

MISCELLANY

EXTRACTS FROM THE PARISH REGISTERS OF BARMING, KENT

contributed by Colin Barham and Roger Schofield

Between 1788 and 1812 the burial register of Barming in Kent includes details about the deceased which are unusually extensive. They stretch far beyond the bare outline of name and sometimes age and family relationships provided by the typical burial register entry of this period. For the historian they illuminate the life of the parish in a way that is seldom possible. The extracts which follow indicate the quality of this remarkable register and have been selected to illustrate the incidence of bigamy, incest, death by violence or accident, smallpox and the incumbent's moralising and attitude of mind.

Bigamy

- 1795: 10 JUDD or Judge, Mary aged 45, wife of Joseph Judd to whom she was married tho' her former husband Joy was, and still is alive, and now and always has been resident within a few miles of this Place, so that she was guilty of Bigamy. Buried October 25th.
- 1796: 4 WICKENS, Mary wife of John and mother of the above children, May 4. This woman was the daughter of a reputable farmer, and married to Wickens tho' he then, and still has another wife; she was highly imprudent but a modest woman: it is with very great grief that I relate it that there is very great reason to suppose she died for want of suitable food and other things necessary to her situation, as having lately lain in and of a double burden. Could I have supposed that the matter had been as I fear it was, it should certainly have been rectified: it as given me great, and sincere uneasiness: tho' she had received some supply from me.

Incest

- 1792: 1 CLEMENTS, Thomas, son of Richard and Isabella, January 12th. This Boy was taken ill whilst keeping geese in West Farleigh Parish, and was inhumanely denied a draught of cold water by the wife of one Pearson. The Bailiff finding him ill sent him home. The poor innocent fell at the commencement of his own Parish, where several persons saw, but had the barbarity neither to assist him, nor even to inform his mother of the situation. Miss Eliz. Amhurst, with that goodness that ever distinguishes her, attended to him, and finding his condition, went and told his case to the Mother, who took him home about 5 o'clock in the evening, and he died in the night. It is melancholy to record so much hardness amongst persons who would think themselves disgraced if not called christians. Although this child was born in wedlock; he was known to have been incestuous: his uncle was his father. Shocking circumstance!!!

Violence

- 1793: 2 MITCHEL, George, a Batchelor aged 31 years, April 3, From East Farleigh. A most worthless abandoned profligate, his father was a parishioner in Barming: the deceased was in every way despicable, his quarrelsome behaviour brought him to a premature grave for speaking with three Frenchmen he so shamefully abused them, though as exiles for Religion and Loyalty they were deserving every compassion; that they, partly in self-defence, and partly in resentment for his unprovoked cruelty, fell upon and beat him so much that he was obliged to submit to a sick bed, leaving which too soon he caught a cold and fever, which precipitated him to an early death, which from his constant ill conduct might be a blessing, or otherwise his exile might have been much more disgraceful to himself and painful to his relatives.
- 1790: 3 PREBBLE, Richard; 2 July. He was killed on the tuesday preceeding by a violent blow which he received from Longhurst of Town Malling in a drunken quarrel about the election for the county: the accident happened on this side of Maidstone bridge. Though the manner of his death may be lamented, yet as he was a most disorderly person, his removal was a great advantage to the parish. Pauper.

Death by Accident

- 1793: 4 COOMBER, William of the parish of Tonbridge, aged 29, July 21. A servant to Robert Young of in the parish of Tonbridge, and going with his master from Maidstone to the camp at Waterdown with beer, the waggon for want of a wheel being chained came with such velocity down the hill leading from the Heath, that it caught the poor man's leg and jammed it against one of those stones that is placed to keep off carriages from the footpath; an amputation was immediately necessary, but it being objected to by the man, a mortification ensued and he died in consequence of it; the accident happened July 10; he died at the public house in the village, sincerely pitied by everyone as he bore an exemplary character; he was married and left one child only ten weeks old. The Master who had objected to his chaining the wheel was much hurt and humanely adored him everything that was proper for his situation, so long as he lived and buried him when he died; his corpse was so offensive that it was necessary to bury him the day following that upon which he died.
- 1808: 1 REYNOLDS, James, a child daughter of Philip and Ann. This poor little creature died in consequence of its cloaths taking fire in the absence of his parents. He languished some days and then, happily died. For had he lived he would have been dreadfully disfigured. How many women, and children, yearly fall sacrificed to the combustable material of the cloaths. What would not the man deserve who could make linen incapable of burning! So much as we are advanced in knowledge, especially in chimestry, it is wonderful the contrivance has not been perfected, for I believe attempts have been made to affect what would be an almost incalculable blessing. This last week two young women as the public papers tell us have been by such sad accidents burnt to death.

1800: 1 SAMPSON, William aged 17 years and 9 months, from Leeds, son of John and Ann. March 12. by permission from the coroner. This youth caught his death in a singular manner. He was an apprentice to a shoemaker, living about half a mile from his father's house, he went with an intention of calling upon his parent but stopped at a small distance to cut two walking sticks in a small wood; having cut the sticks he was proceeding to his father's but by some mean not exactly known he cut himself in a dreadful manner in his left thigh; unable to proceed leaning against a gate he had just got over he called for assistance, a person came out of a house which stood near, but thinking him a person intoxicated he went to a neighbour that they might go together. They found him much exhausted with bleeding, but had no idea of the danger ensuing from the wound, they therefore went to call his father. All the time the unhappy youth lay weltering in his own blood, for he had fallen from weakness. The father thinking it right to see his son before he went for a surgeon going to him said "William have you been drinking" to which he replied "No father, I have not been drinking anywhere today" and then instantly expired. It appears that he had put the knife with which he worked at his trade without any sheath into his pocket, which by falling or getting over the gate had struck into his thigh close to the bone and cut through arteries, sinues and the whole of the flesh. None had supposed him in any danger until he had ceased to breath. The thigh where the wound was had been broken, but the bone was so well set that he had no lameness. The deceased bore a very good character for sobriety and propriety of conduct in other respects. The catastrophe was more sensibly felt by his parents because they had lost a son at the same age by an injury received in cricketing. I feel very greatly hurt to add that this youth was wicked, that he had been committing a trespass, if not a theft, nor was it the first offence.

Smallpox

1791: 9 FARLEIGH, Joseph, aged 79 years, buried December 14. He was bailiff to Paul Beeston, Gent. and superintended all his farming concerns in this parish with punctuality and skill, and though he could neither write nor read yet no-one kept a more faithful account, and once a month he went to Hamton to his master, with him a Bill which he had got written out by one of his neighbours; in this service with a most rigid frugality he had obtained £320, which every half year he had augmented and used to go to London to place out; in his return from thence stopping at a public house called the Birchwoods he sat with a man who was told to go home but he said he did not choose it as he, his wife and children were ill of the Small pox, this gave the old man the greatest uneasiness as it was a disorder he had always dreaded, having never had it, and for that reason he had abstained for twenty years from going to church, because a corpse that had fallen victim to it had incautiously been brought within the walls of the sacred edifice; but the decrees of Providence must be obeyed, for he caught the infection, sickened with the complaint and died. He had been punctual in his attendance upon divine service before the fright he had

respecting the small pox corpse: he was a widower but never had a child. The thoughts of his moneys impressed his whole mind even when he was admonished that death was approaching him with rapid strides — of religion he would hear nothing.

The incumbent's moralising

- 1795: 8 BRIDGELAND, William, aged 80 years, yeoman October 10. He was originally a servant to Mr. James Mashborne, Rector of this Parish; he kept a Public House in Barming and in East Farleigh; but latterly he resided upon a small freehold estate which he had purchased in this Parish. As he was a Publican so he was also a sinner. Few have been so wicked; he was blasphemous; lewd, drunken, dishonest; a cruel husband and a severe parent; I never saw him at church more than once or twice; to his other bad qualities he was one of the rudest and most uncivil of men; thus abusing a good understanding: but it pleased God in his mercy to give him a long and most severe visitation. The Bible then was his only solace and he seemed sincerely penitent for his abandoned life. May it have sealed his peace!
- 1806: 3 WHITTAKER, Miss Lucretia, a daughter of Thomas Whittaker Esq. aged 16 years and 3 months February 21st she died of a fever on 14th. Never was one more generally beloved, nor was ever a more pleasing young creature, more deserving of general regard; her form equalled her mind, and both were exquisitely engaging. Of all the parochial duties I ever performed committing her to the ground was the most painful. Oh shade of gentle Lucretia I shall never forget thee, whilst remembrance of any thing remains — Exonerated — Forever.
- 1808: 15 STEVENS, Elizabeth wife of Joseph Nov. 20. Aged 56. She went to bed chearful and well. Her husband left her in the morning to go to his work and did not perceive that she was dead: though it was evident she had died in the night. A poorer woman could not to all be regretted none will be more missed. This shews how useful one human being can become in any even the lowest station. She was the nurse of the sick, whenever called up, and gratuitously to the poor and destitute. She was religious, industrious, chearful. Let this humble instance of usefulness not be forgotten if her loss is deplored in the parish, and with reason it is, her family have still great reason to lament. I have seldom seen so many and such sorrowing faces at a village burial.
- 1810: 7 WHITTAKER, Emma, daughter of Thomas Whittaker, Esq. She was aged 13 Dec. 24th.
- 1810: 8 YOUNG, Mary aged 14 daughter of William-Christopher, and Letitia Dec. 26th. Here are two instances of youth and innocence being snatched away suddenly in the space of a few days, by fever. Miss Whittaker was chearful even to mirth one minute the one minute [sic] the next fell a lifeless corpse. Ye headless daughters read this and reflect. Life is a lease determinable at will by HIM who granted it — ye know not when or how suddenly it may expire. They died of a putred Fever.

1811: 3 BROOK, Sarah aged 19 from Brompton. Jan. 22nd. This young woman a native of Barming had lived a very irregular life, but had gone to service again. She died suddenly and a coroner's inquest was held when it appeared that she died by the visitation of GOD. She had recovered from the prevailing fever but indisposed she had been recommended to sent to a chymist for paregoric and died very soon after. The chymist was examined — alas this very beautiful frail fair one had never recovered from the diseases brought upon her by her vices. How soon does sin blast the body, and still sooner injure the mind. An orphan, sent a child to be a servant in an Ale house with a beautiful face and form, such as very few possess, what chance had this young creature? Who can be severe — CHRIST forgave such a repentant sinner. Let us hope that this fallen sister has also received mercy. It is with sincere satisfaction that I add the mistress with whom she lived until her death spoke well of her conduct. This young unfortunate had a small patrimony which she would have received when of age — had she fell into the hands of the wise and good how different might have been her fate? The profligacy of the lower orders here is dreadful what then has as feeble female without protectors to expect?

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