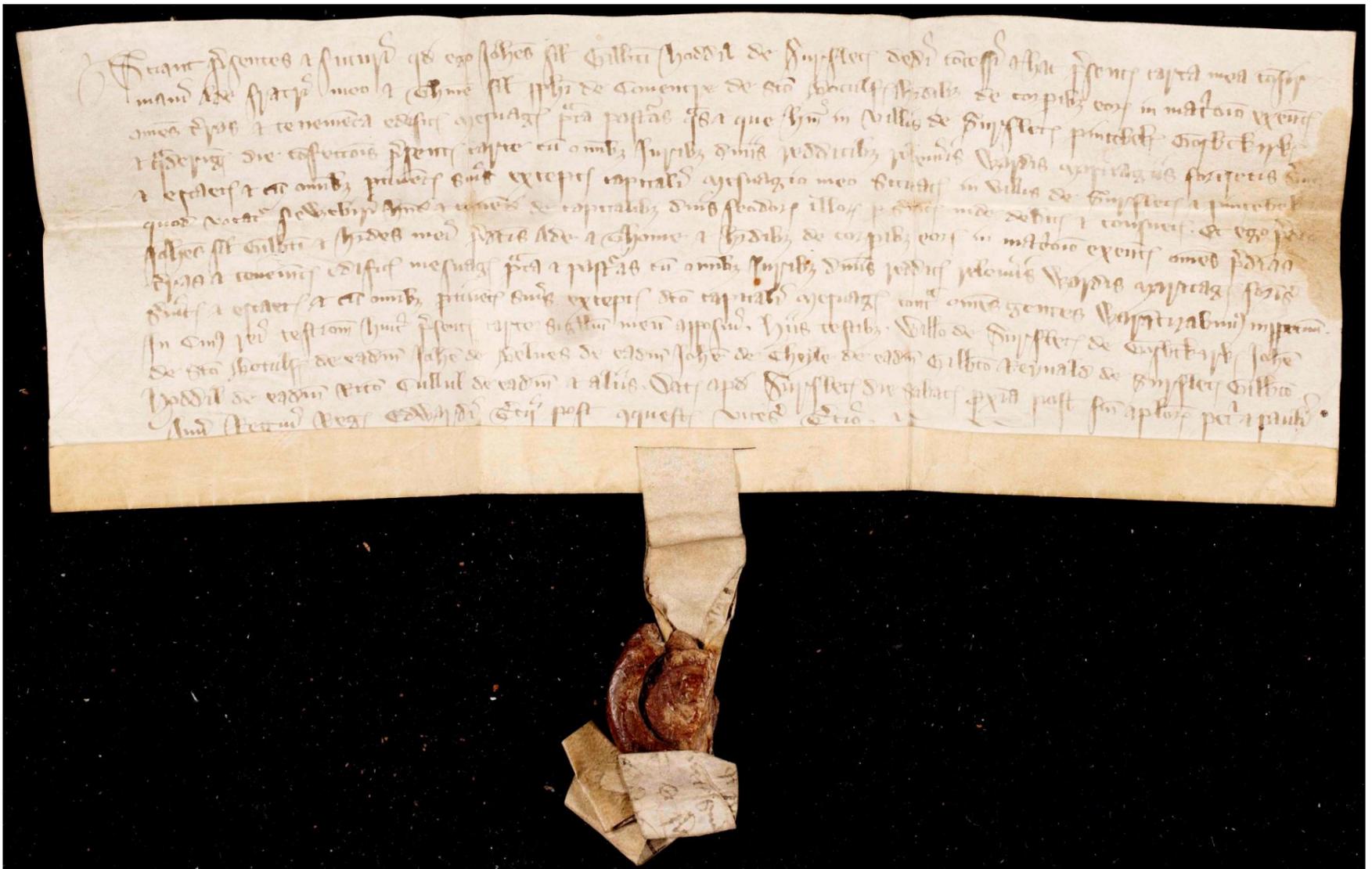


Ill health in the 14th century

These little deeds record property transactions in 1349, but incidentally also contain a very early reference to the ill health of a man named John Hoddil of Surfleet.

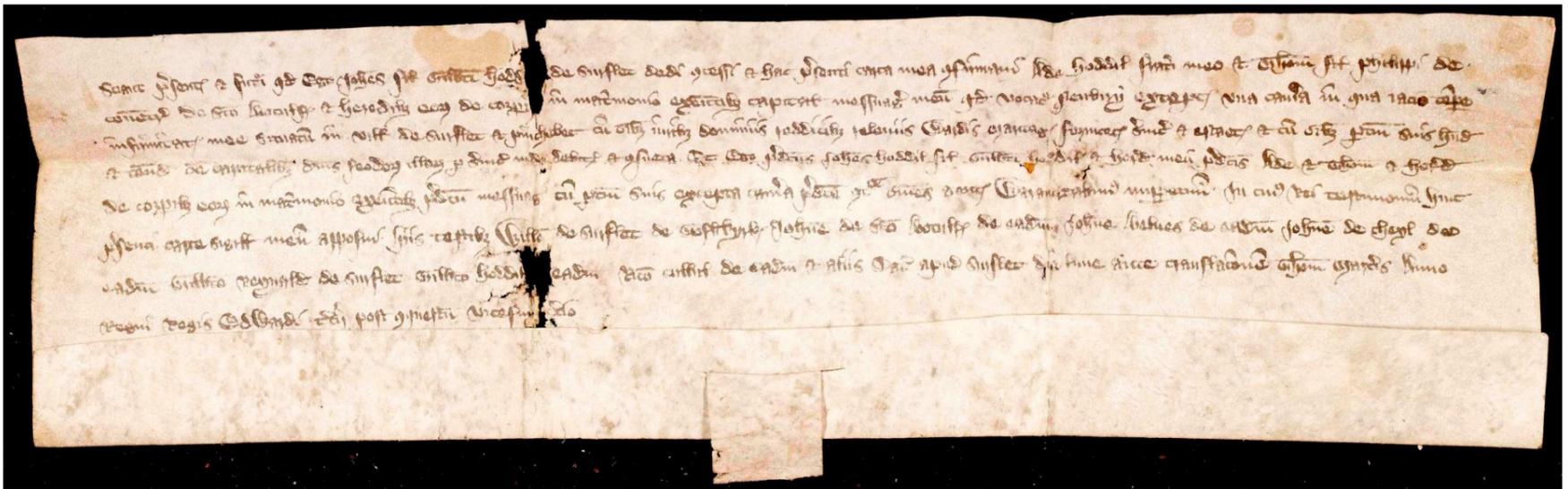
The first deed is dated 4 July 1349. It is written in Latin and records the conveyance of property by John, son of Gilbert Hoddil of Surfleet, to his brother Adam and Adam's wife Thomasina, who was the daughter of Philip de Coventre of Boston.



John conveys all his property in Surfleet, Pinchbeck, Gosberton and Quadring to Adam and Thomasina, with the specific exception of "my capital messuage in the villages of Surfleet and Pinchbeck which is called Newbery".

At this period a "capital messuage" referred to the main house of an estate along with its outbuildings, stables, barns, gardens, orchards and the farmland that went with it. In this case it seems that the land extended over the parish boundary of Surfleet into part of Pinchbeck.

The second deed was made less than six months later, on 28 December 1349, but shows a marked deterioration in John Hoddil's situation. It is also in Latin and is another conveyance to his brother and sister-in-law, Adam and Thomasina, but this time he conveys to them the property which he had previously retained for himself, his capital messuage called Newbery, "**except for one chamber in which I now lie ill**" [end of line 2 and the first word of line 3 – infirmitat'].



A chamber, at this time, specifically meant an upstairs room, in other words his bedroom.

These little deeds of course raise several questions to which we do not have answers.

- Was John already unwell when the first conveyance was made in July?
- How old was he? What was he suffering from, and did he expect to recover?
- Was the second conveyance, which was made when he was definitely ill, part of a deal with his brother and sister-in-law to grant them the house in return for being looked after during his final illness? If so, it would not be the last time that house owners have sold their property to finance medical care.

One thing that can be relatively certain, despite the date of the documents, is that John Hoddil did not have the Plague. If he had fallen victim to this terrifying disease, which ravaged England from June 1348 to the latter part of 1349, he would have had no time in which to draw up either of the deeds.

Moreover, all the people directly named in the first deed were still alive nearly six months later when the second deed was drawn up, not only John himself, his brother Adam and sister-in-law Thomasina, but also all of the seven named witnesses to both documents - William de Surflete, John de Sancto Botulpho, John de Belnes and John de Cheyle of Gosberton, Gilbert Reynaud, Gilbert Hoddil and Richard Cullul of Surfleet.

Document references: BNLW/1/1/55/7-8