

# *Tales of Olde Fransham - Murder Most Foul*

## *Part 4*

In the first three parts of this history I gave a brief account of the lives of Rosaline Fox and her son Sidney, both of Great Fransham, and the subsequent exhumation of Rosaline's body at Great Fransham Churchyard. Rosaline died at a Margate hotel on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1929 and her son was subsequently arrested and charged with her murder.

Crucial to the prosecution case was the evidence of Sir Bernard Spilsbury who had carried out the autopsy on Rosaline's exhumed body at Great Fransham School (now the Village Hall). Spilsbury was adamant that Rosaline had not died as a result of any effects of the fire in her room. He testified that her airways were clear and there was no evidence of carbon monoxide in her blood. Critically, he reported finding a large recent bruise at the back of the larynx, about the size of a half-crown coin. He went on to tell the court that this was the first indication of the conclusion that he subsequently reached - namely that death was due to strangulation.

Whilst this testimony provided crucial material for the jury regarding the possible cause of death, it would probably have not proved so detrimental to Sidney's case had not so much other evidence concerning his past, his character and his financial position been put before the jury. Indeed, the "half-crown bruise" was heavily challenged by the defence who had their own experts and their own theories as to the cause of Rosaline's death. The tissues showing the bruise were not preserved and the defence pathologist, Sir Sydney Smith, claimed that the bruise was no more than discolouration due to decomposition. Spilsbury himself conceded that he had not encountered a case of strangulation that had left so little pathological evidence. Dr Weir, for the prosecution, went on to testify that she might have been only partially strangled and subsequently died of heart failure in the smoke filled bedroom.

The concluding part of this saga will tell of the evidence concerning the nature of the fire and the defence submissions.

.....to be continued

Bob Jenkins