

Jonathan Keer of Wantisden Hall had been acting strangely for some time before he hanged himself from an elm in Crabtree Field on his farm in 1819. Robert Welton, a farmer of Eyke, had known him for ten years and had recently called at his house where the deceased had begun to show him a piece of paper, which appeared to be a farewell address to his wife, but had then snatched it back. He believed that Jonathan Keer had been, for some while, a 'lunatic'. Two of his servants, Clarissa Birch and Sarah Smith, were walking from Tunstall to the farmhouse and saw him standing, as they thought, on a bank beside the field. When they got closer, however, they saw he was hanging by the neck and went for help to cut him down.

The influenza epidemic of 1918/19 was the worst on record, and it is said that more people died worldwide than in the preceding Great War. The numbers probably didn't include the like of John Collins, who committed suicide while suffering the effects of the virus. He was aged 65 and worked at Butley Mill where he crushed his hand in an accident. He had been depressed by the event, and it is likely that the illness added to his unhappiness, and he cut his throat in his bedroom in Butley Street.

Another victim of the influenza epidemic was James Hall of Abbey Cottages, who cut his throat with a razor in April 1919. He was aged 61. Poor Emma Smy, aged 12, had to make a statement to the jury concerning the death of her mother, Mary, who was found dead by neighbours in Chillesford in 1845.

She explained she was the natural daughter of Mary Smy, who co-habited with an unemployed shepherd

named Samuel Wakeling. She went to buy some things for her mother at Butley shop, leaving her brother, aged two, in the garden. Mary had been confined with another child, a female, two weeks before her death. She had been attended by a midwife and a surgeon, but had complained of a pain in her right side. Emma declared that Samuel Wakeling had not been in the house at the time of her mother's death, but had been collecting whins at the rear of the cottage. She had not heard any angry words between them. The jury, made up of local men, as was the custom at that time, decided that Mary had died from a 'Visitation of God'.

Postscript

Among the papers attached to the verdict of the jurors in the case of Lydia Aldrich is the draft of an unfinished letter dated 1838 and some hand-writing practice. The reverse was used to list the potential jurors to attend the inquest. The letter is addressed 'Dear daurter' and the Mary mentioned must be Mary Crosby. If so Mary could be the eldest daughter of the blacksmith John Crosby and his wife Elizabeth, both in their early 40s. Elizabeth would be the likely writer and Mary was away in service, as a cook and later a nursemaid to the same family.

The first child listed in the Butley baptismal records, born to the Crosbys, was Sarah in 1816. Then came Hannah in 1819, who is listed a living at home when the 1841 Census was taken. Mary doesn't appear at all. Thus Mary's parents were living elsewhere when she was born. Likewise Matilda, if she was her sister. Note the Suffolk 'agoen' in the letter for 'going', and enjoy the rhyming couplet warning against theft of Mary's book.