



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Was it an Epidemic - Don Archer

During the incumbency of the Revd. J R Whitaker I was allowed to look at the church records of burials in the hope, unfulfilled, of some clue as to why Charletts House was abandoned.

I expect these records, which began in 1603, have now been photo copied, but then the originals were kept at the vicarage and were so fragile that I hardly dared touch the first two or three sheets of parchment. With the help of the vicar, though, I made a long list of the deceased Charletts, but far from solving the mystery, I discovered another which has intrigued me ever since.

For many years burials had numbered four or five as year, normal for a village of Cleeve Priors Population. Then in the 1720's numbers rose steeply and in 1729 reached a peak of no less than 43. I remember discussing this with Mr Whitaker, who could only suggest that there must have been some kind of epidemic. Well, if that is the explanation, it must have been the most tragic episode in Cleeve Priors History, lasting about four years, it took about a third of the population, yet it seems to have been ignored by local historians. Even the learned John Humphries, who must have seen the records when researching for his "History of Cleeve Prior" has nothing to say on the subject.

Since writing, the forgoing Don Warren has unearthed some information that proves our locality was indeed struck by a serious epidemic. South Littleton lost 14 inhabitants in 1729 and 14 again in 1732 and the vicar wrote "pestifer annus" [year of the plague] in the register. An even closer parallel to Cleeve Prior is mentioned in the book about a Bredon Village by the Late Fred Archer-

"Some could remember 1728 when 45 people died suddenly of swelling of the throat, more folks than in the 20 years before"

So it could have been Bubonic Plague, as that is one of the symptoms, though official history says had died out a hundred years before.