**Murder at Fletching**

On the 14 June John Playsted, newly appointed coroner the previous month, was summoned to Fletching to record the details of an unlawful killing. Due procedure was followed. A group of witnesses, all local men including William Willard, John Awcock, Thomas Awcock, Edward Pollard, declared on oath, that Roger Lewknor of Fletching, gentleman, at Fletching on the 13 June, had stabbed William Stadard, tailor, in the left side of his stomach with a knife, of which wound he soon died. Roger Lewknor remained at liberty for on the 22 June he assaulted William Addon, again at Fletching, stabbing him in the stomach with a knife and he died the same day. Lewknor was captured and sent to the prison at Lewes and from there to Westminster to await his trial in the central court. When brought from prison into court he produced a royal pardon, said that he had found security in chancery to be of good behaviour and was duly released. The pardon and release had been obtained for him by two well-known Sussex lawyers. In return for his pardon, compensation paid to the heir of one of the murdered men, the lawyers fees, an annual sum of money and a new suit of clothes on leaving prison, Lewknor ceded to the lawyers his property in Fletching parish and elsewhere.

As topical today as knife crime, corruption and victim compensation are, these events took place over five hundred years ago during the reigns of the early Tudors. Roger Lewknor was Lord of the Manor of Sheffield which he had inherited in 1503, as the eldest son, on the death of his father, Richard. In his successful bargain to escape conviction for murder he forfeited this manor and it never returned into the hands of the Lewknor family. The two unscrupulous lawyers were Edmund Dudley, leading member of Henry VII’s unpopular *Council Learned in the Law* and John Erneley, attorney general, chief legal adviser to the Crown under Henry VIII. The two men soon entered into dispute over possession of the manor of Sheffield. After the death of his patron King Henry VII, Dudley was accused of treason and despatched to the Tower where he was still making provision to defeat Ernley’s ambitions shortly before his death. His laconic entry in Wikipedia states that he died on 17 August 1510 on Tower Hill, London; cause of death: decapitation. Although he benefited from Dudley’s death, Ernley’s title to the manor was never secure and remained in dispute in Chancery and probably on his conscience until the end of his life. In his will proved on 22 April 1520 he compensated Roger’s brothers with a small annuity of £4 each for life *‘so they claim it not of duty but to have it of my charity’.*

Perhaps we should console ourselves with these thoughts – that crime does not always pay and that the present owners of Sheffield Park do not have similar murderous tendencies. The residents of Fletching may rest secure. Although I must admit that as yet I have not found a date for Roger Lewknor’s death.