

JOHN COLEMAN - Notes on his WILL of 1619

Notes written by Alfred Walker, Churchwarden & Archivist
All Saints Church, Birchington c. 1950 - 1975

In April 1619 the Plague was raging in Birchington, and both John Coleman (whose will was filed with these notes) and his son for whom he was providing so carefully in this will, were victims. But there is an interesting discrepancy with the dates recorded.

John Coleman's will is clearly dated the 12th April 1619 and Probate was granted to his widow Margaret on the 26th April. This means that John must have died between the 12th and the 26th April. But the only entries in the burial registers are "John the sone of John Coleman buried April 4" and "John Coleman buried April 6".

This begs the question - Are the dates in the burial register wrong? ** John Coleman could not have made his will on the 12th if he was already buried by the 6th. If his son had died on the 4th, he would not have taken such pains to provide for him in his will - unless, perhaps, when he made it, he was too ill to be told of his young son's death. His "mark" at the foot of the document is that of a very sick man.

- And "the plot thickens"! - His "loving" wife Margaret wasted no time once he was dead. On May the 19th, just about a month after her husband's death, she married Thomas Tappenden. Even today, such precipitous action would occasion comment, and in those days it must have caused a first-class scandal. However, with the village in the grip of the Plague, the general attitude may well have been, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die"! Thomas Tappenden had buried his first wife in October 1618, seven months before - and one is tempted to wonder "Did they use the same poison?"

Thomas and Margaret do not appear to have had any children, at any rate, none that were registered in Birchington. But it is fascinating to see recorded in June 1622 the death of "John Coleman, the first-born of Robert Tappenden". Now what on earth does this imply? Are Robert and Thomas one and the same man? Or are they brothers who shared a wife? And where did this third John Coleman spring from? As I said, "The plot thickens"!

** Remembering the huge pressure under which the priest must have been working, with seven or eight people dying each week, this is more than likely. The usual rate was one or perhaps two a month.