

John Barube from Coventry

In the summer of 2009, *Le Monde Berrubey* (vol. 21, no 3), published a text where John's testament was decrypted in good part. This document goes back to March 1519, 495 years ago, well before the official discovery of Canada. It belongs to the *United Kingdom National Archives* (UKNA). The spelling Barube corresponds to a Latin form of the family name and it's spelled the same way in the death certificate of our ancestor in 1688, where he appears as *Damianus Barube*. In France, some still spell the name Barubé, instead of Berrubé or Bérubé. I was not able to read every word of the testament, except for the following :

(page 1)¹ **IN THE NAME OF GOD AMEN** xx° die menso for mars anno DM^{oooo}XIX²
John (p. 2 ,first line) **Barube** of the parish of Seint Mighil³ in Coventre⁴ in good mind
make my testament and (line 2) last will in this wife fiate⁵ I bequethe⁶ my soul to
almighty God to mi Blessed lady Saint (line 3) Mary and to all the saints of Heven for
my body to be buried in thi cemetri of Saint Mighil (line 4) before my lady of pytie⁷
and for my burriall I gyve six⁸ten d⁹/ltn to the high aultir there (line 5) pro
Decrement¹⁰ oblige xxS/ltn to the Charter House¹¹ xxd/ltn to the white friars and to
the (line 6) grey friars¹² in Coventre my place (?) xS/ ltn. I will gyve bestowal at my
burriall xl/ltn I (line 7) gyve to any son of my foure children xl/. If any of them
deceases nothing the ... of... (line 8)... yere¹³ than I will these portions to deceased
be divided between their moder and the (line 9) oder childs that they have or ... /ltn
to my father and xx S/ltn to Henry Dilby (line 10) xx S/ltn to the couven box xS/ltn to
the box of the holy yoft¹⁴ & done..... to the reseant of all (line 11) my goods & my
debts be paid and my bequest fulfille I give and bequethe to Margarite (line 12) my
wife. And the same Margarite my wife I ordene and make to be my sole execature¹⁵
to (line 13) dignify for the helth of my soul at the Hall thyn best¹⁶ and I ordene and
make youster Thob (lg. 14) Margy and youster¹⁷ Richard Marler to be inseers of
thyg¹⁸ my testament and to any of these (line 15) I give for these labours xl S. The

¹ With his name written in the margin on page 1

² 1519

³ St. Michael today

⁴ *Coventre* at the time = Coventry today

⁵ In *The Oxford English Dictionary* from 1930, a *fiate* refers to some kind of authorization or approval of a document.

⁶ Old spelling of *bequeath*.

⁷ *pytie* instead of piety?

⁸ S for sols or shillings

⁹ d for pennies

¹⁰ Could mean in a decreasing order.

¹¹ *Monastère des Chartreux*, a monastic order that came from France to take care of sick people.

¹² Corresponds to the Carmelites (white brothers) and to the Franciscans (grey)

¹³ For « désiré »

¹⁴ *Toft* and *croft* are old Norse words meaning a house and a little farm.

¹⁵ The spouse is designated as the sole testament executor.

¹⁶ The word *thyn* or *thyne* seems to correspond to the word good in a religious way. The words *Hall thyn best* could mean a place where good is prevailing.

¹⁷ *Youster* corresponds in old Norse, at least in East Anglia to a job description. It is probably occupational as "the Friend or Servant of Just".

Source : <http://www.surnamedb.com/surname.aspx?name=Youster>

¹⁸ Inseers of thig = in charge of approving the testament execution

wytnes¹⁹ Robert Fyther mate²⁰ at Seint Mighil (line 16) Thomas Rindel Henry Dilby with others

I had difficulties understanding some xx followed by letters or symbols. I had to understand first that they used roman numbers then. In a document about the guild of the Holy Trinity from Coventry, I found some indications that « xx l » = 20 pounds, « xx s » = 20 shillings i.e. 1 pound or « xxd », 20 pennies (12 in a shilling). There was always the letters « /ltn » after the numbers, maybe to differentiate the currency in use with many others that existed at the time. Apart from this difficulty, I came to some understanding of this testament. Though it is not completely clear, I found some information to help me. For instance, Berger²¹ indicates that the documentation is rare about the Coventry merchants, before 1550, except for a few testaments. This city is nevertheless involved in international commercial activities with York. Their goods are shipped through Boston, on the East England coast, before going to Calais. In 1505, Richard Marler, a *stapler*, was seen as *one of the richest merchant in England* (Berger page 95).

From the testament, we also understand that John was a very religious man. He was a Catholic like most of the people then (before Henry the VIII), as shown by his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He is also between two generations, his father being alive as well as his four children, some already with children themselves. He's giving money instead of properties or other goods. He's most probably making his testament in 1519 because he's sick (his first donation going to the Charter House). A french document of the XVIth Century talks about the epidemic that struck then : « *C'est toujours par le Shropshire qu'a commencé à se déclarer la maladie connue sous le nom de Suette ou Sueur angloise. Elle se manifesta, pour la première fois, en 1487; elle fit périr une infinité de monde dans cette province, & successivement dans toute l'Angleterre : elle cessa à la fin de cette même année, & reprit en 1518...* »²²

Because of this *English Fever*, we can presume that he's probably dead in the spring of 1519 while the epidemic had struck since the preceding fall. If he didn't die then, he was sick enough to prepare his departure from this world. Some towns even lost half of their population and more. *It had no respect for wealth or rank, and predominantly attacked males between the ages of 15 and 45 years. The incubation period was frighteningly short and the outcome normally fatal. The symptoms of acute respiratory disease and copious sweating were characteristic, providing the name 'the English sweating disease'.*²³

John's testament also shows us that our family name was present in England. If our ancestors arrived in this country at the time of the Anglo-Norman Kingdom, between 1066 and 1204, they probably lived there over three centuries, a period during which our family name appeared. But if our ancestors were already in England before the Conquest of 1066, our roots in England could go back to the Danes invasion or even a few centuries before, as far as the first Angles or Saxons.

Michel Bérubé, #0338

¹⁹ Witness today

²⁰ The *mate* refers here to the witnesses reunited at Saint-Michael de Coventre.

²¹ BERGER, Ronald, *The Most Necessary Luxuries, The Mercers' Company of Coventry, 1550-1690*.

²² *Mélanges tirés d'une grande bibliothèque*, Paris, Éd. de la Reine 1782.

²³ http://books.google.ca/books?id=Mj8TAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA2-PA103&dq=roger+de+montgomeri&hl=fr#PPP0_M1

²³ E Bridson, "English 'sweate' (Sudor Anglicus)...", *The British Journal of Biomedical Science*, 2001 http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3874/is_200101/ai_n8939673 [archive]