

NEW LIGHT ON OLD BONES

By Victoria Arthurson, Librarian, May 2021

Reproduced from her article in the Leaves of April 21.



During the recent work for new external lighting at the Minster, a grave containing a family of three was unearthed. Minster Archaeologist Professor Philip Dixon said the family consisted of a male possibly over six feet tall, a female, and an infant of maybe one to two years. Without further analysis he was unable to say much more but thought that they were possibly 17th century, give or take a wide margin. It is extremely rare to find multiple occupants of a grave outside plague or battle pits. Spouses often asked to be buried near to each other but rarely to their children. Wondering if it were possible to put a name to the family, I searched the Southwell Burial Register. The Parish Registers began in 1559, I confined my search between then and 1730.

The Register has a few gaps of several years during this time period but gave a fascinating insight into the Southwell of the age. The search for a family who died within a short time of each other brought forth several results. Cross checking against the Baptism Register reduced it down to a possible one. In January 1586, three members of the Waren family were buried. Elizabeth on the 1st, Margerie the 7th and Leonard the 13th. There is no entry in the Marriage Register for Leonard although a Leonard Waren is recorded as father in the Baptism Register three times between 1564 and 1567. A Margerie Waren was baptized in 1584 but her father was Henry. It is possible that Leonard married and had a child baptized in another parish but given the circumstances of lockdown it is not possible for me to check the Registers of other parishes. It is not conclusive but without the age of the child it is a possibility. The family has been re-interred and are now at peace elsewhere in the church yard.

Some interesting details came out of the search. During the 16th century only two occupations were shown; Archbishop of Yorke and a servant. In the 17th century some Registrars entered a little more detail and, of the occupations named, some twenty-five were of or connected to the Minster including 1 Beadle and 3 'Saxtons'. Other entries

show a mixed list of the skilled and unskilled who would be expected in such a community; glover, mercers, wheelwright, pipemakers, inkeeper, malster, carpenter, 'joyners', millers, butcher, fishmonger chandler, blacksmith, barbers and a painter, William Whitfield. He died in 1614 and I wonder if there is a connection to the late Elizabethan wall paintings in the Saracens Head which are late Elizabethan. There are also weavers, tinker, husbandmen, labourers, cart driver, skinner, codder (leather worker), singing men, the 'townes' watchman and three 'souldiers'. Two of the soldiers are from the Civil War era perhaps an indication of military activity in the area.

Gentry are designated Mr., Mrs. or Esq and only one titled person Elizabeth, Lady Cave who was the daughter of William Burnell of Winkburn is named. Fifteen baseborn and a surprising eight pair of twins and one of triplets. Several spinsters -spinsters were usually women deemed unmarriagable. In October 1655 Elizabeth Banes, Spinster was sentenced to be 'cuckt in the Cucking Stoole at Southwell' for being ...'a common scold' and whose 'Conitnuall brawling and extraordinary turbulent spirit doth soe vex and disquiet her neighbours ...'. Elizabeth, was buried in Southwell in 1668.

The vast majority of those buried are named but there are some poignant entries. 'A dumb unknown woman out of ye Correction House', 'A poore wandering man dyed at Westhorpe and was buried', 'Alice Cooper a girl and a stranger'.

Only a few instances of the cause of death are mentioned: 'drowned in the Greete', 'slain by a cart' 'Rowland Key slain by Thomas Underhill', 'Francis Dunne slain by James Banes'. Several outbreaks of plague and smallpox probably account for the years when the death rate was unusually high. The number of deaths per annum generally ranged between 20 and 40, the lowest being 9, the highest 79. Interestingly when in 1609/10 plague ravaged both Upton, 110 deaths, and Bleasby, a third of the population, only 27 burials were recorded in Southwell.

Prior to the Reformation the deceased were honoured by masses, gifts to the church or, for the extremely rich, chantry chapels. As Protestants deemed intervention for the dead unnecessary a greater emphasis began to be placed on mortal remains and gravestones became increasingly popular. In the churchyard the oldest, 1620, merely has the initials WT F, no one of these initials is in the Register. Next to it are the three Fowler stones with 'Geo Sep 5th 1700', 'Geo Fowler the father of these Children died Jan 27th 1706' and 'Easter Fowler the mother of these Children died March ye 19th 1711'. George Fowler, a mercer, married Easter of the Minster clergy family Chappell. They had eight children three of whom died before their father; William Thornton, Anne and George. Two years later after the death of young George they baptized another infant George. The youngest child, Chappell Fowler, entered the church and like several of his relatives became a Vicar Choral here. Several of his descendants have memorials inside the Minster. On the West wall opposite the graves is a stone commemorating George Chappell, 1679, buried 30 feet from this stone.