

## **JOHN CLARK (Butcher) – Last man to be hanged in public for sheep stealing.**

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1830 three prisoners were hanged at Lincoln Castle, John Clarke of Benington for sheep stealing together with Timothy Brammer and Thomas Strong both for burglary.

John Clarke 44 a Benington Butcher was tried at the Lent assizes before Baron Garow for stealing two sheep belonging to Mr Porter, a farmer of Freiston on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1830. About midnight on that day Clarke was seen driving two sheep on the road towards his own house. A search being made the next day, and the carcasses were found in his shop, having killed them during the morning. In his defence Clarke admitted that he took the sheep and killed them but said he found them wandering on the road. The judge indicated clearly that he found this explanation incredible and the jury agreed.

**The following are extracts from the Goalers Book, Chaplains Book and Surgeons Book in which a daily log had been kept by each of them.**

- 10<sup>th</sup> March 1830 (Surgeons Book)
- Ordered Thomas Strong, Timothy Brammer and John Clarke, prisoners under sentence of death, 4oz of tea, 1lb of sugar and 1lb butter.

12<sup>th</sup> March 1830 (Goalers Book)

Behaviour of all at chapel this day orderly and good. The culprits committed for killing and slaying all free from complaints and everything in proper order.

- 17<sup>th</sup> March 1830 (Goalers Book)
- Attendance at chapel orderly, the sacraments administered to John Clarke one of the men for execution. Brammer and Strong declined receiving it.

Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1830 (Goalers Book)

The three men under sentence of death received the sacraments this morning they behaved in a very proper and penitent manner. The execution was performed decently by an executioner from London.

- Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1830 (Chaplains Book)
- This morning Thomas Strong and Timothy Brammer for housebreaking and John Clarke for sheep stealing were executed confessing the justice of their sentence behaving themselves in a manner becoming their awful situation. The three unfortunate men received the sacrament this morning.

***(The information above is from Surgeons, Goalers and Chaplains books at the Lincolnshire archives and kindly presented to our parish website by Mr Ray Clarke who is sure there is a family connection but needs more evidence to prove this)***

While awaiting execution Clarke was visited by his four children and his brother. For the triple hanging at noon a large crowd gathered. The description of proceedings as published in the Stamford Mercury is typical of many.

- “The country people had been streaming in from an early hour in the morning and many foolish parents sent or brought with them crowds of children of both sexes under the weak and almost hypocritical pretext of ‘giving them a warning’, it was too plain that the dreadful preparations had little to impress the greater part of the gaping spectators. Children were throwing oranges or running about the castle ditch. Jokes and levity abounded on all sides and when at length those

who were high enough gave notice that the wretched procession might be seen moving across the castle yard the cry of “they’re coming, they’re coming” that sounded on all sides was such as such as might have announced the commencement of a bull baiting, a boxing march or a horse race. The poor criminals walked steadily to the drop. Clarke had hold of a turnkey, Brammer’s demeanour was firm and unflinching but he had lost much weight. Strong said I am come to pay my debt to the world, but Elsey has sworn falsely. The hangman had put Clarke between the other two but Brammer objected saying “we came together let us die together” and the arrangement was altered to suit him. The two bankers took off their boots – a practice prevalent among their profession as they do not wish to die with their boots on. Brammer’s struggles were the greatest, his legs were nearly drawn up to his check before slowly relaxing again. Brammer’s father removed his son’s body the others were presumably buried at the castle.

*(Taken from the book Hanged at Lincoln 1716-1961)*

- John Clarke was the last man in England to be hanged in public for sheep stealing. Sixteen prisoners were sentenced to death on the day of the lent assizes at Lincoln, but it was the common practice in those days to later change the sentence to transportation. Out of the 16 only 3 were actually hanged; the others were transported to Australia. A report in the Times newspaper said that John Clarke was hanged to make an example to others as there had been too much sheep stealing in recent years.