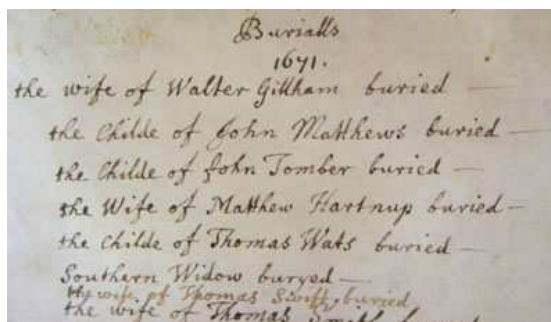


Transcribing Smarden's Burial records 1813—1953

From the first time we caught sight of the four historic books we were captivated. Two smaller manuscripts, the older records from 1632-1750 and 1750-1812, initially posed a problem as we found the handwriting very difficult to decipher.



We decided to tackle the two Registers, from 1750 – 1812, then 1812 – 1953. We followed the format set by Angie Joy of All Saints Biddenden, who has transcribed their Burial Records.

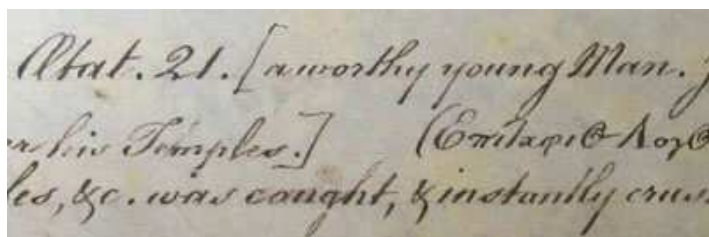
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As we worked through the pages we found that the handwriting and ink quality varied considerably. Some words we could not read, but often a consultation with each other could solve a problematic name. There were many familiar family names such as Batt, Offen, Cornes and Underdown.

We were also interested in the names of the vicars and officiating priests who presided over the funerals. Often the previous vicar would return to the parish to bury the more elderly residents of the village.

In the later book we found much more information included, for instance addresses, jobs, comments about how the person died or other fascinating information. Some people died in the workhouses in Tenterden or Hothfield.

As we progressed through the books we found that we were not just recording facts – we became involved in people's lives, in family dramas, in historical events. Serious farm accidents were recorded, children drowning in ponds, suicides, travellers and paupers dying in fields, personal tales unfolded before our eyes. It became quite addictive – our conversations often started with the words 'You'll never guess what has happened now ...'



We noted periods when many children died. Between 15th February and the 21st November 1838, fifteen children aged twelve years or under were buried in the Village. Four from the Millen family alone, under the

age of eight years, were buried between 18th and 24th July.

We found that those children who died without being baptised were buried 'without ceremony' or 'buried otherwise than by the Church's office'.

In the 1812 book we came across the phrase 'buried in wool' when the churchwardens and vicar had to sign an Affidavit to certify that the person had been buried in accordance with the Act of Parliament (1666 then 1678) which had been brought in to safeguard the woollen trade.

We are now working on the earliest two books, which are presenting challenges on each page – not the least because they are partly written in Latin. They also include not only funerals, but also baptisms, marriages, names of churchwardens and lists of donations made to parishes throughout the country when their churches were damaged by fire (seemingly a common occurrence).

Elizabeth McLeish and Eleanor Bliss, July 2011