

The Dissenters' Burial Ground, Melton: a revised view

by Vic Harrup

Further research proved that the Tithe Map Apportionment of 1837 was wrong in attributing the burial ground to Quakers.

John Armingher of Melton made his will in 1693. He bequeathed his house, barns and lands to his wife Sarah, but set aside a small piece of land which he gave as a burying place 'to that Church and people with whom I now walk in Communion, who have the name of Baptised Sabbath keepers, which the world in derision and scorn call Saturday Jews'. He named the ruler or elder of the church in Woodbridge as Thomas Bett and the deacon was Jeremy Pallinn. All who believed the 'Truth of the Jewish day Sabbath' could be buried there. He then gave the abutments of the piece of land, three being closes whose names were lost by the time Isaac Johnson mapped the area in 1823. The abutment to the west was the road from Walnutree Close (also lost) to Melton Street, and the dimensions were 24½ rods by a rod and a half. These equate to around a quarter of an acre.

Sarah had borne him three daughters, Sarah Mason who was dead but had given birth to seven children, Martha Haken and one unnamed, married to John Baker who was an executor with Sarah. John was unable to sign his will, but wrote his initials J.A. shakily. The witnesses were Thomas Bett who made a cross, Jeremy Pallinn who signed and Rose Mills who also made a cross.

The Melton church register recorded John Armingher's burial on 28th May 1695 'in his own field'. The next reference to the Jews' burial ground was not until 1716, but several burials between those dates are likely to have been Sabbatarians. These were Martha Haken in 1696, Elizabeth Paling of Woodbridge in 1700, Elizabeth Betts (two burials, probably wife and daughter of Thomas) in 1702 and 1709, and possibly Abigail Brooke of Woodbridge 1714.

Those buried were Sabbatarians, a Christian sect that observed Saturday rather than Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. The John Ridley who owned the land in 1837 may have been the grandson of the Woodbridge bookseller. There is no evidence he was a member of the sect, thus the last burial there is likely to have been that of 1797.