

The Dissenters' Burial Ground, Melton

by Vic Harrup

Thomas Lynd, his wife Rebecca and daughter Katherine were buried in his orchard in Melton between 1682 and 1707. They were Quakers and he owned a forge in Melton but lived in Butley towards the end of his life. Thomas died in 1704 leaving his forge and lands in Melton to his widow and after her death to his kinsman, William Lynd. It seemed likely to the writers of *Untold Tales from the Suffolk Sandlings* that the lands adjoined the forge. However, the Melton Tithe Map of 1837 shows a quarter-acre strip of land (numbered 148) described in the Apportionment as 'Quaker Burial Ground'. The owner was John Ridley and the occupier Joshua Bryant. The strip, designated 'pasture', appears to have been taken from the field numbered 149, which, along with other adjoining fields belonged to Thomas Brooke who purchased the farm between 1822 and 1833. They lay at the north end of the parish near the workhouse.

In 1953 there was correspondence between a member of Suffolk Mental Hospitals Management Committee, the Archivist at East Suffolk County Council and The Jewish Historical Society of England concerning burials in 'the Jews' Burying Place' in Melton, said to be the same strip of land. Two burials were listed, that of Elizabeth Broke of Woodbridge in June 1716 and of Thomas Brooke of Woodbridge in October 1742. They appear in the burial registers of Melton Church. The Society believed it unlikely that any actual Jews were buried in Melton in the early 18th century, but thought the burials might be those of a 'curious Judaising sect', which was Christian. It seemed unlikely that Jews would be interred where the last Quaker, Rebecca Lynd, had been buried only nine years previously. There were still Lynd family members in the area until 1736.

This correspondence may have arisen because George Arnott wrote that the path beside the burial place is called 'Jews' Lane'. He believed that the burials were those of Jews who had died in the old Workhouse. Further searches of the Melton burial registers reveal that there were five more burials in the 'Jews' burying ground' between 1767 and 1797, but not thereafter. They were all, except one, connected with the Ridley family, Mary, wife of John, two daughters Hannah and Mary, and finally of John himself.

Two of the above left wills, namely Thomas Brooke in 1742 and John Ridley in 1795. Thomas was a dishturner, living in Woodbridge and the preamble to his will shows he was a Christian, referring to his 'Saviour Jesus Christ'. He asked to be buried at the discretion of his executor Thomas Lillie. He left small monetary bequests to numerous people including John Ridley, senior, John's wife and his maidservant Hannah Ridley. He did not mention any family members so it is unlikely the owner of the fields around the burial ground in 1837 was a direct descendent although he bore the same name. Another beneficiary was Widow Diggons of Old Newton 'Sabbath keeper'. Should she die within 12 months of the testator her daughter should inherit as long as she 'kept the Sabbath'.

The Woodbridge bookseller, John Ridley made his will two years before he died aged 76, and his short preamble shows he too was a Christian. Among his bequests to his son John was 'the Dissenting Burial Ground in Melton in Trust for a burial place, to him and his heirs forever. The burial ground having been upwards of 60 years in my father's and my possession as a burial place'. His executors were his son John and daughter Margaret Linstead, whose husband was dead. It is clear that it was the Church of England clergymen of Melton who, over several years, called them 'Jews'. They referred to themselves as 'dissenters'. John Ridley's father's burial is not mentioned in the Melton registers, so it seems that not all 'Jewish burials' were recorded.