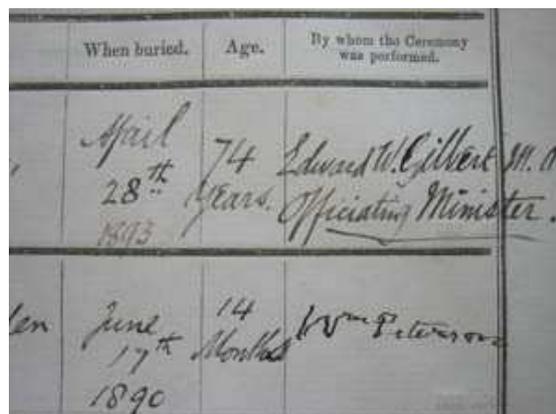


Unearthing Biddenden — Article 1

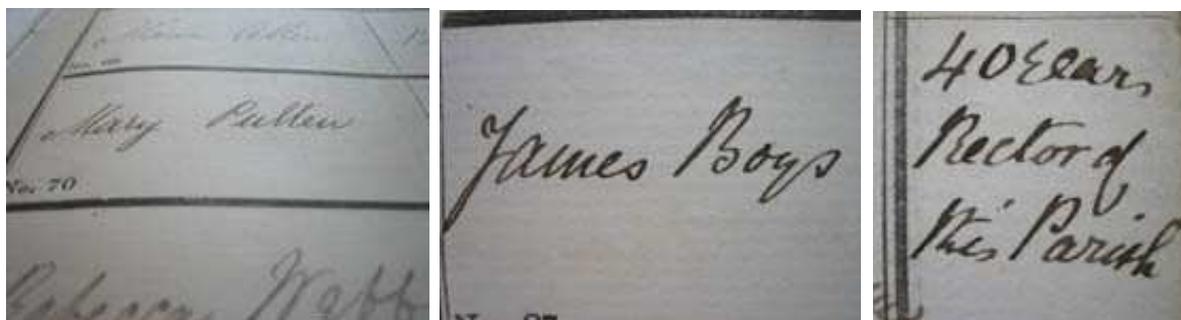
At the end of last summer (2008) I volunteered to transcribe the Burial Register for Biddenden containing the details of burials from 1877 to 1992. What follows are a few observations I made during this project.



When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
April 28 th 1873	74 Years	Edward W. Gilbert M. A. Officiating Minister.
June 17 th 1890	14 Months	Wm. Peterson

This has been a truly fascinating meander through a period of Biddenden history. The Register itself is a large, fairly well preserved book containing 200 pages of handwritten burial details by all the Rectors and Officiating Ministers who presided over the ceremonies. Working from photocopies, in order to avoid potential coffee spills over the original Register, I then proceeded to create a spreadsheet on the computer to contain all the information. After a few weeks I happened to discover a website detailing 'how to' transcribe a Burial Register. My amateur attempts needed some changes!

I became very aware that each entry recorded the end of a life, full of joys and sorrows. A few lives lasted just hours and several spanned almost a century. Many of the Rectors added a brief comment next to the entry – maybe relating to the person's



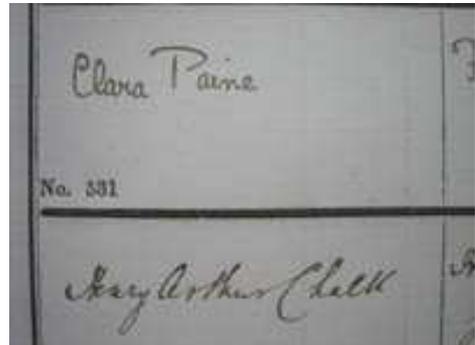
life, but more often describing the manner of an unusual death.

Initially almost all the buried came from Biddenden itself. People obviously spent their entire lives in the village. Now and again the address given was Union Workhouse Tenterden or Chartham Asylum. Towards the end of the 1800s a few addresses showing High Halden, Tenterden & other nearby villages cropped up, plus more details of the actual address was given. This gives a fascinating insight into the previous occupants of some of the older houses in our village. As the 1900s progressed the entries included more and more addresses from further afield including cottage hospitals such as Linton Hospital & a TB hospital called Preston Hall Sanatorium.

The number of child deaths struck me. Several were recorded as being just minutes or hours old. Some of these infants, being unbaptised, were buried 'without ceremony'. Some Rectors added comments such as 'her twin sister unbaptised buried in the

same coffin' or 'found on its face in bed dead'. In one instance I noticed the death of an infant and it's mother just days apart. I often wondered at the sadness in the lives of those left behind.

One poignant detail I noticed was that the death of an elderly person was so often followed closely by the death of their spouse sometimes just weeks later.



Occasionally the comments added next to some entries highlighted mysteries such as 'no fixed abode', 'said to be about 66 years old', or 'found hanged'. Several cases of drowning were documented in the first few decades of the register. As the pace of life speeded up more vehicle accidents caused death particularly amongst young adults. A few burials took place for Hop Pickers and Travellers and during WW2 as 'the result of enemy fire'.

Around the middle of the 1900s cremations started to appear alongside burials and the number of these have been increasing ever since.

Take the time to explore this Register on the church website at www.allsaintsbiddenden.org. A copy will be available in the church in the near future.

Angie Joy, November 2009