

ROUGH MUSIC AT STANTON, SUFFOLK, 1828

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MARRIED: on the 8th inst, Mr James Burr, miller, of Stanton, to Mrs Sexton, grocer and draper of the same parish, and who had been a widow for the long period of eleven days.

James Sexton (the former husband of the blooming bride) died on the 27th of April; and it is reported that during the three last weeks of his illness, a match was agreed upon between his wife and Mr Burr; and further, that the wedding-cap and shroud were ordered at the same time - the cake for the funeral obsequies, and that for the solemnization of the matrimonial rites, manufactured in the same vessel! Whether this be true or not, it is certain that Sexton was buried on Friday the 2nd inst.; the next day the banns for the marriage of Mr Burr and the *Widow* Sexton were entered in the book appointed for that purpose; but it was discovered on the Sunday that the minister must have a week's notice of the intention of the parties. This was too long to wait; they therefore gave up their intention of being married in this round-about way, and off they hied to Bury to purchase a license.

On their return to Stanton, as many of the inhabitants were anxious that due honour should be done on the occasion, a great number of persons met Mr Burr and the widow at Ixworth; they here formed themselves into a regular procession to escort them home; a band of music was provided, composed of kettles, old boilers and various other instruments, which vied with each other in the 'concord of sweet sounds', and 'ever and anon' a stream of light darted through the crowd in the darkness of the evening, produced by a sudden collision of a piece of steel with an old scythe. In this order, and amidst the most discordant sounds, Mr Burr and the Widow Sexton were marched into Stanton about eleven o'clock on Wednesday night, and after the band had paraded round the street several times, the crowd quietly dispersed towards their homes.

The next morning, however, it was understood that Mr Burr and the Widow Sexton

intended to complete their agreement. The band assembled, and the rough artizans of the village began to contrive various appropriate devices. A large white flag was attached to the house of the bride and floated majestically across the street; an ass's skin, stretched upon a board, as an emblem of the disgraceful nature of the marriage, and a white flag, with a rude drawing of a coffin with the bride's former husband quietly deposited therein, were borne by two men, habited in white shirts, black scarves, and long white hat-bands. Others were dressed in garbs equally amusing, but black and white formed the principal part. The band of drums, kettles, rattles, &c. &c. headed this procession, and they paraded the street all the morning.

An immense number of people had assembled when, about eleven o' clock, the bride and bridegroom made their appearance, and lest they be too roughly assailed, the constable undertook to conduct them in safely to the church; he walked before with his long staff of authority, then followed Mr Burr and the Widow Sexton, next the flags and music playing 'Oh dear, what can the matter be!', and lastly the populace. In this order they were led to the very church where, on the Friday previous, the widow had buried her husband; but, unfortunately they then discovered that they had come to the *wrong church*, the license being for the other church! However, that it might not be said they had walked half a mile out of the way for nothing, the bride and bridegroom were made to pay a visit to the grave of old Sexton, and the question was put in due form whether he was willing that his widow should be joined in the bands of matrimony with James Burr; but Sexton answered not a word, and so some of the crowd, in his name, gave consent.

The procession now walked back to the other church, where the ceremony was performed. The church and churchyard were crowded to excess, and the constable was obliged to stand at the altar with his staff, to keep off the pressure of the people and preserve order. When the ceremony was over, the music played 'Go to the devil, and shake yourself', and the church bells rang a merry tune. Mr and Mrs Burr repaired to the house of the latter to spend the remainder of the day, while the band &c. paraded the town until evening, when the musicians, flag-bearers, &c. resorted to the public-houses to spend the money they had obtained for their exertions in

endeavouring to shame those in whom no shame existed. Night drew her sable mantle on the proceedings - the follies of the day ceased - and Stanton was itself again.

There is no great disparity of years between Burr and his wife, but there are strong suspicions that the money which old Sexton had earned by his labour was the object of the marriage. His son, however, will not be deprived of his share, as Mrs Burr was cited into the Ecclesiastical Court two days after her marriage, to compel her to administer. An inventory has in consequence been taken of the property, and Mr Burr will find that his golden vision will vanish, and leave him only the enjoyment of his wife.

Dr David Dymond