



CERTIFICATE OF BURIAL IN WOOLLEN, 1682.  
 (Actual size, 10 by 6½ inches)

## A CERTIFICATE OF BURIAL IN WOOLLEN, 1682.

*Contributed by F. A. Bailey, M.A.*

THE document shown in the accompanying illustration was found several years ago among many other old papers in a chest in the Vestry of Prescott Parish Church. It appears to be the only example of its kind preserved at Prescott, and there is not a strong likelihood that very many will have been preserved elsewhere. It is in the form of an affidavit, certifying that the statutory requirement as to burial in woollen cloth had been fulfilled, and runs as follows :

" *Willm Lyon* of the Parish of *Prescott* in the county of *Lancaster* maketh Oath, That *Richard Lyon* of the Parish of *Prescott* in the county of *Lancaster* lately Deceased, was not put in, wound or wrapt up, or Buried in any Shirt, Shift, Sheet, or Shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemp, Silk, Hair, Gold or Silver, or other than what is made of Sheeps-Wooll only, nor in any Coffin lined or faced with any Cloth, stuff, or any other thing whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemp, Silk, Hair, Gold, or Silver, or any other Material but sheeps-Wooll only. Dated the 14<sup>th</sup> day of *June* in the 34<sup>th</sup> Year of the Reign of our sovereign Lord Charles the second by the Grace of God, of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, KING, Defender of the Faith, etc. Annoque Dom. 1682

Sealed and Subscribed by us  
Who Were present, and Witnesses to the Swearing of the  
abovesaid Affidavit.

ADRIAN O TUCKER

PETER O LYON

I *Edwd Goodall* Vicar of *Prescott* do herebie Certify, that the day and Year abouesaid, the said *Willm Lion* came before me and made such Affidavit as is above specified, according to a late Act of Parliament Intituled, An Act for burying in Woollen. Witness my hand the day and year first above written.

[Signed] EDWD: GOODALL

[Note added] *buried at S<sup>t</sup> Ellens and Parish dues 10<sup>d</sup> to me*"

The Act of Parliament here referred to was passed in 1678 (30 Car. 2, c. 3), to take the place of an earlier statute (18 Car. 2, c. 4, 1666). The object of both statutes, and the reason for the substitution of a new one in place of the first, are shown in the preamble of that of 1678 as follows :

“Whereas an Act made in the eighteenth year of his Majesty’s Reign that now is, intituled *An Act for Burying in Woollen only*, was intended for the lessening the Importation of Linen from beyond the Seas, and the Encouragement of the Woollen and Paper Manufactures of this Kingdom, had the same been observed ; but in respect there was not a sufficient Remedy thereby given for the Discovery and Prosecution of Offences against the said Law, the same hath hitherto not had the Effect thereby intended.”

The Act of 1666 was accordingly repealed, and that of 1678 repeated its main enactment, with more elaborate provisions for ensuring its observance, including the keeping of registers by ministers of persons buried in accordance with the Act, the swearing of an affidavit by a relative of the deceased within eight days of the burial in each case,<sup>1</sup> and the public reading of the Act immediately after divine service on St. Bartholomew’s Day (24 August) for six years. Both Acts imposed the penalty of five pounds for non-compliance, with exemption only in respect of persons who died of plague. A further Act in 1680 (32 Car. 2, c. 1) authorised “Parsons, Vicars, and Curates” to administer the affidavit in places where no magistrate resided, provided such clergy were not of “the Parish, or Chapel of Ease, where the Party is interred.” The Acts of 1678 and 1680 were repealed in 1814 (54 Geo. III, c. 108).

The Certificate found at Prescott therefore accords with the requirements of the Acts of 1678 and 1680. The affidavit was administered by the Vicar of Prescott

<sup>1</sup> The affidavit was to be administered gratis.

in respect of a burial within his parish but not actually at the Parish Church. St. Helen's Chapel had formerly been (and was later to become again) a chapel of ease to Prescott, but during the period in question it had become in fact a meeting-place for dissenters,<sup>1</sup> as is evidenced by the following statement in the Prescott Register: "Burials at S<sup>t</sup> Ellens Chappell nonconformist 1678 M<sup>r</sup> Greg Preacher . . ." Incidentally we may mention that burials at St. Helens were not in every case recorded in the Prescott Register, for the latter has no reference to the burial of Richard Lyon, the subject of this Certificate.

The Prescott Register contains no allusion to burial in woollen before 1678, and we may therefore suppose that, in this parish at least, the Act of 1666 had been inoperative. The list of burials in 1678 is, however, preceded by the following statement:

"These persons whose names are under written were buried either in the Church or in the Church yard of the Parish Church of Prescott, And were not then put in wrapt or wound up in any Shift, Shirt, Sheete, or Shroud made or mingled with flax, hemp, silke, haire, gold, or silver or other then what is made of sheeps woole onely, nor in any Coffin lined or faced with any cloath stuff or any other thing whatsoever, made or mingled with flax, hemp, silke, haire, gold, or silver, or any other materiall but sheeps woole onely, according to an act of Parliament set forth for that purpose."

A similar statement is entered at the end of the Register with respect to persons buried "in other places belonging to the parish of Prescott." These entries were evidently made to obviate the necessity of keeping as a separate record the register of burials in woollen required by the Act.

<sup>1</sup> St. Helens Chapel, Rainford Chapel, and Sankey Chapel, all in Prescott parish, became Presbyterian meeting-places during the Commonwealth, and remained in nonconformist hands until 1710, 1700 and 1728 respectively (*Vict. Hist. of Lancashire*).

The Prescot Churchwardens' Accounts for 1679 record that sixpence had been paid "for the Act of Parliament for burying in woollen." This purchase may have been made with a view to complying with the clause respecting the annual public reading of the Act.

