

A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS¹

by Henny Shotter

Our tale of two brothers looks at John Collins and Peter Collins from Sandway and how they fared in the social order of the 19th century which was dominated by the large estates in the parish.

Most people stayed in the village where they were 'settled' and tried to make a living there. Lenham had more employment opportunities than other villages; there were grocers, butchers, glove makers, haberdashery, clockmakers, outfitters, shoemakers, pubs, wheelwrights, blacksmiths and there were the farms which needed (often seasonal) workers as well as the Chilston Estate, which employed gamekeepers, cooks, maids, gardeners and a host of other servants.



A LIFE WELL LIVED

In 1830 John Collins and Edward Chambers ran the Whitehorse Inn (now the Wishful Thinker) in Sandway. The pub was owned by James Douglas Stoddard Esq. who resided in Chilston Park who was the largest landowner and most important employer in the Lenham area. John Collins also rented 12 acres land from him. Possibly this allowed him to widen his trade and in 1841² his profession is given as "victualier". He is 40 years old and lives still in Sandway with his wife Elizabeth and their six children. His fortune then took a turn to the better. In 1851 he was a policeman and

lived in "Lime Row" (today the northeast side of the square) which must have been one of the best addresses in town. By 1861 he had advanced to Farm Bailiff and collected the rent for the Chilston Estate. He lived with his wife and youngest daughter in the High Street for the next 10 years. He was then seventy years old and of retirement age. He was in the unusual position of receiving a pension and could leave Lenham and retire to a seaside town, to Margate³.



There he lived in 1881 at the age of 80 with his wife Elizabeth, 'happily ever after'.

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² Census 1841

³ The photo shows Margate from the Harbour in 1897 Detroit Publishing Co., under license from Photoglob Zürich, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Not so fortunate, sadly, was his brother Peter. He was

SHOT DEAD BY A CLERGYMAN

Peter was two years younger than John and was married to Sophia Maria and they had five children. He worked as an under-gun keeper on the Chilston estate for James Stoddard Douglas. The Maidstone and Kentish Journal reported the incident on September 14th, 1858 under the headline: Melancholy Gun Accident. Peter Collins had taken Mr. Hamilton and a vicar, the Rev. G. Lamotte shooting. The group walked across stubble fields coming out of Dickley Wood in the direction of Sandway. Rev. Lamotte walked in front of the others having his gun on his shoulder. He was followed by Mr. Hamilton and a few yards behind Mr. Hamilton was Peter Collins who carried his gun and the game they had shot.

Suddenly one barrel of Rev. Lamotte's gun went off, missing Mr. Hamilton but hitting Peter Collins who was immediately dead. The paper states: "The grief and consternation of the two gentlemen can be easily imagined." No such words for the widow, no mention of any children: 'The deceased has left a widow, who, we are glad to hear, receives substantial proofs of sympathy in her affliction.'

The verdict was 'Accidental Death'. The jury went out of their way by issuing a separate



declaration that "from the evidence given, they were unanimously of the opinion the accident did not arise from any want of care or precaution on the part of Rev. Lamotte in carrying the gun." This declaration is somewhat surprising for us today, as guns don't go off by themselves and should not be carried over the shoulder when people are walking behind. It is also likely that the verdict would have been quite different if Rev. Lamotte had been the victim and the under-gun keeper the 'unlucky' person whose gun went off. Rev. Lamotte was at that time vicar in Denton. The incident didn't impact negatively on his career, he became later chaplain to the Earl of Tenderden. We don't know if he ever was invited to another shooting party.

In stark contrast to the Rev Lamotte being excused for killing someone, stands the following case⁴: During his time as policeman in 1850 John Collins was involved in the case of

three men who had stolen two tame rabbits from James Smith in Lenham. They were all found guilty with John Neeves getting 15 transportation, George Baines got 12 months hard labour and 2 whippings and Jessie Brazier got 4 months hard labour as he had a little part to play in this.

Peter Collin's wife, Sophia Maria lived to the age of 77 and was buried in the grave of her husband in Lenham churchyard.

⁴ Kent Archives Kent Quarter Sessions Q/SD/W4.
Q/SB:Sessions Papers 1800-1889

