RINGSTEAD MEN

Who joined the Army and Navy
In the 18th & 19th & 20th Centuries

David Ball

Cover: A Recruiting Sergeant of the 33rd Regiment of Foot 1814. Coloured aquatint by R and D Havell after George Walker.

Contents

Preface

In this book I have collected together the military men who were born or lived in Ringstead.

We see in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the soldiers and sailors travelled all over Great Britain and Ireland and a few travelled to Asia and the United States of America. Not all of them returned. Some died in service, others settled in other places and some we have been unable to locate after they were discharged. For those who did return, what tales they had to tell of foreign lands and different peoples and customs. Were the locals eager to hear of the world outside or were they just the bore in the corner of the pub?

We see with the military men and in the stories of the civilian population that Ringstead was not an isolated static community as we might think of rural life at the time but had a flow of people into and from the village as well as a constant flow of travelling people through it.

I have tried to put my main sources at the end of each chapter so that people can see, and perhaps follow up, how the stories emerged. The chapters are in approximate chronological order but I have grouped families in a single chapter.

David Ball

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Ringstead Soldiers, Sailors and Marines 1776 – 1902

In Date Order of Enlistments

Name	Life Span	Service Years	Regiment	Service History	Notes
1 William Pettitt	1756 - ?	1776 - 1788	2nd Regiment (Coldstream) Foot Guards	Possibly American War of Independence	
2 Samuel Nichols	1777 - 1815	1795 - 1815	4th Battalion RHA	Peninsular War. Killed at Waterloo	
3 John Nichols	1787 - 1807	1805 - 1807	Ist Battalion RHA	? Died in Service	
4 John Knowles	1788 – 1839	1806 - 1821	a 22nd (Light) Dragoons b 1st Veterans' Battalion	India Java Returned to Ringstead area after service	
5 John Smith	1786 - ?	1808 - 1814	34th (Cumberland) Regiment	Peninsular War Musket wound in head at Vittoria	
6 Thomas Nichols	1797 - ?	1812 - ?	98th Company of Royal Marines	?	
7 John Phillips	1793 – 1847	1813 – 1816	2nd Battalion 69th (South Lincolnshire) Regiment	Quatre Bras Waterloo Musket shot in arm at Waterloo (Possibly amputated)	
8 Morris Knowles	1796 – 1866	1815 – 1827	3rd Regiment of Dragoon Guards (Prince of Wales)	England, Scotland, Ireland Food Riots etc	
9 John Percival	1799 – 1868	1819 – 1843	4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards Troop Sergeant Major	All Home Countries Rebecca Riots etc	
10 John Knowles	1808 – 1887	1827 – 1848	a 14th Buckinghamshire Regiment of Foot b 49th Regiment of Foot	India India/China/Ireland In-Pensioner at Chelsea	
11William Atkins	1818 - ?	1839 - 1841	29th Regiment of Foot	England, Scotland, Wales Ireland	
12 George Ball	1818 - ?	1839 - ?	53rd Company of Royal Marines	?	
13 Thomas Ball	Abt 1834 = 1886	1857 – 1878	a Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot b 3rd Battalion of Rifle Brigade	India India	
14 Joseph Edwards	1851 - ?	1866 - 1874	Royal Navy	Portugal Mediterranean	
14 Archibald T. Near	1886 - 1916	1902 - 1902	Royal Navy	England	

Chapter 1

William Pettitt: 1756 - ? (Served 1776 – 1788)

2nd Regiment (Coldstream) Foot Guards

The Pettitt (sometimes Pettit) family has a long history in the Ringstead and Great Addington area. A Lewis Pettitt, son of Eusebie, was buried in the Ringstead Parish churchyard on February 10th 1600. A century later, another Lewis Pettit, was baptised in Great Addington on 12th July 1706, the son of William and Jane. He married Elizabeth Sanderson on 11th May 1729 in Great Addington and a son William was christened on 8th December 1734 in Ringstead. Like many others they had crossed the Nene to the larger village.

On April 20th 1752 William Pettit "of Ringstead" married Mary Yeomans at Rushton, some fourteen miles north-west of Ringstead. They moved back to William's home parish and had at least five children, two of whom died young. One of the surviving children was another William who had been baptised on 5th January 1757. We know from his military discharge that he had become a "cordwainer" (shoemaker) in Ringstead before his enlistment.

William joined the Second (Coldstream) Foot Guards in March or April 1776. Famously, the regiment was placed as the second senior regiment of Household Troops, as it entered the service of the Crown after the 1st Regiment of Foot Guards. It answered to that "insult" by adopting the motto *Nulli Secundus* (Second to None), alluding to the fact that the regiment was older than the senior regiment.

William served with them for twelve years three months, leaving on 27th July 1788. On his discharge paper it states that he was a soldier in Colonel Boscawen's Company of the Regiment He was praised as having "served honestly and faithfully" and was "humbly recommended as a proper object of His Majesty's Bounty of Chelsea Hospital".

The real question is whether he was part of a section of the Coldstream Guards who joined a composite battalion of men made up from the three Guards regiments. This was commanded by Colonel Mathews of the Coldstreams, but it set sail from England in March 1776 so there is some doubt that he had enlisted in time to fight in the American War of Independence. There is, however, another clue in the official records, for William Pettitt appears in The Royal Hospital Chelsea Disability Admission Books (WO116). He is shown as starting his pension on 14th August 1788 and beside his entry it has been written, "Not upon the English Establishment." Michael McGrady, from the National Archives has told me that this probably means that his payments were "not made from the home-based part of the War office, as distinct from the overseas branches of government".

My assumption is that this implies that he was indeed in America for almost all his service career and took part in this ill-fated campaign (although this ended in 1783 so must be some

doubt). Because there is uncertainty that William was in America I will only, for the moment, only deal with it briefly.

A unit of men and officers from all three existing Guards regiments was formed in 1776. This consisted of men from the First (Grenadier) Guards, 2nd (Coldstream) Guards and the 3rd (Scots) Guards. They were all dressed in a uniform of redcoats and white breeches but the three had different lace and other minor features. When they reached America, their uniform changed as they realised its unsuitability for the type of warfare with which they were now confronted and formed a light "skirmishing" company for the campaign.

By 1779 reinforcements were needed and The Ipswich Journal for 27th March of that year reported:

> Saturday a draught was made in St. James's-park from the Coldstream or 2nd regiment of foot guards, to be sent to complete the brigade of guards in America, the major part of which turned out volunteers.

There seems to have been a lack of officers in the Brigade and as a result they spent much of the rest of 1778 and 1779 garrisoned in New York and took part in skirmishes at Portsmouth (Virginia) and New Haven (Connecticut) in 1779 and Young's House (New York) in 1780.

The first major battle that William would have seen was at Springfield in New Jersey in 1780. The British forces wanted to capture New Jersey but were met at the small village of Springfield by a smaller but determined American force. The British could not break through (although there seems some dispute about this) but burnt and looted the village and retreated across a boat bridge to Staten island. This battle really ended British ambition in the north and there were no further major engagements.

The brigade then sailed south to Portsmouth and then on to Charlestown joining up with the main British army in North Carolina in January 1781. On February 1st 1780 the Guards, with great gallantry, forced the crossing of the Catawba River while under heavy fire. The British commander, Cornwallis, was chasing the Americans and trying to bring them to battle. The Americans stopped and formed three battle lines at Guilford Courthouse. The Coldstream Guards were on the left of the British line but the whole line charged as one. They were met with volleys of fire from the first American line who then ran into the woods and their second line then let off another devastating volley and retreated. The third line, of battle-hardened Virginians, then opened fire and the Guards took the worst of these fusillades. 550 British soldiers, including 11 of the 19 officers, were killed or wounded which was about one third of the army. The Americans retreated but the British were short of manpower and supplies and Cornwallis and the remnants of the army, including the Guards who were reduced to one battalion, gave up the south and went in search of provisions for his army.

Eventually the army arrived at Yorktown which was in British hands and started to construct a "defensible deep-sea port". The French fleet defeated the British and blockaded the port. Cornwallis, who had hoped for reinforcements had to abandon the outer defences as lacking the troops to defend so long a fortification. These redoubts were swiftly taken over by the French and Americans and the British were bombarded into defeat. A white flag was taken out and the British troops suffered the ignominy of surrendering to Washington's and the French forces. They had to march to a field through the American and French soldiers lined up on either side and ceremoniously lay down their arms. Some 7,000 British soldiers were then marched to York in Pennsylvania where they were kept captive until 1783 when, with the war's end, they returned to England and their respective regiments.

Surrender of the British at the Siege of Yorktown showing French blockade (1781)
Unknown artist (Wikipedia Commons)

If we are correct in thinking that William Pettitt did go to America, he still had some five years left to serve. I have not managed yet to trace the movements of the Second Regiment of Foot Guards, but we do get a clear reminder that soldiers not at war get bored and sometimes fall into bad ways. The Oxford Journal of 10th September 1785 reported:

> This Morning Captain H. of the second Regiment of Foot Guards, went into a Gunsmith's Shop opposite Bedford Street, in the Strand and purchased a Pair of Pistols, one of which he immediately loaded with a Ball, turned round and shot himself through the Head, and dropped down dead in the Shop. – The Occasion of his committing this rash Action is said to be his losing last Night a capital sum of Money at a Gaming Table.

I also found that the same newspaper on the 19th March 1785 gave the important news that:

> The Duke of York has ordered his Regiment, the Coldstream or second of Foot Guards, to have blue Coats, Waistcoats, and Breeches, with red Capes, Lappels [sic], and Cuffs, at the next Clothing.

In this comparatively quiet period before the explosion of the Anglo-French and Napoleonic Wars it seems that the British Army had fallen into a dangerous lethargy.

William Pettit, by the summer of 1788, had become unfit for service. The reason for his discharge was that he had developed asthma. *The Admissions Book for Invalid Soldiers* of the Royal Chelsea Hospital, (No. 1274) shows that he was examined on Thursday 7th August 1788. As a result, he became a Chelsea Hospital out-patient, receiving a small pension based on his 12 years 3 months of service. He was still only 32 years of age.

Although some Ancestry family trees link him to a marriage and family in Suffolk I have not managed to find any proof to identify him after he left the army although there are many possibilities.

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Chapter 2

The Nichols Family

Samuel Nichols 1777 – 1815 (Served 1795 – 1815)

5th Battalion Royal Horse Artillery

Note: the surname is spelt in a wide variety of ways so I will stick to Nichols.

Struck down with a heavy cold and it pouring with rain outside I decided to while away some time by looking at Ringstead man, Sergeant Samuel Nichols, who was killed at Waterloo in 1815. I struggled to find any more about him not contained in Martin Aaron's booklet, *The Waterloo Men of Northamptonshire,* so I started to look at his family and background and realised that there were other military connections in the Nichols family.

The only possible William Nichols, Samuel's father, to be baptised in Ringstead was on January 23rd 1739 (old calendar so year ended in March) in Ringstead Church along with his twin sister Mary and brother John. His parents were Simon and Mary Nickols (Née Porter) who had married in Ringstead on October 26th 1731. Unfortunately, he and his twin brother were buried as infants. We first find our William again in Barnwell some nine miles north-east of Ringstead, where he was the father of a "natural daughter", christened Mary, on April 19th 1772. The mother was Susannah (or Susanna) Berridge who was the daughter of John and Jane, baptised privately on 26th April 1752 in Barnwell St Andrew Church. William and Susannah had actually been married on 5th April 1772 in that same church and it is in the Marriage Register that we see that William is from the Parish of Ringstead and that they were married by licence, (perhaps to speed up the process before the baby was born).

Another daughter was christened Ann on 3rd April 1774 at Barnwell and it seems likely that they returned to Ringstead soon after for it was there that the rest of their children were baptised. I have so far found no sign of either of the girls in Barnwell or Ringstead Registers Burial Registers. Before the Censuses people are easily lost. However, an Ann Nichols married Menzies Clough Stevens at Barnwell on 3rd December 1793. Menzies was a gravestone cutter and the couple are together in the 1841 Census for Barnwell. Did the girls remain in Barnwell perhaps with Susanna's parents or did the Nichols family keep in contact with the area after their move to Ringstead?

Samuel Nichols seems to have been the first child baptised in Ringstead Church on 19th January 1777. There followed Elizabeth (06/06/1779) who married Thomas Adams of Raunds in 1799; Sarah baptised 10/01/1781 and buried 18/03/1782; William (26/02/1786 who I have not found mentioned again); John (10/09/1787); Thomas (baptism not found but buried 04/03/1795); a second Thomas together with sister Susanna (baptised 14/09/1800). I think Thomas was born in about 1797 so they may not have been twins, although as we have seen, twins did run in the extended family.

In this brief account we are concerned with three of the sons, Samuel, John and Thomas who enlisted during the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

Samuel was the first to enlist. On 1st February 1795 at Thrapston he joined up as a gunner in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Horse Artillery. He was a labourer, just 18 years old, and he was 5 ft 8¼ inches tall with a fair complexion, light hair and grey eyes. He signed up for unlimited service, so it looks as

if he intended to make the army his career. The Royal Horse Artillery had only been formed in 1793 as part of the Royal Artillery. All the soldiers were mounted so they could keep up with the cavalry. The troop had three divisions each with two subdivisions. The subdivision would have one six-pounder gun and its own horses, wagons, gunners and support troops. The "D Troop", which I understand to be the same as the "4th Battalion", would have some 168 officers and men with 200 horses. The uniform was blue with gold lace and red facings but their overalls, (trousers worn over the breeches and gaiters to protect them from dirt and damage), were grey with a red stripe. They also wore distinctive Tarleton helmets.

He was made a bombardier on 1st July 1804 and was further promoted to Corporal on 25th September 1806. Martin Aaron has written that he served with the Battalion through the Peninsular War "seeing many great Battles from Bussaco in 1810 to Toulouse in 1814". It was during this period, on 1st January 1811, perhaps as a result of his showing at the battle of Bussaco that he was promoted to Sergeant. At this battle the British and Portuguese under Wellington held a long ridge in the Serra do Bucaco The French tried to dislodge them five times but failed and lost 4,500 men in the process (the Anglo-Portuguese had 1,250 casualties).

Royal Horse Artillery uniform showing Tarleton helmet
From Pinterest (Originally Suzilove tbc)

British and Portuguese infantry deployed in line on the ridge of Bussaco (27th September 1810)
By Thomas S. St Clair [Public domain] via Wikipedia Commons

The British, Spanish and Portuguese troops then pushed the French out of the Iberian Peninsula and moved on into France. Napoleon surrendered the French Empire and went into exile but, not yet aware of this, the "Sixth Coalition" besieged Toulouse, the regional capital. This was strongly defended and the allies suffered severe casualties on 10th April 1814. They pulled back and the entire French army managed to escape. Wellington and his army marched into the city and were generally acclaimed, as many of the inhabitants were royalists. News of Napoleon's abdication reached Wellington and on 17th April an armistice was called. Samuel must have thought that the worst was over or perhaps he was one of those few men who enjoy the heat of battle.

As we saw in the piece on John Phillips, Napoleon escaped from exile and marched the French army into Belgium to confront Wellington and the Coalition army at Waterloo on the 18th June 1815. Sergeant Samuel Nichols served in D Troop under the command of Captain George Beane at Waterloo and he and his commander were both killed. Samuel did not die on the battlefield but at one of the hospitals in Brussels set up before the battle. Samuel died as a result of his wounds on 30th June, some twelve days after the battle.

John Nichols 1787 – 1807 (Served 1805 – 1807)

Ist Battalion Royal Horse Artillery

The second son to join up was John who, following his brother, at eighteen years old, joined the 1st Battalion of the Royal Horse Artillery in 1805. We do not know what happened to John except that in 1807 he died in service. I do not think that he saw any active service and died in this country.

When we add to these deaths and disappearances the burials in Ringstead of the parents William on March 18th 1808 and wife Susannah, aged 63, on 20th September 1814, we see why the name Nichols disappears from the Ringstead Registers in 1818.

Note the last entry in the Register for Nichols - for the christening of Anne daughter of William and Kezia Nichols in 1817 - is actually a mistake by the curate and should have been in the Denford Register. I had thought William was the other son of William and Susanna (born 1796) but I think now that this William was born in Titchmarsh.

Thomas Nicholls (1797 – 1807 (Served 1805 – 1807)

98th Company of Royal Marines

Finally, the youngest son, Thomas, who I have grouped with his brothers because his time of service was so brief. He signed up in 1812, but this time with the 98th Company of the Royal Marines in Chatham as a boy recruit. He was just fifteen years old. We know that he was discharged but neither the date or reason for his discharge is given in the records and I have not yet found him in any later Ringstead records.

References

The Waterloo Men of Northamptonshire. Martin Aaron.

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Barnwell St Andrew Parish Registers (www.findmypast.co.uk).

Description of soldiers on joining Royal Horse Artillery 1795 – 1815: Refs. 69/3/2100 and WO69/2/2801 (National Archives, Kew).

Folios 131-132 Thomas Nicholls, born Ringstead, Northamptonshire. Attestation papers to serve in Royal Marines... Ref. ADM 157/11/131 (National Archives, Kew).

British Royal Horse Artillery by Richard Moore (www.napoleonguide.com).

www.warof1812.ca.

Chapter 3

The Knowles Family

Some Ringstead families that had a number of sons who joined the military either by choice or conscription. One of these was the Nichols family and overlapping them were three Knowles men who had very different army lives. At home there were times of serious unrest and in the British Empire there were continual small wars against the native peoples but also against other colonial powers.

The Knowles family came from Holcot, a small village, some 16 miles west of Ringstead. Morris Knowles was baptised there on November 3rd 1755, the son of Charles and Alice. Morris was living in Ringstead when he married Sarah Timson of Raunds in her parish on 15th April 1781. They had at least six children, two of whom, Mary and Morris died in infancy (a second Mary was baptised on 9th April 1786.). It is John, baptised at Ringstead on 15th September 1788 and a second Morris born on 5th January 1796 but not baptised until 25th May 1800, and a John, illegitimate son of sister Mary, that we are concerned with in this article. Their parents were buried in Ringstead churchyard, Morris senior in 1813 and Sarah in 1827

John Knowles 1788 – 1839 (Served 1806 – 1821)

22nd (Light) Dragoons & 1st Veterans' Battalion

It was John who first signed up, with the 22nd (Light) Dragoon Guards, on the 6th June 1806. The Light Dragoons had originally only travelled by horse and fought on foot, but they had become a light cavalry regiments by this time. John stayed with them for the next 14 years 9 days but, perhaps surprisingly, never fought in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. Most of this time, from the 7th July 1807 to the 6th July 1820 he was serving in the "East Indies" which usually meant India.

Trooper in 22nd (Light) Dragoon Guards

We are, quite rightly, shocked by the descriptions of the treatment of the slaves in the West Indies but we must also remember that the treatment of the ordinary soldiers could be brutal and tropical diseases meant that this posting was seen as a death sentence. The East Indies was also a dangerous area and beside combat, heat and disease took their toll. Writing in 1829 of his "Twelve Years Military Adventure in Three Quarters of the Globe", H. Colburn wrote:

> Indeed, after a regiment has been a few years in India, it is, in every respect, superior to one just come out; for by that time all those of weakly constitutions have died off.

We see from the Army Muster Books for the 22nd Light Dragoons that John was received from the Recruiting Troop in England, having embarked in England on 7th February 1807. The journey would have taken between four and six months and have been an often unpleasant voyage around the Cape of Good Hope. Later, in the 1840s an overland route through Egypt, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea was opened and in 1856 a railway across this link improved the journey between the two ships. In 1879 the Suez Canal was opened.

In the next muster taken on 24th June 1808 John was sick but in the following years he seems to have acclimatised and remained healthy although the number in the Regiment marked either "sick" or "invalid" in the musters was often high.

Fort Cornelis (date 1770-2: Some forty years before Jon Knowles was there). Johannes Rach. Wikimedia Commons

In 1811 the 22nd Light Dragoons were involved in the capture of Java. William IV of Holland had fled to England as Napoleon advanced and when the French took over Holland they also took effective control of Java and the other Dutch colonies. The Napoleonic Wars spilled across the globe from West to East Indies. A British expeditionary force had assembled at Melaka (Malacca in Indonesia) in June 1811 and on 4th August landed in the fishing village of Cilincing, now part of Jakarta, in Java. The

Dutch, who were still in control of the island, did not defend the main town of Batavia (modern Jakarta) but fell back to Fort Cornelis which had 180 cannon mounted on its walls. They hoped, with some reason, that the heat and malaria would strike down the British troops if they were long in the jungle.

It must have been exhausting, unpleasant work to march, along the path that the engineers had cut through the forests and pepper plantations, in clothes not suitable for the tropical heat. The British brought field guns up this trail and, after heavy fire from both sides, the British prevailed. Many of the East Indian and Dutch soldiers defected, repudiating their allegiance to France. Some 5000 men were captured, and 1000 men were found dead in the fort. The British side, including the Navy had lost 156 killed, 788 wounded and 16 missing.

The rest of Java was quickly taken. The infamous Stamford Raffles became Lieutenant-Governor and used the opportunity to crush the local tribal power. At the end of the French Wars Java was handed back to the Dutch.

John had been promoted to Corporal on 26th April 1811, perhaps for the Java expedition. He remained so for one year 228 days. It seems that when the 22nd's returned to India he was reduced back to Private and remained so for the rest of his career.

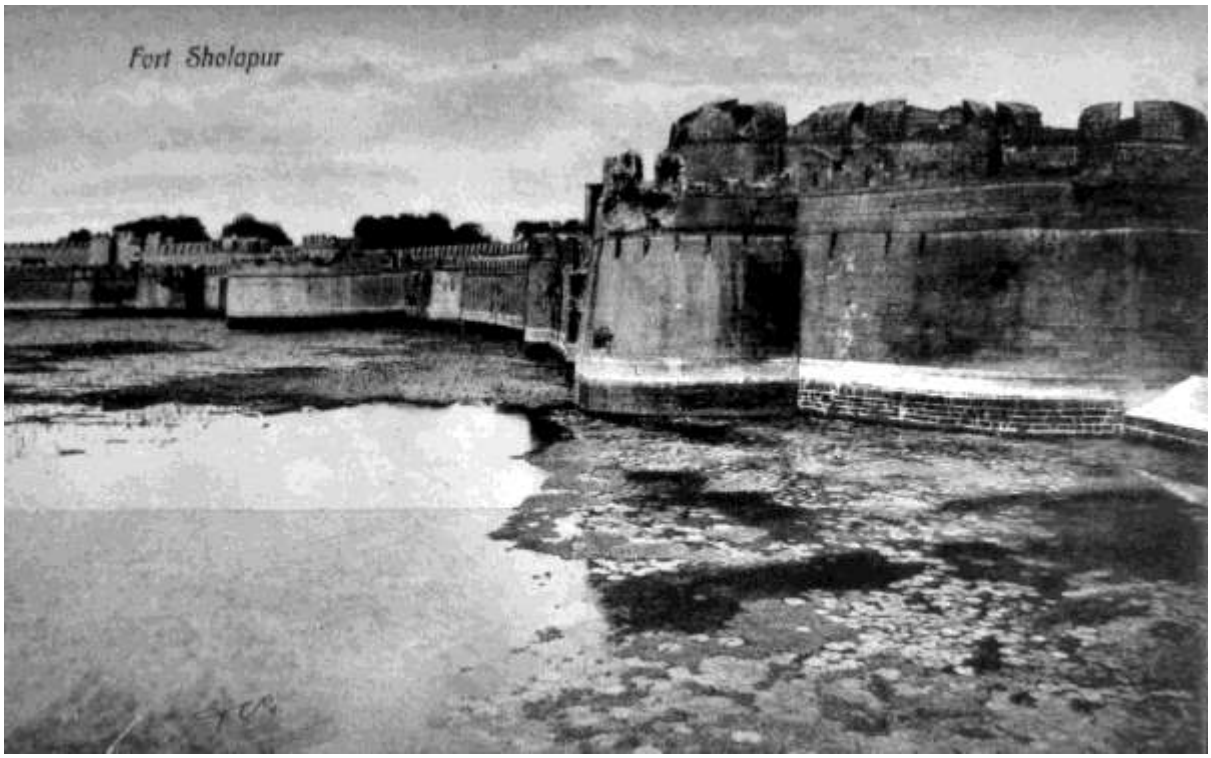
Indian Camp Scene in the Western Ghats in Maharash (c1817 – 1819)
From drawing by Captain Barton who was an artillery officer during this time
(Coloured lithograph by Rodolph Ackerman 1820). British Library. Public Domain.

The 22nd took up duties again in India and later fought in the Third Mahratta (or Mahratha) War (1817-1819) which was decisive in crushing the power of the Hindu Mahrattas, who in their turn had taken over the empire of the Moslem Murghals in much of India. They had a fearsome army and it was estimated that in 1817 it had some 81,000 Infantry, 106,000 horse or cavalry and 589 guns (i.e.

large guns, not muskets). The Mahratta Empire, however, had been in decline, particularly after the Second Mahratta War, with internal divisions and poor leadership weakening its position.

The war was waged by the East India Company who had their own soldiery, mainly Indian Brigades with British officers, but British Government forces, such as the 22nd, were also involved in support. It was a messy war with small sieges and battles and, unlike the Napoleonic Wars in Europe which created an industry, has had little written about it. Further, place names have been changed or, more correctly, differently Anglicised which makes following the 22nd's involvement difficult to discover. For the most part the British were trying to capture the forts, often originally built by the Murghals across the area.

We know that the 22nd Dragoons were at the Battle of Ashta (Ashti) on 28th February 1818. Although not a large battle it was important because it signalled the imminent end of the Mahratta Empire. The factions within this empire led to its downfall. The British won but, more importantly, the Rajah of Satara, who was being held by Baji Rao, the leader of the main Mahratta group, managed to escape and surrender to the British. This drained away supporters from Baji Rao.



Fort Sholapur (Solapur). A later picture when fort partly ruined.
From own postcard

180 men of the 22nd Dragoons fought in May 1818, with other troops, under the leadership of General Munro fought to capture the fort of Sholapur (Bhuikot Fort, Solapur) which is a magnificent granite fortress beside a lake, some 100 miles SSE of Ashti. The Division, which also included "Native Infantry", Artillery and Rifle Corps, amounting to some 4000 men, arrived at Sholapur on 8th May.

Edward Lake describes what John Knowles and the other soldiers would have seen:

> Sholapoor is situated in an extensive plain of black soil, intersected here and there by rivulets of brackish water. The ground immediately to the South is gently elevated and undulating of a hard reddish soil. It is a large commercial town, inclosed by a strong mud wall, with towers of masonry on all sides, excepting towards the South-West, where it is

> bounded by the Fort to which it is contiguous, at the distance of about 500 yards. South of the Fort is a large Tank [artificial lake] which washes the ramparts and part of the wall of the Pettah and supplies the ditch [moat] with water through a sluice cut in a low wall of masonry, which bounds the ditch at its extremity nearest to the Tank.

The assault began, with the 22nd Dragoons in reserve, and scaling ladders were put against the mud walls and the forces gained access to the town with little resistance. On the 11th May the fort itself was attacked from a dry part of the ditch and bombarded it over the next days and nights. All the time riflemen were stationed to prevent anyone from within opening the sluice and filling the ditch. The British forces were readied to pour through the breach in the walls, but the garrison sent out a Vakeel [Envoy]to treat for surrender, and by 5pm on the 15th May the fort was in British hands. 97 men of all ranks were killed and wounded in the East India Company's forces.

The 22nd remained in India after the Mahratta War had finished and, as part of Brigadier- General Pritzler's Division next moved against the Rajah of Nagpur, in his stronghold at Copal Droog. This is a natural hill fort and information is again difficult to find as it goes under many different Anglicisations. Today it is known as Kabbal Durga but other names in the past have included Gopal Drooge, Kaval Drook, as well as Copal Droog and it is this last name that I will use here.

Copal Droog (from Victorian Web) ***Alter this from website***

In "Journals of the Sieges of the Madras Army", Edward Lake wrote in 1822:

> The works of the Copal Droog are of extraordinary magnitude and strength and . . . very complicated. The hill which forms the upper Fort is almost 600 feet high above the plain and is totally inaccessible on three sides. The fourth, or Eastern side, is encircled with walls to the very base where a strong rampart terminates the hill fortifications; below which on this side are two additional inclosures each consisting of a very respectable rampart with towers.

The British force camped near Copal Droog on May 8th 1819 and it included two companies (179men) of the 22nd Dragoons under the command of Captain Mills. At first it appeared that the Rajah was capitulating but when the troops approached they were warned off. Four companies, reinforced by the 22nd's galloper guns [lighter field guns designed to be pulled at speed by one horse], took up position in the pettah [fortified town or market place]. There followed during the night mortar fire, as well as shrapnel from the galloper guns. This bombardment continued through the next days and nights. The lower forts surrendered on the evening of the 11th May. On May 13th the walls were scaled, and the gateway blown up, but they were met by a shower of rocks and stones which caused many casualties. Nevertheless, after a series of assaults the British stormed in and the defenders called for quarter which was given. Five hundred men were marched out as prisoners of war. The British lost 4 officers and 57 men killed or wounded.

In 1819 the 22nd Light Dragoons was ordered to be disbanded and this took place after returning to England, on 25th October 1820. John had joined the 1st Veteran Battalion at Chatham on 28th July and served in it for just 335 days, leaving on 21st June 1821. When John signed up originally it was for life. There was no retirement age and a soldier would either be killed or so broken and worn out that he became a Chelsea Pensioner, either at the Royal Hospital or as an out-pensioner living at home. Pensioners could be called back into service. The Veteran Battalions were a sort of halfway house which had disappeared by 1830. The veterans worked in depots and stores doing administrative and support work. Every soldier paid one day's pay a year (known as "poundage") and this was used to fund the Chelsea Pensioners, any shortfall being made up by the Government.

When he left the army John was 33 years old. We get a brief description of him, which was done in order to try to prevent someone else from collecting his army pension. He was 5ft 8 inches tall with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. We are also told that he was by occupation a labourer.

John returned to the Ringstead area and settled down to civilian life. I had thought originally that he married Mary Cheney by licence in Ringstead Church on November 5th 1826 but I believe now that he married Susanna Morris in Stanwick on 12th August 1822. The couple settled in Stanwick and they had a first child baptised Morris there on 17th August 1823. In the Baptismal Register John is described as a "soldier and labourer". Perhaps it was the last time that he could describe himself as a soldier. There followed Sarah in 1825, Charles baptised on 12th August 1827, Eliza on 16th August 1829, Elizabeth aged eight months on 24th August 1836, William on 6th May 1837. John died aged 51 and was buried on 5th January 1839 in Stanwick Churchyard but there was a further baptism of John, son of John and Susan, on 13th August 1843. When we look at the 1841 Stanwick Census we see widow Susan Knowles, a pauper, with children Morris (18), Sarah (150, Charles (13), Eliza (11), Hannah (8), William (3) and John (2). We also see that John must have been born at about the same time as his father died.

Morris Knowles 1796 – 1866 (Served 1815 – 1827)

3rd Regiment (Prince of Wales) Dragoon Guards

John's younger brother Morris (sometimes Maurice or Morrice) was born on 5th January 1796 and baptised on 25th May 1800 in Ringstead Church. He enlisted at Thrapston with the 3rd Regiment of Dragoon Guards (also known as the Prince of Wales Regiment). He is shown as serving from 25th June 1815 although his attestation date was the 7th August of that year. He was eighteen years old.

This was very soon after the *Battle of Waterloo* which had brought the wars against Napoleon's France to an end. We see from his later discharge that he had similar looks to his brother, being 5ft 8 inches tall with brown hair, hazle [sic] eyes and a fresh complexion. [His brother had grey eyes, but a suspiciously high number of soldiers had grey put down as their eye colour.] We also see that he too had been a labourer.

In 1806 a Private earned seven shillings a week whereas a dockworker could expect four times that amount. On the other hand, an agricultural labourer would have had a poor, uncertain wage and after the glory of Waterloo being heralded across the country, with the richly coloured uniforms and the chance of "loot" many young men would have been tempted. Nevertheless, it was a hard, often brutal and short life with the very real chance of death or disablement. The recruitment of men had become more difficult and in 1813 one fifth of the British Army was made up of foreign volunteers.

When we look at the "Historical Record of the Third or Prince of Wales Regiment" we find that it had arrived in Northampton, after marching down from York, on 5th July 1815 and it was here that Morris first joined the regiment. It established a depot of four troops in Northampton and the remaining six troops marched to the coast and sailed to Ostend. These troops took part in the grand celebrations in Paris to celebrate the fall of Napoleon. When all the peace treaties had been signed most British troops left France and on the 24th January 1816 the 3rd Dragoons landed again in Dover. It was there reduced to four troops and went to join the rest of the Regiment left in Northampton in Leicester. In the Muster Roll for the 3rd Dragoon Guards at Northampton Barracks it states that Morris and others have been "Effective and belonging to the Corps" from 25th November to 24th December 1815. It seems certain that Morris, as a raw recruit, would have remained in England for further training.

The now complete Regiment marched to Manchester, arriving the 29th February 1816 and were billeted in Sheffield, Huddersfield and Liverpool. Even if he had not gone to the Continent Morris would have already seen more of the world than most of his fellow villagers. [Note: When we write that they marched, it would have been on horseback, except in extreme circumstances.]

In June 1816 the 3rd Dragoons sailed from Liverpool to Dublin and from there marched to Ballinarobe, Gort, Sligo, Castlebar, Roscommon and Dunmore. In June 1818 it marched to Dublin, Phillipstown and Tullamore. In early 1819 the troops assembled at Dublin and a reduction was made in the establishment. The troops them marched to Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir, Clogheen, Fethard and Newross. Ireland had suffered terrible rains and poor harvests and the farm produce was being undercut by the New World. On top of this Potato Blight was ravaging the staple crop on which many Irish people depended. Poverty and famine naturally led to popular risings.

The Dragoons travelled the country to show areas of possible insurrection the might of the British Army but it would also have been training in the logistics of war at that time. Edwin Rutherford, the Curator of the Royal Scots Guards Museum in Edinburgh, has pointed out that:

> . . . this was supplemented by Field Days which were grand reviews where regiments would go through clean, tidy and stylised mock battles, with charges, wheels and much showboating to entertain the public. All part of what I would describe as 'cavalry dash.'

After 1815 the Government reduced the army as fast as it was able. The mounted troops suffered the least because it was the mobile dragoons that were relied on in the suppression of riots. The period from Waterloo to the Crimean War in the home countries was one of the most difficult for the army. Initially without a national police force it was the army that maintained the civil peace. Robert Peel was trying to cut back expenditure on the army in Ireland and replace it with "peelers", a local police force.

In 1820 Morris sailed with the regiment to Portpatrick in Scotland and marched to Hamilton, Glasgow and Paisley. Trouble had broken out in Scotland. Like most of Britain the end of the Napoleonic Wars saw widescale unemployment and rising food prices. Further insurrection followed the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester when 16 000 protested in Paisley. On the 1st and 2nd of April 1820, the "Radical War" broke out. Posters in Glasgow, Dumbarton, Paisley and Kilsyth called for a general strike to sweep away the government and assert the rights of man and universal male suffrage. As in the north of England it was the handloom weavers from places such as Paisley and Kilsyth who were at the front of the protests. The ringleaders were captured, tried and hung and the strikes collapsed. The "war" was over.

During the summer of 1821 the 3rd Dragoons marched to Newcastle, Carlisle and Penrith before returning to Glasgow in August. The Regiment was again reduced to six troops consisting of 27 officers and 225 non-commissioned officers and privates with 253 troop horses. In November 1821 the regiment proceeded to Piershill Barracks in Edinburgh, Ayr, Greenock and Perth.

In June 1822 the Regiment assembled in Edinburgh to attend the new king, George IV, on his visit to Scotland. He, like Edward Vll, spent too many dissolute years before he finally became king. This was a famous occasion, much of it orchestrated by Sir Walter Scott, the famous author. He had produced a modified version of Scottish Highland dress and this became the accepted national costume for Lowlanders as well as Highlanders.

By contrast with that grand occasion, in September 1822 the regiment marched to Newcastle. On October 24th the keelmen there were striking and forcing crews from the loading vessels.

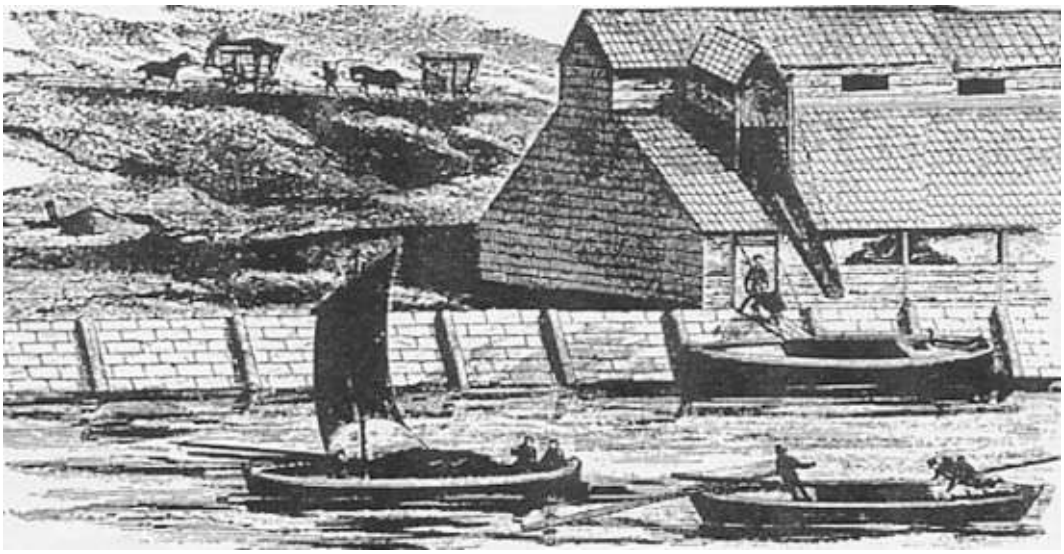
From The history of the keelmen and their strike in 1822. W. Stanley Metcalfe

The keelmen were one of the largest groups of workers in the North-East. They were hard and rough-talking men but well organised for the time with their own hospital. They were reputed to be the best-paid workers in the area and were very willing to take action to defend their way of life. The crew usually consisted of a skipper, two "keel bullies" and a boy known as the "Pee Dee" who was

paid from contributions made by the rest of the crew. The hospital had also been built in 1701 by the keelmen and maintained at their own expense by means of a levy of 4d. a tide, called the "Keelmen's Groat". It was mainly a place for the elderly and those unable to work.

Keelmen's Hospital in Newcastle (Own photograph April 2018)

The Tyne had become quite shallow and a stone bridge restricted larger ships getting far up the river. The keelmen mainly took the coal from the "spouts" (dockside "shoots) and by rowing, poling, or by sail took it to the collier ships, anchored in deeper waters, where it was manually shovelled aboard. To ease their task, they went out with the ebb tide and returned with the incoming tide.



Keel boats, showing one being loaded from a "spout". On the tracks behind the building, a full truck ("chaldron") is going by gravity down the track from the mine (with a man on the brake and the horse tied behind) and the empty truck being pulled back up. A similar system was used in the Ringstead Quarry at the end of the 19th Century. (Sunniside Local History Society.)

The “keel” was a broad barge some 40ft long by 20 ft. wide with a shallow draught and side boards to keep the heaped coal in place. They could carry some 21 tons and it was hard unrelenting work with much of it done at night by the light of coal-fired braziers on the decks of the colliers. The keelmen had had strikes on a number of occasions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the last being only in 1819. There were several issues including overloading of the keels but the most pressing was the direct loading of colliers from spouts lower down the river. This was taking the work away from the keelmen.

In October 1822 when the keelmen were being “arled” (signed on for the year) another strike began without warning. There were riots, involving not only seamen but others stirred into action by the “Peterloo Massacre” in Manchester in 1818.

A small naval man-of-war moored near Newcastle and the 3rd Dragoons were billeted in pubs south of the river and near the Great North Road, at Dunston and Swalwell. Morris Knowles, as part of the 3rd Dragoons, would have been directed to trouble spots to enforce order, rather like the mounted police more recently. The strike ended after six weeks but because the Tyne was not well maintained, and it was not until the 1860s that serious dredging began the keelmen’s work continued. The building of the new Swing Bridge to replace the old arched stone bridge in 1876 allowed collier ships right up the river and the keelmen began to disappear.

Again, in the summers of 1823 and 1824 Morris marched with his regiment around the north of England. There was further unrest, this time by the silk weavers of Macclesfield. It was an important centre for the trade with many large silk mills in the area. The tax on imported silk was reduced and the local trade began to decline. Many silk weavers suffered hardship and there were food riots on 13th April 1824 which the 3rd Dragoons were sent to put down.

3rd Dragoon Guards 1838 (from Wikipedia)

Also in 1824, the 3rd Dragoon Guards were supplied with helmets with bear-skin crests. In June of the following year they returned to Dublin and in 1826 marched to Cahir, Limerick and Clogheen.

Eventually they were stationed in Cork and Fermoy with detachments in aid of the civil authorities and the officers of the revenue.

In Autumn 1827 the regiment marched to Newbridge Cavalry Barracks and it was here that Morrris was allowed to quit the army. He had applied earlier during the half-yearly inspection, but the doctor had said there were no obvious signs of disease. Now his request was granted on the grounds that he was “worn out”. He was thirty years old and his conduct through his army years had been “good”.

Morris had spent most, and perhaps all, of his 12 years 185 days service in the British Isles, mainly it seems, keeping law and order during turbulent times. As we have said, in the years after the Napoleonic Wars poor harvests and mechanisation caused unrest and sometimes starvation to many areas of Britain and the army had to deal not with a foreign enemy but the poor of its own country. One wonders what Morris thought about his role in forcibly breaking up demonstrations by working men like himself. It may be that as in the heat of battle self-preservation and army training kept any doubts he had at bay.

When he left the regiment on 26th December 1829, his intended place of residence was not Ringstead but Liverpool. He was entitled to a small army pension of five pence a day and the records of this help us to follow him around England. The name “Morris Knowles” is an unusual one but far from unique, and we are sometimes left with possible sightings of him which we cannot absolutely confirm.

One possibility was that his intended location was, in fact, Carlisle. On 10th June 1823 a Morris Knowles had married Ann Brown at St Cuthbert’s in Carlisle and we know that in the 1821-1823 period that the 3rd Dragoon Guards were marching around the north of England, including time in Carlisle. In the 1841 Census a Morris Knoles [sic] aged 40 (but ages rounded in this Census) was an Army pensioner living at Poundfold Howe, Crosthwaite in the Cockermouth District in Cumberland. He had not been born in Cumberland and living with him was a county native, Ann Knoles also aged 40.

I think that the cottage was in the hamlet of Wythburn near the foot of Helvellyn. Much of the village is now drowned under the waters of Thirlmere Reservoir, although the church remains. It would have been an isolated life in beautiful, but often harsh, countryside.

As we have seen, there are some common threads to make us believe that his Morris is our man. This is reinforced by the entries in the Pension record for it shows that in 1846 he transferred his pension collection point from Carlisle to Northampton. In the 1861 Census (but not in 1851) he is recorded as a widower. An Ann Knowles died in the Kendal area in 1843 aged 50. More research is needed.

Over the next years Morris transferred his pension from Northampton to Nottingham then, in 1849, to Lynn (presumably Kings Lynn). In the 1851 Census for Newton in Lincolnshire a Morris Knowles aged 54 and born in Ringstead is a farm servant in the household of Harriett Swann an Innkeeper and occupier of fifty acres. Newton is some 50 miles from Kings Lynn and over the next few years Morris transfers backwards and forwards between Lynn and Northampton as his pension collection point.

The pension records stop here and it seems likely that Morris had returned to the Ringstead area as it is here that we find him in the 1861 Census. He is a widower aged 68 and a Chelsea Pensioner and

born in Ringstead. He is lodging with agricultural labourer William Griffen, born in Stanwick and his wife Elizabeth.

Whether from poverty or infirmity, or both, he went into Thrapston Union Workhouse and it was there that he died on 3rd February 1866, aged 73, and on the 7th he was buried in Ringstead churchyard.

*

John Knowles 1808 – 1887 (Served 1827 – 1848)

14th (Buckinghamshire) Regiment of Foot & 49th Regiment of Foot

If we look at the 1851 Census for Ringstead we see another John Knowles who is a Chelsea Pensioner. He is aged 42 (so born about 1809) and born in Sawtry. He was the son of Mary Major, a washerwoman and pauper. When we look at the Ringstead Registers we see that a John Knowles was baptised on 27th September 1808 the BS (bastard son) of Mary Knowles who was the sister of our John and Morris. Looking further we find that she had married widower John Major on 29th July 1816 in Ringstead. We see that the nephew of John and Morris had also seen army life.

Later in his life John is stated to be a widower but I have been unable to find his marriage. One possibility is a marriage (by licence) of John Knowles and Mary Ann Cheney at Ringstead on 5th November 1826. A Mary Ann Cheney, daughter of John and Mary was born on 3rd December 1809 and baptised at Ringstead on 23rd April 1810 so she would have been only 16 at the time of her marriage but this is possible. I have found no further references to Mary Ann so did she travel with him or, did he desert her, and she re-marry bigamously? There are many other possibilities.

John signed up with the 14th (or Buckinghamshire) Regiment of Foot at Buckingham on the 10th October 1827. He was said to be twenty years old and born in Ringstead. By profession he was a brickmaker. He voluntarily enlisted for the bounty of three pounds with Regimental Number 631. The surgeon's report on John stated that:

> I certify that I have this day examined John Knowles a recruit of the Fourteenth Regiment of Foot and find that he has no Rupture, nor sore Leg, nor Mark of any Ulcer, with adhesion of the Skin to the Bone, no Phthisis Pulmonalia [T.B.] or Asthma, or tendency to Varicose Veins; that his Lungs appear to be sound and his Breathing good; that he has the perfect Use of his Eyes and Ears, and the free motion of every Joint and Limb; no Distortion of his Knees, or Deformity of his Body; that he has no Scrofulous Affection of the Glands, nor Inveterate Eruptions, no Scald Head, no diseased Enlargement of Bones or Joints, that his general appearance is Healthy, free from Marks of Punishment, and seems in every respect fit for His Majesty's Service.

At the bottom of the form is written "Hospital for vaccination" which would have been for smallpox. This had been discovered by Edward Jenner in 1796 although the Chinese had used a primitive form, called "Variolation" for some 900 years.

The tune that the 14th marched to was "Ça Ira" ("It'll be fine"), a Revolutionary song that the French were singing in an action at Famars in1793 and which the 14th copied and then took for its own. The Regiment was in India from 1807 until 1831 and was later granted the "Royal Tiger" badge in recognition.

From "Historical Record of the Fourteenth of the Buckinghamshire Regiment of Foot" (London 1845)

In the year after his enlistment, John went to "the East Indies" and was there with the 14th from 9th July 1828 to the 30th October 1830. The 14th had been stationed at Berhampore since the 21 February and John Knowles would have joined them there. In 1829 Berhampore had a Cholera epidemic. (There was another among the 49th in 1835 at Hazareebaugh.) It seems that John was based there for all his time in India. In November 1830 the Regiment moved to Fort William which was a fort in Calcutta (Kolkata) built in 1783 on the banks of the Ganges.

A watercolour of the interior of Fort William in Calcutta in 1828 (It covered some 70 hectares)
By William Wood (Wikipedia Commons)

After 23 years' service in India the Regiment was ordered to return to England and the first troops left on the 27th December 1830 for Europe on the East India Company ship *Recovery*. Those men who wanted to remain in India had to volunteer to join other corps and John was one of these "remainers". He had joined the 49th (Princess of Wales's Hertfordshire) Regiment on October 30th at Fort William in Calcutta (Kolkata).

The 49th remained in India. Harold Raugh in "The Victorians at War 1815 -1914" makes the point that the "other ranks" were often bored with life in India. Drill in many regiments was only nine hours a week which left plenty of time to wander around the regimental bazaar and other local towns. Of course, it was usually very hot. Many soldiers spent the time getting drunk. In 1835 the 49th drank, in their canteen, 7,217 gallons of arrack (a local strong rice liquor), 77 of brandy and 144 of gin.

A Private in the 49th in 1812 by J.C.H Foster (City of Toronto Museums Canada)
I have not found any copyright notice but will remove if there is a problem.

The Regiment was sent to China in 1840 for service in the First Opium War. This was not a war on drugs by the British but quite the opposite, although other disputes were involved. British traders had been illegally exporting opium grown in India to China. It was a lucrative trade but caused widespread addiction in China. In March 1839 the Chinese confiscated and destroyed some 20,000 chests of opium in a Canton (Guangzhou) warehouse. A few days later some drunken British sailors killed a villager and tensions rose. An expeditionary force, including the 49th, was sent from India and the wars began.

In July1840, John, with the 49th, fought at the *Capture of Chusan* (Zhoushan) which was the largest island of an archipelago also called by that name. The 49th was part of the Second Division. There was an exchange of fire between the boats and the Chinese on land before the troops landed and further bombarded the city walls. The 49th took possession of the main gate, which had been barricaded with sacks of grain, and hoisted the union flag. There was generally little resistance and the Chinese ceded Hong Kong to the British.

The *Norwich Mercury* on Saturday 13th February 1841 reported the statistics on the British losses in China as detailed in the Canton Chronicle of November 3rd 1840. We see that the capture of Chusan was not without loss. The casualties are reported under each Regiment and for the 49th it reads:

> 49th or Hartforshire [sic}. – Embarked from Calcutta 649 strong; died on the passage 9; died in Chusan 41, 50 [total] – 609 {I think should be 599 left]; sick in the hospital 148: 461 on duty: total 1,025.

[Note: I find these figures confusing, especially the last total. Can anyone explain them?]

The 49th were at the *Battle of Canton* in March 1841 and the *Battle of Amoy* in August 1841 as well as the occupation of Shanghai in the summer of 1842. From there the British launched an attack on Chin-Kiang-Fu, the fortified town that protected Nanking. The 49th were part of the 3rd Brigade. In fact, the 2nd brigade had already taken the town when the 3rd blew open the Main Gate and on entering found the 55th lined up inside waiting for them. The leader of the British forces, Sir Hugh Gough" wrote of the horrors that confronted the soldiers when they entered the city.

> Dead bodies of Tartars in every house we entered, principally women and children thrown into wells or otherwise murdered by their own people. A great number of those who escaped our fire committed suicide after destroying their families. . .

The British were seen as the barbarians who would commit terrible atrocities if the locals fell into their hands. Death was better. Nanking capitulated and the first "Opium War" was over, At the Treaty of Nanking signed on 29th August 1842 the "Treaty Ports" such as Canton, Amoy and Shanghai, were ceded to the British.

John Knowles returned home with the 49th in August 1843. The Kentish Independent for Saturday 5th August 1843 reported that a first detachment had arrived at Walmer Barracks and the remainder were expected daily. John had been 2 years and 10 months in China and perhaps, like Gough, was "sick at heart of war and its fearful consequences".

Back in the headquarters in Winchester "NOMINAL ROLLS OF OFFICERS, Non-Commissioned OFFICERS, DRUMMERS and PRIVATES who served in CHINA during the late WAR (August 1841 to August 1842)" were prepared. We see that there were men in all ranks who moved to other corps, some to continue their time abroad. John Knowles (Regimental No. 631) was still seen as "1st Class and Effective" and received £8 4s 0d along with the others in this category.

In March 1844 the 49th were stationed in Portsmouth (probably Devonport). On Tuesday 27th August 1844 new colours, to replace the old colours now, "in a sadly dilapidated state, from their long service in all parts of the globe", were presented at Winchester. The article in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* finished:

> After the troops had marched past in review order, there was a dinner to 900 soldiers on the ground, a magnificent dejeuner to the officers and their ladies, and a ball for the men in the evening. [Presumably officers only but no wives?]

To look at the other side of army life that recruiting officers would not have talked about, the punishments of serving men was reported to Parliament and the "Accounts and Papers for the House of Commons", published in 1847, lists these punishments. In all there were twenty punishments in the 49th for offences of which drunkenness was by far the most common. In 1846 the House of Commons voted to reduce the maximum number of lashes to 50 after horrific accounts of the floggings and the injuries inflicted were recounted in the debate. The section on the 49th Foot shows us some of the route that they took through the British Isles and I have listed a selection of these entries below.

Offence	Station	Period	Sentence Lashes	No of Lashes Inflicted
Disgraceful Conduct	Devonport	1845	150	150
Violence to Superiors	Devonport	1845	150	150
Drunk on the March	Tyrrell's Pass	1845	100	100
"	Moate	1845	100	100
Disgraceful Conduct (Theft)	Athlone	1845	150	150
Drunk on the March	Longford	1845	50	50
Drunk and riotous in Billets	Longford	1845	100	100
Drunk on Duty	Mohil	1846	100	100
"	Castlebar	1846	100	100
Making away with necessaries	Galway	1846	150	150
"	Castlebar	1846	100	75

We see that, after Devonport, the 49th went to Ireland and marched around the middle (now middle north) of Ireland. Marching over some of the same ground that his Uncle Morris had ridden over some 30 years earlier. This was the time of potato blight, forced evictions, starvation and emigration. This was particularly bad in 1845 – 1847. Lord Lucan had built a workhouse in Castlebar in 1841/2 but he had not keep up his payments to the Guardians and those in the workhouse were close to starving and hundreds outside attracted to the workhouse could not be admitted. The paths leading to the workhouse were known as the "paths of the dead". Of course, violence ensued and grain stores were broken into. One would guess that the 49th were there for law enforcement rather than for famine relief but it must have been a terrible experience for soldiers with any humanity.

Nevertheless, not al the inhabitants saw the Regiment as "the enemy". *The Galway Mercury* reported on Saturday 16th October 1847 that:

> All classes of the inhabitants regard with much regret the departure from Galway of the 49th Regiment, the members of which gallant corps secured their urbanity and kindness and sincere good will amongst us. – From the gallant Colonel Adams down to the lowest private in the ranks there has been manifested but one disposition, to cultivate the best relations with the people while, at the same time, they served her Majesty with unswerving zeal. On all occasions of charity they were ever foremost, and the services of the splendid band of the Regiment were put into requisition for the amusement of the inhabitants.

He asked to leave the service and on October 23rd 1848 the opinion of the Principal Medical Officer was that he was unfit because of his "worn out constitution and long service". He had been in service for 21 years and ten days. Of these, 15½ years were spent abroad, 12years 3 months in the East Indies and 2 years 10 months in China on the Eastern Expedition.

At Dublin, on October 30th 1848 he was discharged from the army. He was 41 years old and, in a familiar description was 5ft 8 inches tall with brown hair, hazle [sic] eyes with a fair complexion. His profession was still brickmaker although his time in that trade must have been very short. He had never been court-martialled but he had had three punishments for drunkenness, in 1838, 1839 and 1844, twice after a military tattoo.

He travelled to Ringstead and in the 1851 Census he is 42 and an unmarried Chelsea Pensioner living with his widowed mother Mary Major 64, a pauper and her son Lot Major (oddly put as a lodger) who is 25. By the 1861 Census he is 52 and living by himself in Ringstead and still a Chelsea

Pensioner. He is shown now as a "widower" but whether he had been wrongly described in the last Census needs further research.

Lot Major had died, aged 31, in 1857 but I have not managed to find Mary's death (or her husband John Major who died many years earlier). It looks, however, that John Knowles saw no future for himself in Ringstead for, on 1st July 1867 he was admitted as an "In Pensioner" to "Her Majesty's Royal Hospital for Pensioners" in Chelsea.

By the 1881 Census John was 72 years old and had been promoted to Sergeant at Chelsea. He died on 2nd September 1887. It was thought that he was about 80 but I think he was nearer to 78, still a very good age for a soldier at the time.

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Chapter 4

John Smith 1786 - ? (Served 1808 – 1814)

34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot

The 34th Regiment of Foot, like many others, raised a Second Battalion, on 25th April 1804, to prepare for the French threat of invasion. We know from his discharge document that John Smith, born in Ringstead joined this battalion on 25th February 1808. He was about twenty-one years of age when he enlisted. When we look at the Ringstead Baptismal Register there is no exact match. The closest is the John Smith who was christened on March 18th 1792, the son of William and Elizabeth. It was not unusual for late christenings but if his parents were Particular Baptists he would not have been baptised as a child. He was later described as being of "swarthy complexion" and (being stereotypical) we know that that there were gypsies in the area at this time (a memorial to Tabitha Boswell, "an old Gypsie" who died 5th January 1784 is in the church tower) so this is a possibility. We may never be sure of the truth.

Once he had enlisted John would have been kitted out and drilled and marched around the countryside. In July 1809 a 1000 strong battalion embarked for Portugal as part of the Peninsular Campaign against Napoleon. It became part of the Rowland's Second Division in a brigade led by Catlin Crawford. Their first engagement was at Bussaco where the British and allied army made a stand after retreating before the French. The ridge there was a strong defensive position and when the battle began at dawn on 27th September 1810 the 34th were on the right of the line and saw little of the action.

Samuel Nicholls from Ringstead, now an experienced soldier, was with the 4th Battalion of the Royal Horse Artillery at Bussaco. Did their paths cross amid the chaos?

If John had been lulled into thinking that life in the army was as the recruiting sergeant had described it, the next engagement was to disabuse him. The Battle of Albuhera was one of the bloodiest, relative to the troops involved, in the history of the British Army. It took place on 16th May 1811 with the 34th in the Second Division, this time commanded by Stewart. It was a typically confused battle with the powder of the troops dampened by a hailstorm. This allowed the French Lancers to wreak terrible havoc on the foot soldiers, with one brigade almost wiped out. Then, with powder dry, the British, with their Spanish and Portuguese allies, exchanged fire with the French, only some twenty yards distant, for almost an hour. Eventually the French army retreated from the field but the British were not in a state to follow up their advantage. The 34th suffered terrible losses and any illusions that John Smith had about soldiery must have been shattered. Between them the armies lost nearly 14,000 lives that day.

Sir William Beresford disarming a Polish officer at Battle of Albuhera (16th May 1811). W Heath. Beresford.jpg (Wikipedia Commons)

In general, warfare was conducted from Spring to Autumn and, towards the end of the 1811 "season", at the end of October, they met the French at Arroyo dos Molinos. There was torrential rain and the Second Division, including the 34th had to march in terrible conditions through the night of the 27th but as a result took the French by surprise and won the day with the loss of only 100 men. The 34th were matched against the 34e Regiment d'Infanterie de Ligne and they crowned this coincidence by capturing their opponent's drums and drum major's mace, still treasured trophies of the regiment.

Captured drums and mace
From: The Project Guttenberg EBook of Regimental Nicknames and Traditions of the British Army

The following year the 34th were at the Battle of Vittoria which was a decisive victory for the British with their Spanish and Portuguese allies. The 34th were not at the centre of the battle but it was at Vittoria that John Smith received a musket shot in the head and this probably finished his active career. In 1847 a medal was struck for all those who had fought between 1793 and 1814 although they could only be claimed by the living and not by their families. A Peninsular Roll was prepared and it lists two John Smiths for the 34th. There were also additional clasps awarded for particular battles and these are shown in the list by their initial letter. We cannot be sure, but it appears that the John Smith who was entitled to A (Albuhera) and V (Vittoria) is our man (Arroyo dos Molinos did not merit a clasp). The 34th went on to further battles at Nivelle, Nive. Orthes and then Toulouse, by which time Napoleon had abdicated. I do not think that the badly injured John fought at these later battles. The Regiment embarked for Ireland in July 1814. Whether John managed to get back to Ireland early or if he followed the Regiment we cannot be sure. Certainly, we know that he was discharged because of his injury at Kilmainham on 30th November 1814. This would have been after the return of the Regiment.

The Second Battalion was disbanded in 1817. He had been a private for six years 279 days and was about 28 years of age. He was granted a pension and, to help prevent fraud, there was a description of his appearance. He was five feet seven inches tall with brown hair, grey eyes and swarthy complexion. Before enlisting he had been by trade a cordwainer (shoemaker).

His time after the army, like his time before enlistment, is also very uncertain. One would expect him to return to Ringstead and on 14th September 1815 a John Smith married Elizabeth Barber in Ringstead Church. Elizabeth was described as “Of This Parish” but was baptised at the Great Meeting House, a nonconformist chapel at Kettering, on 9th July 1798. I have not definitely found them again. Some Ancestry trees have the couple having a child, Martha Rachel Smith, born on 20th May 1820 in Thrapston. She went to London as a housemaid and married a John Stoyles on 10th May 1841 at St Giles in the Field in Middlesex and emigrated by assisted passage to Australia. Her father is given on the marriage certificate as John Smith but he was a gardener. Julianne Stoyles has notified me that, on her death certificate, Martha’s parents were given as John and Elizabeth and that she had been born in Thrapston. I have not yet managed to spin together the separate strands into one life.

It would be good to find that John did have a reasonable life after his time in the army. In 1824 the Vagrancy Act was passed to punish “incorrigible rogues”. It was directed particularly at soldiers who had returned from the French Wars and had become “idle and disorderly”. Up to one fifth of the army had been “recruited” from criminals but many ex-soldiers of all types found it difficult to reintegrate into society. They often could not find work in the post-war depression and carried with them the mental trauma of their experiences. Some fell into petty thieving and drunkenness and the disabled were often figures of fun or distaste.

Alice Parker has written that the Peninsular War, with its bitter, grinding sieges and the animosity of the Spanish (who were their allies), made worse the drunkenness, plundering,

rape and murder that were associated with most military campaigns at the time. Suddenly, left alone in civilian life with an inadequate pension, and cut loose from the discipline and camaraderie of the regiment many men led short unhappy lives. Let us hope that John Smith was one of the fortunate ones.

Note: There is a John Smith, born in Castor (some 20 miles from Ringstead) in about 1786 and in the 1851 Census he is described as a Chelsea pensioner. Castor was a well-known meeting ground for the Gypsy and travelling community. Could he have been born in Castor but baptised, aged six, in Ringstead? It was not uncommon for people to give their baptismal parish as their place of birth. This is all conjecture.

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My thanks to Julianne Stoyles for her help with the possible Australian connection.

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Chapter 5

John Phillips 1793 – 1847 (Served 1813 – 1816)

2nd Battalion 69th (South Lincolnshire) Regiment

Sometimes the researching of our ancestors is like the books that we had as children where you join up the dots to make a picture. You often have to assume that their lives were described by a direct line between the dots. The official records are our dots and if they show birth marriage and death in a locality we may not look further for the story of their lives unless a Census or other document alerts us to a hidden deviation in the lifeline.

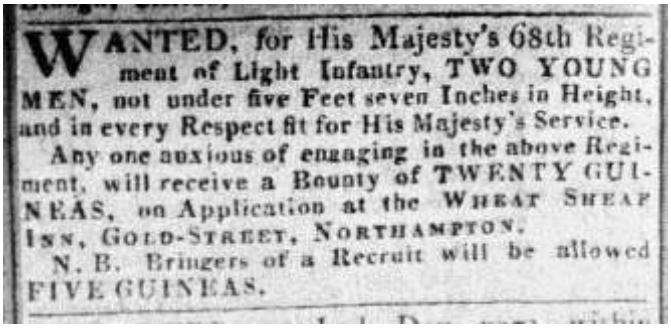
It was in the mapping of my family tree that I first came across John Phillips the maternal grandfather of my grandfather, John Ball. He had been baptised in Ringstead Church on 31st March 1793, the third child of Henry and Ann. Ann died on 24th February 1811 aged 49 and his father married Elizabeth Fryar on 24th January 1813 in Raunds.

The next time that I found John in the local records he was marrying Elizabeth Rands in Raunds Church on 27th October 1817. The Rands family had lived in Thorpe Street in Raunds for several generations. [See Raunds: Picturing the Past page 104.] The couple seem to have stayed in Raunds and went on to have had nine children baptised there: Ann born 1819 (bap. 3rd Oct 1819 and buried aged 16 on 16th March 1835), Sarah born 1822, (bap. 20 Sept 1822) Henry born in 1824 (bap 17 Oct 1824 and buried on 27th April 1834), Susannah Catherine on 10th November 1826, Elizabeth in about 1829, William in about 1831, John baptised 21 July 1833, Henry baptised 25th February 1836 and buried 28th February 1836, and Ann born about 1837 and baptised 27th August 1837.

The years 1834 to 1836 must have been particularly difficult for the John and Elizabeth because four of their children were buried in that period.

I have not managed to find him in the 1841 Census although there are some John Phillips of about the right age around the county. Perhaps he had had to "go on the tramp" to find work as a labourer. At first I thought that he had died before 1841 but then found his burial in the churchyard of St Peter's Church in Raunds (not Ringstead as I put originally) on 18th April 1847, aged 56.

So that was his life, spent labouring in the fields of Northamptonshire. Then I discovered that John had hidden in his life three years of excitement, fear and tragedy.



WANTED, for His Majesty's 68th Regiment of Light Infantry, TWO YOUNG MEN, not under five Feet seven Inches in Height, and in every Respect fit for His Majesty's Service.

Any one anxious of engaging in the above Regiment, will receive a Bounty of TWENTY GUINEAS, on Application at the WHEAT SHEAF INN, GOLD-STREET, NORTHAMPTON.

N. B. Bringers of a Recruit will be allowed FIVE GUINEAS.

I have not found a similar advertisement for the 69th Regiment but it does show some of the inducements offered at this time

Northampton Mercury 6th February 1813

Jon Abbott had alerted me to a booklet written by Martin Aaron entitled *Waterloo Men of Northamptonshire* which listed two men from Ringstead who had served in one of the most famous battles in our history. One of these men was Sergeant Samuel Nichols who was killed at Waterloo. The other was John Phillips who had enlisted aged 20 in 1813, the year of his father's marriage, in the *2nd Battalion of the 69th (South Lincolnshire) Foot Regiment.*

The 2nd Battalion had been formed in July 1802 and was very young and inexperienced with the average length of service in 1815 being only 3½ years for Privates, less than any other British Regiment. It was approximately 57% English, 35% Irish and 7% Scottish. It was known that army life was harsh and the remuneration low so in general only those for whom civilian life was even worse enlisted. Nevertheless, recruiting campaigns, where the glamour of the uniform and an initial bounty were emphasised, attracted many young men to take their chances. John was possibly recruited locally and probably embarked, with some artillery and horses, at Landguard Fort at the mouth of the River Orwell, near Felixstowe on December 17th 1813 and sailed with the Battalion for the port of Willemstad in Holland.

The French still held Holland but as they had now been mainly pushed out of Germany the Dutch and Belgians began to revolt against the occupying force and the British were eager to help this cause and also secure their own interests. Their first objective was to take the ports held by the French, particularly Antwerp. In this assault on Antwerp the British and Prussian allies had an insufficient force and as an alternative the British tried to take Bergen op Zoom, a port some 25 miles north of Antwerp. The 2nd Battalion took part in this ill-fated siege, on the 8th and 9th March 1814. It was an assault on an extensive fortified garrison held by the French. They managed to seize part of the defences but the French counterattacked and the British forces took heavy casualties and many others were forced to surrender. Of the 4000 British troops who took part, 2,100 were killed, although I have not yet discovered how many of the 487 men of the 2nd Battalion of the 69th Foot were killed or injured. After the battle, a negotiated exchange of prisoners took place.

We do not know if John Phillips was one of those exchanged prisoners but, after all the excitement and expectation of enlisting, it must have been a frightening and demoralising introduction to the realities of war. But worse was to come. Napoleon had escaped from his enforced exile on Elba and took his French army of 125,000 men into Belgium to confront the Duke of Wellington who commanded an alliance of British, German, Dutch and Belgian troops based at Brussels but camped across the surrounding countryside.

The first encounter was at Quatre Bras. This was an important crossroads held by allies of Britain, the Dutch and Belgians but on learning that the French under Marshall Ney were advancing on them Wellington sent his 3rd Division to reinforce them. The 2nd Battalion, part of the 3rd Division, now consisted of 30 officers and 516 other ranks. There had obviously been some re-arranging of personnel. They had a forced route march of 12 hours but had just arrived there when they were immediately sent to relieve an exhausted and mutilated defensive square.

As we have seen, the 2nd Battalion of the 69th was very young and inexperienced and perhaps partly because of this, although senior officers including the Prince of Orange have been blamed, they were caught off guard. After being first told to form a line of battle, they were still trying desperately to form a defensive outward facing square, which was the standard defence against charging cavalry, when the French cuirassiers were in among them, appearing with frightening speed out of the tall rye crops. Michael Aaron has written:

The experience of the 69th at Quatre Bras was a horrific one - youngsters stumbling through the rye in terror whilst cavalrymen in armour hunted them down, slashing downwards with their sabres.

The two companies who had managed to form a square mainly survived but those unfortunate soldiers not formed up were massacred.

The King's Colours. Lost at Quatre Bras and regained after Waterloo
©Firing Line Museum of the Welsh Soldier (Commercial Commons Licence)

In all some 41% of the 2nd Battalion were casualties at Quatre Bras but this was not unusual among the British forces who fought there. Nevertheless, the French had a series of mislaid or misunderstood orders and missed their chances for a decisive victory and the cavalry were repulsed and retreated.

Uniform of the 69th (South Lincolnshire) Regiment
(From my own 1930s cigarette card)

The 69th lost 38 killed and 115 wounded and the "King's Colour", the regimental flag, was captured, which was seen as a great shame for the battalion.

After Quatre Bras Wellington withdrew to a ridge near to the village of Waterloo. Most of the troops marched there with little trouble from the enemy but a violent thunderstorm flooded the area and the infantrymen had to try to wade through water up to their knees. At nightfall, soaked and weary they had to get by on sodden biscuits and hunks of meat, uncooked because it was too wet to light camp fires. So, when we picture John Phillips at Waterloo we must remember that, like most of the foot soldiers, he would have been tired, soaked and caked in mud. He must have longed for home.

John and the 69th were positioned a few hundred yards north of the outposts of Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte. He was part of Isaac Downing's Company. Because of their losses at Quatre Bras, they had had to join up with the 33rd Regiment of Foot to have sufficient numbers to form a defensive square. At about 11, on the morning of the 18th June 1815, when the sun had broken through the thick morning mist the battle commenced. Warfare was often a contest between charging cavalry and the foot soldiers formed in defensive squares and if these were properly formed and there was supporting artillery the cavalry would rarely win the day.

The heavy cavalry of the French thundered on the British squares only to be repulsed. Captain Mercer who was there said that it was "like waves beating against rocks". The French, however, could have taken the day but the delayed Prussian army under Blucher arrived just in time and the battle was won. Wellington wrote, "It was the most desperate business I ever was in…". Waterloo is remembered as a glorious victory for the Duke of Wellington and the end of Napoleon but for the ordinary soldier it would been a confused tumult of individual skirmishes with little idea of how the battle was unfolding.

New mock-up of the 69th uniform in front of the Colours.
Firing Line Museum, Cardiff Castle (own photograph June 2018)

The 69th who had lost their commanding officer and 153 others at Quatre Bras suffered a further loss of 6 officers and 64 other ranks killed, wounded and died of wounds. Among the wounded was John Phillips who was shot in the left shoulder by a musket ball. It is possible that his left arm had to be amputated but as yet this is not certain. Did he march with the rest of his 2nd Battalion of the 69th when the victorious troops marched into Paris and were reviewed by the Emperors of Russia and Austria and the King of Prussia?

Waterloo brought the French Wars to an end and the following year the 2nd Battalion of the 69th, along with many others, was ordered to disband. The battalion returned home in January 1816 and was "struck off" in the following October. Wounded soldiers were discharged and others moved to the 1st Battalion or other Regiments.

All the British troops who fought at Waterloo were awarded a "Waterloo Medal" (or should have been – there were many discrepancies) and had an extra two years added to their record of service in calculations of their pension. John was admitted to the pension scheme on 30th October 1816 and it was noted as a "permanent" pension perhaps indicating that he had a disablement that would not improve. In addition, prize money was awarded to all ranks: £433 2s 4d to field officers and £2 11s 4d for privates like John Phillips.

He returned to Ringstead and Raunds and suddenly back to ordinary life as a labourer. He would have had many stories to tell but, as we are now very aware the fear and uncertainty of battle can destroy a man's mental health. There is no mention of him in the local newspaper so not for him the glories and the honours. As we have seen he married and had children but it would have been a difficult life if he had a damaged or amputated left arm, even with his small allowance as a "Chelsea Pensioner".

He died on 14th April 1847 (the date given in the Royal Hospital, Chelsea Pension Registers which states, probably correctly, that he was 54) and was buried in Raunds churchyard on the 18th. There is no gravestone or memorial to his memory.

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Chapter 6

John Percival 1799 – 1868 (Served 1819 – 1843)

4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards

Of all the ordinary soldiers from Ringstead that we have looked at, John Percival was the one who reached as high in the British Army that a working-class man could hope to achieve. We, again, have the problem of finding him in the Ringstead Parish Registers before his enlistment. The reason for this constant problem may be that the soldiers tended to come from a gypsy or travelling background, a significant number of the poorer villagers did not christen their children, or they tended to come from the Baptist community.

If we look for the name Percival in the Registers we find many with this surname but, perhaps significantly, only ten of the 48 entries (up to 1837) are after 1770. None of these are christenings, four are burials but six are marriages. In this period only, the parish church could conduct marriages so local nonconformists had to marry there. Later, a Ringstead vicar refused to marry a Baptist groom and so the local chapel was licensed for marriages too. Further, if we look in the "Brief History of the Ringstead Baptist Church" there is a list of the allocation of pews carried out in 1763. It includes a Sarah Percival of Ringstead who had four places. Perhaps this explains the lack of birth evidence for John.

It was at Nottingham, that, on 6th May 1819, John Percival took the King's shilling and enlisted in the 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards for the bounty of two pounds. The Dragoons had left Ireland for Bristol in July 1818 but from the Autumn the headquarters were based in Nottingham with detached troops in Northampton and Leicester. It seems likely that he attested in Northampton and went with the troop to Nottingham. He initially enlisted for ten years only, although there were a number of caveats, and ways of extending this time, by the crown. He was twenty years old and a labourer.

Through a history of the regiment published in 1837 and the local newspaper reports we can try to trace John's movements but it is important to realise that a regiment was often split into smaller troops or groupings, so we can rarely be certain that he was actually at a particular incident.

In June and July 1819 the regiment marched to York and were stationed there as well as at Sheffield, Leeds and Huddersfield. In the middle of August five troops suppressed riots in Leeds and again in September one troop marched to Durham to quell further disturbances. While stationed at York the death of George III was announced and the accession of George IV proclaimed. The regiment was part of the procession into the castle. The Yorkshire Gazette reported that:

> When the Writ was finished reading, the union Flag was hoisted on the Castel Walls. The band of the 4th Dragoon Guards struck up, "God save the King", three cheers were given, and the Minster Bells rung a merry peal....
> Each of the prisoners in the Gaol as well as debtors as felons, 240 in number, had an allowance of ale from the High Sheriff to drink his Majesty's health; and each felon had a loaf of bread.

A similar ceremony, again attended by the 4th Dragoons, happened on the next day, at Leeds. But this ceremonial could not mask the fact that there was anger and civil unrest in Yorkshire. On 11th April 1820 a large force of protesters was planned to assemble from Barnsley, Bradford, Keighley, Halifax, Dewsbury and Mirfield. The march from some areas stalled but the Barnsley contingent, armed with muskets and pikes pressed on. When, however, they realised that the other expected

groups had not arrived, and they were confronted by the 4th Dragoons and the Huddersfield Yeomanry, the protestors threw away their arms and fled. Seventeen of the marchers were arrested. Other troops of the 4th Dragoons arrived but were not needed. Nevertheless, they were in action again in Sheffield and one sergeant, one private and two horses were wounded with pikes.

John was to spend his military career keeping law and order as well as providing ceremonial security to state occasions.

From Historical records of the British Army; The Fourth or Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoon Guards
www.gutenberg.org

In August 1820 the regiment was stationed at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Carlisle, Penrith and Whitehaven and, in the following March, it marched to Scotland where it was stationed at Piershill Barracks in Edinburgh but also a Greenock, Irvine and Ayr. Before this time, the eight troops of the 4th Dragoons were classed according to the colours of their horses;; two black; two brown; two bay; one bright bay and one chestnut. In August 1821 the regiment was reduced to six troops and the colours of the horses were mixed in each troop. There were then 27 officers, 24 sergeants, 18 corporals, 6 trumpeters, 6 farriers, 281 privates and 253 troop horses.

In July 1822 the regiment marched to Port Patrick and embarked for Ireland. The headquarters were established at Dundalk but the troops continued to move around the country until proceeding to Dublin in March 1826. It had one of its regular inspections there before sailing to Liverpool, arriving there on 29th March. On the 31st it set off again for Coventry, Birmingham and Abergavenny. The trouble in the country over the New Poor Law was still rumbling around and the Dragoons had to deal with protests in Dudley and Wolverhampton where some of the protesters were wounded.

In April 1827 the regiment marched to Dorchester and were also posted in some of the nearby towns. In May 1827 its quarters were moved to Exeter and Topsham Barracks but Sergeant John Percival had met his future wife by then. John had been promoted to Corporal on 13th October 1822

and, some five years later, on 31st August 1827, was made up to Sergeant. Later in that same year, on 9th, 16th and 23rd December the banns were read for the marriage of John and Mary Mitchell at St George's Church in Fordington in Dorset. Fordington was a village near, and now part of, Dorchester. A fellow sergeant in the 4th Dragoons was one of the witnesses. We learn later that Mary had been born in Manchester so whether they met there and she followed him to Dorset. In the 1861 census we find a Christiana Mitchell who is a niece of the couple. In the 1851 Census we find Christiana in Brecon Barracks with her mother, Elizabeth who is the "wife of a farrier". A detachment of the 4th Dragoons were in the barracks at the time. Perhaps the most likely explanation of their meeting is that Mary's father was in the 4th Dragoons, but more research is needed.

From Historical records of the British Army; The Fourth or Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoon Guards
www.gutenberg.org

The job of the army at home in peacetime was to keep law and order, at a time when there was no national police force, in a, sometimes volatile, country. The constant movement and drilling was also a way of keeping soldiers of all ranks occupied. Bored soldiers kept in one place could become fractious and, coupled with drink, could cause trouble. The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette of Saturday 12th July 1828 reported:

> On Monday morning, a duel took place between two of the Officers of the 4th Dragoon Guards quartered in Exeter. The meeting was at 6 o'clock in the morning, in a field behind the late Artillery Barracks. After an exchange of shots, without either taking effect, the seconds interfered, when a most perfect reconciliation took place, and the parties quitted the ground; the differences of opinion arose in one of the Officer's rooms.

John's new wife, Mary, had a daughter who was baptised Elizabeth on 2nd November 1828 in St David's Church in Exeter

In April 1829 the regiment marched to York and then, the following March onto Edinburgh. The Woolmer's *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* for Saturday April 18th 1829 printed a "Lament for the 4th Dragoons on their Leaving Exeter".

"O Weep for the hour",
When in an April shower,
The Royal 4th Dragoons left fair Exeter's walls;
The ladies sobb'd outright,
One long day and one long night,
To think those gay gallants must march where honor calls.

Full many a lovely dame
To the Ball for their sakes came,
Who never in their lives had been at Balls before,
And Matrimony still,
Their pretty heads would fill,
Alas! That all these brilliant dreams should now be o'er.

Yet ah! Would you believe
These warriors do not grieve,
And that all the admiration's on the ladies side?
They boast that they can flirt,
And escape without a hurt,
Nor do they bear from Exeter *one lovely bride*!*

But grieve not ladies dear,
Your drooping spirits cheer,
And from those sparkling eyes wipe the falling tear;
O throw aside your grief,
And in change obtain relief,
For the dashing Third Dragoons will soon be here.

*i.e. *more* than one

Was Mary Percival one of the "lovely brides"? She, and her baby daughter would have followed her husband on his travels with the regiment. There was continuing work for the troops with unrest seething around the country. In April and May 1831 there were riots during new parliamentary elections. The Regimental History records:

> Escorts were required for the voters, and so violent were the rioters, that one man was killed by a brick while proceeding to vote in charge of a party of the military. Many of the soldiers were knocked off their horses with stones and others had their helmets broken; yet such was the exemplary patience and forbearance of the soldiers of the FOURTH DRAGOON GUARDS under these trying and painful circumstances, that not a single civilian was hurt by them during the whole period. During the riots at Ayr the prisoners in the gaol rose against the turnkeys whom they overpowered; but a few men of the FOURTH DRAGOON GUARDS arriving, they dismounted, entered the gaol with loaded carbines, secured the prisoners before they could effect their escape and restored order.

Again, the following year, in March 1832 there were riots in Paisley which the regiment had to pacify before it embarked at Glasgow in steam vessels for Belfast. It seems that the army had turned to steamships for the rapid movement of troops, perhaps so that adverse wind conditions did not leave them in limbo.

But this was not an escape from trouble, for Ireland too was in turmoil. In the autumn of 1832 the Dragoons had to split into smaller units to deal with election, and tithe collecting riots as well as other disturbances across Ireland so that they were constantly on the move. They were based at Cahir for a time before, on 28th April 1834, marching to Cork to deal with the violent resistance to the collection of tithes. They were met with sticks and stones and this time they did fire on the protesters, leaving some ten of them dead at Gortroe, a village north of Cork.

This was the last real battle in the "Tithe War" and is sometimes referred to as the Gortroe or Rathcormac massacre. And we know that two companies (100) dragoons were involved as well as the 29th Regiment of Foot. There were about 250 locals opposing the collection of the tithes (payment to the vicar of the Anglican Church of Ireland parish). They retreated to a prepared barricade on the land of Widow Ryan who was 40 shillings in arrears with her tithe. The troops were pelted with stone and sticks and sustained injuries for 45 minutes before the order to fire was given. The number who died is a matter of dispute but there were up to 20 dead it has been claimed. After this Widow Ryan paid her tithe and the crowd dispersed.

There were elections again in January 1835 and, once more, there were the inevitable riots which were "policed" by the 4th Dragoons.

The regiment completed three years' service in Ireland and in May 1835 sailed from Cork on steamships for Bristol and then on to Brighton. The same story of civil unrest continued, mainly centred around the New Poor Law, and in September a troop of the regiment had to rescue magistrates and the relieving officer from a mob at Steyning and it was involved in similar incidents at Horsham and Bath. The opposition to the Poor Laws did not abate.

In February 1837 we can be certain, perhaps for the only time definitively, that John Percival was at Exeter with the Royal Irish Dragoons. A barracks could be a claustrophobic environment, as we have seen with the duel in 1828, and small matters could quickly escalate, especially if fuelled by alcohol.

A Private Pitt of the 4th Dragoon Guards had absented himself without leave from the Exeter barracks. When he returned it was decided that he and his room should be searched to make sure, it seems, that he had not sold any of his kit. Sergeant Henry carried out the search and returned to his own room which was opposite Pitt's. He was joined there by Sergeant John Percival. The two of them heard the click of a pistol, held by Pitt, which had misfired. He then seized his loaded carbine and, as the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette reported on 18th February 1837:

> . . . fired in the direction of Sergeant Henry's room, the ball passing across the back of Sergeant Henry but without doing him any mischief and closely over the breast of Sergeant Percival who had reclined on a bed, its progress stopped by the brick wall of the building.

Pitt was tried at a General Court Martial and sentenced to be transported for fourteen years. It is a story where you feel that much of the reason for the flashpoint is not reported.

On 29th May 1837 the regiment marched north to a new station in Hulme barracks and took part in the grand procession and spectacle in Manchester in honour of William IV's birthday. Less than a month later, the king was dead and on 23rd June they were at the proclamation of the accession of the young Queen Victoria.

Some things did not change, and new elections caused troubles in some of the towns around Manchester and later, in October 1837 they had to deal with protests in Halifax and Bradford. By July of the following year they had to perform formal duties in London before marching to Ipswich and Norwich. There were riots here too against the Poor Laws and at Stanfield Hall the 4th Dragoons arrested some 84 protesters.

The *History of the Regiment* which was published in 1837 finished with a eulogy to the patience and professionalism of the regiment in the face of provocation and personal danger. It is, of course, a biased commendation but it does seem that John Percival was a part of a well-organised regiment asked to do the unpleasant task of subduing its own countrymen. In June 1838, by contrast, the regiment was quartered in Isllington and Clerkenwell and, on 28th June, was stationed near Westminster Abbey for the coronation of the young Queen Victoria.

John must have distinguished himself, both in the ceremony and pomp, and in the difficult task of dealing with civil unrest in as disciplined way as possible. On 9th January 1840 he was promoted to Troop Sergeant Major. Without the Regimental History, we now have to rely on the local newspapers almost entirely for the movements of the 4th Dragoons. We do know, however, from the British Worldwide Index that in 1841 he was in Edinburgh. Later that year he regiment were sent to deal with the Rebecca Riots again in Wales.

Originally appeared in Illustrated London News in 1843

These riots took place in rural west Wales, between 1839 and 1843, where, small tenant farmers were protesting about the payment of tolls charged by the Turnpike Trusts or groups of businessmen who owned most of the main roads. Small farmers feared that the cost of journeys to and from market could take away all their profits. The protesters took a text from the Bible where Rebecca tells of the need to "possess the gates of those who hate them." They called themselves "Rebecca and her daughters" and, dressed in women's clothes, they tore down the toll gates. The protest was also exacerbated by poverty caused by poor harvests, the tithes they had to pay to the Anglican vicars, and the 1834 Poor Law Act which stopped the payment of poor relief to the able-bodied. Instead they were forced to go into the new Union Workhouses. Finally, the gentry, the J.P.s, and the clergy were Church of England and spoke English, while the working people were Welsh-speaking chapel goers.

The regiment went to Carmarthen but were then sent to Newcastle Emlyn where they were confronted by up to 20,000 protesters, many of then carrying rudimentary arms. The *Illustrated London News* of 1st July 1843 reported:

> The mob were so well armed and ready for action, that the dragoons could not enter the town until Monday morning, and the conflict that took place on Newcastle bridge is beyond description. The soldiers were thrown of their horses, their arms taken from them, and were afterwards thrown into the river Tivey, when one of the men, named Kearns, the roughrider, met a watery grave, and the others are so bruised from having fallen on the rocks below the bridge pool, that they are no more fit for service. The union workhouse has been entirely destroyed by fire and it is feared that a great many gentlemen's houses will be destroyed in the course of the night.

Other troops poured into the area and the 4th Dragoons, with other regiments, eventually order was restored and not all reports were condemnatory of the rioters. A reporter in the Evening Mail on 26th July 1843 wrote:

> On my reaching this place [Newcastle Emlyn] I made the best enquiries that I could as to the alleged general grievances, and as to the working of the New Poor Law, and I found without exception that the opinion of the whole country is that the law is most arbitrary, partial and cruel in its operation. A respectable farmer told me that one of the cruel provisions was that which prohibited the guardians from giving out-door relief to the able bodied. "The state of agriculture," said he, "here is not like in England, the farms are small; and the farmers as well as the labourers are very poor. When the harvest is in the course of being gathered in we do not, as they do in England, have an influx of Irish and other labourers, who at the end of the harvest leave, and are no longer burdensome; but our own people only are employed as agricultural labourers, and they reside in the parish. During the summer they receive 1s. or 9d. per day, but in the winter they are perhaps not employed for many weeks, and when employed have only 6d. a-day. These people have a small cottage each to reside in, and a little garden, and many of them arrive actually at almost starvation point with their wives and children, rather than apply for poor relief, knowing that if they do so they will be dragged into the union-house, where they will be placed, themselves in one yard, their wives in another, their male children in another and their daughters in a fourth; and thus completely separated, they cannot see one another, except through the kindness of the governor of the union-house, who perhaps would get reprimanded for allowing the

> indulgence, and in the meanwhile their little furniture, their cottage and their garden fall into hopeless ruin.

Throughout the summer the "Rebeccaites" were meeting and dispersing before the Dragoons but 1843 saw the end of their activities. Some old soldiers would later end up in the workhouse or begging for a living and many of the regiment must have found that the work they were asked to do was not what they had signed up for. John Percival himself had been a labourer in a poor family although in a community not reduced to the dire straits found in many Welsh and Irish communities where the poor regularly faced starvation. We do know that a number of officers were criticised for not dealing more harshly with the food rioters. In the Limerick Food Riots in 1830 Captain Drought was accused of being on the side of the rioters and he replied:

> . . . as a Christian, he does not think it was his duty to fire on a multitude of starving people.

After the 1831 Bristol Food Riots, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brereton of the 14th Light Dragoons was tried for negligence after he refused to fire on the protesters.

We cannot know what John's feelings were about having to subdue the poor and the starving but we do know that all the drilling and riding had begun to take its toll on his body. The regiment returned to Ireland in the autumn of 1843 and John was assessed for discharge from the army at Longford, some 75 miles north-west of Dublin, on 22nd November 1843. He was found to be suffering from lumbago and varicose veins in both legs, both almost certainly due to his horse riding. He was granted his discharge and given a pension. He had been in the 4th Dragoons for 24 years and 236 days, all of it in "home service".

Unlike some of the other soldiers of this period this was not the end of our knowledge of John Percival in the official records, mainly because he lived to feature in a number of British Censuses so that we can trace him with certainty.

In 1851 John Percival was 50 years old, a Chelsea Out Pensioner, born in Ringstead. Living with him at 2 St John Lane, Halifax home is his wife Mary (42) born in Manchester and daughter Elizabeth (22) who was born in Exeter. A year later Elizabeth married Seth Gray, a widower, and her father is shown as John Percival, "Late Sergeant Major in the 4th Dragoon Guards". By the following Census in 1861 John (59) and now strangely born in Raunds, and Mary (52) are living at 3, St. John Lane in Halifax. With them is Christiana, a niece, who may be a child of Mary's brother. This terraced stone-built cottage is still there today (2018) although much around it has gone.

I believe that John died, aged 70, in early 1868 and in the 1871 Census Mary, aged 62, is living with her daughter Elizabeth and husband Seth Gray at 42, Craven Terrace in Leeds.

As always, there are many gaps in our knowledge of John Percival but in following him round the British Isles we do get a glimpse into a far more volatile and divided rural community than we sometimes imagine for this time. Did John ever return to Ringstead to tell of his life and the life he had seen policing the four countries of the union. It seems unlikely. Nor do we know how he coped after retirement after being a man of importance in the regiment.

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Chapter 7
Joseph Edwards 1851 - ? (Served 1866 – 1874)

Royal Navy

Joseph is yet again, another military man whose civilian life had proved impossible to uncover. We know from official records that his birthday was 12th November 1851 and that he was born in Ringstead in Northamptonshire. All this information is in his "Continuous Service Engagement" document which he signed on 31st July 1866. He was to become a "Boy 2nd Class" on HMS St Vincent, when he would be eighteen years of age and then do ten years' service in the Royal Navy.

He was only 4ft. 9 inches tall with a fresh complexion, light hair, brown eyes and with a scar over his right eye.

The ship on which he had "volunteered to serve, the HMS St Vincent, was a training ship for boys which was moored in Portsmouth harbour. When we look for the adult who signed to agree that "my son has my full consent (being himself willing) to enter Her Majesty's navy for a period of Ten Years and General Service from the age of 18" we see that "son" has been crossed out and replaced with "charge". The chargé (the person having the charge of Joseph) has signed and I think the signature is of John Miller who was the Master of the Union Workhouse in Portsea. He was a local man, who unusually, was also a bookbinder and printer.

The signature appears to be Joseph's and appears clear and confident. We do not know how long Joseph had been in the Union Workhouse but he seems to have received a good basic education. As I have said I have not found any link to Ringstead. The most likely Joseph is 10 years' old in the 1861 Census. He is living with his mother, Ann, and her recent husband William Peters at 10 Hampton Court, Portsea. William is a retired seaman and is 71 years' old and Ann is 39, a corset-maker. They were married locally in the last quarter of 1859. Joseph Edwards is shown as William's stepson.

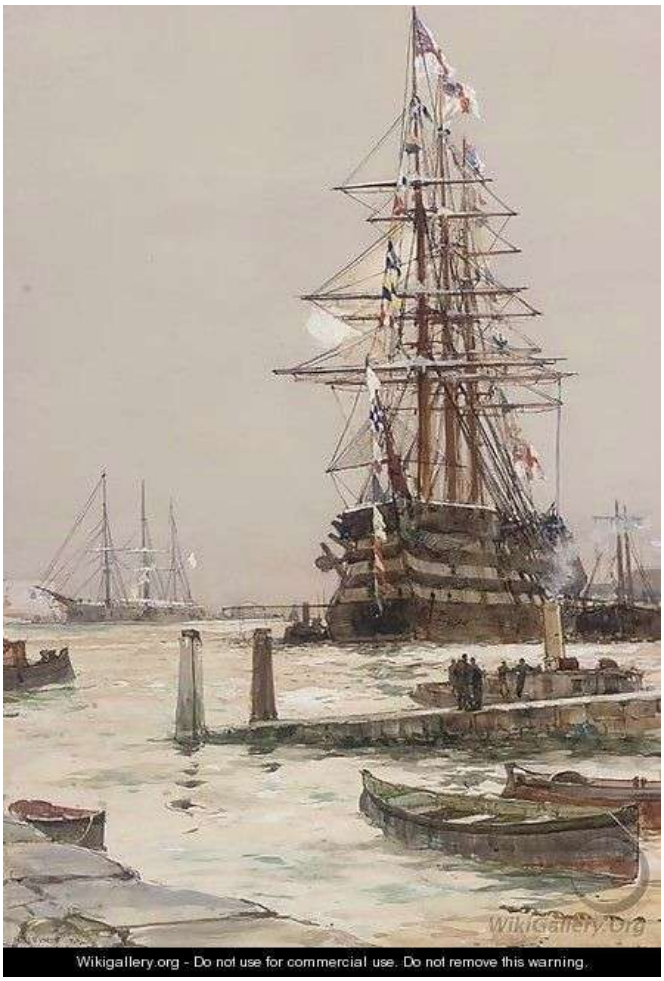
William Peters died in October – December 1864 so it may be that Ann's precarious financial security died with him. Was this the trigger that sent her to the Workhouse and her son then to become a boy sailor? By 1871 she is living with her 65-year-old sister, Elizabeth Edwards at 16 Moore Square. They are both domestic servants and born in Portsmouth. This still does not explain the Ringstead connection. There are a number of stories we could invent to explain how this happened, but all would lack evidence.

There is a small sheet of paper attached to Joseph's file which has written on it, "Mrs. Wafer, R.N. Rendezvous, Near the Dockgates, Portsea". Mrs. Wafer was a remarkable woman who was well regarded in high places and was praised in Parliament. Louise Moon, in a thesis written for her Ph.D. for the University of Portsmouth, has written of

"Sailortown" between 1850 and 1900. In this she quotes from the "Adjourned Annual Licensing Session" of 1868, where it was stated:

> . . . "no person in the borough was better known than Mrs Wafer . . . there was scarcely a captain who entered the port of Portsmouth who did not know [her]."

She had formed a close relationship with the Royal Navy, finding recruits for them, when their own attempts had largely failed. At first, she kept drinking establishments with her Scottish-born husband. They started with the *Three Crowns*, then the *Earl St Vincent.* On her husband's death she took over the licence, helped by her widowed sister. Portsmouth, like most ports, was a magnet for prostitutes and other people wanting to relieve the sailors of their money. Mrs Wafer, however allowed no working girls in or near her premises and she did her best to look after the interests of the sailors. She often gave sailors free lodging or directed them where to go.



HMS St Vincent as a Training Ship in 1897
Wikigallery (Not for Commercial Use)

She claimed that she had "raised for the Navy 88,000 men and boys. This may be an exaggeration but the admiralty, supporting her application for a licence stated that she had found, "no less than 26,572 men and boys to join the Royal Navy".

The 1865 *Harrod's Directory for Portsmouth* recorded that Mrs. Louise Wafer was the licensee of the *Royal Naval Rendezvous* in Half Moon Street. Unfortunately, only a stub of this street remains and it is now flanked by modern blocks of flats.

We cannot be sure, but it may be that John Miller Jnr. Master of the Union Workhouse, or his wife, Ann, had contacted Louise Wafer about Joseph and she had made the necessary arrangements.

Certainly, the workhouse would be a ready source of recruits. The *Poor Law Amendment Act* of 1834 meant that paupers could not receive out-payments if they were able-bodied and so they were forced to enter the Union Workhouse. This was meant as a deterrent, but the workhouses soon filled up to overflowing. The training ships were one way of keeping boys out of the workhouse and also off the streets and providing them with a future in the Merchant or Royal Navy.

Young Joseph joined the *St. Vincent*. It had been commissioned in 1815 and, after service, including the Crimea, it had first become a depot ship at Portsmouth before being used as a training ship for boys and being moored permanently at Hasler (part of Portsmouth harbour). She retained her 26 guns and continued in this training role until 1905.

Discipline in the Royal Navy, although it had been cleansed of its worst excesses was still harsh. From the 1860s boy sailors were birched instead of being flogged with the cat-o-nine-tails. For lesser offences they could be caned "on the breech with clothes on" in front of all the boys. Nevertheless, the boys learnt how to wash and mend clothes and keep their personal area clean, to make ropes and make and repair sails. They also taught to row and other seamanship tasks as well as learning to swim. Alongside these tasks they had to continue with basic schoolwork unlike most working class boys of their age.

On 12th November 1869 Joseph was eighteen years old so, as part of his initial agreement, he was now enlisted as an "Ordinary Sailor" in the Royal Navy. He had now grown to 5ft, 8 inches tall with dark brown hair, brown eyes and a fair complexion. The scar over his eye had either gone or was no longer considered worthy of note. Not surprisingly, as he had been in the Navy all his life, he did not have a trade.

His first ship was *HMS Bellerophon*, but he was only there three months before, on 12th March 1873 moving to the *Duke of Wellington*. He was there another month and his conduct was said to be "very good". Finally, he transferred to *HMS Triumph* which was a brand new "broadside ironclad battleship". It had been built in 1870 but was not commissioned until 1873 so Joseph was part of its first crew. On the 1st August 1873 he had become an Able Seaman.

HMS Triumph became part of "Her Majesty's Detached Squadron" and sailed for Portugal and Gibraltar. We know that they put into Lisbon, because Joseph, spent some time there

with an unspecified illness. When they reached Gibraltar, it was used as a base form which the Triumph would patrol the seas around.

Hi career had hardly started, however, when it ended. On 13th February 1874 he was court-martialled for theft. He was sentenced to be put on "List 18/8" to await passage to England and there serve one year's imprisonment and the discharge from the service.

When we examine the Courts Martial book for the Seamen and Marines of the Royal Navy we find that two men from the Triumph were tried for theft on February 13th and sentenced to the same punishment. Unfortunately, there are no further details of the theft or whether they were acting in collusion. It does, however, detail the conditions of their imprisonment which included the first week of each month in solitary confinement and the rest of the time doing hard labour.

HMS Triumph seems to have been a troubled ship. A new commander had come in and tightened up discipline. Whether this was essential change or bad man management we cannot tell. We do know that in the previous year, on 10th November 1873 a seaman was given one year for theft and another for insubordination. In February 1874 alongside Joseph's sentence, another two were found guilty of desertion. It is important to realise that many on board did not wish to be there. A Lieutenant from a Royal Navy family was court-martialled in May 1875 for being "incapable of keeping his watch" (drunk).

It was, however, later that year, when the *Triumph* was in Devonport, that the trouble came to a head and the crew came close to mutiny. Privileges, such as the keeping of caged birds and having potted flowers decorating some portholes, were suddenly taken away. There was even a letter from some Petty Officers to the *Times* about the new regime and the matter was raised in Parliament.

An account in the *Hampshire Telegraph* on 7th August 1875 shows how the claustrophobic conditions of a warship could escalate small perceived wrongs into major problems.

> DISAFFECTION ON BOARD HMS "TRIUMPH"." – A disturbance of rather a serious character has (writes a correspondent) occurred on board the *Triumph*, one of the Channel Squadron hips, now at Devonport. Until the appointment of the present commander the men were permitted to congregate on the upper deck fro conversation prior to turning in for the night, but now the men have been peremptorily denied the privilege. The disaffection occasioned by this step increased when it became known that a seaman's leave was stopped for ten days because he wore elastic-side boots, on the ground that in wearing them he was not in uniform. At first the men manifested their disaffection by chalking up in conspicuous parts of the ship uncomplimentary and threatening phrases to the commander and growling in an undertone at him as he walked his rounds. Eventually a spit-kettle was thrown at him by some of the crew and he was struck in the leg with considerable violence.

> The quartermaster was summoned on deck but he was unable to identify the offenders. Swabs [?] and other things have since been continually thrown about and a court of inquiry is regarded as certain. The seaman punished for wearing elastic-side boots has his grog stopped, stands two hours by himself on the upper-deck daily, and a sentry stands over him while he partakes of his rations.

For Joseph Edwards, it was an ignominious end to his career and, unfortunately, after that I have been unable to locate him, although there are many possibilities.

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Chapter 8

William Atkins c1818 - ? (Served 1839 – 1841)

29th Regiment of Foot

William Atkins was another soldier whose life outside his army service seems to have eluded the parish and other records. There are some eighteen entries in the Ringstead registers for the name Atkins stretching back to a marriage in 1576. At the time of William's birth there are a number of baptisms, all the children of Smart and Ann Atkins. There is no baptism for a William but it seems most likely that Smart and Ann were his parents.

Smart Atkins had been baptised at Buckworth in Huntingdonshire on 27th February 1792, the son of William and mary. He had married Ann Turner on 5th September 1811 in Great Stukeley near Huntingdon. They had a daughter, Sophia baptised on 8th December 1811 in Alconbury Weston and then four other children baptised from 1816 at Ringstead. In 1838, we know from a property sale that Smart is still a tenant in Ringstead. But still no sign of William.

Looking at the military documents we know that a William Atkins, born in Ringstead in Northamptonshire, enlisted with the 29th Foot Regiment in Kings Lynn on 15th January 1839 and that he was 21 years old and had been a labourer. He was given the service number 1288. He was 5ft 8½ inches (1.74m) tall with hazel eyes, dark brown hair and a fresh complexion.

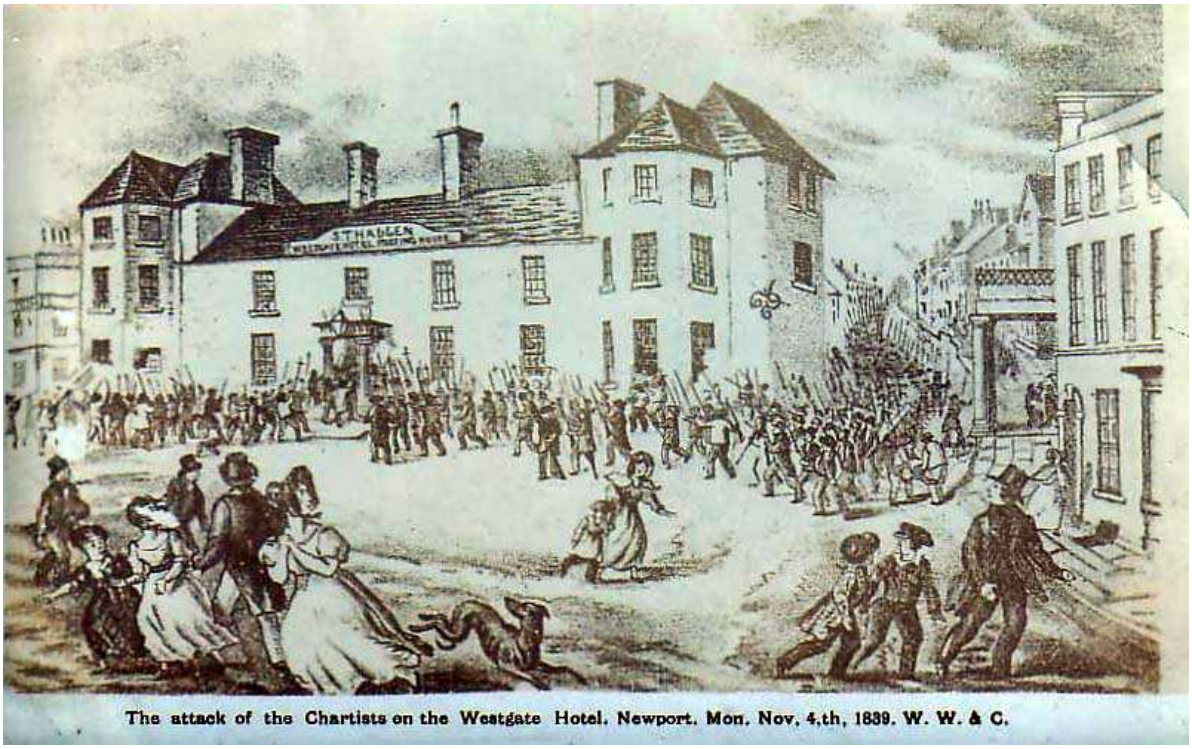
After enlisting William went with the 29th Foot to the Plymouth Citadel. Soon after he arrived he contracted a severe case of small pox and this seems to have had a debilitating effect on his constitution. He was, after that, "very delicate" and subject to "coughs and other pulmonary signs".

In May 1839 the 29th Foot were marched to South wales via Exeter. They were destined to the towns of Monmouth and Newport. The *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, on Saturday 11th May 1839, reported that they had been sent to Wales:

> . . . in consequence of the daring conduct of the Chartists in the counties of Monmouth and Glamorgan who have enrolled themselves in military array and are publicly arming in large numbers, threatening open insurrection.

The arrival of the regiment may have quietened the disturbances, but unrest simmered, and the 29th had marched back to Bristol and then on to Weedon Barracks in west Northamptonshire before the real confrontation. By October 1839 they were in the barracks at Woolwich and probably remained there until August of the following year. Meanwhile, back in Newport, on November 4th 1839 10,000 Chartist sympathisers, including many miners, some of who had armed themselves with home-made pikes, bludgeons and

firearms, marched on the town. It was reported that they had been drilled by a deserter from the 29th Regiment. Three columns of protestors converged on Newport. They had marched overnight but rain and the non-arrival of one group delayed them and they arrived in daylight, losing the element of surprise. The real battle happened outside the Westgate Hotel and the outgunned protestors lost some 20 dead and 50 wounded. The ringleaders were tried, found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hung drawn and quartered, the last time this barbaric punishment was ever meted out. After a furore of protest and petitions, some say including from the young Queen Victoria herself, the sentence was transmuted to transportation.



The Attack of the Chartists on the Westgate Hotel, Newport 4th November 1839
From Monmouthshire News. (Public domain)

As we have said, the 29th had marched to Woolwich and they were there for the celebrations of Queen Victoria's wedding to Prince Albert on 10th February 1840. The *West Kent Guardian*, on the 15th February, enthused:

> Her Majesty's nuptials were celebrated, we are happy to say, by the inhabitants of Woolwich, in a manner worthy of the joyous occasion. From an early hour in the morning the streets were crowded by holiday-folk, all anxious to witness the busy preparations. The whole of the public departments were closed during the day and the vessels in the river, their rigging gaily decorated with the flags of all nations, aided by their appearance, the aspect of almost universal rejoicing. Many pleasing and elegant devices were displayed in the windows of the principal residents; but as there were exceptions to the general feeling, it would be invidious on our part to

enter into details. The front of the Commodore's house in the Dock-yard was handsomely decorated with the words, "God save the Queen" in variegated lamps presenting a beautiful appearance. The Royal Artillery Barracks was not illuminated but this was more than atoned for by a splendid display of fireworks in the barrack-field. Nearly 700 rockets with a proportionate number of other the pyrotechnic art were expended upon the occasion. The west wing which is occupied by the 29th Regiment was, however, well lighted up.

In August of 1840 the 29th took up their post in Leith (Edinburgh), some by the steamship Vesuvius (aptly but perhaps worryingly named). The Regiment remained there until the following June when they moved on to Belfast and on to Dublin.

HMS Vesuvius (a paddle sloop steamship) on the left in a storm in the Bay of Acre (1840) Schranz Brothers (engravers). Wikipedia Commons

We cannot be sure how much of this action William Atkins took part in for, on 23rd October 1841, at Kilmainham Hospital in Dublin he was discharged from the army. He had served two years and 320 days. It is the record of his examination there that reveals the ongoing battle that William had had with ill health. He was adjudged to have a "disease originating in constitutional causes", (i.e. not caused by his treatment in the army), that made him unfit for service. He had a chronic swelling on the anterior side of his chest and was subject to frequent attacks of "catarrh" and there were also "symptoms of incipient consumption".

All this, (and including his bout of smallpox), had meant that he had been unfit for service ten times during the last two years, for periods ranging from one to four months. He was now "unable to march or wear his belt across his chest or perform any active military duty".

As a result of all this ill health, he had often been in hospital and received the painful, but ineffective treatments of the day including the use of "blisters" and expectorant squills. A blister was usually made by applying a caustic powder and the theory was that the body could not contain two ailments at once. Squill, made from the bulb of a plant, is still sometimes used today for loosening phlegm in the treatment of asthma and coughs.

From the diagnosis of tuberculosis, it would seem unlikely that William had much time left to live, He had said that he had intended to live in Ringstead after his discharge. He had been of good character and was granted a pension of sixpence a week for six months.

At first, I could find no proven sighting of him after his discharge but following a lead on an old RootsChat thread I looked at some Ancestry trees and there is a possible sighting of William although the age does not match and most of it is from secondary sources.

A William Atkins, son of Smart Atkins, married Elizabeth Hales (sometimes Hailes) in Leighton Bromswold in Huntingdonshire (old county) on 13th February 1843. In 1846 the couple and Elizabeth's widowed father, Thomas Hales, emigrated to South Australia. William Atkins died in Adelaide Hospital on 23rd June 1852 aged 39 years, four months later, Elizabeth married Richard Fox on 13th October 1852 at O'Halloran Hill in South Australia. She died, aged 87, on 23rd February 1897 at Carey Gully, South Australia, some 54 years after her marriage to William.

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Chapter 9
George Ball 1818 - ? (Served 1839 - ?)
53rd Company of Royal Marines

George Ball was born in about 1818 and baptised in Ringstead on 19th February 1818. Although I was not aware of it initially, it was George, the eldest, who was the first of Daniel and Phoebe Ball's wandering children to leave Ringstead. He joined the Royal Marines, and perhaps set the pattern for a number of his younger siblings.

National Archive Records (ADM157/32/47: C641519) show that George enrolled at Huntingdon on the 10th September 1839 He joined the 53rd Company of the Marines. George was 20 years 9 months old and was shown as being born in Ringstead. He was not married and was a labourer. He had not been in the Militia and had enlisted for "unlimited service" for the bounty of three pounds. It also tells us that he was 5 feet 7 inches tall with a fresh complexion, hazel eyes and dark brown hair. He received the "King's shilling" on being attested which in this case was two shillings and sixpence. He was given a clean bill of health and the attestation was signed off by the Colonel Commandant, Elias Lawrence, on 5th October 1839.

The main role of the Marines at this time was to act as a buffer between the crew of a ship and the captain and officers. Before George was attested he was read article 3, 4 and 5 of the Articles of War. These related to joining in a mutiny, not doing ones utmost to suppress any mutiny, or in any way disobeying an officers command. All would be punishable by death or what a court martial deemed fit. The Marines would also take part in sea battles, often as riflemen but as there were fewer sea battles in the second half of the century they became skirmishers going ashore ahead of the main party.

Unfortunately, the Record of Service for George has not been completed but in the1841 Census there appears to be a name which could be George Ball (Bales) aged 20 (rounded age) who is living in the Chatham Barracks in Kent. By 1851 the Census (which again is difficult to decipher, has a George Ball (the forename not transcribed on Ancestry) who is 34 years old and born in Ringstead in Northamptonshire. He is an unmarried private in the Marines and still living in the Chatham Barracks. Then the trail goes cold.

There is one further document at the National Archives which is a "Declaration of a Marine enlisted before 1st August 1847, claiming Good Conduct Pay for the First Time". George put his mark, relinquishing all claim to additional pay for length of service in order to be entitled to "Good Conduct Pay". It was signed at Chatham on 1st April 1851 (It could be 185**7**).

There is, in the 1861 Census, of the "Tenders to Victory" in Portsmouth Harbour a George Ball, aged 41, who is a Carpenter's mate and married. He is shown, however, as being born in Chatham so unless this is a mistake he is not our man. I have not found him after that. Could he have been killed in the Crimean War? We may never know.

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Chapter 10

Thomas Ball 1834 – 1886 (Served 1857 – 1878)

Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot & 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade

We first find Thomas Ball, brother of George, in 1841 aged seven living in Ringstead, with his parents Daniel, a shepherd, and Phoebe and his brothers, 'Daniel, John, James, Samuel and Elisher'. On 12 September of the same year he is baptised at Ringstead Parish Church with three of his brothers. Perhaps there was a reduction for a job lot. In 1851 he is still living with his parents but at seventeen he is now an agricultural labourer.

Then, like his siblings George, Daniel, Sarah and John and his younger brother Elisha, he disappears from the Censuses. Most have gone to the New World but George and Thomas proved more elusive to trace although fragments of George's and Thomas's life appear. Unlike Elisha, Thomas does not reappear again in Ringstead with children whose birth places tell of his travels.

There is one possible siting. On a Stray Marriages site I found the following:

> *BALL Thomas of Raunds, age 21 bachelor, father Daniel, shepherd Sarah GALE otp age 21, spinster, father Henry, carpenter 18 Oct 1855 Pertenhall BDF {Bedfordshire}.*

It does give his home parish as Raunds rather than Ringstead but it seems too much of a coincidence: same name, same age, same father, and with same occupation! Also I cannot find any siting of another Thomas Ball in later Censuses to fit this same description. Assuming that this is the correct marriage there is more confusion because some five years later, in the 1861 Census Sarah is still living with her parents, Henry and Mary, in Pertenhall, and is surnamed Gale, not Ball. It appears to show her as married and certainly there is a marriage certificate. By 1871 she has disappeared and I have been unable to trace her. In 1881 her mother, Mary Gale, now aged 79 and a widow is visiting George Pearson, a labourer, living in 'The Bear, St. Mary's Street, St Neots in Huntingdonshire. George's wife is Sarah, aged 45 and born in Pertenhall. Could this be Sarah Gale? I have not yet traced any marriage. In 1891 George, now a gardener and Sarah are living in Yaxley in Huntingdonshire.

Of course this may all be a false trail but Thomas's story is one of alleyways and cul-de-sacs. If we have the right person, the fact that she is put as Sarah Gale and not Ball is a strong indicator that something has gone wrong. There is no sign of Thomas either in 1861 or 1871.

In the 1881 Census, thirty years after his last appearance, we find a Thomas Ball living at 1 London Wharf, High Street, Chatham, Kent. This Thomas is only 37 (not 47 as we would expect) but it does show his birthplace as Ringstead, Northants. His wife is Emily J Ball aged 31 and born in Cathrington, Hampshire. They have a son Edgar J aged two months old and born in Chatham, Kent. Thomas is also shown as a Chelsea Pensioner so we know that he had been in the army. Although the Census describes them as married, I have been unable to find a record of the wedding.

Looking at the birth certificate for Edgar John Peter Ball we see that Emily's maiden name was Ellis. Emily too is something of a mystery and she variously is shown in the Censuses as coming from Cathrington, Chichester and Frogmore. It also shows Thomas as a labourer so he is still trying to earn a living. A Pensioner was allowed to work for a living, for his pension would not have been enough to live on. The great majority of Chelsea Pensioners received outpayments and did not lodge in Chelsea and wear the familiar red uniform.

With this lead we turn to the British Army Records for Chelsea Pensioners in the National Archives of the Public Record Office in Kew (and now increasingly online). Suddenly those missing years are filled in. Here is one of a number of Ringstead farm labourers who has left the security, and insecurity, of a Northamptonshire village for a world full of excitement and danger but one which gave him the chance of earning a living.

What we see are his discharge papers recording his service and his entitlement to a pension. It also tells us a little about the man. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall, of fresh complexion with grey eyes and brown hair. His only scar is from a cut on the end of the forefinger of his left hand. Few coming out of the army would have got away so lightly.

It also confirms that he was born in Ringstead and was a labourer before signing up. He 'attested' for the 48th, The Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot, at Northampton on 28th September 1857, at the age of 21 years 10 months which means that he was born in November 1835. Was his enlistment connected to his 'marriage' to Sarah, some two years earlier?

He had been in the army for 21 years so where had Private 2548, Thomas Ball, been up to his final discharge on 8th October 1878? We are told that for the first 7 years 14 days he had been a private in the 48th but that on 11th October 1864 he transferred to the 3rd Rifle Brigade with which he remained until his discharge. It is also recorded that he served abroad for 13 years 77 days of which 28 days were in Gibraltar and 13 years 49 days in India.

The Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot had fought in the Crimean War with distinction and when that conflict had finished moved first to Malta and then Gibraltar for about a year. The Northamptonshire Militia Regiment had re-embodied (re-formed) in 1857 when news came of the Indian Mutiny. It assembled on 27th October 1857 and proceeded by rail to Plymouth on 4th December. The militia remained in Plymouth until May 1858 when it received orders to return to Northampton to be disembodied. Did Thomas travel down with the Militia and then sail out to join the regular Northamptonshire Regiment in Gibraltar, perhaps as one of the replacements for the losses suffered in the Crimea? He was only there for a month when orders were received from London and the regiment embarked for India. Apparently, the 48th had behaved well in Gibraltar and they were given a hearty send-off by crowds of local people as they marched to the docks behind various regimental bands.

It was the 15th September 1858 when the regiment left Gibraltar on the steam transport ship *Jura* and a week later landed in Alexandria in Egypt. It was transported by rail to the terminus but from there travelled by donkey across the desert to Suez. Thomas and the other soldiers would have seen the construction of the great canal in progress but it would

be another 11 years before it was opened for shipping. At Suez they boarded the P & O Steamer *Hindostan* and after an unpleasant overcrowded voyage, (there were only enough bunks for half the men), arrived in Calcutta on 20th October. They had been at sea for a month and must have been grateful to get their own bunks in the barracks at Barrackpore. It was on the Barrackpore (Barrackpur) parade ground that a single sepoy had first refused to use the alleged 'cow and pig fat' bullets, the action that had triggered the rising.

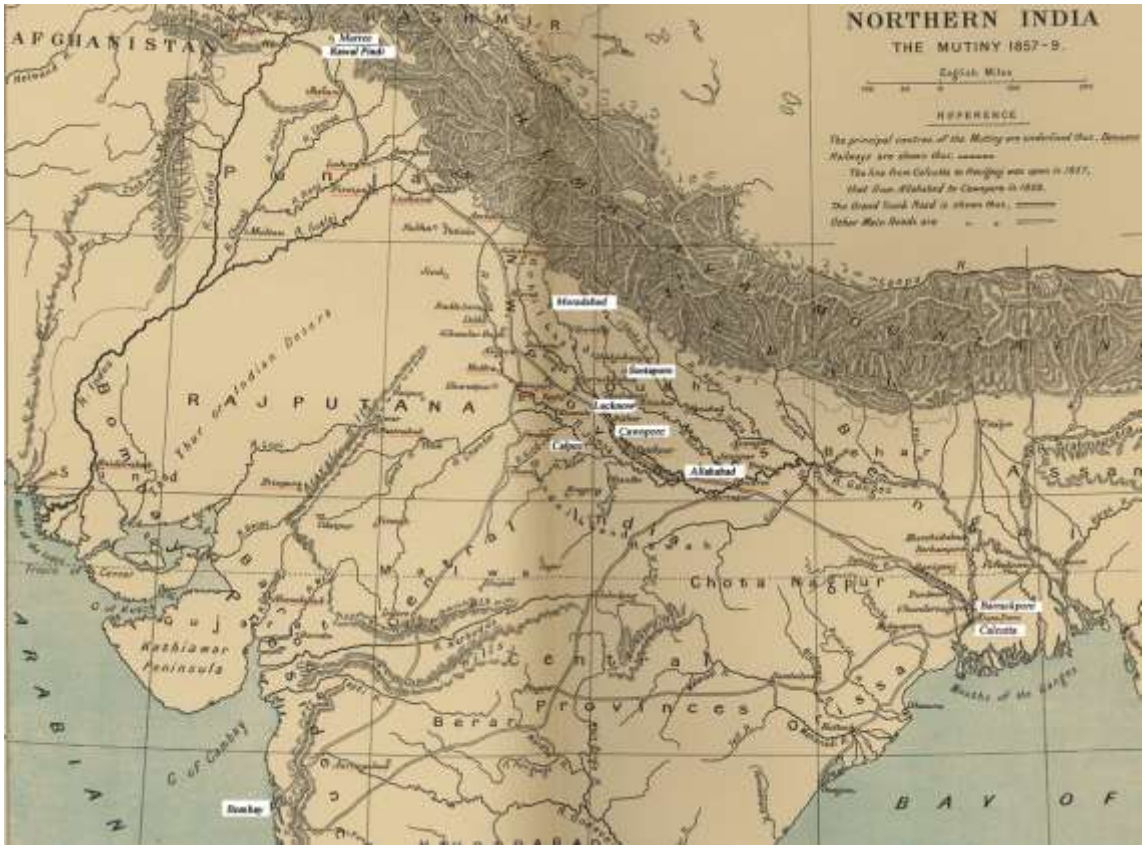
The regiment had just missed the vicious fighting of the Indian Mutiny and it seems that its time in India was comparatively uneventful. They were stationed, over the next seven years, at Allahabad, Calpee, Cawnpore, Lucknow and Calcutta. These had had been places where the rising had been at its most ferocious. It is not for us here to allot guilt but, certainly, terrible massacres were carried out by both sides. Although armed hostilities were over it must have been a tense time both between British and Indian soldiers in the army but also between the army and the civilian population. It was because of the Mutiny that India came directly under the rule of the Crown rather than the East India Company.

Rifle Brigade Uniforms 1871
History of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own). William Henry Cope

On 1st January 1865 the Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot sailed for home on the *S.S. Patrician* but Private Thomas Ball was not with them. Nearly three months earlier, on 11th October 1864, he had transferred to the Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. We can only speculate as to his reasons for this move. What seems certain is that he realised that this would prolong his time in India. Perhaps he enjoyed the life in the sub-continent and he seems to have been a model soldier. Although he was never promoted, he was never court-martialled and gained five good conduct badges and one good conduct medal in his career. There is also the possibility that we are right in our unproved theory that something had gone very wrong in his marriage and he wanted to keep out of England. The records we have do not help and give no details of his marital status or children.

The Rifle Brigade was a famous fighting force with its colonel being Field Marshall H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Its title usually had 'Prince Consort's Own' in brackets after the brigade name. It had been formed in 1800 to make use of the new more accurate 'Baker' rifles in the Napoleonic Wars and was famous for having a green, rather than the usual red, uniform. It is difficult to work out if the two forces were stationed close to each other at the time of Thomas's transfer, but it does not seem likely with the 48th in the east near Calcutta and the Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade in the west around Rawal Pindee (Rawalpindi). Perhaps Thomas, and others who elected to stay, travelled partly by the Indian railway system which was one of the legacies that the British left.

A Murree bridge in 1865. Could this be the road that Thomas worked on*?*
From http://en.wikipedia.org.



The 3rd battalion moved around the North-West area in what is now Pakistan: from the headquarters at Rawal Pindee to Peshawar and Nowshera. In 1866 and 1867 they worked on a road from Murree to Abbottabad. Thomas was probably one of these road-makers because on 26th April 1867 he was re-engaged at Rawal Pindee.

On January 10th 1869 the 3rd Battalion left Rawal Pindee and marched to Moradabad and Seetapore. From there they travelled by rail to Allahabad and on to Bombay. The tour of duty was over and on 21st November 1870 the brigade embarked on H.M. Troopship *Euphrates.* This time Thomas was on board.

On the way home they stopped at Aden for a week before leaving on December 7th on the final lap of their journey on the Troopship *Seraphis* . The brigade finally arrived in Portsmouth harbour on 30th December 1871. Even though they had spent much of the time in the cooler highlands of north-west India an English winter must have come as something of a shock. They occupied the Clarence barracks and were joined by the Depot companies from Chatham. Over the next six years the Battalion moved between Exeter, Dartmoor, Plymouth and Winchester before moving to its permanent barracks in Chatham. Each year there would be manoeuvres but Thomas would have no more active service. By luck he had missed both the terrible European and Indian conflicts.

One can only speculate as to Thomas's state of mind on returning home. There is no sign that he went to see his relatives and old friends in Ringstead but this type of evidence would rarely exist. Was he pleased to see his home shores after so many years or was he worried about just what awaited him in England.

Thomas left the army with a £5 gratuity and a good conduct medal for his years of service. He had a small 'Chelsea Pension' based on his years of 'good' service but, as we have said, he would also have to work as a labourer to make ends meet. It is probably about this time that he met a woman called Emily Ellis. The Censuses variously give her birthplace at different places in Hampshire so it is possible that they met while Thomas was stationed or on manoeuvres in the south west. They may have married abroad or it is possible that they never married because Thomas was never divorced from Sarah Gale. When he had first married, in 1855, divorce was not an option for most people because of the costs and procedures involved. The *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857 had begun the process of making it more accessible and a little fairer to women, but it was still not affordable for ordinary working class people.

On his discharge form, in September 1878, he gives his intended place of residence as No. 4 Lower Church Path, New Brompton, Chatham. As we have seen, in 1881, his residence is given as 1 London Wharf, High Street, Chatham and his son Edgar is just two months old so Emily and Thomas met, if not before he left the army, at least shortly after. It must have been something of a change for an army man in his forties, used to barracks and army discipline, to find himself with a wife and a young family. It is possible that his labouring work was in one of Chatham's military establishments so perhaps he did find an environment with which he was familiar.

Unfortunately for Thomas he was not long to enjoy his new life. After many years of living in the tropics and enduring the tough dangerous life of a soldier, on the 11th April 1886 at Old Luton Road, Chatham, he died, a civilian in England, aged just forty nine. His death certificate records that he is an army pensioner. It also records that he died of *Phthisis Pulmonaris* a latin name used for Tuberculosis (TB), a feared disease in the nineteenth century and one that is still a killer in the world today. It was rife in England at this time and much of the milk was contaminated with it.

For Emily his death also meant that she would have to struggle to bring up her young family. The 1891 Census shows Emily Ball, as a widow, aged 41, with her sons Edgar aged 9 and Charles aged 7, both of whom were born in Chatham. She now lives at Church Path, Chatham. Emily is a laundress, one of the occupations resorted to by women who feared the workhouse. This is the address (or close to it) given by Thomas at his discharge. Perhaps it was a friend or relative of his or Emily's which they stayed in for a time after he came out of the army and which she either rented or inherited some time after his death.

In 1901 Emily, now 50, is living with her two sons, Edgar (20) and Charles (19) at 10 Britton Farm Street, Gillingham. She also has a boarder, Jesse Woods, a sixty-five year old house painter from Leeds. It does not show Emily as working but the two sons are both Assistant Corn Factors. By 1911 Emily is aged 68 and shown as coming from Frogmore in Hampshire. She is living at 17 Albany Road Gillingham, still with her two sons, now 30 and 28 and unmarried. Edgar is a carter for the District Council and Charles a General Labourer at the Government Shipyard. For the first time, in 1911, the residents filled in the Census forms themselves. In this case it was Edgar, and we must presume that her age is correct and that she was born in about 1842, rather than the 1850 that we might expect.

Could Edgar have been wrong or had she lied about her age all these years? I believe that Edgar married Olive Trice in 1915 in the Medway District and that Emily died in 1920. Did Thomas tell Emily and his sons of those times in India and have they become part of a family tradition or has Thomas's life, like most, been lost to his future family?

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Chapter 11

Archibald Thomas Near 1884 – 1916 (Service 1902 – 1902)

Royal Navy

I have been following up the men recorded in the *National Archives* list of Ringstead military men. The last one, who just crept into the twentieth century, was Archibald Thomas Near. What I found was a very different life story than any of the other men who served and one full of twists and confusion.

Archibald was born in Ringstead on 8th July 1884, the son of Isaac and Eliza Near. Isaac Near was the Minister at the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church, He and his wife Eliza (née Goodson) had both been born in Coggeshall in Essex where his father, also Isaac, was a journeyman shoemaker.

Isaac junior by 1873 is 23 years old and had served an apprenticeship with William Balley Polley, a renowned carver. Isaac become a cabinet maker and carpenter while his wife Eliza was a tambour maker. Later, his eldest son, Isaac Lawrence Near was also apprenticed to Polley and worked at Westminster Abbey, Norwich cathedral and many other colleges and churches.

Coggeshall was famous for tambour lace which had been brought there by a French émigré, M. Drago and his two daughters, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had taught the local women the craft. It was a quicker method than the bobbin lace produced in Ringstead and involved stretching a fine net onto a frame, into which patterns were chain stitched, using a tambour hook.

Isaac, however, had another calling. He was a committed Baptist and in 1872 he entered the *Pastors' College* in Croydon set up by Charles Spurgeon in 1856 and which now bears his name. He completed a two-year course and, in 1874 he, with his family, moved to Stanwick in Northamptonshire, to take up his first pastorate. He already had a son, Isaac, and two daughters, Florence and Edith were born during the four years that the family was there. On 19th September 1878 he was appointed to the vacancy at Ringstead left by the brief but controversial incumbency of J.T. Collett (whose chaotic life I have written about elsewhere).

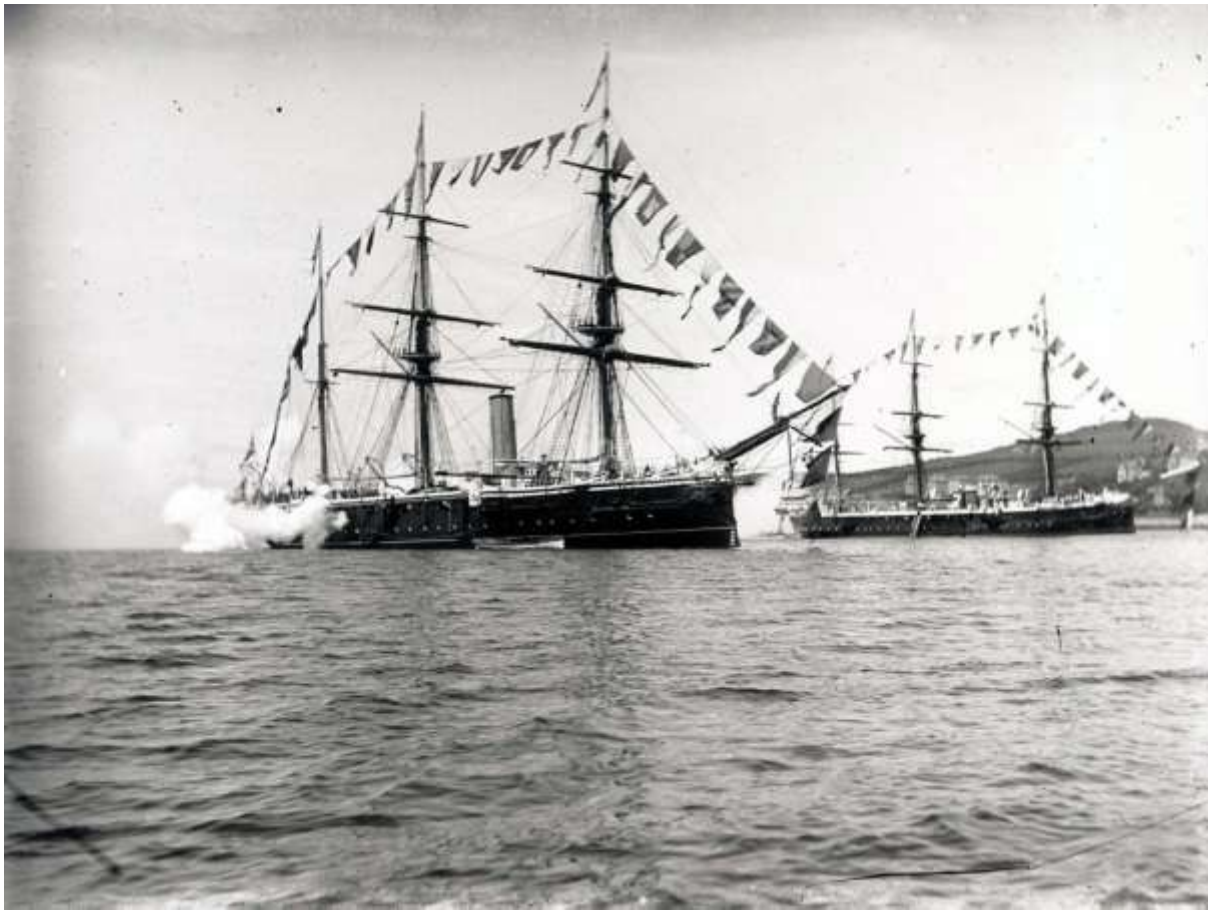
Isaac was a popular Minister, but the church had financial problems so, after six years he resigned although he continued to conduct services and live in the manse rent free with his salary paid by voluntary contributions.

In 1885 he secured another post as Pastor of Dormansland Baptist Church in Lingfield in Surrey. In the 1891 Census, Isaac and Eliza and their family are living at 40, The Street in the hamlet of Dormansland. Daughter, Florence, is 15 years old and a pupil teacher and Archibald is just six years old. This was only a brief stay, however, and soon after the Census Isaac moved the family back to Northamptonshire and became Pastor at Desborough and remained there for fifteen years. He was forced to step down because of ill health in 1907 and returned to Lingfield for his retirement , possibly to be nearer his eldest son. Isaac, who

too had given up his craft to become a Baptist Minister, In March, Birmingham and finally in Penge. In 1911 he was living in Anerley, some twenty-five miles away from Lingfield.

Returning to the 1901 Census we find Archibald with his family at 20 King Street in Desborough. He is sixteen years old and a public school teacher or, perhaps, more accurately a pupil teacher. He was not to remain one for long for, in one of the strange twists of fate that were to punctuate his short life we next see him in the *Royal Navy Register of Seamen's Services* and it was here that I first noticed him. He was 5ft 5 inches tall with light brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion.

He had signed up on 6th March 1902 as a boy sailor 2nd Class on *HMS Northampton* This was an old armoured cruiser, built in 1876, that had been taken out of service and used as a boys' training ship. On 16th August 1902 she took part in the fleet review for the Coronation of King Edward VII but Archibald was not on her deck.



HMS Northampton as a sea-going training ship for boys.
Photograph by C. & D. MacGrory. (MacGrory Collection, courtesy of Live Argyll Libraries.)

His character was said to have been "V G" and it seemed as if he might have a bright naval career ahead of him. He was seventeen years old and it looks as if he had signed up for two or twelve years but I cannot be sure because, scrawled across the entry it states, "Cancelled by purchase". His last service date was 21st March 1902 so he had been in the Royal Navy for

a fortnight. Had he run away to sea and his father paid ten pounds to bring him home or had he quickly decided that the naval life was not for him and appealed home for help?

This was the start of an extraordinary run of events and I was initially concerned that there were not two people with the name Archibald T Near who shared many similar characteristics.

On 26th May 1905 the *SS Lake Manitoba*, a Canadian Pacific steamship arrived in Montreal from Liverpool. On board was an A.T. Near who was a twenty-one-year-old male and a mason by trade. He was from Northamptonshire and was headed for Toronto.

The new *Zettler House* in Pine Street, Macon, Georgia,

If this was our man, he made his way to Georgia on the east coast of the United States. On 2nd February 1907 Archibald T. Near and Estelle May Zettler obtained a "Marriage License" in Bibb County, Georgia. "Miss Stella" as she was always called was something of a celebrity in Macon, Bibb County, where she lived. Her parents ran a hotel in Macon, known as "Zettler House" which was famous in the state. After the death of her father, her mother Elmira (née Beecher) and Estelle ran the hotel together. In 1915 they built a new modern hotel premises with thirty-five rooms (some reports say twenty-five). After her mother's death in 1918 Miss Stella ran the hotel herself. We also learn, from a later obituary, that she was an active member of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Macon (which I think started in 1907). In the light of what happens later, it is perhaps significant that there is no *Marriage Certificate* to turn the legal permission to marry into a confirmed marriage.

It appears that Archibald returned to England briefly and Paul Fleetwood, a descendant of the Beechers, has informed me that his family were aware that Archibald had taken letters of authorization in order to claim for Estelle (or Elmira) an inheritance from her maternal grandparents. On 17th August 1907 Archibald Near, travelling first class, left Southampton bound for New York on the S.S. St. Paul. It arrived in New York on 24th August and we see

from the *Passenger List* that Archibald was born in Ringstead in about 1884 and that he was a marble dealer and was last resident in America. It is also recorded that his wife was Mrs Near, Macon, Georgia and that this was his final destination. His entry was stamped, “NON-IMMIGRANT ALIEN”.

Hard Archibald visited his parents to tell them of the news of his marriage and good fortune? People would say that he had “fallen on his feet”, for Estelle was quite a wealthy woman.

Marriage Photograph of Archibald and Estelle. Is it significant that her left hand is hidden? With the kind permission of Paul Fleetwood

When, however, we look at the 1910 U.S. Federal Census we find Elmira Zettler, aged 57 and a widowed hotel proprietress, in her hotel. With her is her daughter Estelle Zettler aged 28 who is shown as divorced. There is no sign of Archibald but when we search for him in the Census we find an Archibald Near lodging in a hotel in Pine Street, King in Seattle in Washington State on the opposite side of the United States.

In fact, it is about as far away from Macon as you can get in the United States being some 2,750 miles or a three-day Greyhound Bus journey. He is recorded as 25 years old and a setter in marble. The Census states that he is single, and his birthplace is said to be Georgia and his father's birthplace to be Virginia. This is obviously wrong and is possible that it is another Archibald Near but, looking at his occupation, his age and the unusual name it seems certain that he is our man. It is believed that Estelle and the family never knew what had happened to Archibald and the inheritance.

I have not found the divorce or the subsequent marriage of Estelle Zettler to Curtis Grady Hardy who is widely reported to be her husband in various newspaper reports and is declared to be so in Estelle's Will. In this Will she leaves diamond rings and property. To her "beloved husband", Curtis Hardy, she leaves the hotel. After her death, her husband and the family began to fight over the Will.

Meanwhile Archibald was living further down the west coast in Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Herald*, on 19th July 1911, contained the brief notice:

> Formal announcement is made of the marriage of Miss Jennie Larsen to Archibald Near. The ceremony was made by the Rev. J.M. Schaefle at the home of the bride's parents. After a brief wedding trip Mr and Mrs Near will make their home at 756 East Fortieth Street.

This time we can be sure that is our Archibald for there is a *Marriage License* and *Certificate of Marriage.* These tell us that Archibald was 27 years old and was resident in Broxburn Hotel in Los Angeles. It also reveals that he was a marble cutter and setter and that his father was Isaac Near and his mother's maiden name was Goodson.

For once in his life there is some certainty. His wife, Jennie Grace Brown Larsen was a divorcee from Elroy in Wisconsin. Their marriage took place on 15th July 1911.

Archibald's life was to take one last unfortunate turn before his death. On the 14th August 1916 he died and was buried in Saint Peter State Hospital Cemetery in Nicollet County in Minnesota, The Saint Peter Hospital was opened in 1866 and we know that in 1911 it consisted of four separate institutions: a mental hospital, a detention hospital, a hospital for tuberculosis insane, and a hospital for the criminally insane.

We do not yet know in which section Archibald was committed but it is clear that his erratic behaviour had some mental illness as its cause.

When we look at the death certificate for Archibald the position becomes much clearer. Besides confirming his parents' names, and that he was 31 years old, it also tells us that he was a marble setter by trade. The cause of death was "General Paralysis of the Insane", for which he had been in the hospital for seven months and three days. It seems certain that there had been some signs of this illness for months or years before this date.

The disease of "General Paralysis of the Insane" had become something of a plague in asylums in the second half of the nineteenth century. Jennifer Wallis, writing on the British Psychological Society website, reports that most of those diagnosed were men in their 30s and 40s. They often had grandiose plans, a staggering gait, disturbed reflexes, asymmetrical

pupils, tremulous voice, and muscular weakness. They also would become embroiled in financial or legal difficulties caused by their delusions of great wealth and would steal, believing everything belonged to them. Yet they were generally cheerful and optimistic.

It eventually became clear that “General Paralysis” was caused by the final stage of untreated syphilis, now called neurosyphilis. The disease finally attacked the brain and rendered its victims helpless. Most died within months of diagnosis.

When we look at Archibald’s life we see his apparent bigamy, the possible spending of Estelle Zettler’s “Beecher inheritance” as clear indications of this diagnosis. The only problem is the length of time this erratic behaviour had continued. When he was admitted to the St Peter Hospital it was stated that this was his first attack and it had lasted about a week. It also records that he was “delusional and exalted” which would accord with the neurosyphilis diagnosis.

We must also remember that there is a possibility that Archibald was not the instigator of his own downfall. Could his short time in the Navy been caused by child abuse? It can take one or two decades after the initial infection for the intreated syphilis to attack the brain. The disease can also show symptoms similar to Alzheimer’s. Nevertheless, it seems most likely that Archibald was suffering from a terminal stage of what was sometimes called “the Lady’s Disease” but it is important to realise the limitations of reconstructing the past.

It is also intriguing that his last place of residence had been Salt Lake City, the centre of the Mormon faith with its long history of polygamy (although officially banned by the Mormon Church at the beginning of the twentieth century). It may be, however, that Archibald was following his trade in that city when his behaviour became extreme and he was committed. The person who accompanied him to the hospital was Samuel Mork and he was “rooming” which seems to confirm this possibility of a travelling tradesman.

If further proof was needed that this was our Archibald Near, the Hospital Record gives his wife as living at 756 East Fortieth Street in Los Angeles. Initially he was a non-resident but it seems certain that he was soon kept within the hospital system. The record of his commital to the hospital in January 1916 records that he was 5ft 5 inches tall, with light brown hair and a fair complexion. This is identical to his description when he signed up as a boy sailor. Only his eyes had changed, from grey to blue, but I know that the majority of military enlisters had grey eyes so this is not surprising.

His “second wife”, Jennie, married again, to Fred Coach, an auto supplies salesman and in the 1920 Federal Census they are living with her 82-year-old father, Eben Brown at 756 East Fortieth Street in Los Angeles (where Archibald and Jennie had also said they were to make their home).

Back in England sister Edith had married a Welsh schoolteacher, and Florence the manager of a gents’ outfitters in Newark. As we have seen, eldest brother Isaac had married and become a Baptist Minister like his father. On Christmas Day 1919, Archibald’s father and mother, Isaac and Eliza, celebrated their golden wedding at Lingfield in Surrey. Just over two years later, aged 79, Isaac died at Lingfield but was buried in Desborough where, it seems, he had left his heart. Father and son had very different lives and deaths.

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Chapter12

Frank Robinson and the Baker Boys

As people researching their families find, life is full of coincidences. While looking around a "War and Peace Exhibition" at Ringstead on Saturday 2nd November 2013 I met up with Kay Collins from the Rushden and District History Society. She had a photograph of a family including four young men in uniform. It was thought to be in some way related to Frank Robinson from Ringstead and the men were named from the left Charlie (3rd), Herman (eldest) Arthur (2nd) Walter (5th). The women were Clara (6th) and Edith Ann (4th). There was some confusion about the older woman in the middle and it was wondered if she was Edith and the younger woman on the right was Ann.

Luckily Herman was an unusual name, and perhaps one which attracted some comments in 1914. It was comparatively simple to find him and thereby the family name and Frank Robinson's connection. Frank was born in 1895, the son of Francis and Violet Robinson. In 1920 he married Clarice (Clara) Baker and it is her family that we see in the photograph.

Charlie (1892) Herman (1887) Arthur Harry (1889) Walter (1896)
Clarice (1899) Annie (1864) Edith Annie (1894)

The Baker Family with approximate birth dates and named as the pencilled note seems to indicate

This was how I started my brief look at the Baker family and brother-in-law Frank Robinson in Book 2 of *Ringstead People*. The Baker children were born in Ringstead to Ralph and Annie (Nee Mayes) who were married in Ringstead Church on September 14th 1885. Ralph an army bootmaker died in 1906 and it is the widowed Annie proudly seated in front of her four enlisted sons with her two daughters sitting either side of her. Herman and Arthur did not enlist until 1917 so we must presume that the photograph was taken towards the end of the First World War or just after it had finished.

I decided to have another look at the family as I had been researching some of Ringstead's earlier military sons. The corrections and additions that I found were generally small but I have included all the "Baker Boys" even when there is little or no change.

Herman Baker 1887 – 1948. (Served 1916 – 1919)

6th Company Machine Gun Corps (83933)

The eldest child, born on 30th April 1887, was **Herman Baker** who is second from the left in the photograph. He married Charlotte (Lottie) Octavia Gray on 21st September 1908 and the 1911 Census for Ringstead has them living in Chapel Yard in the High Street with their one-year-old daughter Elsie Florence. Lottie is a year younger than Herman and was born in Heckmondwike, a small town south west of Leeds, in Yorkshire. Lottie was the daughter of Alexander and Albertine Gray. Alexander was a shoemaker but although born in Bradford, we can see from the children that he had pursued his craft in Yorkshire and Surrey as well as in Northampton. In 1901 the family were living at 9 Carlow Road in Ringstead.

What the photograph of the Baker family does not make clear is how small the brothers, and most men at the time, were in comparison with today's average young man. Herman looks one of the taller of the brothers but his *Record of Service* shows that he was 5ft 6½ inches in height with a 34½ inch chest. For his trade or calling he has put down "shoe hand" and he had asked to enlist in the RFA (Royal Field Artillery).

At first he went to a Field Depot, but on the 1st February 1917 he transferred to the 6th Company of the Machine Gun Corps (Reg. No. 83933). On 11th April 1917 he was posted to the British Expeditionary Force in France. He embarked at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne before moving to the Base Depot at Camiers which was just north of Etaples. It was not until 4th May 1917 that he joined the Machine Gun Corps in the front line.

On the 1st June he became ill and was taken to the field hospital at Camiers where he was diagnosed with P.U.O. or Pyrexia (fever) of Unknown Origin which was usually called Trench Fever, (not to be confused with Trench Foot). Trench Fever was an increasing problem as the war progressed and produced symptoms of headaches, rashes, inflamed eyes and leg pains. It was not considered by the men a serious condition and often disappeared in under a week although some sufferers might need to be hospitalised for a further couple of weeks to fully recover. It also often recurred at 4 – 6 week intervals although usually with diminishing intensity. It must be remembered that soldiers afflicted with the disease would compare the symptoms to the fear and misery of their life at the Front.

Finally, in 1918, it was discovered that P.U.O. was caused by the excretions of lice, the illness being transmitted in their bites which were one of commonplaces of life in the trenches.

On 13th June 1917 Herman returned to England on the *SS Brighton* and remained for some 280 days. This indicates that he had a more serious attack. He was first at the V.A.D. Hospital at 27 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, a large Georgian house in Mayfair and then to the Paddington V.A.D. Hospital at 37 Porchester Terrace, Bayswater. These V.A.D. or Auxiliary Hospitals had been set up by the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance working together as the Joint War Committee. Each establishment usually had a commandant, quartermaster and matron but were mainly staffed by members of the local V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment) who were trained in basic first aid and nursing. The patients were generally the less seriously wounded and these hospitals allowed the wounded or ill soldiers to recuperate under a more relaxed regime. One of the alternative names for Trench Fever was Shin Bone Fever for it could produce great pain and sensitivity in that area. In 1918 Paddington was designated an Orthopaedic Hospital so it may be that Herman was receiving some form of massage or even electrotherapeutic treatment for this condition.

On the 19th July 1917 he was certified fit enough to go home to his family in Rushden on an eight-day furlough. [I wonder if it was about this time that the family photograph was taken.]

His war was not over, however, for on the 29th March 1918 he embarked once more at Folkestone and joined the Machine Gun Corps' Base Camp at Camiers and, on the 6th April 1918, he returned to the front line. He seems to have remained there until 8th February 1919 but from the 14th September 1918 he was performing the duties of a shoemaker for the army left in France after the armistice. It is often said that an army marches on its stomach but of course it also needs well shod feet: a car certainly requires fuel but it also needs tyres.

Finally Herman returned to Purfleet and was demobbed on 14th February 1919. Appearances can be deceptive but when we look at Herman in the photograph we do see the character noted on his army record, He was described as temperate, reliable and intelligent.

At some point his mother and the family had moved to Rushden. Herman too had moved with his wife, Lottie, and their daughter, Elsie, to 3 Oak Street in Rushden and this is why he was not included in the 1919 Ringstead Roll of men who had served in the First World War.

Soon after returning home Herman and Charlotte moved to 73 Queen Street, Withernsea in East Yorkshire, still as a shoemaker. It may be that father-in-law Alexander Gray had some influence on this for in the 1911 Census he, with his family, had moved back to Yorkshire and was a boot repairer living at 256 Division Road in Hull. Albertina had become a midwife.

What we discover from later events is that Herman played the clarinet and saxophone while Charlotte sang and played the piano and the violin. The photograph of the Ringstead Band in the chapter on Benjamin and George Roberts in Ringstead People, as well as the many newspaper reports, shows that the village had a long musical tradition which Herman and Charlotte carried on. While in Withernsea they had a son born on March 1st 1921 who they named Kenneth. Kenneth, as a child, learned, probably mostly from his parents, to play piano, saxophone, violin and accordion. He later switched to the cornet and played in the local Gospel Mission Band. The family moved to Hull in about 1936 and Kenneth joined the West Hull Silver Prize Band as a solo cornet player. It is through

the biographies of their son that we are told a little more about Herman and Charlotte because, known as Kenny Baker, he became one of the most well-known and internationally respected British jazz musicians of his age.

The authorised biography of Kenny baker makes clear that not only did Lottie help with the shoemaking, probably doing the "closing" of the uppers but also ran a boarding house for the summer visitors. It also tells us that husband and wife both played in dance bands but she was the more accomplished musician, gaining qualification in piano, accordion, violin and singing. She formed a small orchestra to accompany the silent films at the local cinema and ran a female accordion band. She was also the main driving force in her son's early musical training, teaching him to sight read music and insisting that he had good musical grounding. In the local paper we see a few examples of her drive in her charity work. The *Hull Daily Mail* reported on 7th December 1922:

> *There was a charming scene at Unity Hall, Withernsea, on Tuesday evening, when some thirty children in fancy costumes, composing Mrs H. Baker's Juvenile Concert Party, gave a delightful entertainment on behalf of the fund for providing a Christmas treat for the children of ex-Servicemen.*

We also see that husband and wife performed and daughter Elsie gave "a very pretty song and dance step" and that Mrs Baker designed and made all the dresses. Again in 1925 the *Hull Daily Mail* reported on a musical service at the Withernsea Brotherhood where Herman performed on the clarinet, Elsie sang sweetly and Herman, Lottie and Elsie were part of a quartet. We see a very musical family performing for the community before son Kenny started on his rise to fame.

Herman and Charlotte "Duellists"
Photograph form Kenny Baker by Robert G. Crosby

On 30th July 1933 Herman was driving his car when he came upon a serious accident. A motorcycle and sidecar had overturned in an eight-foot drain on the Kilnsea Road to Spurn. The young wife of the driver was killed and a girl seriously injured but a nine-month old baby was found safe in the mud of the drain. We also note that Herman was stated to come from Withernsea. By October 1938, however, when he was found guilty of driving without insurance, (an oversight, Herman said, due to being on holiday at the time of its renewal), Herman was reported to be living in Hull. As we have seen this is confirmed in his son's biography and it seems possible that when he moved his business had been taken over by younger brother, Walter, but this has yet to be proved.

Surprisingly. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales,* Herman, a bootmaker, and Charlotte are living at 26 Linden Avenue in Kettering with General Shop Keeper Arthur J Fox and his wife Florence. When we look a little further, however, we discover that Arthur is the son of Frederick and (Mary) Elizabeth Fox. Elizabeth was the older sister of Charlotte and the two families lived a few doors apart in Carlow Road, Ringstead in 1901. Lottie and Herman are staying with their niece and her family. There is no sign of Kenny. He is back in Withernsea, a musician, staying with older sister Elsie who had married postman Sydney Cowen in 1929. It seems that this was one of the few times from then on that Kenny was in Humberside for in 1939, Kenny had answered an advertisement and became part of comedian Sandy Powell's travelling show and his career had begun. I think this may have been just a short visit back to Northamptonshire for his parents.

Herman died in 1948 aged 61 in the Holderness District.

Arthur Harry Baker 1889 - 1974 (Served 1917 - ?)

(Royal) Army Veterinary Corps (SE 29437)

The second oldest son was the last of the Baker boys to enlist. I was always aware that I had written very little about Arthur Harry Baker, and it was this that led me to see if more could now be found about the family.

He had been born on 5th May 1889 so, when he joined up in 1917, he was some twenty- seven years old. His brothers had been in the boot and shoe trade but Arthur was a farm labourer and he went into the Army Veterinary Corps, (the prefix Royal was added in 1918). This Corps had qualified veterinary surgeons as officers but farmworkers, ostlers and blacksmiths and others used to dealing with horses formed the other ranks.

At the beginning of the war the cavalry regiments, along with the Guards, were seen as the premier regiments in the army. In 1915, at Mons there was a major cavalry charge but that was the last one

of real significance although some useless, suicidal attempts occurred throughout the war. Trench warfare and the machine gun ended the horse as a useful fighting force. The *Charge of the Light Brigade* had been over fifty years earlier but the old order could not believe that the cavalry had become obsolete.

Nevertheless, as the books by Michael Morpurgo and the subsequent *War Horse* play and film have once again made clear, horses still played an important part in the Great War and, despite the various veterinary corps' attentions it is believed that some eight million horses died on all sides during the conflict. Mechanised transport, especially over rough terrain was still unreliable and horses had a vital role in the movement of supplies and artillery to and around the battle front.

Originally, I had thought that Arthur's war records had not survived but I think, although not complete, there are enough to fill in a little more of his army career. The Medal Roll for WW1 shows that Arthur Harry Baker of the Army Veterinary Corps (Regimental Number SE29437) was entitled to the British War Medal, which showed that he had served overseas, and the Victory Medal, which meant that he had been in an area of active fighting.

In 1914 the Veterinary Corps was based in a number of sites across the British Isles with detachments in Egypt and South Africa. With the start of the Great War the Corps reorganised to provide a Mobile Veterinary Section as part of each Division that went overseas. I still have not found the Division to which Arthur was attached. Perhaps more details of his service will come to light.

Arthur's son Derek remembered that his father was said to have been discharged because of bleeding ears and had to have a metal plate inserted in his head. It does seem the sort of injury that could have occurred from the kick of a horse or perhaps from falling off one. On the other hand it could have been bomb blast damage.

In my new research I was led astray by one of the coincidences that makes nonsenses of many Ancestry family trees. An Arthur Harry Baker married Maud Estella Fox in 1922 in the Thrapston District. Maud was the widow of Ringstead bootmaker Nathaniel Fox who had died in 1920. The marriage was not a success and on 3rd August 1923 the Northampton Mercury reported a case brought by Maud telling of Arthur's assaults on her. This was dismissed as a "tissue of lies" but a fortnight later she successfully applied for a maintenance order of £1 a week. The couple had briefly lived together in Lower Street Ringstead and had a son, but Arthur moved to Kettering and I think he later died there.

Despite the name and the Ringstead connection this Arthur is not our man. He is probably a carpenter named Arthur Henry Baker who came from Rushden originally. I include these brief details just to show how easy it is to be misled without certificates or census details to confirm facts. [Just to confuse things more the older sister of Lottie Gray, who married Herman Baker, married Frederick, the brother of Nathaniel Fox.]

Our Arthur Baker married Constance Lily Houghton (possibly in Higham Ferrers) in 1920. Constance was the daughter of Silas Ponting and Elizabeth Ann Houghton. He was a currier's labourer and the family lived at 13 York Road in Higham.

After leaving the army the family remembers that Arthur became a gravedigger for some twenty years and in the 1939 England and Wales Register Arthur is a "Cemetery Caretaker" living at 16 Windmill Banks, Higham Ferrers. During the Second World War Arthur worked at Chelveston air base for Braybrooke's Haulage. He then repaired Wellington bombers at Sywell Airfield. It may seem unlikely that a man with Arthur's background would be allowed to do this kind of important repair work. However, on the BBC WW2 People's War webpages, Olive Skinner was quoted as remembering that:

> I was just 17 and working in the office of a shoe factory when the War broke out. As soon as the opportunity came, I took a job more useful to the War Effort, working for Brooklands Aviation at Sywell Aerodrome at Sywell in Northamptonshire. I would cycle the five miles from home to Sywell, where we would repair Wellington Bombers in vast hangers. The planes were a skeleton metal framework with heavy linen stapled to it, and then painted with 'dope'. They were extraordinary aircraft, and when we got them for repair I often wondered how they managed to fly with so much damage.
> The planes were stripped to the frames and fabric replaced. I remember having to hand sew the seam along a length of wing with my curved needle. At the regulation eight stitches per inch, it seemed like a mile. I still have my needle to this day, ready for any more repair work!

It was a world away from today's computer-packed fighting machines

Arthur finally worked as a stonemason for Marriotts the builders. I believe that Constance died, aged 70, in 1968 and Arthur in 1974.

Charles Mayes Baker 1891 - 1978 (Served 1915 – 1919)

118th Railway Company of Royal Engineers 1915 – 1916 (138560)
298th Railway Corps of the Royal Engineers 1916 – 1919 (253519)

Charles Mayes Baker [Charlie] was born on 23rd December 1891: (the death Index on Ancestry has 1890 but I think this is incorrect). He worked as a platelayer for the London and North Western Railway Company. He enlisted as a Sapper when he was 23 years old, joining the 118th Company of the Royal Engineers, possibly at Whitehall or at their headquarters at Longmore Camp in Hampshire on 9th December 1915. The Woolmer Instructional Military Railway had been constructed there and this was used in the training of the railway troops who would have to carry out their work in very different conditions to the ones they had been used to.

The railway troops are another less well known part of the war effort in the First World War. There had been a large recruitment drive among the employees of the various railway companies. A special port was built at Richborough in Kent from which trains were loaded onto boats in a

sophisticated roll-on roll-off system and taken across the Channel. Boats would also bring trains loaded with tanks to France so they could be taken to the Front. By mid-1915 there were eight Construction Trains operating in France which carried the sappers and their equipment to where they were needed. Once at their destination they would pitch tents for their accommodation. They would try to lay standard gauge track as close to the front as possible and also carry out repairs to sections destroyed by shellfire.

Charles first embarked with the British Expeditionary Force on 6th February 1916 and at some point joined the 298th Railway Company . He seems to have adjusted to army life well for he was first promoted to Lance Corporal, then to full Corporal and finally to Second Corporal. [Second Corporal was only used in the Royal Engineers and Army Ordnance Corps and meant that the person held full non-commissioned officer rank.]

In April 1917 he was admitted to hospital, perhaps with Trench Fever, but rejoined his unit within a week. In July he was given leave and on 10th July 1917 he married Winifred Shallow and appears to have moved to 25 Red Row in Raunds. Winifred Shallow had been born in Pentney and baptised there on 24th May 1896. She was the daughter of Robert, a bread baker, and his wife Clara from Irthlingborough. Clara had been a Britchford and in 1911 Winifred is staying there with her mother's sister, Laura and her husband George Robinson. It does not seem that he was a relation of Frank Robinson who married Charles's sister Clarice.

On 5th April 1919 Charles was demobilised as a Class Z Reserve. There were still some fears that Germany might not accept the terms of the Peace Treaty and these Class Z men would have been recalled immediately in the case of the conflict breaking out again. As we know, this did not happen for another twenty years and Charles went, at first, back to his work as a platelayer in the Rushden and Higham Ferrers area.

The 1939 Register of England and Wales has Charles working as a "Colliery Permanent Way Foreman" in Leicestershire. He and Winifred, with son Frank (who is an electrician underground in the colliery), are living in a cottage at Measham Hall near the Colliery. We see that Frank was born on 31st December 1922 and a little research tells us that his birth was registered in early 1923 at Atherstone in Warwickshire. The couple had three sons in all, Kenneth, George and Frank. At some point Charles separated or divorced , or Winifred died (although one Ancestry tree has her dying in the Northampton District in 1987 aged 92). Certainly, we know from Charles's descendants, that he married again in 1955 in the Coalville District of Leicestershire to Charlotte, the widow of his eldest brother Herman. In 1959 Charles went out to Australia with his son George and the rest of George's family followed. They remained, but it seems that Charles could not adjust to Australian life and returned home.

At some point Charles moved to Harrow in Middlesex and, at the time of his death on 17th April 1978 he was living there at 4 Heath Road. His birth date is given as the same as in 1939 Register which confirms we have the correct man.

Walter Baker 1896 - ? (Served 1916 – 1919)

3rd Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment 1916 – 17 (30926)
2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Regiment 1917 – 1917 (40722)
Royal Irish Regiment 1917 – 1919 (18580)

Walter Baker, born in 1896**,** was the youngest son in the family. His enlisted in 1916 like his oldest brother, Herman, but he went into the Northamptonshire Regiment rather than the Machine Gun Corps. Walter's records have nearly all disappeared so we only know a little of his army career from his medal card brief newspaper reports.

He remained a private throughout the war but changed regiment twice. The reasons for these transfers could have been because so many men in a battalion had been killed in action that it ceased to be a viable unit and the survivors were sent to bolster up other regiments. It was also the case that after the first wave of deaths the new recruits would be transferred to whichever regiment was in need of replacements.

By checking the records that have survived of men with similar regimental numbers and military history Steve (Stebie9173) on the Great War Forum website has managed to reconstruct the likely path of Walter's early army career. Like Horace Allen of Irthlingborough, Walter would have enlisted at Northampton in November 1916 and been posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment for training.

He was sent to France on 1st February 1917, initially to No. 17 Infantry Base Depot at Etaples, south of Boulogne. Frank James in his recollections, A Privates War, describes "Etaps" as it was known to the soldiers.

> It was a large bivouacked area near the sea and covered several acres. Its purpose was to hold and give further training to troops fresh from England and then send them off to join their various units in the battle zone.

This was in 1914 and James and the other men of the Northamptonshires travelled from Le Havre in overcrowded cattle trucks. There may have been some improvements by early 1917 but one suspects that it would have been a largely similar experience for Walter. He had travelled with the Northamptonshire Regiment (Reg. No. 30926) but it is likely that at Etaples he was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and his regimental number was changed to 40722. He joined his new regiment and soon after, on April 1st, as part of the 32nd Division, he took part in the fierce battle to take Savy Wood near St Quentin. The Battalion War Diary for April 1st records:

> Battalion receives order at 11.30 am to advance at 1.30 pm. Battalion advances to SAVY in Artillery formation, under hostile artillery fire. Battalion formed up and advanced at 3 pm in extended order. C, B and D companies in front line and A company in support. Battalion met with heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire.

The Inniskilling Fusiliers, as part of this advance, gained the wood after thirty minutes intense fighting and consolidated "strong posts" but at the cost of 132 casualties: The official list was: Officers, 1 killed and 10 wounded; Other Ranks 31 killed, 107 wounded and 3 missing. John William Elliot of Raunds was also in the same battalion and was killed there. He is remembered on the Raunds and Stanwick War Memorials.

Walter was badly injured in one leg and would have been taken back to a field hospital behind the lines. He was probably evacuated from France on 17th April to Newcastle Military Hospital. It may be that his return to England was delayed by the mining of the hospital ship *Salta* on 10th April.

He was in Newcastle Military Hospital (a requisitioned lunatic asylum) for five months. It is presumably, after he had recovered, in the autumn of 1917 that he was transferred finally to the Royal Irish Regiment (Reg. No. 18580). Walter joined the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment and fought with them at the Battle of Albert on 21st and 22nd August 1918. which was part of the lead into the final Battle of the Somme and the Allied victory. *The Rushden Echo* of 13th September 1918 reported that, youngest son of Mrs R [Ralph] Baker of 32 Winchester Road, Rushden, was again in hospital. He was in Birmingham suffering from a shrapnel wound in his leg sustained on August 22nd 1918. The report continued:

> Pte. Baker had once before been wounded in the leg, and as this limb had occasionally caused him inconvenience during the last time out he asked the doctors at the hospital of which he is at present an inmate to make an examination. The X-Rays have revealed the cause of the trouble, viz., a machine gun bullet which has thus been embedded in the muscles for twelve months.

One would imagine that Walter's war was over and he was demobilised before June 1919 when the Ringstead Roll of Honour was printed.

It was believed by some in the family that Walter moved to Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire where he worked as a winder in a local colliery. This may be true but his older brother Charles worked at the colliery at Measham Hall which is only a few miles from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. On the other hand, in the 1939 Register, there is a Walter Baker, born on 24th November 1896 who works in a Boot and Shoe Repair Shop living at 31 Cammidge Street, Withernsea. (Oldest brother Herman also lived in Withernsea with a similar job, but had moved to Hull in about 1936.) With him is his wife Alice M., born on 5th May 1905. Checking further a Walter Baker married Alice M. Gallagher at Patrington, (5 miles from Withernsea), in Yorkshire in the last months of 1921. Could there have been some confusion between the brothers?

The Three Baker Women in the Photograph

The three women in the photograph are **Clarice Emma (Clara)** who married Frank Robinson and, on the right **Edith Annie Baker**. Edith married Herbert Woodham from Kimbolton in 1921. Herbert too had served in the army, in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment and had received a severe gunshot wound in his left arm.

The father of the family, Ralph Baker, had died on 3rd August 1906 and it his wife, Annie, who sits in the middle in her widow's weeds. Ralph had been buried in Ringstead Cemetery in 1906 and although Annie moved to Rushden sometime in the 1910s, where she died, on 31st August 1944, she was buried near her husband in her home village.

Francis Horace Robinson 1895 - 1970 (Served 1916 – 1918)

28th Battalion Royal Fusiliers 1916 - ? (G/11402)
7th Battalion Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment ? – 1918 (G/14941)

If we now return to **Francis** (**Frank) Horace Robinson**, who was born on 23rd March 1895 in Ringstead. He was the grandson of Elijah Robinson who had been the landlord of the Black Horse public house in Ringstead High Street as well as being a small farmer and carrier. Landlords of small village pubs often had a second occupation and it meant that the wife, in this case Sarah Ann (née Childs) would have done most of the bar work. Elijah gave up the licence to his eldest son William in 1894 but continued with his carrier business and perhaps a little farming. He became ill and was diagnosed with "consumption of the throat". He became very depressed and committed suicide by cutting his own throat on 31st October 1902. He was 62 years old.

In 1901 his son, Francis senior, and wife, Violet were living at 5 Denford Road with their children, Frank, Dora and Beulah. Francis was an army welt sewer and by 1911 his son, Frank, aged sixteen, was a shoe finisher. The family was now living in the High Street. The military boot and shoe trade began to improve as by 1913 war with Germany seemed inevitable. Most of Frank's records have been lost but we know that he enlisted on 20th January 1916 and joined the 28th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (Reg. No. G/11402). At some point he was injured and also transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment (Reg. No. G/14941). As we have said, losses were often so great that whole Battalions were almost wiped out and became part of another Regiment and it may be that Frank (or Horace as he was known by his family) was part of this movement. The exact sequence of events is unclear as Frank's records were probably burnt with many others in a German bombing raid in 1940.

The War Diary of the 7th Battalion of the Queen's (Royal Surrey) Regiment has survived and been put online. We do not know when Frank was wounded and captured but it seems certain that the two occurrences were linked. His early repatriation would have been because of his wounds so it seems likely that he was taken some time early in 1918. We know from the Diary that the 7th Battalion was involved in the attack on the Bois de Hangard, some 20 kilometres west-south-west of Amiens on 26th April. The Battalion was attached to the 53rd Brigade which was itself part of the 58th Division. Like many battles at this time it was an attempt to retake positions previously held and lost.

The rain was falling heavily when the Battalion moved off, soon after 7.30 pm. They struggled to the Villers-Bretonnneux - Domart Road after having been badly guided, arriving at 10.30 pm. They halted in Artillery formation, while being shelled at intervals by heavy explosives and gas. Everywhere was confusion, made worse by a mist which crept up soon after midnight hiding the wood from their view. They eventually reached their allotted positions by 4 a.m. and were told that zero hour had been brought forward from 6 to 5.15 am. Three tanks took part in the operations that morning but had little effect and returned back to their base. The Diary continues:

> From midday till 3 p.m. 26th the enemy subjected the whole area of VILLERS – BRETONNEUX and DOMART to a most intense bombardment of H.E. and gas. No infantry action followed. Troops holding the line South of the wood were forced to leave their posts during the bombardment, but returned immediately it ceased.

The Queens were finally relieved by a French Battalion and by 1 30 am of the 28th they moved back to bivouacs at Blangy-Tronville, having "partaken of tea" at Gentelles Wood on the way. The table for the Battalion's total casualties shows that two officers and ten" other ranks" were killed but only one officer was wounded, one missing and one wounded and missing, whereas other ranks had 85 wounded, 41 missing and one wounded and missing and a further four had died of their wounds. The whole daylight attack was called a "dismal failure" in the official history of the Great War and the capturing of the wood by the Queens was one of the few successful actions, however temporary.

It seems a possibility that Frank was one of the men listed as missing although we cannot be sure. What we do see from the Diary is the training, drill, billet cleaning and organised football matches behind the lines; the carefully drafted battle instructions with details of meeting points, dress, equipment to be carried, and the formation set for the coming battle. The Diary would have defined Frank's daily life. We also glimpse how quickly the conditions and enemy action shredded these plans so that at Hangard Wood it became a series of separate skirmishes with almost all coordination gone. It was often in this sort of action that prisoners were taken.

Certainly, we know that Frank was captured by the Germans and taken to Langensalza Prison-of-War Camp in Germany. Conditions may have improved a little by the time Frank became a prisoner but in December 1916 George Mulford from the 12th Yorks and Lancs Regiment recalled:

> Think of the conditions of 12,000 men huddled together on a large sized ploughed field so situated that it caught all the water draining from the surrounding hills. . . Food of the vilest and unhealthiest nature for human consumption. Long ramshackle dilapidated barracks to hold 7-800 men with no thought in their construction for comfort and accommodation.

George also stated that the guards at Langensalza were the most brutal and ferocious that he ever saw and it is likely that at the time when Frank was there it could still be a very hard place. Even as late as November 27th 1918 Corporal Golding of the Leicestershire Regiment recalled an officer named Krause exacting revenge. There had been a wooden theatre and the various nationalities had built small changing rooms on the side. These they were now dismantling for firewood. The camp had a Help Committee made up from the prisoners which tried to make life at the camp as bearable as possible and it seems they had their own hut. Suddenly Krause came with his men and surrounded the theatre and committee hut. Golding continues:

> There must have been 15 to 20 prisoners standing outside the hut and I should say about 30 others round the theatre. When the order to fire was given, I tried to get into the committee hut, but the door was so crowded by others endeavouring to do the same that I could not get in. At least 15 shots were fired in the direction of the committee hut.

He saw three of the men who were killed and two others were wounded. It must be remembered that on 11th November 1918, over two weeks earlier, the Armistice had been signed.

Frank (Horace) is on the left in the darker uniform (POW Camp)
With kind permission of Rushden & District History Society

Fortunately for Frank he had been repatriated on 5th May 1918 almost certainly because of his injuries which were considered to have rendered him incapable of taking part in any further military action.

The dates are unclear but it appears that early in May 1918, just before his repatriation, Frank had been allowed to send a postcard home, addressed to his father stating his name, regiment, prisoner number and the camp and the simple message, "I am well".

On the front of the postcard is a photograph of Frank in his darker uniform with another prisoner. It seems to have been taken in a substantial place with ornate windows. Perhaps it was in the chapel which we know was in the camp but is also possible that it was taken in a photographic studio with one of the painted backdrops that they used. We also know that there was a bootmakers' workshop at the camp and perhaps Frank worked there to help repair the prisoner's boots.

We also learn from Derek, a son of Arthur Baker, that there was another side to the Germans' treatment of the POWs. The stories of brutality must be balanced by their treatment of Frank. As we can see in the photographs of Frank he has a scar across his chin and he holds his mouth awkwardly. His nephew has filled in some of the details of what happened to Frank. He knew him not as Frank or Horace but as Uncle Joe. He recalls:

> He was taken prisoner after being shot in the mouth and the Germans fashioned him a set of false teeth. He had no lower jaw, however, so the teeth were fitted with metal springs to enable him to open and close his mouth [and] when he talked he never moved the bottom of his mouth but his head moved instead! A source of fascination for all the children at the time.

Frank is on the left in his wounded soldier's uniform. The man on the right appears to be from the North Staffordshire Regiment and I have not found a local man in that regiment.
With the kind permission of the Rushden & District History Society

Frank (wrongly entered in the roll as "F.A. Robinson") was deemed entitled by the Royal West Surrey Regiment to "War Badge" which was awarded to soldiers wounded and unable to serve further. He was discharged on 31st July 1918 when he was 23 years and 4 months old. He was shown as being at the Regimental Depot which is where he would have been sent after his repatriation to England. He would have returned to Northamptonshire soon after. There is a photograph of Frank in the blue "hospital" uniform worn by wounded soldiers. The main reason for the badge and the uniform was to make clear that the wearer had served his country and was not avoiding enlistment. Besides the white feathers that were sent, there could be abuse and even violence against men suspected of not "doing their duty".

Frank returned to his job as a shoehand in a factory and married Clarice E. Baker on 31st July 1920 in St Mary's Church, Rushden.

In the *Register of England & Wales* taken in 1939 to get an accurate list of the population at the beginning of the Second World War, Frank and Clarice were living at 74 Shirley Road in Rushden. He was now a foreman in the "Heel Building Department" of a local shoe firm. Mother-in Law, Annie Baker was living with Herman, Clarice and their family. He died in 1970 in the Wellingborough District.

At each Remembrance Day we are asked to remember the dead of the Great War but all those men who served are now dead and we should also remember the millions who survived and lived shattered or troubled lives because of the terrible places that these ordinary men found themselves. We also see that the war memorials do not show just how many people in a village like Ringstead were directly affected by this deadly attrition of men by machines.

References

My thanks again to Kay Collins and the Rushden & District History Society for the photographs and other help. My thanks also to Val Baker for providing me with some of the reminiscences of her father-in-law, Derek Baker. Also Ken Baker (via Tina Hacking) grandson of Charles Mayes Baker for some insights into his side of the family.
I came late in my research upon the authorised biography of Kenny Baker, *Kenny Baker: The Life and Times of a Jazz Musician* by Robert G Crosby (Evergreen Graphics 1999). It gives a great insight into Herman and Charlotte's family life. I have used one photograph from it. I have tried to find an address to ask permission to use it but without success. I will, of course remove it if there is any problem with my usage.

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Chapter 13

Peacock Family

Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock (1890 – 1914)

1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment 3/8607 (Served 1909 – 1914)

Throughout the nineteenth century, especially when agriculture or shoemaking were suffering hard times, young men from Ringstead left to join the army, marines or navy. Some returned but many settled elsewhere or died in service. Two of the Peacock family served in the First World War but had very different experiences.

Arthur Henry Peacock was the son of John and Jane (nee Bates) Peacock and the grandson of Thomas and Sarah. He was born on the 18th August 1866 and baptised on 23rd March 1867 in the parish church. John had become a shoemaker and the 1871 Census finds the family living in Church Street with their five surviving children. Two girls called Sarah had died in infancy.

Arthur was the youngest son and by 1881, aged 14, he had also started work as military boot maker. He probably married Eliza Emma Sophia Bugby from Raunds sometime around 1890. It is a little unclear because, perhaps due to a bureaucratic anomaly, the marriage of Arthur and Emma, (as she was usually known), is not on the National Register of Marriages. On 3rd May 1890 their first child, Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock, was born. The couple only had a further two children, both sons, Leslie Montrose, baptised on 15th May 1903 and Harold William, who was born on the 14th February 1908. This would normally have meant that other children had died in infancy but the 1911 Census makes clear that they only had three children, and had lost no other children. Of course there may have been early miscarriages but as increasingly most children survived infancy, and there was greater access to contraception the large Victorian families began to decline and the small modern family began to emerge.

Arthur Edward Raymond was always known to his family as Raymond, perhaps to distinguish him from his father. The military boot industry was going through one of its periods of depression and Arthur signed up with the Northamptonshire Regiment. After the Boer War a recruit could sign up for twelve years but opt to be on active service only for the first three years. He then would have nine years in the Reservists but, in time of war, would have an obligation to return to the “Colours”. I have sought advice on the Great War Forum website and *Stebieg173* advised that that Raymond was almost certainly a Special Reservist who had signed up for a “Six Year Special Reserve” term.

His Regimental Number 3/8607 is a Special Reserve number dating from January 1909 and the first letter we have from him is from “The Barracks”, which was the Gibraltar Barracks on Northampton, and dated January 1909. This starts:

Dear Mother and Father

I hope that you are in the best of health as it leaves me the same. I received your letter with love and was very pleased with it. The reason I have not written before was because I thought I would wait till I could send something. I went to the football match on Saturday, but I could not see Dad, and when he came down to the barracks with the other chaps it fair made me jump I was so glad.

This affectionate letter assures his mother that he is getting enough to eat and he is sorry that his baby brother is not well. He signs off with nine kisses and:

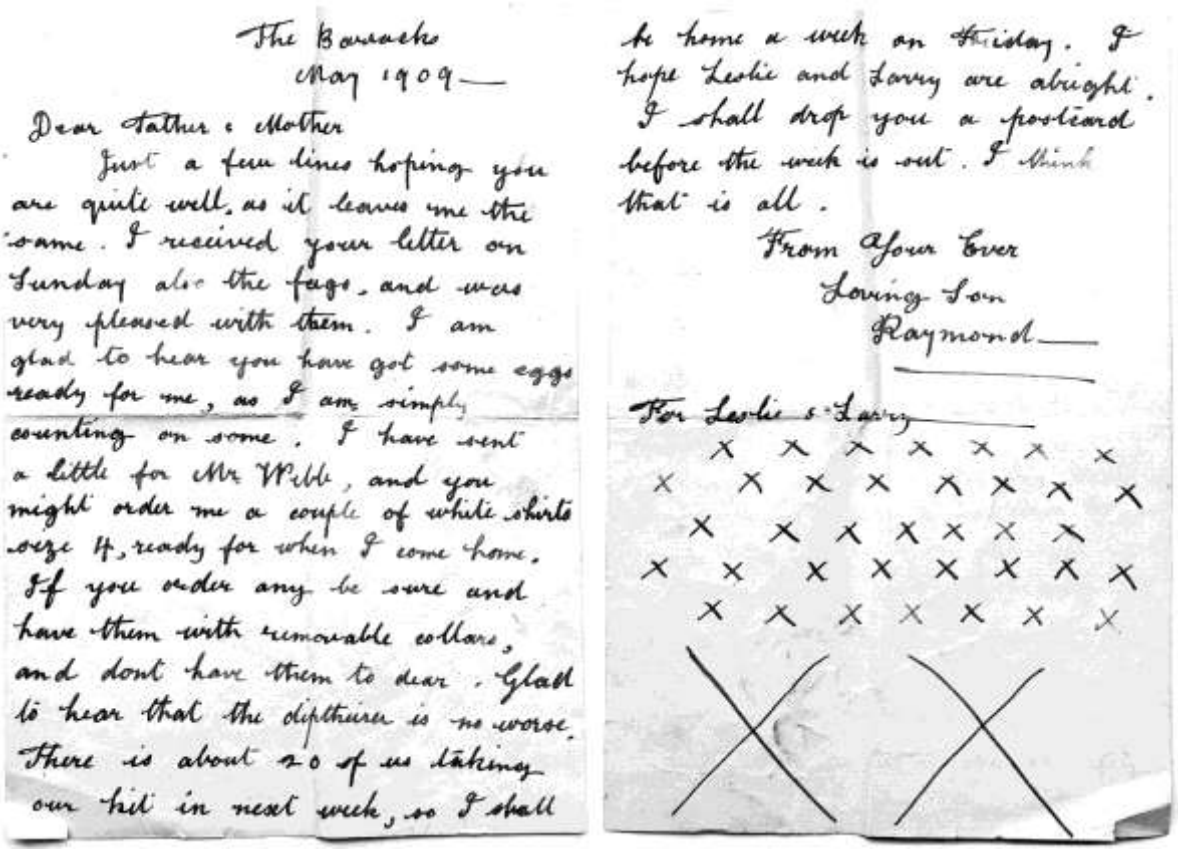
PS. Tell Ralph the barber his fags were alright and thank him for them.

PPS. Give my love to Rose and the others [and another seven kisses]

Raymond's letters tend to follow this pattern but with glimpses of his army life. The letter in April remarks:

While I am writing this I am very near asleep for we are digging trenches this morning. I think I shall get a job in the sewer when I come home.

This time he fills half of the page after signing off with kisses for his younger brother, Leslie and Larry [Harold].



The Barracks
May 1909—

Dear Father & Mother

Just a few lines hoping you are quite well, as it leaves me the same. I received your letter on Sunday also the fags, and were very pleased with them. I am glad to hear you have got some eggs ready for me, as I am simply counting on some. I have sent a little for Mr Webb, and you might order me a couple of white shirts size 14, ready for when I come home. If you order any be sure and have them with removable collars, and dont have them to dear. Glad to hear that the diphtheria is no worse. There is about 20 of us taking our kit in next week, so I shall be home a week on Friday. I hope Leslie and Larry are alright. I shall drop you a postcard before the week is out. I think that is all.

From Your Ever
Loving Son
Raymond—

For Leslie & Larry

Letter from Raymond May 1909

With the kind permission of Kevin Varty

Raymond would have served a five month training period and in May he tells his parents that he has paid 2s 10d to get his boots repaired. He also fills in a little more detail about army life:

> *We have to get up at half-past five in the morning, and we are done for the day at 1 o'clock. But I shan't have much more of it as we only have about a month to do.*

A second letter in May tells how he is "counting the time" to when he comes home. He also adds:

> *I have sent a little for Mr. Webb*, and you might order me a couple of white shirts size 4, ready for when I come home. If you order any be sure and have them with removable collars, and don't have them too dear. Glad to hear that the diptheria [sic] is no worse. There is about 20 of us taking our kit in next week, so I shall be home a week on Friday.*
>
> *This may refer to Alfred Webb, a draper in Denford.

Interior of Landguard Fort, Felixstowe (2017)

He would have attended a trainee's musketry course from the 18th June until the 11th July 1914 followed by a summer training camp at Landguard, near Felixstowe in Suffolk until the end of the month. He was obviously looking forward to getting home for he wrote:

> *We shall be home a week today, so you need not trouble about that, We start from here about half-past six in the morning, and get to Northampton about half-past twelve, so that I reckon I shall be home for tea on Saturday*

He also adds:

> *I am sorry to here [sic] about J. Scholes little girl,* and I hope that you will mind and not let Leslie go out to [sic] much. I hope that he is alright, and the Baby better. I have sent 7/6 more, so that I think I shall have a little for August. I think that is all.*
>
> *From Your Ever*
> *Loving son*
> *Raymond*
>
> **This refers to the local baker daughter, Rita Mary Scholes, who had died aged ten years old.*

Below are four rows of kisses for his young brothers. Leslie and Larry

That would have been the end of his initial full-time training and he would have been a part-time soldier from then on, rather as in the Territorial Army today. He would have had to have had a full-time job and by the 1911 Census he was back in Ringstead working in a local factory as an "Army Boot Stitcher". The days of the home based hand-sewn army boot makers are numbered and his father, now 45, was unemployed.

There is a letter written in 1912 although the date is rather ambiguous. In it Raymond tells his parents:

> *They gave us our own insurance cards yesterday, and they are going to put two stamps on it, and they stop us 8d. Dad might ask Joe Smith, about me going in the Trade, so when you write let me know what he says. I hope Leslie and Larry are alright. I am sending another order for 5/- as that is better than losing it. I am glad Dad done alright at Thrapston.*

It is possible that this letter was, like the others from the army while he was doing the compulsory annual training, but it may be that Raymond was working away from home in a factory, perhaps in Northampton.

The *1911 National Insurance Act* introduced the idea of benefits based on contributions paid by the employed persons and the employer. Stamps were put onto a card and if a person lost their job they were "given their cards" to pass on to the next employer. At first this was for unemployment benefit only and a scheme ran alongside it administered by "approved societies" which could include trade unions. I think that the "trade" that Raymond mentions in his letter means trade union and we know that he joined the *National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives* and his card for 1913/1914 seems to be filled in until the end of December 1913 but from January 10th 1914 it appears that he does not pay his eight pence weekly contribution .The collector seems to have signed each week across the Sick Pay and Unemployed Pay columns. Was Raymond out of work or was he taking part in the military training exercises of 1913?

On 8th August 1914 the Special Reservists were called up and Raymond would have reported to the Depot at the Gibraltar Barracks in Northampton. Raymond did not go with the main force of the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment to France. They had sailed on the *S.S. Galeka*, on the 12th August 1914 arriving at Le Havre on the following morning. Raymond would probably been on

the second draft which was sent after the first major casualties were suffered by the Regiment. It consisted of some seventy men under the command of Lieutenant Ralph Davison. Raymond's medal card shows that the arrived in the "Theatre of War" on 12th September 1914, although it was not until the 21st that the draft finally joined up with the 1st Battalion.

There is a tantalising note which seems to have been written by Raymond as he waited ready to go to France. Unfortunately it was scribbled on rough grey card in soft pencil and time and wear has made much of it is difficult to decipher. It appears to say:

Southampton [?]

Dear Dad [?] & Mother
Just a line hoping you are all well, as it leaves me the same.
I am writing this in the train [?] while it is in the dock [?]
We sail [?] in the morning [Rest completely undecipherable].
With Love
Ray
X X X

Unfortunately, this lack of clarity was also apparent in the official record of Raymond's movements at the time and his mother, Emma, after his letters stopped, tried to find out what had happened to him. She received formal letters from the Infantry Record Office, the local Member of Parliament Stopford Sackville and the War Office assuring her that Raymond was not on any casualty list. This continued into 1915. Even as late as 31st March 1916 the *Northampton Mercury* was reporting that he was "Missing". We are not sure when Arthur and Emma were told that their son had died just a few weeks after he had arrived in France.

Raymond would not have taken part in the early engagement with the Germans at the sugar refinery at Troyan. At this time the battles were open with only scrapes for the soldiers to lie in. It was often close quarters hand-to-hand fighting rather than the grinding stalemate of trench warfare that quickly developed. The Northamptonshires had been relieved and were resting behind the lines from 19th September and it is there that Raymond's draft probably joined them. There had been heavy rain and the trenches then being built were filling with mud. The terrible nature of trench warfare was beginning to dawn on the soldiers.

The 1st Battalion returned to the front on the 29th September and remained there until mid October. We can only guess at how a sensitive young man was affected by entering this terrible world of mud with the constant noise of the artillery and the sight and fear of death. Raymond was killed on the 16th October 1914. He was buried at Vendresse British War Cemetery, the neat white stone concealing the confusions of his death. Most of the bodies had been buried elsewhere on the front and were re-buried in the ordered ranks at Vendresse.

Raymond was awarded the Victory Medal, the British Medal and the 1914 Star and Clasp. His mother received the back pay due to Raymond and a small pension as the War ended in 1918. Emma died on 2nd February 1956 aged 87 and Arthur Peacock died of heart failure and old age, aged 90, in Glapthorne Road Hospital, Oundle on 12th March 1957. They are buried together in Ringstead Cemetery.

References

My special thanks to Kevin Varty for allowing me to copy the letters and other documents of Raymond Peacock and to Janice Morris for alerting me to their existence and acting as the agent in this process. My thanks also to Stebieg173 (Steve) particularly and also Grumpy (on the excellent Great War Forum website) for explaining the likely context of Raymond's letters and adding more detail for me.

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Thomas Cyril Peacock (1887 - 1964)

6th Battalion Machine Gun Corps 205101 (1915 – 1917)

Heavy Brigade of Machine Gun Corps (Tank Corps, later Brigade) 7868433 (1917 – 1920)

In telling of the life of John Thomas Peacock and his tragic death after he had been badly burnt by an upset oil lamp, we briefly mentioned his second son Cyril, born on the 1st November 1886. Cyril first followed his father into the shoe trade and is shown as such in the 1901 Census. His father died in 1896 and his mother, left a widow with a young family, had married widower Benjamin Phillips in 1902. Cyril had been baptised Thomas Cyril but., like his cousin, Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock, he was known by his middle name, probably to distinguish him from his father who tended to use his own second name. At some time after the death of his father, perhaps because of difficult times in the military boot trade, he had become a hairdresser. The 1911 Census shows him living with his mother and stepfather but a year later on August 12th 1912 he married Rose Brayfield in Raunds Parish Church.

Cyril joined up on 10th December 1915 and became part of an Army Reserve Battalion. At this time the army still was made up of regulars and volunteers with single men being used first from the latter group. In the following month Parliament introduced conscription. It was a controversial measure and some ministers resigned but the carnage on the Western Front meant that the need for new men was urgent. Cyril had expressed an interest on his Attestation Form that he would like to be considered for the Royal Flying Corps which had only been formed some three years earlier and consisted of balloons and aircraft. It seems from his later career that Cyril may have been looking to be in the ground crew but what mechanical background he had is unclear.

When he took his army medical in 1915, Cyril was 29 years old. He was 5 feet 5 inches tall with blue eyes. He had a chest size of 33¼ inches and a "range of expansion" of 1¾ inches (this was later changed to 3 inches). The minimum height for conscription was 5ft. 3 inches but even this was reduced in the so-called "Bantam Regiments" as men died in their millions. It was the revelation of the poor health and small size of many recruits in the First World War that stimulated the movement towards the Welfare State.

He was mobilised on 9th December 1916 and posted twelve days later to an Infantry Reserve or Training Battalion. On the 8th February 1917 he joined the Machine Gun Corps (Motors). This was potentially one of the most dangerous postings as the machine gunners were a vital target for snipers as well as other artillery. It looks, however, as if Cyril did not see front line fighting and served the rest of the war in England.

On the formation of the Machine Gun Corps in October 1915 the Motor Machine Gun Services was absorbed into it and became the Machine Gun Corps (Motors). It had machine guns mounted on motorcycles, cars, armoured vehicles and even trains. The real industry of war had begun.

Cyril joined the No.6 Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps which was based at Belton Park and Harrowby Camp in Grantham. On one official form (B103) it calls it, No. 6 Dominion Battalion which seems to imply that it was composed of soldiers from Canada and perhaps also from Australia and New Zealand. Cyril remained a private or gunner throughout his army career and it is not clear what role kept him away from the fighting. He had gained a "Machine Gunner First Class" qualification so perhaps he was an instructor or demonstrator to the new troops. It is also a possibility that he was a driving or motorcycle instructor. There is also the nagging thought that he was the dreaded man who gave the troops their regulation haircuts. On his discharge there is no indication of a skill that he could take into civilian life so it would seem that he was a military instructor of some sort but we cannot be sure as his army records give no clue.

On 26th July 1917 he was posted to the newly formed Heavy Brigade of the Machine Gun Corps soon to become the Tanks Corps and then the Tank Brigade. It was based at Bovington near Wareham in Dorset and Cyril became part of the Central Schools of Instruction. Originally Cyril had asked to be in the Royal Flying Corps and tanks were the other great innovation of the First World War.

The tank was based on ideas from before the war but the stalemate and terrible slaughter of the Flanders trench warfare had once more ignited interest among the military and political leaders. The tank was under development in all the main warring nations but the prototypes, often based on tracked agricultural machinery had many problems and research and progress was top secret. The name "tank" itself was part of this secrecy designed to give the idea that water tanks were being built. Some of the first British production tanks were marked with Russian lettering and the rumour was propagated that they were snow ploughs intended for Russia. It was designed as a weapon to cross the rough terrain between the opposing trenches, the "killing field", and break into the enemy defences. Many designs were tried and failed. Eventually on 15th September 1916 tanks were used but it was only very late in the war that tanks played a decisive part in the Allied victory.

British Mark 1 male tank: Somme 25 September 1916
Photograph by Ernest Brooks. Imperial War Museum. Wikipedia Commons (Public Domain).

Cyril had a good army record and his only offence was to overstay his leave pass from Grantham by 12½ hours in April 1917. As his daughter Ellen Louisa had been born on the 16th March there may have been some excuse and the four days' pay that he initially had deducted was reduced to one. His only injury seems to have been a dislocated elbow on 20th October 1920 which kept him in Wool Military Hospital, near the Bovington Camp for thirty-two days. As we can see from this date Cyril had been retained at the end of the war, first for six months and then for a further three and he was finally demobbed on 12th December 1920.

He stated on his discharge papers that he wanted to be a publican, place unknown, when he returned to civilian life. In my original biography, in my second book, *Ringstead People 2*, I was not sure that he had achieved his ambition but it is now clear that he did. The 1920 Electoral register for 1920 records that he was at the Red Lion, Winfrith in Dorset. The 1939 England and Wales Register confirms Thomas Cyril Peacock is the "proprietor" of the Red Lion. Living with him is wife Rose, who is doing "General Hotel Work" and daughter Ellen Louise (born 17th March 1917). There is one closed entry (which could be daughter Rita Julia). I am sure that we have the correct man but there is one concerning anomaly. When he was baptised in Ringstead on 6th April 1900 it stated that he was born on 5th November 1887 but here and in his death certificate in the USA he is said to have been born on 1st November 1886. However, the Civil Registration shows his birth was in the last quarter if 1886 so it seems certain that this was a clerical error.

The Red Lion at Winfrith (early 20th Century Postcard)
This was one of three pubs that Thomas Hardy amalgamated into "The Quiet Woman" in The Return of the Native.

Cyril and Rose sold up the Red Lion and on 12th October 1949, with their unmarried daughter Ellen Louise, sailed into New York harbour on the *Queen Mary*.

The family were bound for Texas and we know that Ellen, aged thirty-two arrived in El Paso after having crossed the border from Mexico. She was bound for Alpine in Texas and it seems that it was here that her parents had settled.

It may be that Alpine was chosen because they were hoping to improve the health of Rose. She died on 1st August 1956 after having lived there for seven years. The causes of death included a chronic peptic ulcer which she had also had for seven years. She had suffered as well from Hypertension for six months and was killed finally by a "Massive Coronary Occlusion". She was sixty-nine years old and obviously had been unwell for some time.

Thomas Cyril Peacock died some eight years, later on 6th February 1964, of lung cancer aged seventy-seven and was buried in Elm Grove Cemetery, almost half a century after many of his former comrades

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