

## **HIGHWAY ROBBERY AT MANWOOD HILL**

**24 October 1789**

Samuel Deeks and his wife a happy, young couple from Abberton and their friend Sheppard Stammers of Peldon were returning on horseback from Colchester Market in the early evening. Samuel and his wife were on the same horse. They were making their way uphill from Manwood Bridge and in the wooded areas on both sides of the Mersea Road three highwaymen, footpads, emerged from the woods and pointed a horse pistol at them. Mr Deeks gave the robbers his money but even so one of the villains fired a horse pistol at Mr Deeks. The ball passed close to Samuel's face leaving burn marks on his cheek and throat then passing through his shoulder to become lodged in his wife's head, she was found unconscious forty-five minutes later in a pool of blood.

In those days such criminals made their living by preying on vulnerable travellers along quiet roads and country lanes, usually operated in areas where there was plenty of cover putting their prey at severe disadvantage and an easy target. There were few banks and no credit cards or cheques so many people carried their money around with them. Such footpads were not the 'Robin Hood' type figures who gave to the poor but ruthless robbers who had little pity or concern for their helpless victims.

No regular police force, the only form of policing or crime detection would have been under the control of the parish constable, an unpaid volunteer who may have been pressed into service for a 12-month period. Despite a reward of £55. £4000 today no arrests were ever made for the murder of Mrs Deeks. In this particular case the culprits were never apprehended nor any further information of Mr Deeks and his friend from Peldon.

***Adapted from a book in the local studies section at Colchester library.***