

Some people of Eastbourne

In the Eastbourne records we come across many interesting descriptive names but we also find compelling stories such as that of Thomas the Weaver and John the Skinner, who in 1248, threw themselves on the mercy of the Church after being involved in a theft. We will never know the details, but we do know that John confessed to the crime and was exiled from the Kingdom...but did the punishment fit the crime?

If we leap forward 100 years, we reach the calamitous years of the 14th century when a deadly plague spread its' insidious tendrils through every community in the country. In Eastbourne we find that the vicar, Richard de Clouworth, with a parish ravaged by pestilence, was fined for not carrying out the required services at St Gregory's Chapel in what is now Meads, for which he had been paid. Perhaps Richard felt unable to leave the core of his parish through fear or duty, perhaps the other clergy who would usually carry this out had died or run from the plague or perhaps he felt that his absence wouldn't be noticed amid such national mayhem, and he could just pocket the fee. All we can say is that Richard was gaoled a few years later, potentially for a dubious land deal and only released when he paid a £20 fine - the equivalent of £17,500 today, so perhaps that gives us a hint as to his character.

This simple, but finely made, cooking pot was found broken and abandoned on a stone hearth beneath a house in Filching Road. The hearth, an open fire, formed the focal point, the heart of the house, abandoned shortly after the pot was made, no later than 1350. The date of the pot may give us a clue as to why this home was abandoned. The fourteenth century was a turbulent time with war and plague very real dangers.



Illustration of Richard de Clouworth
by Chris Clayton

People have left Wills for hundreds of years and as historic documents they give us a fascinating peek into what society valued or at least what was seen as an item worth bequeathing and these are often surprising. In 1496, Robert Story (another vicar!) left among the usual payments of cash "...to John Chymyng...one short violet gown with a hood". Robert seems to have had a bit of a thing for violet gowns as he gives another to Master Grene along with one of his many books and another to Richard Hawkyuse who also benefits from 6 silver spoons, a pair of sheets, a jar, a plate and a cauldron -perhaps Richard had been his cook? His servant, Robert Felwyne is also gifted a gown, but this time rose coloured. Robert Story didn't just wear violet.

In the 17th century, the parish records for Eastbourne are very informative and as well as recording baptisms, burials and marriages, they also sometimes give us occupations or indications of character.

We see entries for people who are shepherds, fishermen, mercers, husbandmen, millers, bailiffs, servants, soldiers, blacksmiths, clerks, surveyors, labourers, vicars, masons, saddlers, haberdashers, carpenters, butchers, thatchers, weavers, saltpetre makers, brewers, ale-house keepers, scholars, chair-makers, tailors, barristers, gardeners and even a hat-dresser! This is just a snapshot of what people were actually doing in Eastbourne as the majority of occupations go unwritten.



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