

William Fairall

William Fairall Infamous criminal

William Fairall was one of the senior members of the Hawkhurst Gang and is known to have been with Thomas Kingsmill at Poole when the Customs House was raided. He was eventually captured after the Galley and Chater murders and tried at the Old Bailey. He received the death sentence and was hung at Tyburn on April 26, 1749. His body was later taken and hung in chains at his home village of Horsmonden in what is now known as Gibbet Lane. The Highwayman pub in the village was named after him.

The first reference to the Hawkhurst Gang was in 1735 showed them as being the "Holkhurst Genge". It was the most notorious of the Kent gangs and were feared for miles round their home base of the Village of Hawkhurst where their headquarters, The Oak And Ivy Inn still stands. The Gang, in their heyday, ranged the full length of the South Coast although they were perfectly situated for working the Marshes which begin three miles from Hawkhurst. It was claimed that when needed for a smuggling run, 500 mounted and armed men could be assembled in the village within an hour. They were also only 13 miles from Rye, one of their favourite haunts. It was not uncommon for the Gang to be seen in the Mermaid Inn in Rye (the Inn still stands and is basically unchanged to this day) where they would sit and drink with loaded guns and pistols on the tables. They looked after their own but had no mercy for anyone that interfered or got in their way.

More information

In 1749 the Hawkhurst gang were tried for the murder of a customs official and witness. Smuggling was active along the south coast. Tea, wine, silk, lace, jewellery, spices coffee and chocolate were smuggled in. In 1748 local Master carpenter got involved with the Hawkhurst gang. He went to Guernsey for tea and brandy and his boat was impounded at Poole. An attempt by the gang to recover the goods was successful and the bounty was distributed amongst the smugglers. A witness Daniel Chater was arrested and held in custody at Chichester. It was decided to send Chater with an escort, William Galley who had a letter to give to Major Battin, a Justice of the Peace for Sussex. The pair stopped at Rowlands Castle where unsuspectingly told members of the gang at a public house about the whole matter.

The gang decided to move against Chater and Galley and just after going to bed the gang appeared in their room and dragged them out of bed. They were then tied under the smuggler's horses and dragged for a number of miles. Galley was repeatedly stabbed with a knife while Chater was taken to Lady Holt Park in Rowlands Castle and where they tried to strangle him. As he would not die quickly the gang then hung him down the well and threw stones until he was quite dead.

The Duke of Richmond did everything he could to capture this gang. They were eventually captured and tried in January 1749 at the Guildhall. All 7 men were found guilty and all except William Jackson who died in his cell the night before were hung on the Broyle and their bodies were hung around the county as a word of warning to other potential smugglers.

More information

The Old Bailey Trial on 4th April 1749