

## **THE SUSPICIOUS DEATH OF JOHN DANDRIDGE born 1619** **300710**

John Dandridge was my 10x great-grandfather was a yeoman who lived in Drayton St Leonards, Oxfordshire. He married twice and had two daughters and three sons, John Francis & William. William, the youngest, was my direct ancestor.

In 1674 he wrote a will which he signed in his own hand, which was largely concerned with the succession of ownership of his copyhold lands to his three sons. He also mentions that he had already given his son John £1,000 pounds and so he would only bequest him five shillings.

From Oxford Record Office was obtained another will written by John Dandridge shortly before his death in 1684 and a bundle of Court papers which shows this will was disputed, but unfortunately the papers were incomplete and do not give the outcome of the case - although they do go into the circumstances of the making of the will in some detail.

The Court papers also mention a third will in which he gave a legacy of four hundred pounds to his son William, but this has not been found.

The will written in 1684 leaves virtually everything to his son Francis, with his son John and daughter Mary getting one shilling each, son William £30 and daughter Sarah £100. His sons John and Francis were present at the making of the will and son John wrote the will from words "from his father's mouth" Others present were Mary Dandridge (son John's wife?), John Wells who later married Sarah and Mary Webb. John Wells and Mary Webb witnessed the will. The old man then signed with a mark apparently saying, this is how I have signed for 40 years (although he had signed his name, John Dandridge on the 1676 will). The will was made in the upper chamber of the old man's house, when he was ill with fits of colic.

Supposedly John Dandridge then died a fortnight after this signing. The tone of the cross examining in court was that Francis & John manipulated the old man when he was light-headed and confused from the colic and produced a will to their benefit, making sure that their brother William's share was very small, and that the others present collaborated in this, but the verdict is unknown.

One has to wonder if something more serious was going on as "fits of colic" does sound like it was possible the old man was poisoned. This

was not directly mentioned in the Court papers, but witnesses were called in an effort to prove that John Dandridge was prone to these colic fits, so the implication was there.

As the Court papers are incomplete it is not known who is challenging the will, but it is likely to be my ancestor William who was the one who lost out in the last will produced.

Wills and Court Documents received from Oxford R O 08-08-08  
Pec 67/2/18 which contained the following documents

1676 Will John Dandridge

1684 Will of John Dandridge

1684 Inventory

Booklet of Court Papers with 11 pages –JD1 – JD11

Separate Court pages JD 12 - 16