Have you no more?" asked the highwayman, so Wesley put his hand into a pocket and gave the man some halfpence. Again the highwayman asked the question: Wesley had thirty guineas in another pocket which he did not want to lose, but he could not lie, so he asked the highwayman to search for himself. This bluff worked, the highwayman assuming it was another way of saying that he had no more, so Charles Wesley was allowed-to go on his way to London with his thirty guineas intact.