



INTRODUCTION :

It is Thursday 16th August 1660 in the first year of King Charles II's reign. It is evening in the small market town of Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire. An anxious wife is worried that her husband, William Harrison, has not returned home....

William Harrison was 70 years old and worked for the local landowner. He had gone to the village of Charingworth, two miles away, to collect rent money from some of the landowner's tenants. When he had not returned by 9pm, Mrs Harrison sent John Perry, their servant, to look for him.

When she woke up the next morning, John Perry had not returned either....



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT :

Mrs Harrison asked her son, Edward, to go looking for her husband and servant. On the way to Charingworth, he met John Perry. Perry told Edward that he had not been able to find William.

They went to Ebrington where one of the tenants said he had seen William Harrison the night before. Then they went to Paxford but no-one there had seen him.

They decided to go home. On the way they heard that a poor woman had found some of William Harrison's clothing by the side of the road between Chipping Campden and Ebrington. They found her and she showed them :

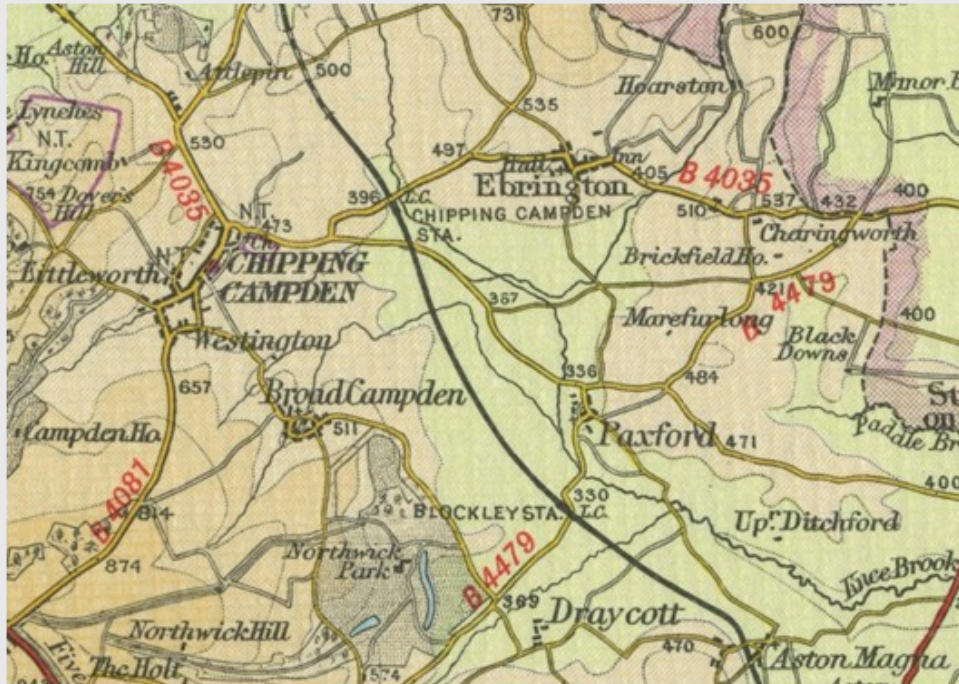
- a hat ; it had been cut by a knife
- a comb and the collar from a jacket ; they were bloodstained

Edward confirmed that they belonged to his father. They went with the poor woman to the place where she had found them. They looked all around but could not find a body.

When they got back to Chipping Campden, they explained what they had found. The townsfolk carried out an extensive search of the area but could not find William Harrison's body.



A RECENT MAP OF THE AREA :



What John Perry told the local magistrate on Saturday 18 August, two days after Harrison's disappearance:

John Perry said that after Mrs Harrison had sent him to look for William, he met a man called William Reed at Campden Field on the road to Charingworth. John told William that he was looking for his master but was worried that it was getting dark so he was going back to Harrison's house to get a horse. Then he met another man called Pierce. Afterwards Perry returned to the Harrison house and rested for an hour in the chicken coop. Then at midnight he started walking towards Charingworth but it was very misty and he got lost. He spent the rest of the night under a hedge.

When he woke up early on Friday morning, he walked to Charingworth and went to Edward Plaister's house. He told him that he had seen William Harrison the day before and paid him £23. Then Perry went to William Curtis' house. Curtis said that Harrison had called at his house but he hadn't seen him because he was out at the time. Then, at about 5am, Perry started walking back to Chipping Campden and met Edward Harrison on the way ...



What John Perry told the local magistrate on Friday 24 August :

After the interview on 18 August, Perry was kept in custody. Rumours spread that he knew who had murdered William Harrison. Perry asked to speak again to the magistrate.

Perry said that William Harrison had been murdered but he hadn't done it. Eventually, after further questioning, he said that his mother Joan and his brother Richard had killed him. He said that they kept asking him to help them steal money from Harrison, by telling them when he was going out to collect rent money. On Thursday 16 August, after Mrs Harrison had sent him out to look for William, he had met his brother Richard outside the house. They walked along the road towards Charingworth and John told him that Harrison had gone into a field called the rabbit warren. Richard went into the field to look for him but John stayed outside. After a while John went into the field and saw his mother and brother standing over William Harrison. He witnessed Richard strangle Harrison. Then Richard took a bag of money from Harrison's pocket and gave it to their mother. John and Richard then took Harrison's body and threw it into a cesspit.

John walked towards Chipping Campden, met John Pierce, and returned to the Harrison house where he rested in the chicken coop. On the way he took Harrison's hat, collar and comb, cut them with his knife and threw them on the road.



Joan, Richard and John Perry were interviewed by the magistrate on Saturday 25 August :

John repeated his account of how his mother and brother murdered William Harrison. Joan and Richard both denied it and said that they were completely innocent. While they were being taken back to Chipping Campden a roll of cloth tape fell out of Richard's pocket. John immediately said that Richard had used it to strangle William Harrison.

The next day, Sunday 26 August, they went to church to talk to the priest. When they passed Richard's house, two of his children rushed out to see him – immediately they both had nose-bleeds (this was believed to be a sign of being in the presence of a murderer).



John Perry had more to tell the magistrate :

It was well known in the town that William Harrison's house had been burgled the year before. £140 had been stolen from an upstairs room but the thief had never been caught. The magistrate asked John if he knew anything about it:

Perry said that his brother Richard stole the money. He told his brother which room the money was in and where he could find a ladder to reach the window. Richard told John that he had stolen the money while John was at church and had buried it in the garden.

John also said that after the robbery he had made up a story about being attacked by two men with swords. He did it so that people would believe that they were the thieves who had stolen the money.



What Joan, Richard and John said during their trial in the following spring :

Joan, Richard and John Perry were put on trial for robbery and murder in September 1660. The trial was stopped because there was no body. A second trial opened in the spring of 1661, even though nothing more had been found.

Joan, Richard and John Perry all pleaded not guilty. John said that what he had told the magistrate on 24 August was not true; he said that he was insane at the time and didn't know what he was saying.



After his return to Chipping Campden in 1662, William Harrison wrote an account of what happened to him for the local magistrate:

After I collected rent in Charingworth, I started to walk home. On the way, I was met by a man on a horse. He wounded me with his sword. Another man grabbed my collar and stabbed me. Then another man arrived. They tied me up and took me away on a horse.

Four days later, we reached a place called Deal (*in Kent*) on the coast. They sold me to a man called Wrenshaw. He put me on a ship and treated my wounds. I was on the ship for about 6 weeks. Then I was transferred to a Turkish ship. When we landed, I was taken to a prison with several other men. We were questioned for about 4½ days about our trades and professions.

I was sold to an 87 year old doctor who lived near Smyrna (*in Turkey*). He gave me a silver bowl and I ran his distillery (*probably making herbal medicines*) and collected cotton. I was there for a year and ¾ until my master died. Then I escaped to the nearest port, a day's journey away. I sold my bowl to get on a ship which sailed to Portugal. The sailors hid me below deck for the whole voyage. When we landed, I had no money. I walked into Lisbon and met a man from Lincolnshire. He gave me food, drink and money – and he introduced me to the captain of a ship which was sailing for England. We set sail and landed at Dover. Then I went to London and travelled home.

This is a true account of my sufferings and deliverance, by the mercy and goodness of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.