

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 11th December 2008

The Long Compton Witchcraft Murder

Richard Ratcliffe

This was a memorable talk partly because it had a story-like format. The enthusiasm of the speaker for his subject was very obvious, possibly because Ann Tennant, the murdered person, was his great-great grandmother. She was married to John who was variously described as an agricultural labourer, butcher and shoemaker. Eighty-year-old Ann met her death at the hands of James Hayward at Long Compton in 1875. He had been working in the harvest field that day and drunk quantities of beer, a factor in his state of mind and choice of weapon. He firmly believed that he was under the influence of witchcraft and that she was a witch. That this was a motivating factor appears clear from reports of his vow to seek out and kill 15 or so other witches he had identified.

The subsequent inquest was held at the Red Lion in front of a jury of men from the village. They could easily have been swayed by the assailant's wild stares and failure to answer questions directly. He was highly superstitious and said to become excitable after consuming beer. James Hayward was found not guilty on the grounds of insanity and therefore held in custody at Broadmoor Lunatic Asylum.

This talk was much more than the revelation of a murder case. The painstaking research into family history revealed a lot about those who took part in the trial, village life at that time and the subsequent extensive Press coverage, especially in the *Daily Mail*. Despite the fact that Long Compton is close to the Rollright Stones and their links to legend, there would seem to have been no justification for the belief that Ann was a witch. The need for a measured approach to this and the rest of the story was part of the attraction of a topic that in itself encouraged a large attendance by our members.

Thursday 8th January 2009

Eviscerating, Embalming and Boiling: Funeral Practices in Medieval England c. 1066-1509

Rowena E. Archer

This lecture was all about on-going research into Royal Wills and their subject matter of death, dying and funerals. Investigation of these makes it possible to get an understanding of a medieval funeral.

Rowena Archer began back at the time of William the Conqueror, whose own funeral was an undignified end to a great life. By contrast Henry VII lay in state for nine days and was laid to rest amid much pomp. In general funerals were found to reflect religious attitudes prevailing at the time. In any case after the Black Death there was an enhanced need for decent burials.