

Italian organ grinder's murder

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And Jack Wheeler's memoir – Ewelme News Jan/Feb 2005

The murder of Italian organ grinder Raffael de Guidi by Davide Bursi

A burial that made headline news was that of Raffael del Guidi on 10th February 1904. The 29 year old Italian organ grinder had his throat slashed by a fellow countryman and rival organ grinder Davide Bursi whilst arguing on the road at Firebrass Hill. Bursi tried to hide the body under some straw, but men working in Farmer Orpwood's fields saw him and found the bloodstained cutthroat razor discarded in the road. Guidi's body was carried to the mortuary in the Cloisters. Meanwhile Bursi casually carried on into the village, pushing his cart past the Shepherds Hut, with village children skipping beside it.



Photo of an Italian Organ grinder. History does not relate as to whether the organ grinders had pet monkeys, but these were a common accompaniment used to collect the money.

Mr Orpwood alerted the police in Watlington who arrested Bursi at Britwell Salome. The 21 year old Bursi appeared at the Magistrate's Court in Watlington where - *'the prisoner did not appear to realise his position and for a great part of the hearing lolled up against the wall with his hands in his jacket pockets.'* Through an interpreter, he claimed the death was an accident and he had not seen the razor before. Bursi was found guilty and ended his days in the late 1940s in a secure mental institution. This shocking event was widely reported, and according to a local newspaper, *'the occurrence had been one subject of conversation in the neighbourhood... hundreds of people visited the scene of the tragedy'*.

Davide Bursi having cut the throat of his colleague Rafaele de Guidi, proceeded into the village. The local newspaper account says he persuaded some of the village children to help him push the heavy machine up the hill behind the Shepherd's Hut. The account reports the body was conveyed to the Almshouse hospital and the Inquest subsequently held in the Almshouse kitchen.

Local men were called to give evidence, including William Hewitt who found the body, and Mr Munday who discovered the discarded blood-stained razor in Mr Orpwood's field. Although found guilty of wilful murder, Bursi did not hang but was detained in a secure mental institution, where he died circa 1947. Guidi was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard.

"My father's story always comes to mind when I'm driving down 'Fire Brass Hill' from Watlington into Ewelme passing the very spot where it happened. An Italian organ grinder killed his friend by cutting his throat with a razor. My father remembers this from his school days in Ewelme, saying the murderer washed his hands in the Sheepbrook and then wiped his hands on a girl's apron, she being one of a group standing nearby.

Ewelme Village Archive