

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 many other villages: there were grocers, butchers, glove makers, haberdashers, clockmakers, outfitters, shoemakers, pubs, wheelwrights, blacksmiths. There were also the farms which needed (often seasonal) workers as well as was 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 White Horse Inn (now the Wishful Thinker) in Sandway. The pub was owned by James Douglas Stoddard Esq., who resided in Chilston Park and who was the largest landowner and most important employer in the Lenham area. John Collins also rented 12 acres of land from him. Possibly this allowed him to broaden his trade as, in 1841<sup>2</sup>, his profession is given as 'victualler'. He is 40 years old at this time and still lives in Sandway with his wife Elizabeth and their six children. His fortunes then took a turn for the better. In 1851 he was a

policeman and lived in "Lime Row" (today the south side of Lenham 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 was able to leave Lenham and retire to Margate<sup>3</sup> on the coast. There he lived in 1881 at the age of 80 with his wife Elizabeth, 'happily ever after'.



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 were walking across stubble fields coming out of Dickley Wood in the direction of Sandway. Rev. Lamotte walked in front of the others

<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Darren Collins for sharing research into his family history with us.

<sup>2</sup> Census 1841

<sup>3</sup> The photo shows Margate from the Harbour in 1897 Detroit Publishing Co., under licence from Photoglob Zürich, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

with his gun on his shoulder. He was followed by Mr. Hamilton and, a few yards behind him 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 killed outright. The paper states: "The grief and consternation of the two gentlemen can be easily imagined." No such words of 'grief', however, for the widow, no mention of the 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 possibly went beyond their remit 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 ( or do they?) and should not be carried over the shoulder when there are people 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 of Denton. The incident didn't impact negatively on his career: he became later chaplain to the Earl of Tenderden. There is no evidence, however, that he was ever invited to another shooting party!



Peter Collins wife, Sophia Maria, lived to the age of 77 and was buried in the grave of her husband.