RINGSTEAD PEOPLE

The Lives of some Nineteenth Century People

From a Northamptonshire Village

David Ball

Ringstead People

By

David Ball

Published by David Ball,

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ISBN 978-1-903981- 19- 24

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Front cover shows a preliminary drawing of Ringstead Church by George Clarke (Probably February 1847). By kind permission of Northampton Record Office

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for the help and support over the last few years. The problem is knowing when to stop. Vivienne Marshall, Agnes Burton, Rachel Henderson, Janice Morris, and Jean Thomas have been great e-friends throughout this time. Others have helped tremendously on particular biographies and I have acknowledged them in the references for the individual chapters.

Crispin Powell and the staff of Northamptonshire Record Office have been unfailingly helpful. The Huntingdonshire and Leicestershire and Manchester Record Offices have also been of great help. The Northampton Central Library Local Studies staff have been of great assistance. Less used, but very important, has been the National Archives at Kew. All at a time when they are all under great strain because of budget cuts.

A number of commercial organisations have allowed me to use images at no, or very little, cost and almost without exception people have been willing to give me more time than I can reasonably expect from them.

As you will see from the references many other people, both in Ringstead and all over the world, have generously given me their time, knowledge and expertise and I would like, collectively, to thank them all. Of course, any errors are entirely my responsibility.

I would like to thank my wife, Betty for her patience and my three sons, Tom, Jack and Seth, for giving me the time by growing up and leaving home.

David Ball

References

I have given my main references at the end of each chapter for people who wish to follow up anything with their own research. I have omitted certain references which underpin all the chapters. These are the Parish Registers of Ringstead and the neighbouring parishes. These have been viewed mainly at the Northampton Record Office, (NRO), but more recently I have also used the transcriptions on the excellent Rushdenheritage website. I have also used the Censuses from 1841 – 1901 on Ancestry.co.uk and the 1911 Census on FindMyPast.co.uk, as well as at NRO. Every month more is becoming available on line But Record Offices are great places to visit and there is nothing quite like seeing the original documents and getting some expert guidance.

Website

Thanks to my son Tom I have a website **www.ringsteadpeople.com** on which these stories originally appeared. I hope to continue posting new stories once this book has been printed.

Introduction

This book started life as a website. I loved the ability to post stories in an unfinished state which people could correct and respond to. I am still old-fashioned enough, however, to think that the information needs to be put into a book before it is really finished.

Having said that, I realise that it is still unfinished. More information will emerge about the people that I have covered, either because I have missed it, or because it is newly released into the public sphere. Also I will have made mistakes or wrong assumptions. Family trees are notorious for catching out the confident. I have to confess that, although most of my father's ancestors came from Ringstead in all branches, I have never lived there. I grew up in Wellingborough but I have no local knowledge except from my reading, walking and the many helpful Ringstead people who have given me their time.

I have left the chapters roughly in the order that I wrote them rather than lumping all one kind together. I hope that by reading through the lives, or dipping here and there, you will get a sense of the life of Ringstead in the nineteenth century. As today, we see people, good and bad, steadfast and fickle, in happiness and sorrow.

When you wander along the streets you may see the people who once lived in the houses, or kept the shops, taught in the school or worked in the fields, preached in the church or chapel, or served at the inn. Also wander round the churchyard, Baptist burial ground or the cemetery. Do not see peeling gravestones but the villagers, the real breathing, fallible people, whose lives ended there. A community needs a vibrant present but also a proud past.

David Ball

October 2011

[Note a 'c' before a date in the text is short for circa meaning 'about' or 'approximately'.

I hope that you will see this book as the first part of dialogue. E-mail, ring or write to me if you see errors; or you have extra information or images; or you know of other Nineteenth Century, Ringstead people who had interesting lives. Hopefully there may be a second edition. In any case I will continue with my website. David Ball died in 2022; his books are now published in full online at www.ringsteadpeople.com.

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Chapter One

To New Worlds and Back

Elisha Ball (c1839 – 1908) & Sarah Elizabeth Childs (c1849 – 1936)

Elisha Ball is one of the those Nineteenth Century Ringstead people whose lives caution us not to think that all the villagers were born, lived and died in one small corner of Northamptonshire. It is by following the Censuses through the years, that we begin to discover a little of the truth about his years away from everything and everyone that he had grown up with and come to expect.

He was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 12 September 1841. Often a baptism is a good indication of a birth date but in this case he was baptised in a, not uncommon, 'job lot' together with his brothers, James, Thomas and Samuel so we must look elsewhere for a more accurate estimate of his coming into the small village world.

Elisha's parents were Daniel Ball, a shepherd and his wife Phoebe. Unfortunately I have not been able to find Daniel's baptism but I believe that he was the brother of John Ball who was killed when a wall fell on him during a fire at Denford in 1821. Daniel married Phoebe (or Phebe as she is sometimes called) Whittering, who came from nearby Denford, on August 7th 1817. The couple then had children on a very regular basis with some 11 baptisms, and one burial, in the eighteen years up to 1836. It was, perhaps, the large number of children that meant that some had to fly further from the nest.

In the1841 Census, Elisha is two years old and living in Ringstead with his parents, and his siblings, John, James, Thomas and Samuel. Already the older children, George, Elizabeth, Anne, Sarah and Daniel have left home. By 1851 another child, Elizabeth, aged 8 is shown as a daughter but it seems odd that a second child should be named Elizabeth while the first is still alive. I can find no baptism for her although there is an Elizabeth baptised on 11 September 1842 the daughter of John Ball and Sarah Smith. Elisha is eleven years old and at this comparatively advanced age still a scholar.

In the 1861 Census Elisha is 21 years old, still living with his parents and there is also a granddaughter, Elizabeth aged 18, so it appears that the girl we met in 1841 was not a late daughter of Phoebe after all. But whose daughter was she? We have discovered that she is the illegitimate daughter of Anne born before her marriage to George Mayes. In the 1861 Census, Daniel senior is 71 years old but still a shepherd while Elisha is a humble agricultural labourer. All the rest of the family have left home and we meet them in later chapters.

Farming was constantly going through difficult years with the New World imports causing falling grain prices. In 1841 the common land around Ringstead, had been enclosed, as had already happened in the neighbouring Parishes, destituting many cottager families. The better wages in the

towns were also attracting the young labourers and throughout Victoria's reign there was a rapid drift away from the countryside into the new industrial towns and cities.

Elisha also had personal reasons for changing his life. His father, Daniel aged 73 was buried on 20th April 1863 and a few months later Elisha had married Elizabeth (or sometimes Sarah Elizabeth) Childs. His mother Phoebe also died at the good age of 79 years in 1868. Perhaps these events, together with his uncertain prospects caused him to make the great leap into the unknown. At first all we know is that Elisha and his new wife disappear from the Ringstead Censuses and parish registers.

Elisha does not appear in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses and it is only in 1891 that he suddenly reappears and some of the mystery of the missing years is solved. The1891 Census finds the family in Carlow Street in Ringstead with their children Ida and Samuel. It is when we scan along the Census sheet to the children's places of birth that we realise that something quite momentous has happened. Samuel, aged 20 is a shoemaker and was born in New York State, United States. Ida aged 12 was born in Upper Canada. The world is changing and, even in small villages like Ringstead, people are seeking their fortunes far from home, although it seems that Elisha did not find his.

Perhaps we also ought to record that Ringstead had had, from the very start people, who left its tight little community and ventured into the unknown. William Tuttle was born on 26 December 1607 in Ringstead and, on a ship called the '*Planter*', he and his family, including three children also born in Ringstead, reached Boston, America in April 1635. They settled in Connecticut and never returned. If you Google 'Ringstead' you will find people from the New World tracing their ancestors back to this small Northamptonshire village.

Shoemakers have always been known for their radical tendencies and to 'infect' the communities in which they worked, so perhaps it was the democracy of the New World that beckoned. For some early settlers the reasons may have been religious. In the nineteenth century it is more likely that it was the same cause that drove village people into the slums of London and other big cities; the poverty and uncertainty of being an agricultural labourer in those changing times.

With Elisha, there is one more factor that we have discovered since we first wrote his and Sarah's story. Three of his older siblings had emigrated in 1852 and two of them, Daniel and Sarah (Nobles), had remained in New York State. One imagines that Elisha and his family may have stayed with one of them when they first arrived in that vast unknown country.

We now have to find out where the family had been in those missing years by looking at the 1870 American Census for the 3rd Ward of the City of Elmira in the County of Chemung in the State of New York. There we find Elisha Ball aged 30, born in England, with his wife, Sarah E., 26, and children, George, 7 and Samuel 3. George travelled with his parents to America but Samuel was born in New York State. Elisha seems to be a *C Laborer* or could it be G(eneral) Laborer. The ages do not quite match up but this is not unusual and this is undoubtedly our family.

Postcard of Elmira City in Nineteenth Century.
www.rootsweb.ancestry.com.

Early Elmira Photo from Stereoscopic View.
Submitted by (the late) Norma Jenkins to www.joycetice.com.

Elisha's neighbours were mainly from New York or New Jersey with a few born in Ireland. Of the forty people on their Census page only Elisha, Sarah and George are born in England. There are

labourers like Elisha but also painters and carpenters and a stone mason. George, who is seven years old, is shown as having attended school that year.

Mark Twain, who wrote many of his most famous books in Quarry Farm, overlooking the Chemung River valley, was often seen roaming the streets of Elmira looking for a billiards game or someone to chat to. Did the Balls stroll, unaware, past Elmira's most famous resident? Perhaps, they even passed the time of day.

Elmira City itself was a fast growing settlement. In the *Hamilton Childs Gazetteer and Business Directory for Chemung and Schuler Counties* for 1868 it tells us that Elmira City had four banks, two daily and two weekly papers, a book and printing office, 12 churches, a synagogue, a female college and a water cure establishment. It also had a number of public schools It had changed its name from Newtown in 1828 and by 1870 there was a population of 20,538 the vast majority of whom lived in timber-framed houses.

Chemung County was still mainly rural with a vast range of crops and animal products from honey and maple syrup to corn, wool and from wheat, barley and oats to milk and butter and cheese. It also grew tobacco and made wine and cider. The county did have 346 factories including 32 saw mills, 17 flouring mills, 13 copper shops, 26 carriage and wagon manufacturers, 9 tanneries, 4 boot and shoe establishments and 4 woollen factories. There was also a rolling mill in Elmira.

It must have been a shock to Elisha and Elizabeth after Ringstead. At the moment we can only speculate as to why Elisha and his family ended up in Elmira which is some distance from the coast. It was a railway centre so perhaps this was the reason. It is also possible that he knew someone from the Ringstead area who had moved there, perhaps in the boot and shoe industry. It may be that it was always just a stopping off point, a place to gain funds and become acclimatised before the next part of their journey to a new life.

Whatever the reason, by 1881 we find that Elisha and his family have left the United States and he is now described as a 'farmer' in Southampton, on the shores of Lake Huron in Ontario (Upper Canada). This is a journey of some four hundred miles, not a huge distance by American standards but we do not know how he and his family made the journey. Did they travel overland to Buffalo and then by boat through the Great Lakes to Bruce or was it all by land, perhaps via the railroad which had been built to Southampton in 1872? We can only guess. It may be they were helped by the Canadian government for the emigration to Canada had slowed and it increasingly advertising for farmers and labourers, especially to the western states. The Census records that both Ida (now aged two) and Samuel were both born in Ontario but one would expect the 1891 English Census to be right. Why would Elisha bother to give two birth places for his children if it was not correct? His eldest son, George who was born in England just before they left, and is now 16 years old, is also recorded as a farmer.

The Bruce Peninsular was a territory controlled until the middle of the nineteenth century by the Saugeen Ojibway Nations which included the Chippewas who had defeated the Iroquois. Like many other Native American tribes they were pushed into signing away their land rights to the Peninsular in the period from 1836 onwards. The lands were divided up by the Indian Department and sold, with the interest from the sale going to the local tribes. The Saugeen Peninsula was ceded in 1854

with the ‘Indians’ retaining certain Reservation areas. The Chippewas believed that the white men would look after their lands. Settlers then poured in, attracted by the rich fisheries and the lush forests, both of which were destroyed over the next 70 years.

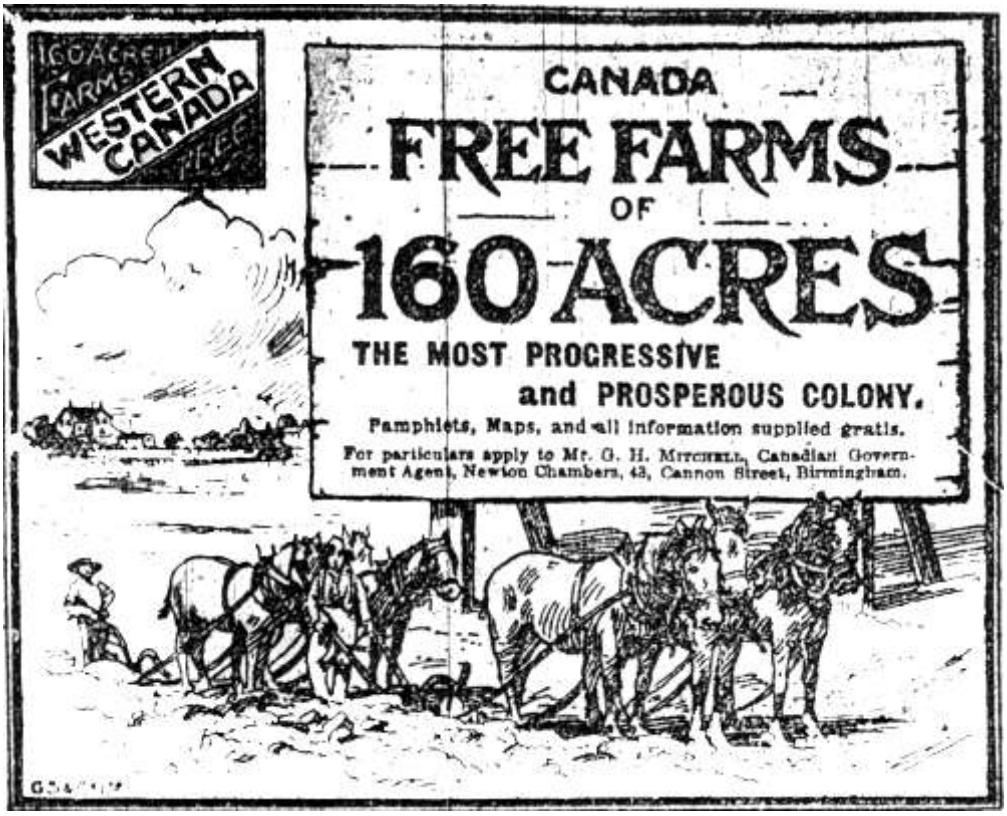
It may be that Elisha was granted a piece of land and set up a homestead there with his family. The Canadian County Atlas Project only records two E. Balls, one in 1876 in Norwich South in the County of Oxford, and one in 1878 in Clarke in the County of Durham. It seems unlikely that either is Elisha because the Gazetteer and Directory of Bruce County published in 1880 has Elisha in the village of Southampton as a ‘labourer’. This lists over 200 people and as it only gives heads of families, unless a person also held land, it must have had some 800 inhabitants. Certainly the 1881 Census records 1,141 people in the village. (Ringstead had some 950 inhabitants at this time).

We see included in the list, ‘laborers’, fishermen, (and a fish inspector), farmers machinists, carpenters, coopers, tailors, teamsters; brakesmen, a station master and track inspector; a harbour master and agent for the Inman ocean steamers, a customs officer; a crown land agent, a postmaster, a meteorological station manager and a barrister; a brickmaker, a miller a printer, a weaver, butchers, confectioners, a grocer, two hoteliers, a cabinet maker and photographer. It also lists the land that people own. Elisha has none. It may be this was before he managed to acquire some but possibly he came too late to stake his claim.

Southampton had originally been called Saugeen and in 1848 the Crown Lands Department decided to lay out a town at the head of the Saugeen River. It was surveyed in 1851 and by the end of the year it was a small village of some dozen or more families. A storm on Lake Huron sunk the supply ship and it was a difficult first winter in the cold with the heavy snow falls of an Ontario winter. Nevertheless it grew rapidly and by 1871 it had a school and churches as well as banks and shops. The real pioneer days were over and land was not available as once it had been.

Under the advert for *‘Strong’s Lung Syrup which cures lung diseases’,* D. Cascaden advertises as an agent for the ‘North-West Transportation Co. and the Inman and White Star Line of Ocean Steamships’. He states that ‘intending Emigrants for the North-West will find it advantageous to write for information which will be cheerfully given’. Already the movement is further away from the well established states into the newer, unclaimed areas. Certainly the *Northampton Mercury* was still continually advertising the opportunities for free farms in Western Canada in the early 1900s.

Whatever the truth, for some reason, it did not work out for the Ball family. Perhaps they were homesick for Ringstead or perhaps they could not make a living and they struggled in poverty away from their friends and family. Farming was not easy in Bruce County and it was mainly in logging and fishing that people made good money. It would be interesting to know when Elisha and his family left Southampton because on November 4th 1886, fanned by high winds, a disastrous fire broke out which destroyed fifty buildings and left over thirty families homeless. There was a collection made to help the victims but, for Elisha, was this the end of his dream?



Northampton Mercury 10th March 1905.

By permission of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service.

We know that, by 1891, the family were back in Ringstead and Elisha is a farm labourer, Samuel is a shoemaker and Ida a scholar. There is also a niece (probably great niece), Elizabeth Sykes aged 9, living with them. She is the daughter of Rachel (nee Ball) and the great granddaughter of John Ball, Elisha's uncle. It seems almost certain that Daniel and John were brothers as we thought.

One wonders how the family managed to return home and how they told friends and neighbours of their experiences of the strange peoples and places that they had encountered. Did they bring postcards back of the places they had been? Did they have their own photographs taken, before they left Southampton, by Thomas Davis, cabinet maker and photographer? Perhaps life seemed a little humdrum after the wonders of the New World.

By 1901 the whole family, including George, were living in 6 Barritt's Yard in Ringstead. Elisha and George are 'Ordinary Farm Labourers', Samuel is a shoemaker and Ida a boot closer. Living with them were two boarders, William Wyman and Henry French. Henry, at twenty-four, was two years older than Ida. He was a Railway Bridge labourer, born in Paulerspury near Towcester, who moved to Blisworth as a young child. Ringstead was on the railway line from Blisworth to Peterborough. Obviously the stranger appealed to Ida and they were married within weeks of the Census.

Elisha died, aged 72, on 3 September 1908 and his son, Samuel died just two years later on 6th April 1910. Sarah Elizabeth, Elisha's wife, has been somewhat overlooked in this account. It is often difficult to find details of women's lives through official documents. Luckily her great granddaughter, Rachel Henderson, was told a little about her by her own father. She was known as 'Air Granny' and,

by his account, she was one of those women that people send for in time of trouble. One can surmise that her time in Canada would have increased her natural hardiness and resilience. I will set down the tragic story, which is one example of how Sarah had to show this character, in Rachel's own words.

> *It wasn't until I was in my forties that [my father] told me of one instance [of being sent for in a time of trouble]. It was during WW1, that there was a man in Ringstead whose wife had recently died, leaving him with two small boys and a baby girl. In the midst of all this trouble, his call-up papers came. I think that at that time Ringstead was a singularly hard place to live; people were very poor, and the 'local gentry', such as they were, obviously were indifferent to his plight (he would have qualified for exemption). The night before his departure, his daughter was being looked after by relatives. He waited until his sons were asleep before cutting their throats and then his own. (All this is quite true!) Dad accompanied his granny to the house where she helped to wash the bodies and lay them out before taking the sheets home to launder.*

Like many women who have had hard lives Sarah Elizabeth lived to a good age and was 85 when she died, on 2nd February 1936. She and Elisha are buried in Ringstead Cemetery although I have not yet managed to find a headstone.

The connection with Canada was not entirely lost because Henry French also went to work in Canada although it is not thought that Ida went with him. They also called their daughter Veve, a French name, perhaps recalling Ida's birth in Ontario. Could it have been a hidden pun? Long live the French!

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Ringstead, Northamptonshire, England.
Northampton Mercury 10th March 1905 (Northampton Central Library) Canada advertisement

Elmira City, New York State, USA.
www.cityofelmira.net.
www.joycetice.com (including digitalised text of book: History of Tompkins, Schuyler, Chemung, Tioga 1879 Chapters 35 & 46).
1870 USA Federal Census (via www.Ancestry.com*).*

Southampton, Bruce County, Canada
www.ourroots.ca which has digitalised versions of :
Gazetteer and Directory of Bruce County (published 1880).
The History of the County of Bruce: and of the minor municipalities therein, province of Ontario, Canada by Norman Robertson (Bruce County Historical Society).
1881 Canadian Census for Southampton, Bruce North, Ontario (via www.familysearch.org).
http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/countyatlas.

Also my thanks to Rachel Henderson, granddaughter of Henry and Ida French.

Chapter Two

Boston Workhouse

Sarah Manning (1809 - 1875)

When searching through the records for Ringstead you quickly discover that two factors try to thwart your progress up, or down your family tree. The families naturally link and interweave and the parents were rarely imaginative in the choice of names for their children. The boys are often John or Thomas or George or Henry and the girls are Rebecca or Sarah or Elizabeth or Hannah or Mary. The men then set about marrying women with the same names as their mothers or sisters or cousins. Suddenly the village is littered with Rebecca Mannings or John Balls. Some of the women will decide to use their middle name to help the family and enable them to keep some individuality but for us searching through those pre 1841 Census days an entry in the Parish Register is as likely to perplex as enlighten.

Sarah Manning was baptised on January 9th 1814, in a family batch, with her older brothers Isaac and Jacob. Luckily the parish register records that she was born on 4th April 1809 and is the daughter of James and Mary. Her eldest brother, James, was baptised on 7 March 1784 and is recorded as, 'James Manning Bosworth the Bastard son Of James Manning and Mary Bosworth. Relieved by the Parish''. James and Mary married some two years later on 8 May 1786 but, surprisingly it appears that the next child, Rebecca was not born until November1791, as it records at her baptism, on 24 October 1813. It may be that some children have come and gone unrecorded, or that James was away, or was it possible that they were in a local workhouse and segregated. Of their first child, James, I can find no further trace.

In all, James and Mary had ten children and Sarah was the eighth. I say eighth although it seems quite possible that her sister Rebecca, born in 1791, is the same person as Rose who appears in the 1851 Census as being born in about 1791 and whose birth or baptism cannot be found. If this is true then Sarah was the seventh child.

She next appears in the records when she marries Edward Chambers on 20 October 1832 at Ringstead. It is in the Parish Register and it states that 'Both are Of This Parish' (BOTP). There are no baptisms recorded for the couple and we never see Edward Chambers again. There are some Edward Chambers in the criminal records so perhaps he was transported. By 1841 Sarah is living with her older sister Rebecca and her brother Isaac. Also living with Rebecca is another Rebecca who appears from the 1851 Census to be the older sister's illegitimate child. The two younger women are shown as lacemakers but Rebecca is a 'pauper'.

We meet Sarah again in 1845 but now using her maiden name of Manning. The birth certificate of Charles Andrews, born on the 8th August 1845, records Sarah Manning as the mother and a William Andrews, a mariner as the father. William, in the 1841 Census, was recorded living in North street in

Boston. More surprising is that Charles has been born in the Union Workhouse in Boston, Lincolnshire and Sarah is recorded as living there. There may be a few explanations as to how Sarah ended up in Boston. She may have gone there for work and failed but there was a system where some unions sent their poor to other workhouses that could look after them more cheaply. Boston had a rather magnificent workhouse designed by George Gilbert Scott and built in 1837 which had an infirmary where Sarah could have had her baby in comparative luxury. For many poorer people the workhouse hospital was the only hope of medical attention.

At this time Boston was an important port and it seems possible that Sarah was in Boston when she met the mariner William, rather than going there to have his child. Perhaps she travelled there with the mysterious Edward Chambers.

On the 4th January 1847 Sarah married William Andrews, still a mariner, at the General Baptist Chapel in Boston. The witnesses are Michael Morgan and Elizabeth MacQueeney, and it records that Sarah and William live in North Street, Boston. William's father is given as John Andrews (deceased).

William, however, had not long to live and suffering from 'inflammation of the lungs' he dies just eighteen months later, on 7th June 1848. He was just forty-nine years old. The informant of the death is his nurse, the same Elizabeth MacQueeney and the 1851 Census for North Street records that 'Elizabeth McQueena' is running a pauper's lodging house. Neither of Sarah's husbands seem to have survived long after marriage.

It is the next two Censuses which help us to tie the two parts of Sarah's life together. In 1851 a Charles Andrews, aged 5 and born in Boston, appears in Ringstead living with his Aunt Rose, a pauper unable to work, with her daughter Rebecca. Rose is shown as unmarried. With them is Rose's sister Sarah Andrews, a widow who is the main subject of this story. By 1861 Rebecca, the daughter, is head of the house and her aunt, Sarah Andrews and her nephew Charles Andrews are living with her.

By 1871 Sarah is shown as the head, living in London End, Ringstead and Rebecca, her niece is still living with her. Sarah, aged 62 continues on Parish Relief although Rebecca is working as a lacemaker. Charles has married Elizabeth Warren on 31 August 1866 at the Baptist Meeting House in Thrapston and by 1871 is living at 29 Shop [High] Street, Ringstead with his three children, Ada, Annie and George.

Sarah does not appear in the 1881 Census and checking back we find her death, aged 67 in October December 1875.

Sarah lived much of her life in poverty and we can only skim the surface of the difficulties and privations that she suffered.

References.

Boston BMD (Lincolnshire Record Office) (my thanks to Agnes Burton for this information).
My thanks also to Liz Smart for alerting me to other details of William Andrews in the Boston Census.
Birth Certificate of Charles William Andrews 18th August 1845.
Marriage Certificate of Charles William Andrews and Elizabeth Warren 13th August 1866. (Thrapston Baptist Meeting House).

Chapter Three

Hard Times?

Jedidah Louisa Abington (1837 – 1914)

Jedidah is something of an enigma. Her Christian name caused Census officials, and more recently *Ancestry.co.uk* transcribers a good deal of trouble. It is only with some effort that we can recover her from the official records and then we only get hints of the turmoils of her life. She saw the life of a shoemaking village with its gossip and interbreeding where most people had a reason to like or dislike a neighbour. She also saw life in one of the first great industrial cities of the world visited by people from all over Europe to study this wonderful but terrible new phenomenon.

She was born in Ringstead in 1837. The 1841 Census shows that her father, Herbert J Abington, was a tea dealer. [See a later chapter]. He had been born in 1809 in Sommerstown in Middlesex but her mother Kezia Bull was a local girl born some two years later. By 1851 there were five other children besides Jedidah: Leonard (abt 1839), Edwin (abt 1841), Mary Jane (abt 1843), Edmund (abt 1845), and Herbert (abt 1848).

Already in her first Census she is causing trouble for she is recorded as Julidah Abington but by 1851 she is transcribed by Ancestry as Isdadah although the Census writer has her right. We will use Jedidah in this story, the name that was mainly used and the one that is on her tombstone. Her father is recorded as a tea dealer **and** grocer and all his family is still around him. There are signs of the modern world intruding into Ringstead. The old system of parish constables was not able to cope with the ever more mobile criminals of the railway age and, in 1839, County Councils were allowed to form their own police forces. It was opposed by many because of the perceived great cost to the ratepayers but it survived. Superintendent Knight was appointed to the area which included Ringstead and he obviously took his role seriously.

One of his tasks was the important one of making sure that shopkeepers were not cheating their customers. Imperial standard weights had been introduced in the 1825/6 period and County Inspectors had been appointed in 1834/5. The new police force gradually took over this function. In 1843 alone four Ringstead shopkeepers were fined at Wellingborough Petty Sessions for 'deficient weights'. These included Thomas Lee, the baker; Henry Weekley, butcher and James Whiteman, grocer. Also fined twelve shillings was Herbert Joseph Abington, grocer, Jedidah's father. It was likely that some of the lawbreaking was caused by the sellers not keeping up with the legislation and not using the properly approved and stamped weights. There must have been much grumbling about government interference by the small shopkeepers of the village. Nevertheless some of them were not fined but only had to pay the 'cost of the summonses in cases where the deficiencies were trifling' which implies that the people fined were selling seriously short measures. Herbert's fine of 12s was small, however, compared to his grocery competitor in Ringstead, James Whiteman, who was fined £3 12s.

The same report, on the Wellingborough Petty Sessions, does give a small insight into the way standardisation was rapidly entering villagers' lives but, as yet, lack of access to the technology was still a defence:

> *Mr. Hill, a beer-shop keeper, at Ringstead, was charged with keeping his house open after ten o'clock. It was proved that the church clock at Ringstead was not going on the night in question, and the Magistrates gave Hill the benefit of this circumstance and dismissed the charge.*

By 1861 Jedidah Abington had disappeared from Ringstead and it seems from England. Her sister, Mary Jane has become a servant to an old farmer John Williamson, who was 83 years old, and his three daughters. She has not moved far for the house is only three doors away from her parents. Herbert is now a plain 'grocer' and his wife a dressmaker. Herbert, their son, is, at thirteen, a baker and there are two more sons, Joshua, nine years old, and Samuel just four. Kezia had her last child when she was 46 years old. There is a gap of some five years so there is just the suspicion that Samuel could be the son of Jedidah and that is why she is away from village and the gossip.

View of Manchester 1850 by Lenz.
By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

This shows the countryside and the old country ways about to be swallowed up by the industrial city, the smoking chimneys of which can be seen in the distance. It does recall the first chapter of Mary Barton by Elizabeth Gaskell, where the Wilsons and the Bartons meet, away for the grime of the city, before tragedy strikes.

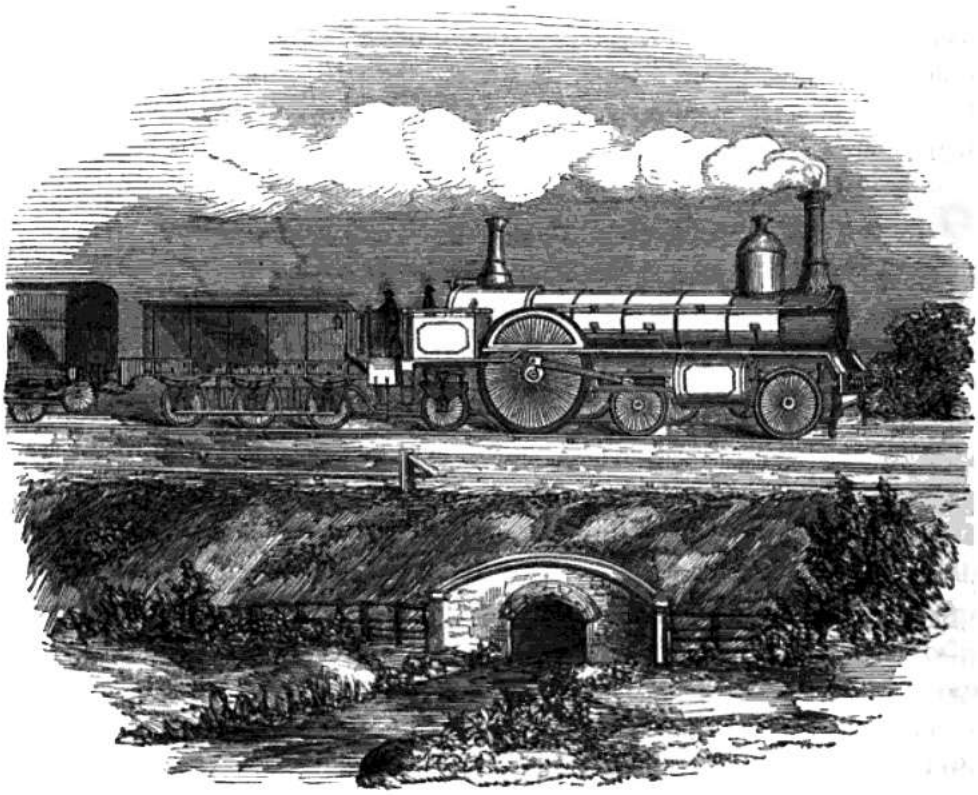
Finally, in the 1861 Census, we locate Jedidah in Manchester. Well not Jedidah but Louisa J Abington a servant at the house of Carlos Chamberlin. Manchester had become one of the first great industrial cities. In 1861 the parish of Manchester had a population of 529,245 people and the borough had some 300,000. Engels, who later helped write the Communist Manifesto, and many others came and wrote about this city where the sun never shone through the smoke pall, and cotton specks clouded the air: where the noise of the cotton mills started up at 5.30 in the morning like the boom of Atlantic breakers. A place where working people, crammed into substandard housing with little or no sanitation, lived in poverty and died young: where typhoid and cholera and infant diarrhoea meant that life was cheap. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote about it in *Mary Barton* and Dickens in *Hard Times*. One of the places where modern capitalism, as well as English socialism, was born.

It was also a time when men made great fortunes and gated estates of large villas were built for this new class of factory owners and professionals. One of the first to be built in the world was the Victoria Park Estate in the Rusholme area of Manchester. It was in parkland on the edges of the city, away from the prevailing smoke stream from the mills. The first residents moved in, in 1837, and in the 1861 Census we see living on the Victoria Park Estate, Henry Salomonson, a shipping merchant born in Holland, William R Callender, a JP and merchant, George Hadfield a Member of Parliament, Arthur Sief, a cotton manufacturer employing 950 men and women. Here also we see Richard Cobden the Chartist politician and Charles Halle, the German born founder of the famous orchestra. It was a radical stronghold where members of the Anti-Corn Law League and Whig politicians lived. Later, Emmeline Pankhurst and her husband lived in a Victoria Park villa. It was to here also that a wealthy American called Carlos Chamberlin and his family moved. He was a 'Commission Agent' buying and selling commodities for people and taking a percentage as his fee.

'Sunbury' or 'Vermont House' in Victoria Park, Rusholme
(Taken in the 1970s and looking in a rather sad state)
By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies

Carlos had been born in Vermont, USA, in 1811 and lived with his wife Elizabeth and their seven children in *Sunbury* from 1856 to 1875. I think that he re-named it *Vermont House* for so it is named in the 1861 Census. He had just become a naturalised British citizen in 1860 and business was doing well for he had five servants, including Louisa, living on the premises.

How do we know that Louisa Abington is our Jedidah? Well, she is shown as having been born in Ringstead, Northamptonshire, she is the correct age and, when she appears again in Ringstead with her father after missing two Censuses, she calls herself Louisa. It seems proof enough but we also have the diary of her younger brother Herbert [see later chapter] to confirm it as fact. One may also ask, how did she get there? We hear of the poor being shipped by canal boat up to Manchester for work. There would also be stage coaches which would take some twenty-four hours. It is more likely that she went by one of the wonders of the steam age, the new railway system which was becoming affordable to all but the poorest. The London and Birmingham Railway Company had built a line between Blisworth and Peterborough and as part of this Ringstead had its own station which was opened on the 2nd June 1845. A little earlier the London Euston to Manchester route had also been built by the same company and, bypassing Northampton, had a station at Blisworth. Lord Grafton had agreed to fund a new station at Blisworth as long as it was 'first class' which meant that all trains stopped there. In 1846 it had become part of the London and North Western Railway.



A LONDON AND NORTH WESTERN PASSENGER LOCOMOTIVE.

(http://upload.wikipedia.org/wikipedia/commons)

In 1850 she could have left Ringstead at 7.35 am and, if travelling 2nd class, after changing at Rugby, would have arrived at Manchester London Road at 4.45 pm. Third class, which stopped at all stations, would have not arrived until 9.15 pm. By 1863 the times had been reduced by some two

hours and three-and-a-half hours respectively. Second class would have cost her some 20 shillings (£1.00) and third, 13 shillings (£0.65). To give some comparison £1.00 is roughly equivalent to £43 today (but five days of an 1860 craftsman's time because wages have risen more than costs). By this time the carriages were roofed and glazed although the third class would still have had plain wooden seats. The picture shows the type of engine, painted green, which would have pulled the train in 1852. One can only imagine that, although a long and wearisome journey, it would also have been an exciting one for Jedidah.

As we have said, Jedidah would probably have arrived at London Road Station, which was later rebuilt and renamed Piccadilly. Perhaps her new employer had arranged for someone to pick her up or arranged for a cab. Otherwise she would had to walked nearly two miles or used one of the horse-drawn trams that you can see in the photograph of Piccadilly, below, taken towards the end of the century. Her route would probably have avoided the worst of the industrial and slum areas, with terraced houses giving way to the spacious surroundings of Victoria Park. She would have had to get past the gate keeper and then been confronted by the grand villas, including Vermont House.

Manchester Piccadilly in 1892 showing the horse-drawn trams, the crowds and the new tall buildings of the modern city.

By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

She had been fortunate in reaching Manchester after the building of Longendale reservoir and the provision of relatively clean water which had begun the elimination of the waterborne diseases, such as cholera, from the area although it was not until the end of the century that they were virtually eliminated. Manchester was also a place full of people equally as radical as the shoemakers of Ringstead. From 1845 there had been Ladies' Day Classes at the Mechanics' Institute for intending governesses, young wives and the daughters of respectable artisans.

Ten years later, 1871, the Census shows Carlos Chamberlin was still living in Vermont House with four of his children but there were only three servants and none of them remained from the original group. Louisa however, as she now is, is not far away. She is living with one of the older servants from her former employment called Elizabeth Spence who came from Dalton-in-Furness, and her daughter Mary Ellen and a one year old visitor Fanny Watterson. Elizabeth was the widow of William Spence, who had been a groom at Clayton Hall. She had become a grocer and around her small shop, at 45 Wilmslow Road Rusholme, are a basket shop, and an ironmonger and gas fitter. These were small local shops, a world away from the grand department stores and warehouses that were growing up in the centre of Manchester. Elizabeth Spence's shop is just a stone's throw from *Vermont House* but the two younger women are not shown to have any work. This would be a little concerning for her father and mother but, as we gather from Herbert's diary [See later chapter], they are progressive women who take part in the intellectual life available in Manchester. We also know from the diary that this was a time when she was constantly visiting her sick brother. It may be that the Census just comes at a time when she is not working and we know from the same source that Elizabeth Spence and her daughter were good friends to Jedidah and her family.

Herbert' diary tells us that in the1869-1870 period Jedidah, usually with Herbert and the Spences, went to Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester Flower Show at the Botanical Gardens, saw *A Winter's Tale and Richard III at the theatre*, attended the Royal Institution and probably many other events where her brother just puts '*We* went to . . . '.

At the same Census her father, Herbert, is shown as a grocer in Shop Street [High Street], Ringstead. He is now about sixty-two years old and his wife is a couple of years younger. Not far away, in Shop Street, John Ball is living with his wife and granddaughter, Florence E Smith. He is still a butcher but is also a farmer of 43 acres and has a labourer working for him. The troubles of the fifties and sixties, when his brother William had brought scandal to the family with his accusation and finally acquittal of the murder of his pregnant mistress Lydia Attley, are now in the past. John's wife, Rebecca (née Wilson), was the sister of William Weekley Ball's wife, Hannah, so it would have been difficult for the whole family. But William now lives and prospers as a butcher in Ramsey in Huntingdonshire and John too is doing well.

In 1879 Kezia Abington, Jedidah's mother, dies, but it may be that she has already moved back to look after her two brothers' last years as well as her ageing father. In 1881 Herbert is shown as a Chemist and lives in High Street with his daughter Louisa, as she is still calling herself. In the same Census John Ball is still living with Rebecca but she is shown as an invalid and there is a live-in nurse, Sarah Hackney, as well as a servant, Louisa Truelove. In the few months following the Census Rebecca died aged 62 years.

The grieving was not long for John because, that same autumn, he married 'Edidah' Louisa Abington. Her father dies a few years later in 1884. It seems that the newlyweds settled down for a comfortable retirement together. An advertisement in the *Wellingborough News* on 4th October 1884 gives notice of an auction on the Wednesday 15th '. . .upon the Premises at Ringstead, the property of Mr John Ball, who is giving up his land.' The sale gives some idea of what a small farm would have looked like. It lists:

SHEEP - 30 half-bred two-shear down ewes, 13 theaves, 42 lambs.

BEAST - Three cows in-calf in-profit, I barren cow, ditto heifer, 1 heifer in-calf, 1 2$^{1}/_{2}$ year-old steer and 2 calves.

HORSES- Two active powerful cart mares.

IMPLEMENTS - Two Scotch carts, 1 cart, 1 narrow-wheel wagon, 2 ploughs, 2 set iron harrows (Page), Scuffler, 5-coulter drill, horse hoe, 12 doz hurdles, 10 sheep troughs, 2 turnip mills, cake mill, etc etc.

We see the end of one of the small farmer-butchers who were a feature of many villages. In 1891 John and Jedidah are still living together in High Street in Ringstead.

The Register for the Ringstead Cemetery shows the death of John Ball on the 26thNovember 1894 aged 75 and the burial some two days later. The service was conducted by the Baptist Minister, the Reverend J. Bates and under the heading 'Trade' he is classified simply as 'Gentleman'. On the same solid, respectable grave it also remembers 'Louisa, Jedidah Ball, beloved wife of the above who died on 24th July 1914 aged 77 years'. There is no sign of Rebecca. The Baptist Minister again took the service.

The two Wilson sisters who married John and William Ball were not productive by nineteenth century standards. Rebecca had two children, Hannah and Joseph and her sister, Hannah, had no children as far as we can tell. William, it appears had at least one child, (although it disappeared before birth with its mother, Lydia Atley). Jedidah also appears to have had no children. She, of course, married very late. Such things are not uncommon but one senses that there is somewhere, perhaps other unrecorded sadnesses.

What about Carlos Chamberlin, or 'Chamberlain', as he is named in some Censuses? He was part of the American 'aristocracy', one based on chronology rather than English bloodline, although perhaps both emanate from the claims of the principal invaders, one Norman, one English. His grandson, George Howard Chamberlin, was an architect in Yonkers, New York. George is listed in the Roll of Associates of *The Order of the Founders and Patriots of America Register* of 1911. To be an associate one had to trace ones ancestry back to the first colonists and to have forefathers, in the same male ancestral line, who served in the American Revolution. The qualifying generations are given, including Carlos and then back to William and Rebecca Chamberlin who must have been those 'first colonists'. Why someone in that revolutionary line should become a naturalised British citizen and live out his life in England is another story to be told.

By 1881, now some seventy years old, he is living in Dunham Road Altrincham in Cheshire with his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Mary now a spinster of thirty three. They have three servants, once again all different. It may be that they were bad employers but servants, because they had to live in, tended to be younger women. When they married they moved out and found other employment. It seems that he died in Hastings in 1890 and by 1891 his widow, Elizabeth is living at 39 Harrington Road, Kensington.

Although worlds apart both mistress and servant became the widows of 'gentlemen' who could live comfortably in their old age.

There is one final small mystery. If you walk down the cemetery toward the road from the fine headstone of John Ball and Louisa Jedidah (as she now finally is) you come to the grave of Benjamin Lovell and Mary Jane, his beloved wife. At the bottom of the gravestone it also remembers Louisa Jedidah Ball. Mary Jane was Jedidah's sister, who she is shown living next door to, in the 1901 Census. Benjamin Lovell died a few months after Jedidah and Mary Jane died some 7 years after, in 1921. Who wanted her remembered again?

Jedidah's grave in Ringstead Cemetery.
(Author's own photograph 2009).

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Chapter Four

Soldier of Empire

Thomas Ball 1835 – 1886

We first find Thomas Ball 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 prove 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

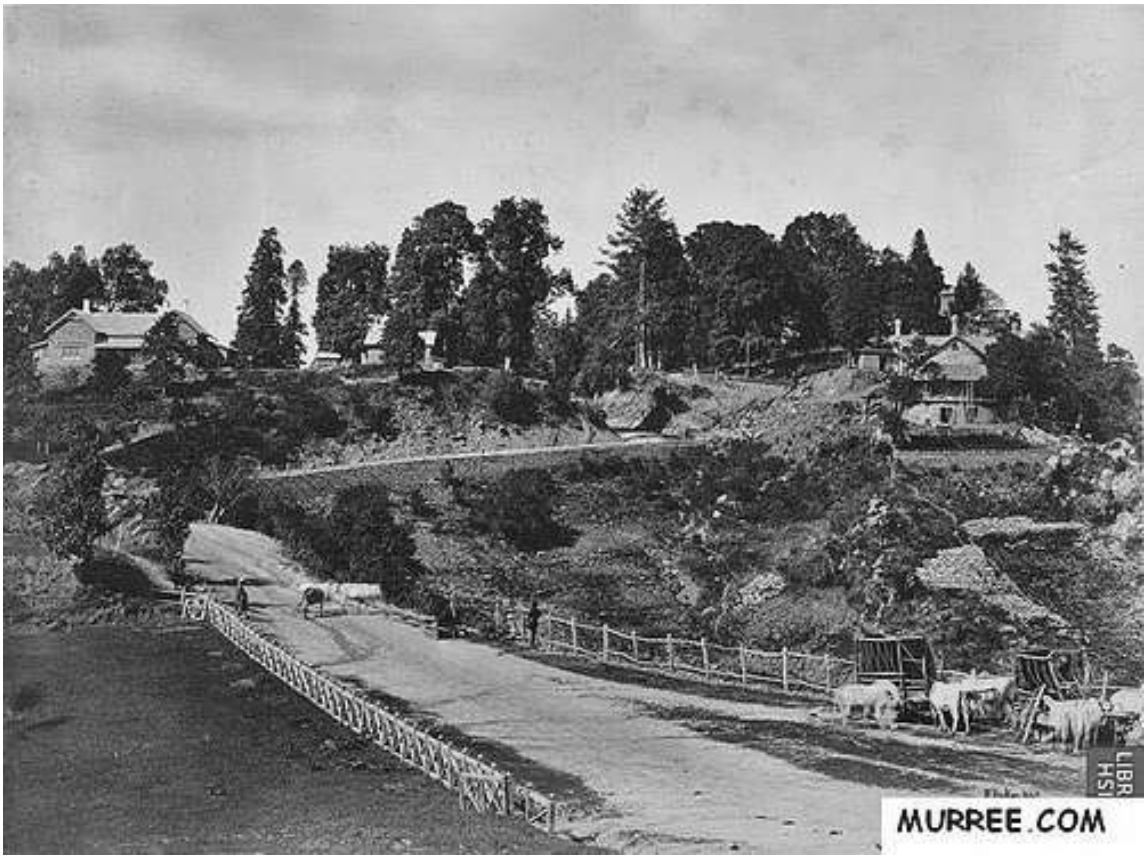
there travelled by donkey across the desert to Suez. Thomas and the other soldiers would have seen the construction of the great canal in progress but it would be another 11 years before it was opened for shipping. At Suez they boarded the P & O Steamer *Hindostan* and after an unpleasant overcrowded 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.

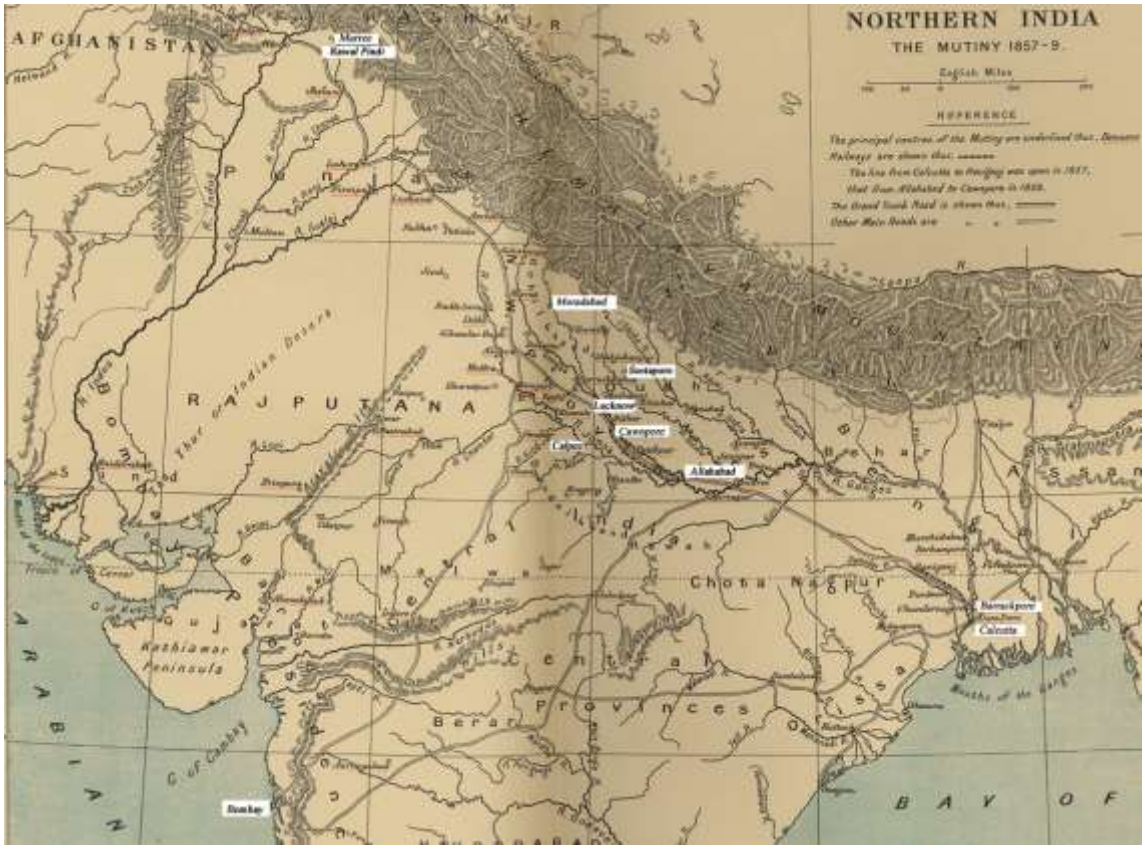
Rifle Brigade Uniforms 1871
History of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own). William Henry Cope

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* an old name 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 Five

Will to Leave

Henry Manning (1791 - 1859)

Unless they commit some crime it is rare that the ordinary families of Ringstead appear in the official documents of the time except as brief entries of their births, marriages and deaths and, after 1841, in the ten-yearly Censuses. Henry, however, and his family became part of a case to settle a point of law on the 'Duty and Office of Magistrates'. His misfortune casts a little light into these lost lives.

Henry Manning was born in about 1791. I have not found any record of his birth but he was twenty-three years old when he married Rebecca Stevens on 3rd November 1814. His parents were Thomas Manning and Elizabeth Bugby and his grandfather was another Thomas Manning.

Unusually, Thomas Senior had a little property and on the 6th January 1800 he made a will. In this he left 'five acres of land, more or less, of copyhold meadow ground with their and every of their appurtenances lying and being dispersed in the open and common fields and meadows of Ringstead'. He also gave 25 shillings to his daughter Mary, the wife of Thomas Plant. He bequeathed to Elizabeth the widow of his late son, Thomas, 'all that part of a messuage or tenement with the appurtenances, which is now in the occupation of Henry Lawford situate in Ringstead aforesaid and adjoining the tenement in the occupation of Joseph Manning.'

Finally, he left to the four children of Thomas and Elizabeth, namely Henry, John, Thomas and Rebecca, on the marriage or death of their mother, this house as well as the house next door in which Joseph Manning lived together with the 'close or orchard lying about the said homestead on the north side of a back lane and now in the several tenures of Thomas Senior, Samuel Hackett and Mary Whitney.'

Henry must have moved to Wellingborough and become a pauper for, in about 1828, the magistrates there sent him back to Ringstead because they said that he had an 'interest in property' there. It was decided by the court that, because his mother had not died or remarried at the time, he had no interest in property in Ringstead and therefore this action was illegal.

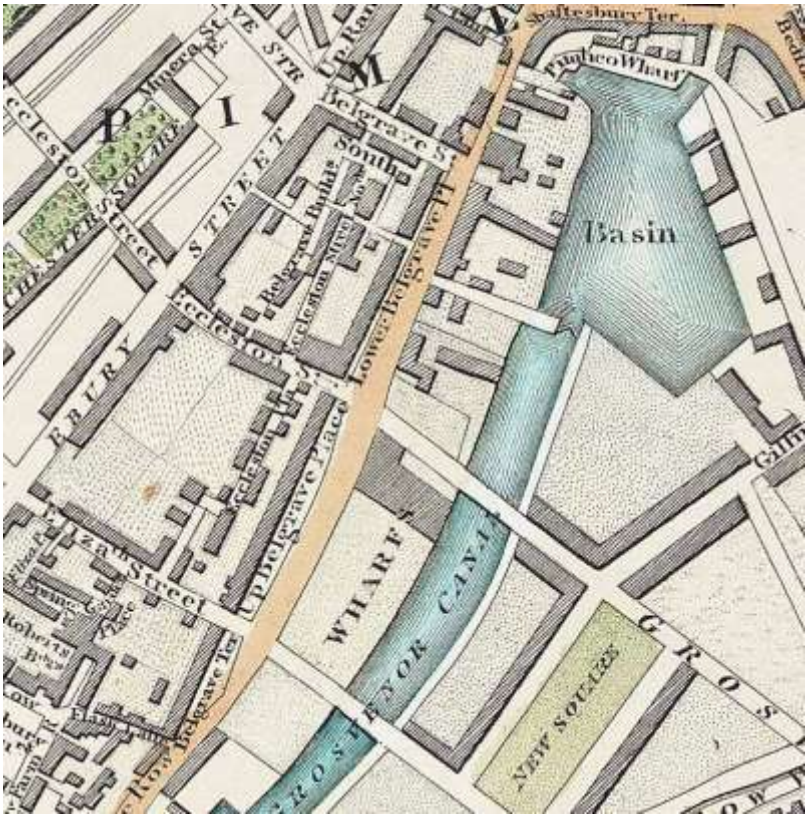
Unusually for the family historian a family tree for a working family is partially laid out. It also shows how the Poor Law operated with parishes eager to unload the cost of any pauper if at all possible. They were on the lookout for the 'illegal immigrant'. Henry himself, now 50 years old, is recorded in 'Harriotts Lane', [now Herriotts Lane] Wellingborough with his wife Rebecca and daughters Maria and Elizabeth. Also living with them is Hannah aged 50 who is probably the wife of his brother John He is recorded as a shoemaker.

Here we get one of those surprising leaps when a family break through the parochial bounds and suddenly appear away from friends and family. In this case it was not unusual in the middle of the

nineteenth century for people from the villages, pauperised by the depressions in agriculture, to be drawn into the 'Great Wen'. Areas like Bethnal Green became terrible, overcrowded, stinking slums with neither clean water nor adequate sewerage. Ways of living, which had been sustainable in a rural setting, when continued in the cities, led to terrible living conditions and often to disease and early death.

Henry and Rebecca seem to have fared a little better than many because in 1851 we find them at No 28 Lower Belgravia Street in the Parish of St George, Hanover Square in the City of Westminster. I have not found the re-marriage or death of his mother, Elizabeth, but it is likely that this had occurred and Henry had his legacy. He is now 59 years old and Rebecca is 50. He is a bootmaker and Rebecca is a dressmaker. Elizabeth, now 21 is a ladies' maid and Mary Ann is a dressmaker like her mother. Next door lives Samuel Candy, a Master Mason employing 40 men and, two doors away at No 30, James Burrows, a coal merchant. Number 28 had four families living in it. There was a house painter and his wife from Gosport, a master tailor from Gloucester with his wife and four children, and a woman from Canterbury and her grandson who was 'supported by friends'.

There is some confusion here because in 1851 Lydia is shown not living with her parents but nearby as a visitor with Elizabeth Collins. In 1861 the two are again living together but this time Lydia is shown the sister of Elizabeth. Elizabeth is the correct age to have been Elizabeth Manning so who is the Elizabeth Manning living with her parents in 1851. It appears that Maria, who is about the same age, has changed her name to Elizabeth once the first Elizabeth has married. There may be another explanation but at the moment none is obvious.



From Map of London (1827) by Christopher and John Greenwood
By kind permission of Motco Enterprises Ltd.

Lower Belgrave Place was not one of the 'best' streets of this prosperous area being more Pimlico than Belgravia but it was pleasanter than most in the capital and seems to have had an artistic community. Allan Cunningham, the Scottish born writer lived at number 27 until his death in 1842. The sculptor, John Evan Thomas, who produced statues of the great and the good, especially from his native Wales, established a studio at number 7 from about 1834 until 1862. His most famous sculpture is 'The Death of Tewdic' and a bronze electrotype of it was exhibited by Elkington, Mason and Co. in the *Great Exhibition* of 1851.

It would be surprising if Henry and his family did not attend this grand display of Victorian confidence in industry and Empire. Hyde Park, where the Great Exhibition Hall, the Crystal Palace, was erected, was just a stone's throw away and, it seems the whole of England, regardless of class, clamoured to see it. One of its opponents in the House of Commons, railed against it being allowed to stay in Hyde Park, after the Exhibition had finished, in these words:

> *Unfortunately, however, for the people of this country, the erection of the Crystal Place took place; and what had been the result? The desecration of the Sabbath - the demoralisation of the people - a disunion of parties - and increasing poverty to a most serious extent; for he had heard and with pain, that the poor of this country had been seduced to come up to this Exhibition. All that they had saved and all they could borrow had been in many cases spent in this foolish journey; and he knew he spoke facts when he stated that not only had they borrowed money but pawned their clothes to enable them to come up to this 'World's Fair,' as it was called; and now they were left without a penny in their pockets.*
>
> *Colonel Sibthorpe 29 July 1851.*

Others were pleasantly surprised that the working class had behaved well and there had not been the terrible outbreak of violence and immorality that had been predicted. The more recent criticism of the Millennium Dome seems very mild by comparison.

A new world of invention and manufacture was being celebrated but one that neither Henry nor Rebecca lived long to see. Rebecca died on 26th October 1857 in Pimlico followed some eighteen months later on 14 June 1859, aged 68, by Henry.

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Chapter Six

The Butcher of Ringstead?

William Weekley Ball (1818 -1896)

It is with some reluctance that I set down the history of William Weekley Ball. I have tried in these brief biographies to show some of the ordinary people of nineteenth century Ringstead whose lives usually go unrecorded except by official statistics. William's life has had many a chapter in books on Northamptonshire and his story is well known by locals. Perhaps many would like to forget him because as one said to me, 'he did not come from Ringstead'. Well, certainly his father William came from that den of iniquity, Little Addington but William was christened in Ringstead on 19th January 1818.

I think that I must give his story because the court case gives us a glimpse not only into William's life but also into some other villagers who gave witness at his trial. I hope also that I can fill in a little detail about his later life which is often either omitted or wrongly described. By one of those strange coincidences I first came upon William before I knew of his notoriety. My wife had been doing our family tree and because of lack of progress wrote down all the Balls in Ringstead that appeared in the parish registers. (This was in the pre-internet days of long ago).. We had moved to near Ramsey in Huntingdonshire and someone lent me *Craven & Co.'s Directory for the County of Huntingdon* for 1855. There I found in the section for Butchers in Ramsey 'Ball, Wheatley, Great White'. In spite of the incorrect name I guessed that it might be the right person and then I saw, when visiting my mother in Wellingborough a local paper with an article written by Marion Pipe headlined 'The Ghost of Lydia Atley'. My father had always said that we had a murderer in the family. I had found him, although I still have not proved his connection with my own branch of the, (very common), Ball name.

As I have said, William Ball senior was born Little Addington in about 1773. He married Ann Weekley on 7thJuly 1814 in Ringstead and they are described as 'both of this parish' by that time. In the 1841 Census William is given as a shepherd but by 1851 when he was 78 he was described as a 'Greenwich Pensioner'. This reveals that he must have at some time been in the Royal Navy and this may explain his late marriage and the register describes them as bachelor and spinster so we must presume this to be the case. Ann was some 34 years old and William 42 when her first child, Mary, was born. At the birth of Henry, their last born child who did not survive childhood, she was about forty-three years old.

Looking back at William, Ringstead is a long way from the sea and one wonders where he spent those years before he enters the official records again. The Royal Greenwich Hospital had a fixed number of in-pensioners (like the more well known Chelsea Pensioners for the army) but it also gave out-pensions, a form of superannuation, for deserving applicants based mainly on rank and years of trouble-free service. They could be in work and did not have to have reached old age. The time when

the Hospital gained its biggest intake was during the Napoleonic Wars and it seems likely that it was in these that William fought before his marriage. [I have given a tentative biography of him in another chapter].

William Weekley Ball was born into a family that was probably more comfortably placed than most ordinary people in Ringstead. His father was a shepherd in 1841 but William, at 20 is described as a butcher. Also in Ringstead is Henry Weekley a butcher and probably William's uncle. By 1851 Henry has retired and is living next door to William Weekley Ball who is described once again as butcher. We have no proof at present but it looks as if William worked for his uncle and took over the business when he retired.

Of course something tragic had happened some nine months before the 1851 Census was collected. The story that we have is mainly from the mouths of witnesses in their depositions given in 1864, first to magistrates at a committal trial in Thrapston and then at the Lent Assizes in Northampton. We must remember that in a small close-knit village like Ringstead few had no connection with, or opinion on, the two main characters: alleged murderer and alleged victim. First, we will look at the alleged victim and murderer, as they were perceived by the newspapers at the time.

We must see Lydia Atley, Attley or Atlee as a person whose last act was, perhaps, to be a victim. What little we know of her leads us to suspect that she had not had an easy life. In the 1841 Ringstead Census she is given as 15 years old and is living with her sister Elizabeth, who is also given the rounded age of 15, and her mother, another Lydia, who is 50 years old and a pauper. The two girls are both lacemakers, a common occupation for the women of Ringstead at the time but not one which could support anybody without another source of income. The Census was taken on June 6th and just some two weeks before on May 23rd both Lydia and Elizabeth are baptised in the parish church. They are given as the daughters of William and Lydia and young Lydia is 'represented to be in her twentieth year' and Elizabeth is 'represented to be in her sixteenth year' It seems to show the father was a miller.

We do have a retrospective description of Lydia given in the February 29th 1864 edition of the Eastern Counties Gazette when William was brought to trial. It states that, in 1850, she was twenty-five years old (but she was probably some four years older).

> *…..Lydia Atlee…was of middle height, thin in person, and of rather singular appearance. Her hair was auburn in colour, nearly inclined to red, her face was slightly contracted on one side, and disfigured by a scorbutic eruption, which tinted her forehead and cheeks alike with a deep crimson. Besides this she possessed a pair of innocent eyes, and a remarkably fine set of teeth of ivory whiteness, which she frequently displayed, but altogether her physiognomy [sic] was decidedly of the plainest order. Her character was somewhat indifferent, from being of a weak intellect. She unfortunately became initiated into vicious practices and immoral conduct, which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child.*

You feel that the reporter is trying to be fair-minded but failing. He does, however, go on to say:

> *With this exception, the woman was of harmless disposition and was generally liked by the villagers, who regarded her with compassionate feelings. Lydia Atlee picked up her*

> *precarious living in various ways; hawking nuts and oranges, acting as an errand woman, and occasionally assisting in housework. She resided as a lodger in the quarter of the village known as the 'London Road.'*

Today we would see her as a vulnerable person and it is easy to see why the people of Ringstead were so antagonistic to William. Paradoxically we also see in the description of her why the men in authority or in the newspapers were generally supportive of him.

Having said that, the descriptions of William were mixed, to say the least. We must remember that these descriptions are 14 years after the two were lovers. A clipping from an unnamed Peterborough Paper is pasted into the Defence Brief in 1864 and it describes William as:

> *..a respectable looking man, 46 years in age and standing about 5feet 7 inches in height. He is of a rosy and pleasing complexion, is moderately stout with dark and straight hair and habited in a suit of light tweed cloth. He has pretty regularly for years attended various markets in the county of Huntingdon and his character for honest and straightforward dealing is unimpeachable.*

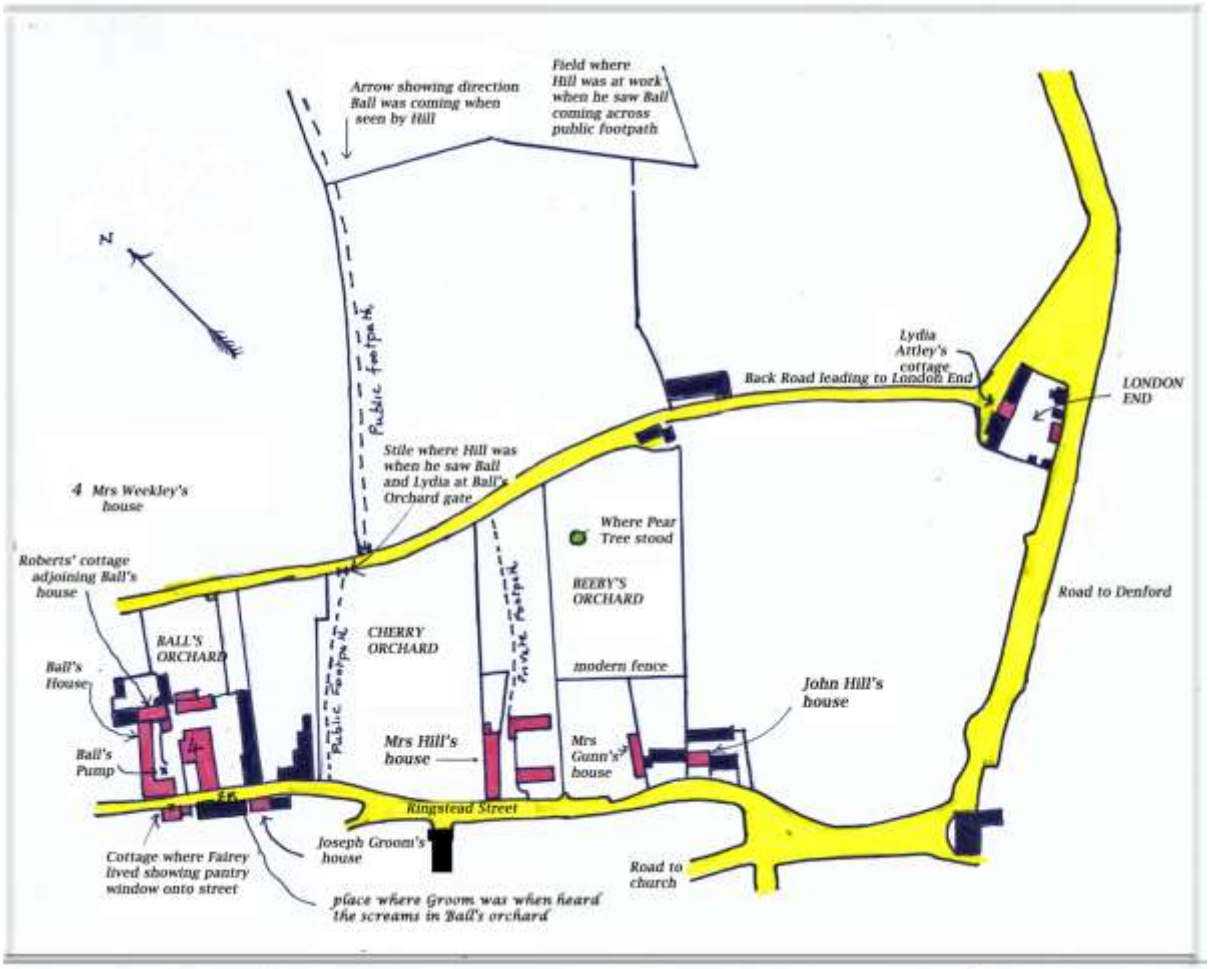
On the other hand the Northampton Mercury for 27th February 1864 gave a less favourable picture.

> *The prisoner, who appears to be between forty and fifty years of age, was dressed respectably in black, and had the appearance of a well-to-do tradesman. He has rather a high, bald forehead with a single lock of long dark hair drawn across it, a well-shaped nose, thin lips and eyes with many wrinkles about them. His face is peculiar from a complete absence of eyebrows.*

We do know that William and Hannah had no children but we do not know whether this was due to inability or inactivity. The few signs that we have lead us to think that it may have been an unhappy match but Hannah was loyal to him throughout the whole saga and moved with him to Ramsey. It is her story which we do not hear and which might throw most light on the real events of that night. Where was she when all these events unfolded? Whatever the background it does not seem disputed that William and Lydia were lovers and she certainly claimed her unborn child to be his.

Statements were taken by the police at the time but it is only fourteen years later that the trial allows us to see how the events that unfolded that warm July evening in 1850 from the lawyers' Briefs and the newspaper reports.

For many years the only map to explain the alleged facts of that late evening was one drawn in the Defence Brief. It was a strange travesty of a map which is impossible to reconcile with the local geography. Within the last few years the solicitors, *Hunnybun & Sykes*, have deposited archive material in the Northampton Record Office which includes the *Brief for the Prosecution* for the case and includes beautifully clear maps drawn up by Law and Sons, Architects and Surveyors, of Northampton. My copies do not do justice to the originals but they do help to show what happened and help to bring that evening one-hundred-and-fifty years ago back into our imagination.



Drawn from Maps attached to Prosecution Brief.
(Hunnybun & Sykes Archive 2009/16: Northampton Record Office.)

Lydia was heavily pregnant and lodged with her brother John who had kept on the family house after their mother had died that May. At the time she was sleeping with Sarah Ann Phillips whose mother also had recently died. Sarah Ann told of the ordinary events of that day, Monday the 22nd July 1850. Lydia had gone down to the shop to buy some soap and rice ready for the next day. The rice was for dinner and the soap was to do some washing, probably to earn a little money. The two women took the tray used for washing and at about nine o'clock in the evening Lydia went out to confront William.

We also hear from Sarah Dicks, Lydia's married sister, who was also heavy with child. She asks Lydia to take her husband's dinner to where he was working in Mr. Freeman's hay field. Lydia at first says she is too ill but eventually goes but on her return again complains about feeling unwell. Sarah says that she too saw Lydia off at about a quarter past nine on the fateful night.

Lydia's sister, Elizabeth was housekeeper and then wife of Joseph Groom and she had been to their house in the Ringstead (High) Street [See map] while Joseph washed himself after finishing work at nine o'clock. He stated that she had said that she was going to, 'see Weekley Ball about some money and if she did not have some there would be a row that night.' Joseph left his house with Lydia at about a quarter to ten but after some ten yards he had stopped and leant against a wall in the street

to smoke his pipe, opposite the entrance to Ball's orchard while Lydia continued on to confront him. As Joseph quietly smoked his pipe he heard the two quarrelling in Weekley Ball's orchard although two boards, possibly a gate, prevented him from seeing inside. He heard Lydia say, 'Get off me for I believe you mean killing me tonight, Weekley Ball. The Lord have mercy on me, if I am going to die in the state that I am in'. He then heard a trembling noise like 'screaming from a human being' which was 'either going further away from him or getting weaker.' He thought that it was just a quarrel and did nothing. He denies that he 'had improper intimacy with Lydia', who was his wife's sister.

Another witness, John Hill, told how he was working in Mr. Beeby's orchard, making a chair for himself, when he hears William coming down the slipe (a narrow close, which probably refers to the private footpath from Mrs. Hill's house, *The Black Horse:-see map*). He sees Lydia with William in Back Lane and follows them to a new listening point, by a stile in a nearby cherry orchard. He hears them arguing and Lydia repeating loudly, 'I won't! It's yours and nobody else's'. She also protested that she did not want to go into the orchard but they did and he heard the latch go on the orchard gate. John Hill was supposed to be looking after his baby in its cot so he had to hurry back home.

As part of his evidence, he tells us that Ringstead Field was enclosed in 1840 and in 1850 the road to Keyston(e) was very bad with cart wheels often up to their hubs. John Hill also denied, when questioned at the trial, that he had been evicted because he had kept a brothel. Two young women, who he claimed were distant relations, had stayed with him a few days and he was unaware that one named Emma Bird came from a 'house of ill repute.'

Elizabeth Gunn, a widow, lived in a house not far from Ball's orchard (see map). She was an infant schoolmistress, possibly in some form of Dame or Lace School. She stated that:

> *About ten o'clock that night I was in my house; the house door was open. I heard screams which appeared to come from Weekley Ball's orchard.*

When cross examined she told the court that:

> *There is great excitement in Ringstead about this. People are wild about it. I have not heard that in order to do Ball a great many people were ready to come up to say anything that was wanted.*

The only other witness was Elizabeth Groom, wife of Joseph, and Lydia's sister who said that William had visited Lydia and had given her meat for her sister. She also saw him the next morning in the street and asked him if he had seen Lydia and he replied, 'No.'

So these were the witnesses of the alleged murder, who, it must be admitted, were mainly relations or an alleged brothel keeper who had not given evidence in 1850 when the magistrates in Thrapston had to decide whether there was a case to be heard. They had adjudged that there was insufficient evidence, especially with the lack of a body, for there to be a case for William to answer. The police, as we hear later from the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire at the later trial, advertised in the *Police Gazette* and circulated handbills offering a reward of £50 for any evidence leading to Lydia being found. No one came forward.

A letter was also received from a local man, then living in Northampton, who had seen Lydia after the time of her disappearance. Weekley Ball had shown the letter to Thomas Green the innkeeper at the *Axe and Compass* and this had rather allayed police suspicions.

Nevertheless local opinion was against him and most seemed to have believed that he was the murderer and all that was wanted was the body. Soon after her disappearance as the Eastern Counties Gazette recalls in 1864:

> *On the Wednesday the public excitement had reached such a pitch that the police were forthwith communicated with, and a diligent search was instituted over nearly all the parish and the adjoining one of Denford. Gardens were dug over and excavated, ditches woods and thickets pryed into, and the adjacent ponds together with the river Nene were carefully dragged.*

Nothing was found but many were convinced of his guilt and a printed ballad was hawked around the streets, first at the October Fair in Thrapston in 1850 and probably at other fairs and feasts in the area. A copy is in the Brief prepared for the defence barrister in 1864. It is called, *The Cruel Butcher of Ringstead* and runs to nine verses with a chorus after every one. It also introduces some new 'facts' which do not appear to have been mentioned anywhere else and were perhaps part of the rumours flying around Ringstead. A few of the verses and the chorus will give a flavour of the broadsheet:

About that time we all do know
Up to the Black Horse that man did go
And for to have a glass of ale
And there he told a dreadful tale

Chorus *A cruel Butcher he hung should be*
For killing of Lydia Atlee

And then from there he went straightway
To kill a sheep as he did say
To kill that girl it was his guile
Likewise to kill his lovely child

Chorus

When she got home and left her tray
To meet the man she went straightway
To get her bounty she did intend
Not thinking of her latter end

Chorus

Obviously William decided that he could not stay in Ringstead. In 1851 he was still there with Hannah and a niece Hannah Ball, daughter of his brother John, but sometime soon after he has left and, as we saw earlier, by 1855 was established as a butcher in Ramsey. He appears in Kelly's

Directory of Huntingdonshire for 1854 as 'Ball, William Butcher'. In 1861 Hannah, William's wife is staying with William's brother John and his wife (Hannah's sister) in Ringsted, but we do not know if this is just a short visit. She does declare herself as a butcher's wife to the Census collector. Staying with William in Ramsey are his 16 year old niece Ann Ball and his nephew William Wilson from Oundle who is a butcher's assistant. It looks as if, at the side the entry, the Census Collector has written 'Mrs. Ball absent'.

William was building up a local reputation as a solid citizen who, as we have heard, was known for his 'honest and straightforward dealing'. We hear in the Brief written for the defence lawyer that, 'he has recently enlarged his premises and erected a commodious house on the site of his former shop'. There may be the sadness of having no children of their own but nephews and nieces are always staying with them as some compensation. Then in 1864 the past came again to haunt and humiliate him.

According to the Eastern Counties Gazette of February 20th:

> *On Thursday the 4th day of February inst., a man named Warren was engaged in cleaning out a dike which lies at the side of a lane leading from Denford to Keystone and opening into the Denford road near Mr. Peach's farm. As Warren proceeded with his work, his spade struck against a hard substance buried in the ground buried at about two feet from the surface. The man paused, and manipulating very carefully with his implement, soon unearthed first the skull (split by the spade), and secondly the weird form of a human skeleton, nearly complete and buried with the face downwards, the toes and front of the skull being pressed firmly into the soil. It is a remarkable fact that the heels of this skeleton were close together as if they had been originally and forcibly placed in that position. It lay facing nearly due north and south and in moist boggy earth which received and retained the impression of the bones.*

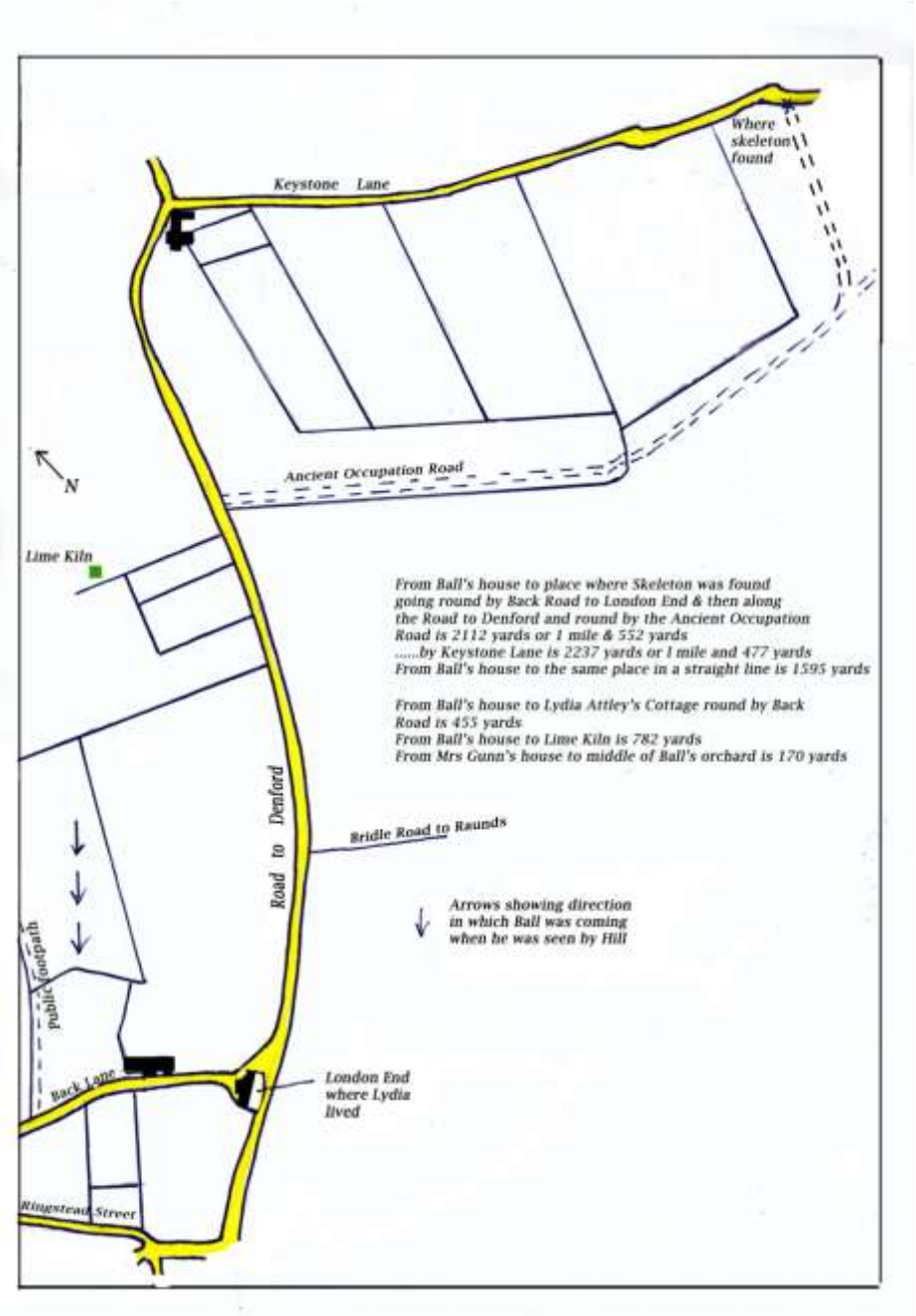
At the committal trial in Thrapston in 1864 Richard Warren, who was the labourer mentioned, said that he had dug up the skull on Wednesday 3rd February at about five o'clock in the evening. He said that it was about five feet from the stool of the hedge and about one foot from the side of the ditch. He tells the court that the road had been bad for many years after the common land there had been enclosed. He is also asked about a skeleton dug up in Little Addington parish which had also been thought to have been Lydia's. He knows nothing about this but it does show that people were convinced that Lydia was buried somewhere and were constantly expecting her body to turn up.

Warren ran to Denford Vicarage which was nearby and the Reverend Percival Sandilands sent a message to J. G. Leete , surgeon, at Raunds, who examined the skeleton and pronounced it a female of middle height who had been interred for a period of thirteen or fourteen years. Even today forensic scientists would not be able to be so definite. Obviously the good doctor had a very clear idea of who he thought it might be. The area was always boggy so was little used except by the farmer and, at the time of Lydia's disappearance, was a 'quagmire composed of an agreeable mixture of mud and water of a depth of several feet. The other clinching argument, that this was Lydia, was that the skull had a missing tooth.

Henry Dix, Lydia's brother-in-law, gave his account of the extraction at the trial. She had most of her teeth, and, as we have heard was proud of them. According to his testimony Lydia had come to him

about a fortnight before her disappearance to ask him to extract a tooth, the third one on the left hand side of her jaw. He was unwilling to do it because she was 'very large in the family way'. She insisted and he drew the tooth, which was double but he could not remember if it was fanged. 'She sat on the ground and I stood before her' and... 'I drew the tooth with a pair of nippers'. Henry stated that he told these facts to Inspector Williamson at the time of the discovery.

John Hill, who had stalked the couple the night before, also stated that at about six o'clock the next morning he had seen William coming from the direction of Ringstead lime kiln with a hoe in his hand



Drawn from Maps attached to Prosecution Brief

(Hunnybun & Sykes Archive 2009/16: Northampton Record Office)

We are not quite sure who said what, when, but we do know that the local magistrates, headed by Lieutenant General Arbuthnott, heard several witnesses in private and issued a warrant for William. Inspector Williamson of Thrapston left for Ramsey in a horse and gig at about 11.30 am. A Peterborough newspaper reported that during that morning, 'throngs of the poorer inhabitants of the villages of Denford and Ringstead, with other persons, were continually pouring into the town. This 'jostling, laughing, and impatient' mob managed to get into the courthouse but the rumours, that William was already there, were unfounded and they saw only the usual business of the day. The newspaper continues:

> *…the hall cleared the mob adjourned to the various public houses in the town from which they did not emerge until late at night. We must not forget to add that a strong party of 'roughs' walked up the road which leads to Ramsey, via Huntingdon, with the intention of meeting Inspector Williamson and his charge and saluting the latter with certain ugly looking pebbles which they appropriated on the way.*

Inspector Williamson reached Ramsey late in the afternoon and went to the Constabulary depot and William was summoned, the warrant read and he was quietly taken into custody.

Although there was much excitement in Ramsey, he was well thought of, and the local reporter states, 'evidently a strong feeling here in favour of the accused'. The gig did not start back until 6 o'clock the next morning arriving in Thrapston at 11 am. He was greeted, 'in language which was more profuse than polite'. Wisely, the:

> *. . . prisoner jumped hastily off the gig and bolted into the police station with remarkable alacrity leaving Inspector Williamson to remonstrate with the crowd.*

There were obviously very strong feelings against William locally and the discovery of the skeleton had revived this. On William's side was the lack of any foetal bones within the body. It was possible that Lydia had given birth before being buried but it did cast a doubt on William's guilt. William was described as being impassive throughout the case, only showing an interest when the details of the skeleton were given.

He had been worried, however, at the time of Lydia's disappearance. As we have heard, shortly after Lydia's disappearance, William had gone to Thomas Green's house and shown him a letter stating that Lydia had been seen alive in Northampton some time after her alleged murder. The letter had been from a William Weekley, living in Northampton, to his mother, who still lived in Ringstead. He had now admitted that William Weekley Ball had come to him in Northampton and asked him to write the letter. The mother, Eliza Weekley was summoned from her home to the court and then gave evidence that she had received such a letter from her son. A copy of the letter (wrongly transcribed as to 'Mrs. Ball' by a local policeman) was read out.

> *Northampton Aug 12th 1850*
> *I write you a few lines to inform you that I saw L. Attley in Northampton. I was going down Castle Street at about eight p.m. or half-past eight pm on Sunday night. There was a man with her with a long frock coat on and a cape*
> *William Weekley*

One can see the little details of the man's dress and the vagueness of the times to give an illusion of reality but would a son sign a letter to his mother with his surname? Was this the clever ploy of a guilty man or a desperate attempt to clear his name by an innocent one? The evidence seemed to be piling up against William when suddenly news came through from Ringstead. On Saturday March 5th 1864 the Northampton Mercury had the following brief announcement.

> ***The RINGSTEAD MURDER***
>
> ***As we were going to press we learnt that another skeleton was yesterday found lying by the side and partly beneath the spot where the former skeleton was found. The skeleton lay in a sloping position and the feet were 18 inches lower than the feet of the former.***

The Prosecution Brief also has the news written in the margin which includes the note:

> *What effect it may have on the case is difficult to say.*

A further note in the margin resignedly adds:

> *7th March 1864. Two more skeletons have been found in the same place.*

The case collapsed and William Weekley Ball was discharged. Whatever the feeling in Ringstead, the press accepted the verdict and felt that William had been wrongly accused because of the rumour-mongering of a small village determined that he was the villain. The Mercury printed a letter from someone signed just *VERITAS* which started 'Satisfied that the withdrawal of the case against Weekly Ball is only an act of simple justice'. It goes on to tell of another woman who disappeared only to turn up many years later. Hopefully it was not written by another friend of William.

Archboulds, the prosecution solicitors, did seek legal opinion on behalf of General Arbuthnott, the magistrate whether he:

> *. . . would be acting properly and be justified in issuing a warrant for the re-apprehension of Wm Weekley Ball on his discharge should the General be of opinion he would be justified.*

The reply from the counsel was that it would be justified, if 'the defects in the evidence that now exist could be supplied,' but he saw little chance of a conviction without a body. Legally, William was never troubled by the case again.

We see the villagers of Ringstead as perhaps people today imagine them. Almost all the prosecution witnesses were related to each other and rumour could turn possibility into fact. We also see people like Lydia trying to scratch a meagre living from selling oranges around the villages even though her sister said that she had a bad leg. All working people tried to stave off starvation and the workhouse. We also see the man in the evening sun smoking his pipe after a long day in the field. Cottages were generally dark, uncomfortable places to live in and children and adults alike tried to live outdoors as much as they could, making the most of the light. We also see that there were brothels and extra-marital activity. It was not a Jane Austen world.

William returned to Ramsey and seemed to prosper. 1871 finds him a butcher employing one man and a boy. His nephew Joseph Ball aged 22 and niece Margaret Wilson, 15, are staying with him and his wife Hannah. Looking at the local records we find that William has purchased two pieces of fen land on the outskirts of the town amounting to some seven acres for £540. On April 2 1874 Hannah dies aged 62 and is buried in the local cemetery.

Just two years later, in 1876 William married Catherine Cattling who was born in Birmingham. She was some twelve years his junior but has been married at least twice before. As Catherine Littleford she is shown in 1861 as a barmaid in the George Hotel an old coaching inn with links to the Cromwell family. It was a place where the local farmers would gather on market day. In March 1862 she married John Jackson in the parish of St Marylebone in Westminster. It seems a little odd that they chose to marry in London until we find that her father, a coach maker, was living close by the church in 1841. Perhaps, although born in Birmingham, London was her family home. John did not last long and as Catherine Jackson, a young widow of 38 was married to John Cattling in Ramsey on September 16th 1867 and the 1871 Ramsey Census shows her living in the High Street with John, a farmer of 28 acres and her son, Frank Jackson, aged eight. On October 24th1873 John Cattling died. She and William are married in London. Perhaps it was a wedding near her family, or a romantic wedding in the capital, or, perhaps, both William and Catherine may have wanted it away from gossip and pointing fingers. Both had interesting pasts.

The 1877 *Post Office Directory of Bedfordshire, Hunts and Northants* records that Joseph Ball, William's nephew, has taken over the business. The following Census shows William is a farmer of 17 acres living in the High Street presumably in the house he built on the site of his first shop. Joseph himself soon disappears in a strange change of circumstances, [See separate biography]. By 1891, aged 74, William is described as a retired farmer and he dies some five years later on November 16th 1896. He is buried alongside Hannah in the Ramsey Cemetery where their stone can still be seen. Catherine dies on March 6th 1899 and she is buried elsewhere in the cemetery.

The *Hunts County News* for the 3rd November 1896 records his death, 'at his residence in the High Street on Monday morning at the age of 79. It also records that, 'for many years he followed the occupation of butcher in the town and was widely respected by a wide circle of friends'. He would certainly have settled for that as an obituary notice in 1864.

William had left Catherine (confusingly copied as Caroline in the registered copy of the will) an annuity of £50 per year from the rents of his land. On her death, John Bull, a tailor from Ringstead, the son of his sister Mary was one of two executors. Catherine's son, Frank Jackson and his wife and young child were living two doors away from William and Catherine in 1891: he is an 'iron turner.' William's land was sold to Lord de Ramsey and in his will he leaves a personal estate of £2729 17s 1d. After Catherine, the main beneficiaries are his sister, Mary Bull and nephew, Joseph Ball, and Edward Smith the husband of his brother, John's late daughter Annie (or Hannah). He also gives sums ranging from £10 to £100 to a bewildering range of relatives, some 31 in all. There are 4 nieces, 4 nephews, 4 step nieces, 2 step nephews, 3 great nieces, 5 great nephews, 3 step great nephews, 4 step great nieces, the two trustees and Frank, his wife's son by her former husband.

Despite all the information we have on William compared to most of his fellow Ringstead villagers we are really no nearer the truth of his guilt. He seems to have been a popular man in Ramsey who,

through his life and afterwards, looked after his extended family. Yet the people of Ringstead took against him with a virulence that makes you wonder as to whether there were old scores to settle. When we look at that fateful night in July 1850 can we assess the evidence and come to any conclusions? Unfortunately the answer is still no. The circumstantial evidence of the witnesses would seem enough to convict most men. He had the motive, the opportunity and was last heard with the victim in a heated argument. The other main options seem to be that she committed suicide or fell into the waters that make up a large part of the Parish. I think most people would judge him guilty.

On the other hand, how did he dispose of the body? As the solicitor who wrote the Defence Brief for his trial pointed out the distance to the original alleged burial site was a mile along muddy lanes and fields (and in fact as the Prosecution map shows it was more than that). Could he have carried the pregnant woman so far and undetected. Of course the site of the burial was discredited later but as Paul Harrison has pointed put in his book, *Northamptonshire Murders* another body in a shallow grave was found near the Thrapston Road in 1906. The body was declared to be a woman of about the right age. Harrison posits that William walked with her, pretending to discuss the problem, then murdered her and buried the body. It seems plausible but did no-one see them? Did he take a spade with him or rush back to get one later?

It is Hannah, his wife, who is a silent witness to all this. No mention is made of her at the trial. William did not forget her after her death, for even though he re-married, her nieces and nephews were remembered in his will. And, what of his brother John and the other members of the family? If he was the murderer, would William have needed an accomplice to dispose of the body? Unless, unexpectedly, further evidence comes to light we will never know the truth. Lydia's ghost is said to walk near the church yard. Is she still looking for justice?

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Chapter Seven

English Butcher & Canadian Musician

Joseph Ball (1849 –1920)

We have heard about the troubled life of William Weekley Ball and also, through the life of Jedidah Abington, of his brother, John Ball. Both men were described as 'Gentlemen' after their deaths so had gained a certain amount of property and prestige. The two Ball brothers had married two sisters from Thorpe Achurch, Rebecca and Hannah Wilson. The unions were not to prove fruitful by Victorian standards, for, as far as we can tell, William and Hannah had no children and John and Rebecca had two. Their names were Joseph and Hannah.

One might think that although by the judgement of the day they were not blessed with children they could have had happy lives together. We cannot be sure but this seems unlikely. We have heard the story of William and his pregnant mistress who disappeared under mysterious and damning circumstances. We also know that he quickly married a younger woman after his wife's death. With John we only know that within months of his wife being in the ground he had remarried, also to a younger woman. Even allowing for the nephews and nieces that lived with the brothers it does not give the impression of connubial bliss.

But what of Joseph? He was born in about 1849 although he does not seem to have been baptised, at least in Ringstead. When John Ball, his father was buried many years later in 1894 the service was conducted by the Baptist Minister, the Reverend J Bates. Perhaps this is the clue, for Baptists do not believe in infant baptism. From 1837 every birth marriage and death had had to be registered so the infant christening in the parish church became a less important part of village life.

Although not directly relevant to Joseph's story the state of affairs between the Parish Church and the Baptist Chapel at this time can be illustrated by an article taken from an English newspaper that was quoted in the 5th May 1843 edition of the New Zealand Colonist and Port Nicholson Advertiser. Under the headline 'Intolerance', it tells the story well, so I will quote it in full:

> *A worthy young couple named Thomas Stains and Mary Roberts residing at Ringstead, near Thrapston, in Northamptonshire, intending marriage, the banns were duly published in the parish church of Ringstead. The wedding day was fixed for the 12th October, on the very morning of which, the vicar of the parish, the Rev. Dr. Watson sent for the intended husband, and finding that he had not been 'christened' in the parish church, his parents being of the Baptist denomination, he refused to marry him, although his intended wife and her parents both belonged to the establishment. The disappointment was great; yet, as the wedding dinner was prepared, and the invited guests assembled, they kept the day as pleasantly as they could under the circumstances. The young man went to Dr. Watson to have his money returned; for it seems in that parish they demand the whole of the fees when the banns are*

put in. 'Well,' says the Doctor, 'if Thomas Messer (the clerk) will give you up his share (half-a-crown) then I will return you my part of the fees.' The honest clerk instantly refunded his portion. Stains returns to the poor parson, saying, 'I am come for my money, sir' 'What!' says he,' did Messer give you up his?' Reply:-:- 'Yes sir, he behaved like a gentleman.' The poor clerical doctor, on examining his treasury found it reduced to a solitary halfcrown. This sum he gave to Stains and with a note written by him, to the clerk, begging him to pay the remaining 3s 6d for him. But what was now to be done? The parties must be married somehow, and that legally too. Their characters were irreproachable. The whole parish cried shame on the vicar. The dissenters in the village, with several staunch church people, immediately raised the 3/- requisite for licensing the Baptist meeting at Ringstead as a place of marriage, which was instantly applied for, and obtained; and on the expiration of the twenty-one days' notice required by law, Thomas Stains and Mary Roberts will be the first couple married there. In the interim the bride elect returned to reside under the parental roof.

After four years of marriage, Hannah is born and Joseph arrives some four years later. There is not going to be another child. A little over a year later the world of the Ball family explodes. William's pregnant mistress Lydia Atlee is allegedly heard accusing William of wanting to kill her and promptly disappears. John and Rebecca must have been caught up in all the accusations and hate directed against his brother who is forced to leave the village. Nevertheless, life seems to carry on and in 1851 and 1861 the family are there in the butchery business with various nephews and nieces staying with them.

By 1871 the lives of the family have taken a new turn. John seems to be prospering being described as a butcher and farmer of 43 acres employing one man. There is however no sign of Joseph and we finally locate him living with his Uncle William and Aunt Hannah and two Wilson nieces in Ramsey in Huntingdonshire, some twenty five miles away. William has been acquitted of the murder of Lydia, the case collapsing some seven years earlier. Joseph is described as a butcher's assistant. One would have expected him to have worked with his father ready to take over the business when the time came. Perhaps, with William and Hannah being childless, it was intended that Joseph should inherit the business. It is a strange fact that the younger Hannah never appears in a Census with her parents, and at six and sixteen she is with William and Hannah. Joseph is only there once, as a young child.

By the 1881 Census the plan, if such it is, appears to be working because now Joseph is running the butcher's business in the Great Whyte, Ramsey and William has moved to the High Street and is a farmer of 17 acres. William is now 65 years old and living with his new wife Catherine, some 13 years his junior. Shortly after the Census Joseph's mother Rebecca dies and by the end of the years John has married Jedidah Louisa Abington (some sixteen years his junior).

Great Whyte, Ramsey, Huntingdonshire in about 1895.
The wide road, which I heard from a much later incomer led his wife to say that he had brought her to the wild west, is due to the culverting of the river under the road.
By kind permission of Keith Sisman (http://sisman.net/greatw.htm).

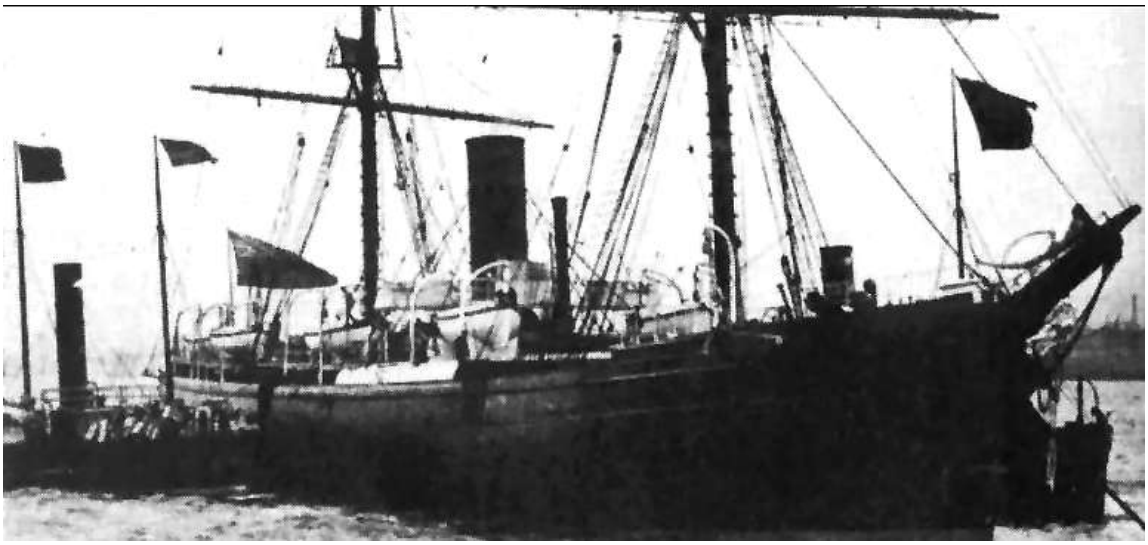
Joseph is now married with five children. His wife is some twelve years younger than he is and when we look at the children we see that Harry Arthur Ball is eight years old which means that Joseph's wife, Annie Judith, would have been twelve at his birth. It is possible but seems unlikely. On searching the Marriage Register we find that Joseph married Mary Elizabeth Housden in 1872 but she died on the 30th December 1878, aged just twenty five years, having given birth to four children in five years. He remarried to Judith Ann Sewell a local publican's daughter in 1880. She was already pregnant with Joseph's fifth child Sidney.

It had been a frantic few years and as the local paper, the *Peterborough Advertiser* of the 15thNovember 1879 reported, he had also been knocked off his horse on the road between Bury and Warboys in Huntingdonshire. Poor Joseph, returning slowly home, along the roadside, from Warboys, 'his horse having got some wheat', a Mr Edward Samworth rode straight into him. Mr Samworth had to be pulled by Joseph from under his horse which shortly 'expired'. The paper reported that Joseph was shaken and 'is suffering a good deal from the culpable and rash conduct of the other horseman'.

So, after the domestic turmoil of his father and uncle, as well as his own problems, he seems settled. He has a business with an assistant. There is also a general servant to help his young wife. There is perhaps one small hint of what is to come in the name of his youngest son Sidney, probably the only child of Annie Judith. His middle name is transcribed in Ancestry as 'Feninure' but it looks rather like 'Fenimore'. An unusual name, perhaps a family name from somewhere? There is another possibility, as we shall see.

We never see Joseph or his family on an English Census again. The next time we find him is in October 1883 and he has just disembarked from the *SS Samaria,* in Boston Massachusetts, having travelled from Liverpool via Queenstown in Ireland, a voyage of some ten days. The Samaria was made of iron with one funnel but also had two masts rigged for sail. There was a capacity for 130 first passengers and 800 third class passengers. Her last sailing to Boston was on 30th January 1896

and she was scrapped some six years later. The passenger list states that Joseph is in transit to Canada. Surprisingly he describes himself as a ‘spinner’ but there can be no mistaking the family even though the ages are somewhat astray. With Joseph there is his wife Annie, aged 25 and children, Henry aged 9, William 7, Gertrude 4, Fred 3 and Sidney 2. They have six pieces of baggage and are in ‘Intermediate’ class. This was ‘quite separate from steerage and with superior accommodation and dietary scale’, although ‘very inferior to saloon.’



S.S. Samaria
The Samaria, built in 1868, was in the Cunard Line and was an 'intermediate ship' with an iron hull and steam engine but still with two masts for sail.
With the kind permission of www.ginnisw.com.

This was a time when many were leaving Britain, especially to Canada and the United States, or Australia and New Zealand. The population of Great Britain has been estimated at about 30 million by 1881 and of England and Wales at 26 million. The emigration figure for Great Britain for 1882 was about 29,000 so a little less than one percent of the population was leaving these shores every ten years. Emigrants' Guides were produced by *Pitt and Scott* who were passenger agents. These contained letters extolling the new land, ‘for those willing to work’, and gave practical advice on what to bring to their new lives. The emigrants were also given cautionary advice. John Hale writes from Manitoba, ‘A man who drinks heavily is worse off there than at home’ and, ‘working men and their families must expect a little rough life for a few months until they get properly settled down’.

So looking back at that 1881 Census was ‘Fennimore’, as Sidney’s middle name, a homage to James Fenimore Cooper who, in his ‘leatherstocking’ books and especially *The Last of the Mohicans*, had brought the pioneer glamour of America to England. Or was it not so much a sense of adventure but a realisation that with John and William marrying younger wives it might be many years before he would come into any inheritance. At this distance we cannot be sure but we do know that by 21st May1891 his family were established in the St George’s ward of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. Joseph was now forty-two years old and a ‘piano tuner and musician’. His son Harry aged 18 is a confectioner and John, 16 is a fur cutter. They are all put down as Church of England. Their neighbours are tradesmen, railwaymen, servants and machinists and, immediately next door, is an Irish hotel keeper and his family.

Toronto had a mix of faiths and backgrounds with Evangelical Baptists and Irish Roman Catholics. There were some 22 riots or near riots between Catholics and Protestants of Irish origin between 1867 and 1892. It was on Lake Ontario and raw materials and people came by ship to the waterfront but the coming of the railway in 1855 and its development over the next half century turned it into a railway centre and, by 1891, into a rapidly developing large industrial city. In 1861 horse-drawn street cars first appeared and they were electrified in the 1890s. Telephone and electric lights in homes and businesses as well as on the streets arrived in the 1880s. Modern flush toilets came at the end of the century and the first skyscrapers, at first a modest seven storey Board of Trade building in 1889, were built.

This was the noisy bustling city that Joseph and his family came to. It is therefore even more of a surprise to find he was neither butcher nor spinner or in one of the new industries. When did Joseph Ball, butcher change into Joseph Ball, musician and piano tuner? What type of music did he play? Was he a classical musician in a local concert hall or did he earn a living in the Music Hall or even on the street corner? Of course we must not forget that pianos had their heyday in the Victorian era and most homes aspired to have an upright piano in the parlour. In a sense piano-tuning was part of a new industry.

By 1901 he was living in the centre of Toronto and, aged 52, he is just described as ‘musician’. Annie, his wife is 40 and is not working. All the children except Sidney have gone and he is 20 and also described as a musician. Over the next years the children marry in Toronto and have children of their own. Harry marries in 1895 and is shown with his family in 1901. His job is given as an Auto Inspector Maker although I suspect this may be a mistranscription. His mother is given as Elizabeth. Frederick Gilbert marries in 1897. Sydney, the youngest marries in 1906 and his mother is given as Judith Annie Jewell [sic]. His middle name is recorded as Venimore so the idea that he was given the name in honour of the New World pioneers is probably wrong. Looking back at Ramsey we find that the local MP is a certain Venimore Sewell. It may be just coincidence but Judith Annie’s maiden name was Sewell. It looks as if, after all, it was an allusion to a family name. Perhaps Joseph had always been a reluctant butcher.

Joseph and Annie had appeared in the 1911 Toronto Census giving their address as 258 Augusta. He was now 62 and still a musician. Joseph dies in July 1920 and Annie J Ball dies, some three years later, on 9 April 1923. All around their deaths you can see marriages of grandchildren. It is in the New World that the descendants of John Ball and vicariously of William Weekley Ball now live. The notoriety and tragedy of the Ringstead butcher is now long forgotten. Perhaps that was what Joseph and Annie Judith wanted when they took the brave step of making a new life for themselves.

Spadina Avenue from Queen Street.

From 100 Views of Toronto published 1900 -1910 with the kind permission of Benjamin Nagy.
http://www.abruptjunction.com.

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Chapter Eight

Farm Labourer

John Ball (1783 – 1821)

John Ball is one of those 'ag labs' nearly lost in the carelessness of history. He died before the first Census that began to put names and places and ages to our ancestors. Even the 1841 ages are often rounded to the nearest five and the place of birth is not given. We have to piece their lives together from scraps of information and the laws of probability. It surprises me that people confidently trace their ancestry back to some noble Norman lord when one wrong piece of information, one unrecorded 'one night stand' would send the roots off into much commoner soil.

At first I thought that he was the John Ball who married Sarah Lackson in 1807 in Ringstead but they were widow and widower and the children of our John and Sarah did not start appearing until 1817. Then I discovered another John Ball (one of many) who married Sarah Burkett on the 6th June 1816. I realised that for all those years I had the wrong man.

As was often the case in those comparatively contraceptiveless years the children then came tumbling one after another. John was baptised on the 18th May 1817, Thomas on the 19th July 1818, Ann on the 16th April 1820 and Daniel Clarke Ball on the 4th November 1821. Then just as suddenly the children stop. John and Sarah have no more baptisms recorded in the registers. It is only when we turn to the entries of burials that we see a possible reason. The register states in unusually full detail:

> *John Ball killed 13th March 1821 at Denford by the falling of a wall at a fire at Thos Fouscutts aged 38.*

1830 was the year of *Captain Swing* when groups of agricultural workers and their sympathisers went around the countryside burning ricks and machinery of farmers who had brought in the new steam threshing machines. Wages were poor and the new machines threatened even this meagre income. Land was being enclosed and the family use of the common land, for animals or wood gathering, was disappearing. There was unemployment and pauperism. Even as early as 1816 there was some machine breaking and rick-burning. Northamptonshire was never as much affected as Norfolk but, as the book *Captain Swing* points out, riots were more prevalent where there was a large population of shoemakers. Shoemakers, like tailors, were known to include many dangerous radicals. Was John's death just an accident or was there insurrection in progress?

If the latter, on which side was John Ball?

Many may find that this is fanciful stretching of the known facts. There is, however, a bill which was posted around the district, a copy of which is in the Northampton Record Office. As the emerging police force was unable to cope with large scale problems Associations were set up. The wealthier

members of an area paid a subscription and, if one of their number suffered harm, the Association would send out reward notices and also pay the court costs. The 'Thrapston Association' sent out such a notice offering a reward of sixty guineas (including fifty from the County Fire Office), on the conviction of the culprits, to anyone (except the perpetrator) who shall 'discover' them. As Richard Cowley points out in his book 'Guilty M'Lud!', sixty guineas would pay an agricultural labourer's wages for at least two years. In this case someone had set fire to 'A Range of Hovels and Sheds partly covered with beans and partly with straw, standing in a Farm Yard in the Parish of Ringstead'. The date of the fire was 24th April 1824, just three years after John's death.

Northamptonshire Record Office

Arson.

Thrapston Association.

SIXTY GUINEAS REWARD.

WHEREAS some evil-disposed Person or Persons did, on the Night of SATURDAY the 24th INSTANT, WILFULLY and MALICIOUSLY

SET FIRE

TO A RANGE OF

HOVELS OR SHEDS,

Partly covered with Beans, and partly with Straw,

STANDING IN A FARM YARD IN THE

PARISH OF RINGSTEAD,

In the County of Northampton,

Now in the Occupation of Mr. WM. COLEMAN.

Notice is hereby given, That whoever will discover the Offender or Offenders, so that he, she, or they may be brought to Justice, shall, on his, her, or their Conviction, receive a Reward of FIFTY GUINEAS from the COUNTY FIRE OFFICE, and TEN GUINEAS from Mr. BENJ. LEETE, of Twywell, the Treasurer to the Thrapston Association.

If two or more were concerned, the above Rewards will be paid, on Conviction as aforesaid, to any one (except the Person who actually set Fire to the Premises), who shall discover his or her Accomplice or Accomplices.

SHERARD & ARCHBOULD,
Solicitors to the said Association.

THRAPSTON, APRIL 26TH, 1824.

With kind Permission of Northampton Record Office.

It is only the death entry in the Parish Register which gives us some idea of John's birth date because it means that he was born in about 1783. There are other John Balls in Ringstead and the villages around but none seem to be the correct year. Like the people of prehistory we only know a few details of their lives through their deaths.

On 25th April 1831 a Sarah Ball (widow) marries John Cheney (widower), 'Both of this Parish', at Ringstead. This I believe is John's widow. The 1841 Census now helps to offer some evidence for what we have so far surmised. John Cheney, (60) and his wife Sarah (50) are living together and it appears that John (20) and Thomas Ball (20) are living with them. Given the fact that the ages are

mostly rounded to the nearest 5 this seems to be compelling if not conclusive evidence for the pattern of events I have given being true.

John Cheney (72), tailor and his wife Sarah (62), tailor's wife are there together in 1851. By 1861 John is dead and Sarah has her granddaughter aged 14 living with her. By 1871 she is living on her own in Carlow Street, a few doors down from her son Thomas and his family. She is aged 81 and on Parish Relief. In 1873, aged 83 she dies.

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Chapter Nine

Quarries & Closing

John Ball (1852 – 1886) and Susannah Phillips (1855 – 1944)

Susannah Ball was one of those nineteenth century women, not uncommon, for whom marriage was a short interlude between maidenhood and widowhood. Her husband was born and died in the heart of Victoria's reign but Susannah lived to see another, more terrible, world emerge.

John Ball was the grandson of the other John Ball who had been killed in a fire in farm buildings in Denford some thirty years before his birth. He was baptised on the 16th January 1853, the fifth of seven children of Thomas and Ann Ball. His father was an agricultural labourer.

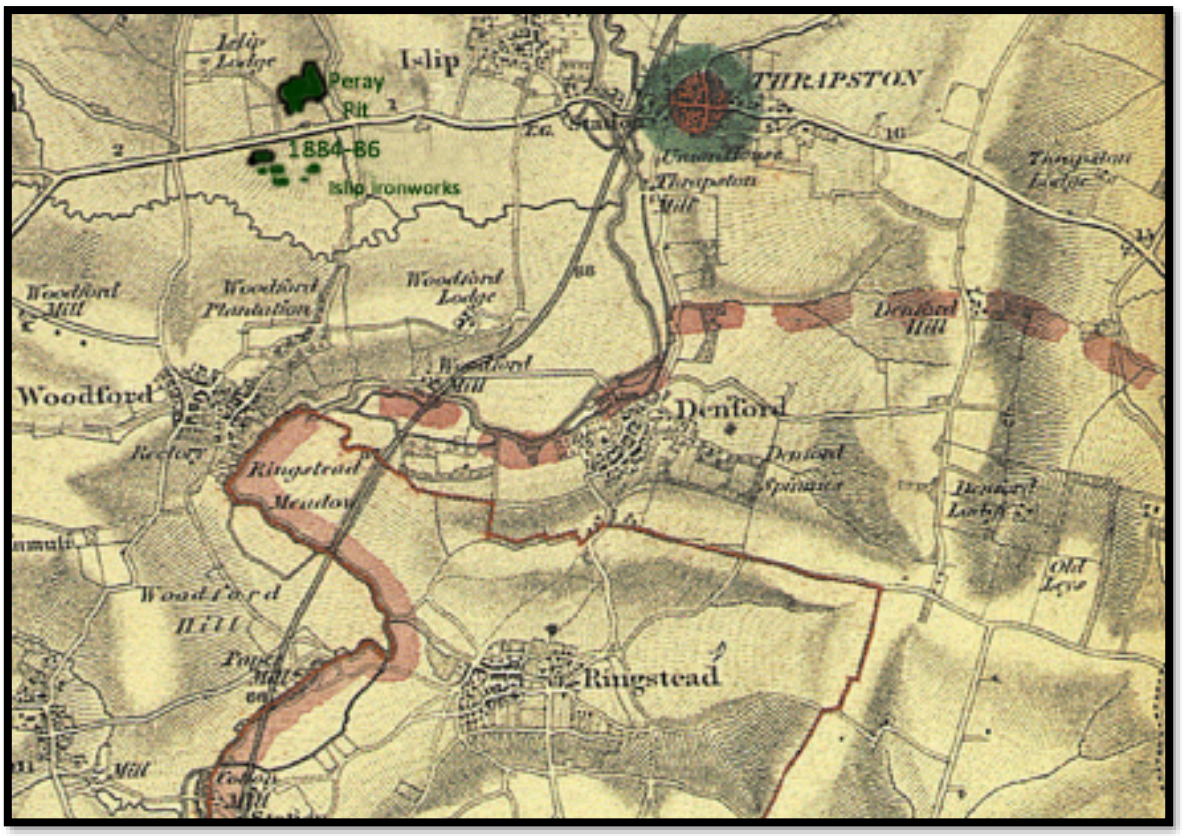
John and Susannah.

In the 1861 Census he is living with his family in Ringstead; parents, Thomas and Ann Ball and his six siblings, Sarah, Hannah, Esther, Rachel, Anne and Susan. Next door is another namesake, the butcher John Ball. Again in 1871 he is there in Carlow Street, now an agricultural labourer, with his parents and siblings. The older girls of the family who were doing lacework in 1861 are now doing shoe work.

On 14thSeptember 1874 John married local Raunds girl, Susannah Phillips, in Ringstead Parish Church. Neither can write their signatures. He is stated to be a labourer which probably means he is still an agricultural labourer but at some point over the next decade John becomes a labourer in one of the limestone quarries in the area.

Limestone and ironstone quarrying had been carried on in the Nene valley since Roman times. There were quarries in the parishes of Ringstead and Woodford but it was at Islip that John seems to have obtained work. How and when this happened we do not know. Many agricultural labourers left the land at this time. Pamela Horn gives figures of a decline in agricultural workers for the forty years from 1861 of between 8.9% and 19.5% per decade. There were many reasons including mechanisation and a decline in agriculture leaving many farm workers without a job. Also important was that jobs in the new industries were often better paid and less tied to the whim of the 'master'. Education was slowly raising the aspirations of the rural working class.

So John walked each day, we must presume, from Ringstead to Islip , a distance of some three-and-a-half miles each way. The first thought would be that the quickest route would be along the road through Denford to Thrapston and across the old stone bridge to Islip. We must be careful, however because the Islip quarries covered a wide area and were not in the village itself. Eric Tonks tells us that there 'was also a little quarrying in the middle 1880s between Thrapston Road and the main tramway - possibly when the Slipton area was difficult to access in winter storms - and a branch of the tramway was laid under the road to a limestone quarry on the north side. This was worked generally clockwise from 1883 onwards up to 17th January 1934 and was referred to as Peray Pit or Peray Hole.' It seems likely that John was working in the quarries close to the furnace and possibly in Peray Pit. He would have probably gone to work via Woodford, perhaps using the railway viaduct to cross the Nene. He would have often had smoke from the furnaces belching across the skyline to guide him on his way. It would have been a weary trudge home at the end of the day after a hard shift moving earth at the quarry.



Based on the 1871 Ordnance Survey Map showing the relative positions of Ringstead, the Peray Pit, Islip Ironworks, the Nene and the Railway. (The Kettering- Cambridge line is not shown). The 1884 – 86 Pit may have been the one where John Ball was killed.

As I have said, iron ore was mined in the area in Roman times but the cutting of the railways showed clearly to the mining engineers that good seams of ironstone lay close to the surface in the area. Also the railway gave another, easier, route for the ore, other than the poor roads and the Nene barges. There were a number of small local quarries including one at Ringstead owned by Thomas Walters. This, like many others, was soon exhausted and was only active from 1873 to 1881. The Islip area, however, contained good deposits and, but for the opposition of the local major landowner, it could easily have replaced Corby at the major steel town of the region. The Islip Iron Ore Company had a number of quarries in the Islip, Slipton, Lowick area. A Derbyshire coalmine owner, C. H. Plevins with his partner, John Kidner, formed the Islip Iron Ore Co. Ltd and four blast furnaces were planned. The coal came from Plevins' mines in Derbyshire using the new rail system. At first, the ore was transported also by rail, to be smelted elsewhere but quite quickly, by 1873, the first two blast furnaces were built and two more were added later. They were open-topped furnaces and only made pig iron in sand casts, 200 tons at a time This became a real industrial site with, finally, 10 locomotives and 10 miles of track.

Mechanisation changed the work dramatically over the next fifty years but, at the time John was working, it was very labour intensive. In this period, as we have said, the main quarry was up the Slipton Road in Islip. After the initial trench or ‘gullet’ the gangs would work along the face removing the overburden, limestone and ironstone keeping a ‘batter’. The overburden would be barrowed off across planks to the back of the gullet and dumped. Once an area of limestone or ironstone had

been uncovered by the labourers it would be broken up by a mixture of mechanical means and explosives and then loaded into narrow gauge horse-drawn trucks to be taken to the iron smelting. furnaces.

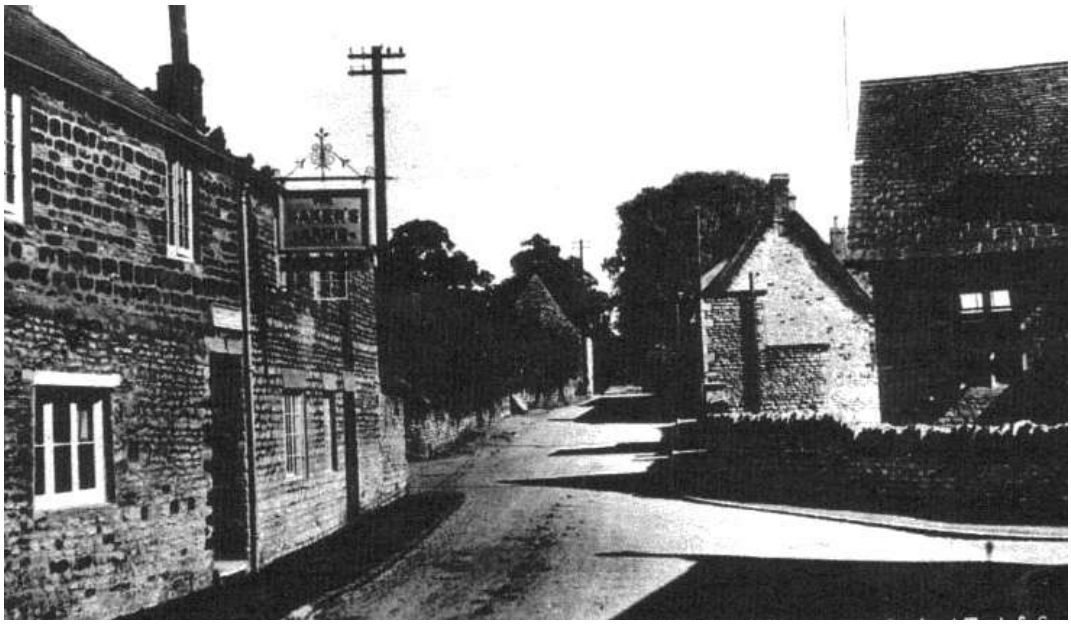
***Photograph by E.A. Ward from 'Northamptonshire' by Malcolm William Brown (1911)**.*

(In the picture you can see the dark upper layers of the overburden, then the pale limestone and at the bottom the darker ironstone).

It is likely that John was part of a gang removing this overburden. The simplest, quickest way of doing this was to undermine the soil with picks and shovels rather as the sea undermines a cliff. Then the soil above would slip and fall and could be shovelled up and carted away. It was an easier as well as being a faster method of working, and the labourers would almost certainly be on very hard piece rates. In 1930, although working practices were safer, workers were still paid by how much they moved in a fortnight and if it rained, and they could not work, they would be sent home and were not paid. It was an inherently dangerous way of working forced on men trying to make a living. It is easy to see how there was always the temptation to remove too much from the foot of the overburden. Bill Warren, who has helped me with this chapter, has told me that his great grandfather's nephew, Lewis Warren, was killed on the 6th June 1881 by a fall of earth in the Slipton quarry. He was only 22 years old and he is remembered on a gravestone, in Twywell churchyard, erected by his fellow workers. We also know, from his death certificate that, on the 21st September 1886 at Islip, John Ball was 'accidentally killed by a fall of earth in a limestone pit'.

Searching the Northampton Mercury we find on October 2nd 1886 that a brief paragraph reports the Inquest. It was held just one day after his death. It states:

ACCIDENTAL DEATH. – An Inquest was held at the Bakers Arms, Woodford on the 22nd inst., before Mr. Parker, on the body of John Ball, labourer, who was accidentally killed by a fall of earth. It appears that the deceased, who was 34 years of age, was engaged in removing earth in a pit, in the parish of Islip, along with several other labourers. On the morning of the 21st he had undermined a piece of earth and several tons fell suddenly on him, killing him on the spot.- A verdict of accidental death was returned.



***The Bakers Arms in Woodford in late 1930s (photograph kindly provided by Bill Warren**).*

The Baker's Arms is not far from the church in Woodford. There was a bakery in the building adjoining it. Today it is a private house but can be picked out by the large boulder, which was used for mounting horses, which stands beside it. There is also a large barn where, into the early twentieth century, drowned bodies found in the Lower Shott between Denford and Woodford would be brought by four men on a sheep hurdle ready for the Inquest. [*Information given to Bill Warren by his father.]*

Is this how John Ball was brought there? It seems more likely, given the distance, that he came on a cart but he too may have been left in the barn for the doctor's post mortem examination.

John, in his quest to better himself and his family had lost his life. For his wife Susannah there was not only the grief and emotional loss of a young wife with a young family but also the prospect of grinding poverty with the spectre of the workhouse hanging over their lives. It is her life we must now follow to see how she coped with this tragedy and its financial consequences.

In 1881 Susannah, or Susan, as she usually calls herself in the Censuses, had no paid job recorded but by 1891, some five years after her husband's death, she is an Army Boot Closer. In the early part of the century it was to lacemaking that the women looked to help them avoid the workhouse. As this declined they went on to the tough work of closing boots, for the Raunds and Ringstead area's main work was for the army and navy.

Closing Room 1869.
(In Raunds and Ringstead most 'closing' was done at home).
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Gallery.

She had moved back to Finding Terrace, Raunds, where she lived with her three sons. George Henry, at 13, was an errand boy, but Thomas, aged 12, has as his occupation 'Rivetter and school' and John is at school. Her daughter, Eliza, is away in Knotting Bedfordshire where she is listed as a visitor and an 'Army Boot Closer'. It is likely that Susan, like most of the women would collect, or get one of her children to collect, the cut leather pieces, or perhaps they would be brought by a sort of outwork agent, and the completed uppers would be taken back to the factory.

H.E. Bates writes of this period in *The Feast of July*. He tells of family competing with family to get the available work in one of the depressions that the industry suffered between conflicts. The father sends his daughter to find them work:

> *By chance, every few days, Wainwright would hear of a hope of work in towns across the Valley: a pair or two in Orlingford, a dozen at Nenborough, something at Evensford, A chance at Addington, nine miles away. 'Git the truck out. Nip through Chapel Yard. Go down by Long Hedges or somebody will twig you. And git back before dinner if you can.'*
>
> *There were factories that began at six in the morning and sometimes she was out in the darkness running with bread in her hands.*

Bates was writing of the Higham Ferrers/Rushden area so we can only guess that it was a similar story in Ringstead and Raunds. Certainly, in Woodford, Richard Roe, who was born in 1826, was a 'sprigging boy' for his father at the tender age of 6, he was flat-seam sewing at 8 and putting tongues in jockey boots when nine. He walked each day to collect his work. Incidentally, Eric Humphries tells us that, later, Richard became a prominent politician in Northampton.

Susan continues until 1911 in Hill Street Raunds as a boot closer living with her two unmarried children Eliza, 36, a closer, and George, 33, a clicker and nephew Harold aged 9. Susan worked 'at home' but her two children worked in Boot Manufacture in one of the nearby factories.

This photo is wrong in many ways. It is the wrong county (Norfolk), is not army boots work, is a little later than our period and the woman is using a sewing machine which Susannah probably did not. Nevertheless it gives a feeling of the way women had to fit the work into the domestic routine - and such photographs are rare - so is worth including for that reason.

Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Museum (original believed to have been destroyed in fire).

She lost her son Thomas, who was killed in the First World War in Belgium, on Tuesday 15th October 1918 aged 38. George also died in 1932. Susan was my great grandmother and was known in the family as 'Little Granny' She died on 19thJuly 1944 and is buried in Raunds Cemetery with her son George. Her husband was buried in Ringstead but is remembered on the gravestone at Raunds. She lived with John for some ten years and without him for a further forty-eight.

Susannah in old age.
(Her younger self looks down on her).

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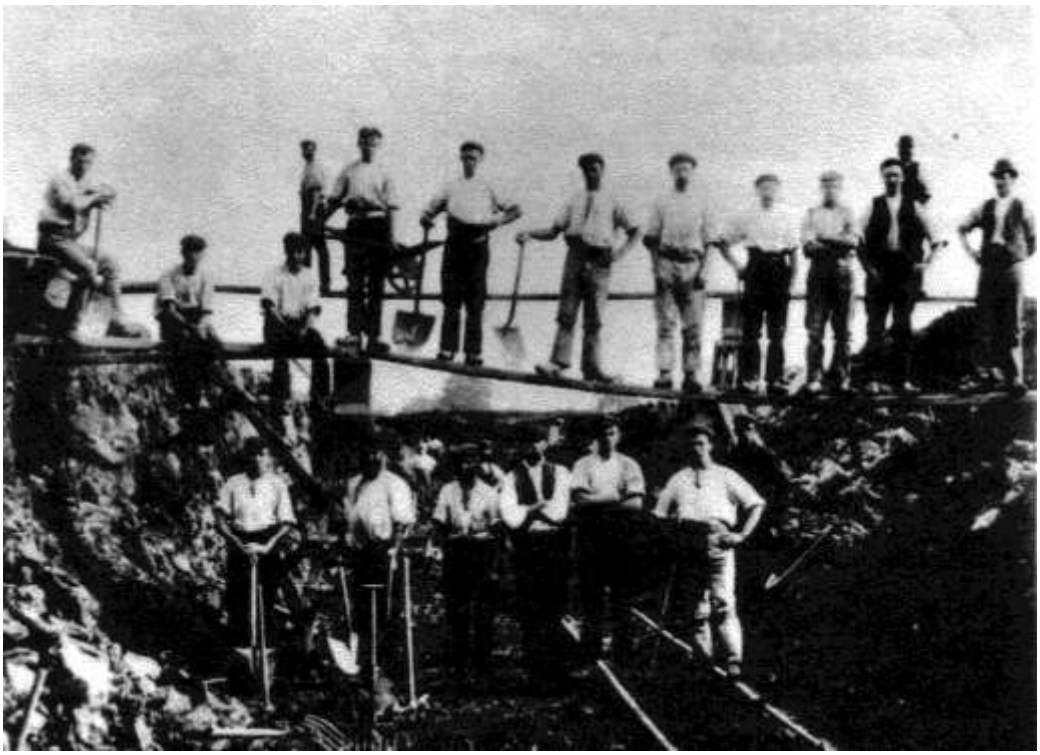
My thanks to Tom Love of Islip and Bill Warren of Barton Seagrave for all their help.

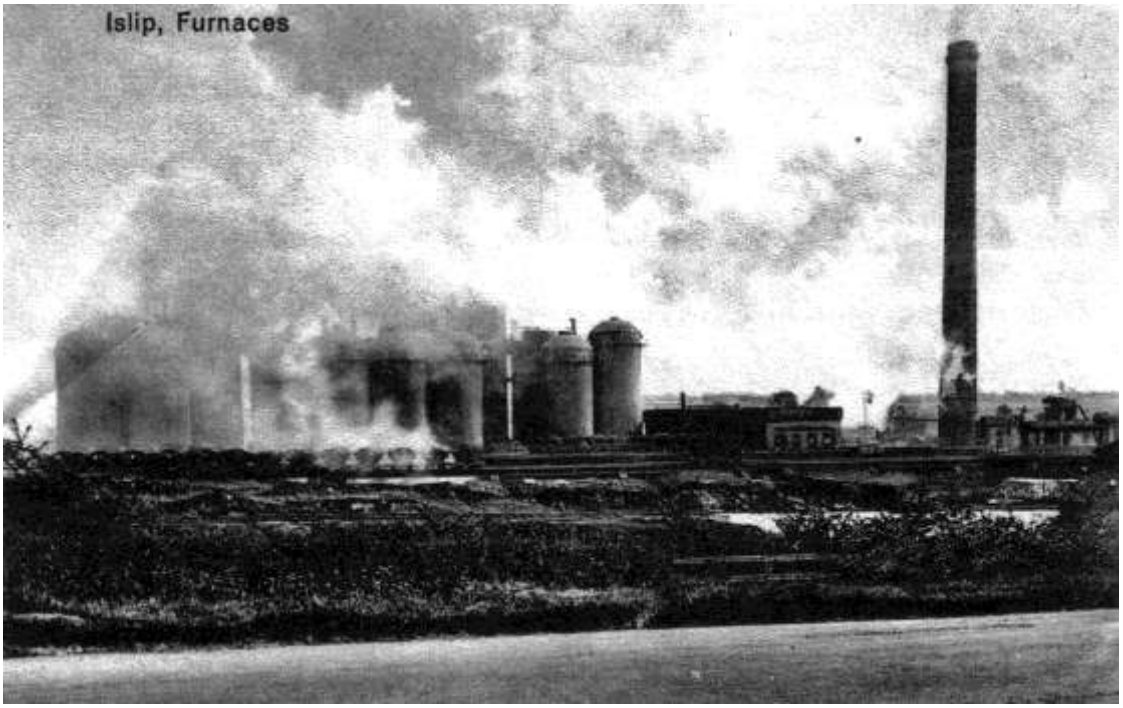
Postscript

Bill Warren has kindly sent me some photographs of the quarries and furnaces which are a little later than the period covered in this life story but show the conditions that the men worked under. The captions are from Bill.

About 1910. This picture shows a large gang of men working in one of the quarries removing the overburden. There are a lot of trestles and planks bridging the quarry to provide access to the dump side where the overburden spoil was tipped from the barrows.



This later photograph (1930s) is at Long Hills Quarry at Weldon. You can see right at the back a man crossing the planks with a barrow.



Islip Furnace in the 1920s taken from the Thrapston to Kettering Road. The small 3 ft. gauge wagons loaded with ironstone were parked on top of the bays where they are tipped. The view shows the eight stoves with the four furnaces and two lifts behind them. The building to the right with the large water tank above is the blast furnace engine house.

Chapter Ten

Shoemakers not Thatchers

Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts (c1858 - 1925) & George Henry Roberts (c 1865 - 1941)

John Roberts was born in about 1791 and was an agricultural labourer. Perhaps more surprisingly his wife, Alice Page from Bythorn, who he married in Ringstead on 2nd August 1830, is described in the 1851 Ringstead Census as a 'Church Sunday School Mistress'. One cannot be certain but one would imagine that this meant that she could read and write. They had five sons, William, John, William, Thomas and George between 1831 and 1842. Their first-born, William, died at only eight months old but, as was often the case, a later son was also given the name. All are shown as shoemakers in the 1851 Census. George, the youngest is only nine years old but he is already learning his craft. John, at 17 the eldest, is not living with the family but is lodging with another shoemaker, John Pearson and his wife, presumably as an unofficial apprentice.

Shoemaker 1780.
(With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery).

The younger John was married just two years later, in 1853, at the age of nineteen to Letitia Phillips, who was a year younger. The children followed quickly with almost all working in the shoe trade. Elizabeth, born c1854; Owen, born c1856; Benjamin Ebenezer, born c1858; John, born c1860; Alice, born c1864; George born c1866 and finally Herbert, born c1868. All are in the shoe trade in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses, including the girls, except for George who is, in 1881, a 'Railway Employee'. (In 1891 he is a Midland Railway Station Master at Asfordby in Leicestershire where, later, his nephew Alfred Roberts held property).

The shoemakers, like the tailors and miners, were always known as a radical, freethinking part of the working class population. In the book *Captain Swing* which looks at the agricultural riots of 1830, the authors compare parishes with and without shoemakers and conclude: 'The average riotous parish had from double to four times as many shoemakers as the average tranquil one'.

If we look at the figures from the Censuses for Ringstead we find that there were some 36 shoemakers in 1841, 79 in 1851, 145 in 1861 and 186 in 1871. We must be careful in overstating this doubling of shoe workers every ten years in the early Censuses. Some of the increase is due to the lack of information on those who were not heads of families in the 1841 Census. Certainly, some of it is due to the movement of women and girls from lacemaking, which declined very rapidly from 1851 to 1861, although only 35 female shoe workers are recorded in the 1871 Census. There was a great increase nevertheless mainly based on the production of army boots and shoes. Some of this increase seems to have been the result of the various strikes in Northampton culminating in the ones of 1857, 1858 and 1859. The introduction of machinery, especially in the closing process, where a form of sewing machine was introduced in November 1857 led to workers fearing for their jobs and strikes were held. The shoemakers refused to work on any boots and shoes that had been 'closed' by machinery. At first there was no trade union but the men belonged to benefit clubs to help see them through hard times. In April 1858 *The Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Makers Mutual Protection Society* was established with the main objective of preventing the introduction of machinery and to protect, equalise and raise wages, as far as possible.

The writer of an 1860 report on the strikes, coincidentally a man called John Ball, a common Ringstead name, criticised the action but did concede that:

> *It is, however, undeniable that the improvements in machinery, when rapidly introduced into any branch of trade, sometimes deprive workmen and those depending on them of their daily bread.*

Of course daily bread must be taken literally here. The strike ultimately failed and many men left Northampton seeking work. The writer of the report estimated some 1500, mainly young men, left the town. There was a movement of some of the shoe making production to the Leicester area which had accepted the new machinery, often in larger factories. There was also a movement of the 'coarser' boots and shoe manufacture into the smaller towns and villages such as Raunds and Ringstead. In these cases much of the work was 'outwork', based on piece work with comparatively low rates.

Well into the twentieth century much of the work in the Ringstead area was done either at home or in small workshops. In his novel, *The Feast of July*, H. E. Bates writing of the end of the nineteenth

century, based mainly on the Higham Ferrers and Rushden area, talks of the two-storey sheds behind the cottages where the shoemakers worked. His heroine sees one such first-floor workshop for the first time.

> *She looked round the small oblong white-washed shop, with its crowded benches under the cobwebbed leather-dusted windows; the rolls of kip and calf and belly leather and the untidy mess of tins and sprigs and eyelets and brass tacks and wax-end. A glue pot was cooling on its burner. You could smell the hot breath of it and with it the close dark odour, almost the stench, of leather.*

Certainly Ringstead had such workshops attached to cottages as can be seen from the various sales in the Northampton Mercury; (e.g. 19th December 1868 'Sale of cottages with shoe-makers shops').

This is South Place Works, Long Buckby in the early Twentieth Century but does give some of the atmosphere of a workshop and little had changed in the last one hundred years.
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

Others did not have that luxury and would work in the living room or in one of the bedrooms. This was particularly true for the women doing the 'closing' which involved mainly sewing. Doris Watts, speaking of the early years of the twentieth century in Rushden, remembers:

> *Mother was a 'boot finisher' and I can see her now in my mind's eye in that little back room of our house in Cromwell Road finishing a boot that was strapped on one knee and with the other foot tapping the cradle that had a baby in it. It was a wicker cradle on rockers. Women in those days with boots and babies all in one small house had a very hard time. It was drudgery*.

We must remember that in the Rushden area it was less likely to be the heavier, military boots that dominated the Raunds and Ringstead production. Incidentally Doris remembers her mother telling her of when her mother planned to marry her father, a Roberts.

> *When my parents planned to marry, Dad asked Mum where they should marry. The Roberts were brought up Ringstead Baptist but moving to Raunds became Wesleyans. The Raunds Baptists were known at Ringstead as a quarrelsome lot; in Raunds they were known as the 'Chosen ones'. Mother said that they would like to be married at Rushden Church, where her mother had been christened. To mother's surprise my father replied that he was broad minded himself 'but had Grandfather been alive he would have forbidden it'.*

In the early nineteenth century there had emerged entrepreneurs who acted as middle men and they began to organise small workshops where the clicking (leather pattern cutting) was done and they put out most of the other processes to home workers. In Raunds and Ringstead it appears that the workers would go to the factory to collect the work and then also take it back when finished. The middlemen had in effect become the factory owners.

We do know that in 1867 there was only one major factory in Raunds, *Wm. Nicholls & Son*, because of a letter sent by a shoemaker to the *Co-operator*. Isaac Burton writes:

> *.....Raunds is a large village containing about 2,500 inhabitants, who are chiefly occupied in the shoe trade, but all under the control of one employer, who resides in the place. He keeps a grocer and draper's shop, and if you don't spend your money at his establishments, you must go and seek for work at another village about four miles distant.*

Underneath the letter is an article, *Serfdom in the Shoe Trade,* by Daniel P. Foxwell who, as a result of this letter went to Raunds and spoke at the Temperance Hall, trying to get the workers to form a Co-operative society. Isaac Burton may have expected that Mr Nicholls did not read the *Co-operator* but word got back and a few weeks later his indignant rebuttal of the accusations was printed, although he does not deny the statement about the 'company shop'. Incidentally I have found Isaac Burton, born about 1835 in Raunds in the earlier Censuses but in 1871, the Census after his letter appeared, his parents and siblings are there(his brothers wrongly transcribed as Barton) but Isaac has disappeared. I cannot find his name again in the following Censuses. There are many possible explanations for this but, perhaps, there is a story to be told.

It is important to remember that shoemaking was not a single, uniform craft. Some master shoemakers made bespoke shoes by hand and did all the processes in their own workshops. Increasingly, most only did part of the process with the clickers being the aristocrats of the workforce. Their skill in cutting out the leather to produce matched pairs and to get the maximum from a hide was vital to the quality of, and the profit from, the finished boots and shoes. The clicking was the first process to be organised into workshops and factories because of the space needed and the importance of it to the whole process.

An article in *The Boot & Shoe Journal* in 1887 described the factories in Raunds, some of which appear to have had all the shoemaking processes within their four walls. The reporter describes the factory of *Messers W. Nicholls*, for example, as 'admirably arranged....The machinery which is of the

best description, is driven by a gas-engine. The firm also curries the upper leather required and the whole factory is noticeable for completeness in every respect.' Nevertheless he goes on to say:

> *Commenting on the army trade generally, I look upon Raunds as the centre of the army-boot-and-shoe making in Northamptonshire and the village of Raunds reminds me of the old days when scarcely anything but hand work was in vogue. The prices paid for closing and making are far from extravagant. The closing of army bluchers is done by hand throughout, and occupies the female workers in the village. For closing bluchers the sum of 3¼d, on an average, is paid per pair. A man must work hard to make ten pairs of boots per week and there are many who do not make eight pairs, yet the inhabitants are generally an enterprising class of people, thrifty and industrious, comparing favourably with operatives in the trade elsewhere.*

If we look in the *Art of Boot and Shoemaking: A Practical Handbook*, which was published in 1885, it describes many machines available for the shoemaking processes. These include the Upper Skiving Machine, The Rand Turning Machine, The Sole Moulding Machine, National Closing Machine, Welt or Forepart Stitching Machine, Mackay Heeling Machine, Inside Nailing Machine and Blake Buffing Machine. Many, like Victorian kitchen devices, are hand-powered mechanised processes. Raunds and Ringstead, however, tended to remain a cottage, outwork industry, reliant on the military's insistence on hand sewn boots.

Our shoemaker, John Roberts, has died before the 1871 Census, well before his fortieth birthday. His widow, Letitia, at 36 is living on Shop Street, on 'Parish Relief' Her oldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 17, is doing 'shoework' and Owen (15) and Benjamin (13) are both apprentice shoemakers. She has four other children who are ten or under and are at school. It must have been a very difficult time for Letitia. Next door lives John Barritt and his wife Rebecca. He is a shoe maker and shoe agent. Perhaps after all there were still small middle men who put out the work and collected it again for a commission. On the other side of her lives Sarah White who is fifty, also a widow, with two children. She is trying to make her living as a seamstress. All around are other shoemakers and their wives. We can only hope that she was helped and supported by the community in her hour of need.

By 1881 she was living in the High Street and is housekeeper for her family. Times are maybe a little better because Benjamin, John, and Herbert are all shoemakers and Alice is a shoe worker. As we have said, George, at fifteen, is the exception and is a railway employee. All her family will be bringing money into the house. If she feels unwell, Emma Kitchen is only a few doors away and she can help her because she is a vendor of patent medicines. Many would have had laudanum in them to dull the pain.

Letitia married John Smith in 1884 and the1891 Census finds her living in Rushden with John who is a 'Cemetery Caretaker' and by 1901 they are in Stanwick with John now a general labourer. Her children are all elsewhere. She dies in 1909 aged seventy-five.

We cannot follow all the Roberts family lines so we will select two: Benjamin Ebenezer, son of John and Letitia, and George Henry, not Benjamin's brother, the railway worker, but the son of Thomas, John's younger brother. These two cousins carried on as shoemakers but the industry went through increasingly difficult times as the nineteenth century drew to a close. In fact, initially, many Raunds

and Ringstead workers resisted unionisation because they had always made their own rules as to when they worked. Most would have initially echoed the words of an Irthlingborough shoe worker on the union's policy of speeding up the move from hand outwork to mechanised factory production:

> *The men do not thank the Union for doing so, they do not want their liberty meddled with, as they have shops to work in, and leading men will not go with their sons into such places . . . . Some will leave the Union if they do not stop such interference.*
>
> *(Boot & Shoe Journal 10th December 1892).*

It was a common practice to drink heavily at the weekend ('fuddling') and then take Monday off. It was known as Saint or Snobs Monday. It is no coincidence that Raunds had a Coffee Tavern, a Temperance Band and a strong Rechabite movement. It was recounted, many years later, by Major Henry Attley that the Roberts were a musical family and Benjamin played the flute and had a fine baritone voice. They were also staunch Nonconformists and his younger brother. John, was a well known local organist. He also built organs for some of the local chapels. Mr Attley remembered 'blowing the organ' for John and particularly one occasion when his attention wandered and the pressure dropped. 'Blow, boy, blow!' John hissed at him as loud as he dared without the congregation hearing.

The new unions saw the outworkers as undermining the rights, conditions and wages of workers in the factories. At the 1894 Conference of *The National Union of the Boot and Shoe Operatives,* a Stafford delegate complained about a navy contract being given to Raunds because non-union workers undercut the rates.

The Reverend A. C. Neely, who was the vicar of Denford-cum-Rngstead, writes a poem some thirty years later about the Hand-sewn Boot makers of Ringstead in 1896. He tells of the first-floor workshop, reached by a ladder and of their disdain for 'machine-mades'. he also tells of the hard work of making the boots:

> *'Hard work?' Why, yes, of course it is. Just try to pull this thread.*
> *Can't manage it? I thought not. Try something else instead.*
> *Hammer this bit of leather, on this iron, on your knee,*
> *It don't hurt me a blessed bit – but you just try and see!*
> *'Don't want much of that' you say? Ah! You haven't learnt the trick,*
> *I'll tell you about it sometime. Can't learn it all so quick.*
> *You're right, it is hard work, sir and more than that, it's Art*
> *To do it all yourself like, and fit in every part.*
> *The missus sews the tops, of course, but then that's not so tough,*
> *But if you had a day at that, you'd say you'd had enough.*

Ironically, in view of what was to follow some ten years later the shoemaker is against strikes, although there is a hint of reservation:

> *'Did we go on strike last summer, when the chaps in town were out?'*
> *No bless you, we don't want to strike; we get on best without.*

I'm not going to say, though, that many would refuse,
(If they chanced to get the offer), sixpence more a pair of shoes.

We also hear that any boots which were rejected by the War Office for minor defects were sold locally very cheaply and the good vicar had invested in a couple of pairs himself. He also liked to go to the workshop and sit and talk to the shoeworkers about 'all sorts of things'.

At this time it was a campaign in Egypt which they had made boots for but it was the larger conflict of The Boer War at the turn of the century (1899 – 1902) which came to the rescue of the industry, especially in the Raunds area which was heavily dependent on military orders. The orders flowed in and the agreed price for making a pair of boots was met by the War Office and the factory owners. Once the war finished, however, the orders dried up and the contractors tried to undercut each other to try to secure the diminishing orders. Suddenly the shoemakers' wages dropped as even the *Ringstead Britannia Co-operative Society*, which had been formed in 1891, cut costs to secure business.

Photograph by author April 2010. (It is no longer a factory).

This led to a strike of the army boot and shoe makers and to the Raunds March of 1905 where 115 men (selected from the 300 who volunteered) marched to London to petition the War Office and Parliament. The views of the Union and the local workers were as one. Well nearly! All this is covered in J. Betts' excellent book which anyone interested should read. I will just quote from The Times of May 15th 1905 to show what a considerable event this was at the time:

THE RAUNDS STRIKERS IN LONDON

A demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in support of the Raunds bootmakers who are on strike, was held in Trafalgar-square yesterday afternoon; and an

audience of between 8,000 and 10,000 persons was addressed by Socialist and Labour leaders from three sides of the plinth of the Nelson column. The deputation of strikers assembled under the Charing-cross railway arch about half-past 2 and were there joined by contingents from Socialist and Labour organisations. A procession was formed and, headed by a brass band with twenty or thirty banners unfurled, the men marched to the square, where they met with an enthusiastic reception from the crowd. One of the 115 men who have marched from Raunds, a cripple who walks with a crutch, headed the strikers as they marched into the square to the strains of the 'Marseillaise,' and was loudly cheered..... The crowd was the largest which has been seen in Trafalgar-square for some years and it showed its practical sympathy with the strikers by throwing coins, not unmixed with silver, upon the plinth for their benefit. In this way a sum of about £10 was collected.

But what of our two Roberts' cousins? Some twenty of the marchers were from Ringstead including over half the brass band that accompanied them on the journey. Most were young men but Edward Bird from Ringstead at 59 was the oldest marcher. There were no Roberts on the march but the conflict split the family. As we have seen from the more recent Miner's Strike of the 1980s bitterness can brew up in communities when some go hungry and others continue to work. George Henry tried to carry on collecting his work from the factory in Raunds in defiance of the strikers and violence ensued.

It appears, although as yet I have no proof, that George Henry was the only one in his family who was a strike breaker. Certainly, his own younger brother, William, appeared on behalf of one of those accused of violence against George. Was it all quickly forgotten after the march or did it make George a pariah in the community. David Saint has reported that George was a church man unlike the rest of the Roberts clan who were Nonconformists. He also says that George ran a welfare club to help members get health care but that his great nephew, Paul, insisted that he was a narrow minded bigot and he had never heard anyone say a good word about him. There is no real evidence in the official records except, perhaps, a hint in the 1911 Census in that Benjamin's children are all put down with one Christian name but George and Mary's all have two listed. Does it mean nothing at all, is it Mary's influence, or is it evidence of someone the locals would see as 'putting on airs and graces'?

All we can be sure of, is that in the 1911 Census, Benjamin is described as a 'Handsewn Army Bootmaker' and George Henry is also a 'Handsewn Army Shoemaker.' After George, however, is added the word, 'Unemployed'. Was this an indication that George was frozen out by the community. On the other hand Benjamin has a son, called George too, who is a shoe hand and also unemployed. Perhaps it was just the difficult times in the shoe industry a few years before some help came from a terrible source. I say. 'some help', because the War Office gave a mortal blow to the area when they announced that, for the first time, men would be going to war in machine-made boots. The handsewn craftsmen were now in desperate trouble and in 1922 the local papers told of their plight.

Benjamin died aged 67 and was buried on 21st September 1925 in Ringstead Cemetery. George Henry lived to be 76 and was also buried in the Cemetery on May 1st 1941. That part of the cemetery has been levelled into green anonymity and no headstone marks either grave. Benamin's house was identified by Wilfred Roberts in 1975 as one in Carlow Street which still exists today, set back on the

left, behind a fence, as one walks from the Axe and Compass. His workshop was at the back of the cottage.

One of Benjamin's sons, Alfred, was not able to follow his father into the craft. He was too short-sighted to do the work and was later said to have worked in *Palmer's Grocery Stores* in Raunds. In 1911, aged 19, he was a grocery assistant in Oundle, boarding with a widow and her elderly sister. He moved on to Grantham, married and had two children, one of whom was a clever girl called Margaret Hilda Roberts who made him one of the most famous shopkeepers in England. My Uncle, Dennis Ball, told me that he saw her, a very well dressed little girl, visit her uncle 'Barrel Roberts' in Marshalls Road, Raunds. I do not know who 'Barrel' was and if this story is true but one wonders if her Great Uncle George's views and his experiences in 1905 had some effect on her attitude to unions nearly 80 years later.

Postscript

Photograph by kind permission of Vivienne Marshall, great-granddaughter of Harry Abbott Mayes

The band included many from the Mayes family. Back Row in the middle, holding a trombone, is Len Mayes; the two men on the left of the second row down are Benny and Ernest Mayes; the man, second left, on third row down is Harry Abbott Mayes. On the right of the front row, lying down, is Bill Mayes who later emigrated to Australia. ***Behind him on the right, holding a vertical flute, is Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts.***

Although not strictly in the nineteenth century the Raunds March, as I have said, could not be omitted. Queen Victoria died in 1901 and there followed the Edwardian postscript before the modern age blasted the world apart. In 1902 the Ringstead Band played for the celebrations in the village for the coronation of Edward VII. Above is a picture of the band, many of whom were, three years later, on that historic march.

Perhaps, as we look at Benjamin and the others in the photograph, we can see something of the spirit that H. E. Bates was describing in his autobiography:

> *The impression I chiefly gain from the recollection of those shoemaking men is not exactly one of coarseness; they lack the sheer belted belching muscle and guts of what used to be known as labouring men; they do not exhibit the beer-spitting swagger I remember of navvies, bricklayers or those wild-eyed drovers of cattle I sometimes used to see drunk and rosy-eyed, on Midland market days. Their roughness is of rather different order, and I find it difficult to describe. If I use the word rude, in the sense of uncouth, the impression will be a shade too strong. Nor are they loud; nor, in Rupert Brooke's words, excessively 'black of mouth'. Nor are they as forthright, or as blunt or as self-opinionated as Northern men. The impression I really get is of a dry, droll, unshaven independence and it is not at all an unlikeable quality.*

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Chapter Eleven

Clicker

John Ball (1882 – 1953)

John, or Jack as he was usually known, was the third John Ball in a direct line, only separated by his grandfather Thomas. They span the years from 1783 to 1953 and he was the only one that I touched, in his old age. I did not know him well, for I was only seven when he died and it was a small part of an article in the *Rance Reunited* magazine that determined me to tell something of his story.

John was born the fourth child of John and Susannah, or Susan, Ball, in 1882. He followed Eliza, George Henry and Thomas. In 1881 his parents and his siblings were living in Carlow Street, Ringstead. His father was an ironstone labourer in the Islip quarries. As we have seen in his story, on the 21st September 1886 he was buried in a fall of earth in the limestone pit, where he was working, and killed. John junior was only some three years old.

We do not know how Susannah coped with four young children on her own but by 1891 she has moved back to her home town of Raunds. She had not been able to write her signature at her marriage in 1874 so opportunities must have been limited for her. She became an army boot closer, sewing the uppers, and her children also worked to help keep the family from the workhouse. Eliza is away from home, also working as a boot closer and the two older boys are 'Errand boy' and 'Riveter and School'. At nine years old, John is still a 'Scholar'.

By 1901 the whole family, including Eliza is living in Hill Street and all are engaged in the army boot trade. Susan, the widowed mother, and Eliza, her daughter, are both closers and Thomas is a riveter but John has followed his older brother George and is a clicker. It appears that all the family are working at home, except George and John. This is what we would expect because 'clicking' was considered the most skilled work and the one which cost or saved the employer the most money. The ability to match parts of the leather and cut the maximum from a hide were valued abilities. It was also true that it required room and was for all these reasons often centralised into a factory before the other shoeworking crafts. All around them in Hill Street are people in the boot and shoe industry, mostly working at home.

There is a photograph in *Old Northamptonshire in Photographs* of five men in the 'Rat Pit' of Adams Bros, Raunds in about 1908. My sister, who was fifteen years older than me and so knew my grandfather well, was sure that one was him He is finishing a boot as one of the 'handsewn men' so perhaps he could not get work as a clicker and had to settle for other work. He then decided, with his brother Thomas, to move to Wollaston where they both had been offered, or obtained, work.

So, by 1911, things have changed. George Henry and Eliza appear to be working in a factory, George a boot clicker and Eliza a boot closer, although Susan, now 56, continues to work at home. They still live in Hill Street. Two of the sons have left the nest. John has married Eunice Andrews on

23rdDecember 1905, some five months before the birth of their first child. They are living in Highfields Cottages, Marshalls Road, at the time of his birth. Thomas has married earlier, in 1902 to Charlotte Cade and the two couples have moved to Wollaston where they share York Cottages which had six rooms, excluding the scullery and any outbuildings. Thomas is now a 'Bottom Stuff Riveter' and John is a clicker. Both work in factory but the two wives are 'Hand Boot Closers' at home.

■ WINNERS . . . the Wollaston side which took the Wellingborough and District League title in 1909-10 – pictured from left, back, are W Bellamy, W Drage, W Holloway (secretary), F Rivett (chairman), A Nicholls, A Holloway. Middle: H Woodhams (trainer), V Murdin, A Perkins, Dr Baxter (president), A Watts, P Simco and E Wesley (linesmen). Front: F Partridge, H Pettit, C Shelton, J Bellamy, J Ball and T Mears (treasurer). Sitting on ground: G Hurlet

Jack played for Wollaston in his time there. He is the last player, in kit, on the right of those on chairs. Cutting provided by Brian Ball, Grandson of Jack and Eunice.

John and Eunice with their sons (probably just after the First World War).

John and Eunice already had three children, the older two, Aubrey (4) and Sydney (3), born in Raunds and Ronald (5 months) born in Wollaston. It seems that they did not move from Raunds until after 1908 so he could be the man in the photograph of the 'Rat Pit'.

It is here that we come within the reach of living memory, or at least the memories of my father, who was Aubrey Ball, eldest son of John and Eunice, told to me in his last years. *Senile Dementia* was beginning to cloud his memory but I believe that the basic facts are true. He was born in 1906 and the first house that he remembered was in Thorpe Street next to the Blacks and opposite *Partricks Stone Masons*. If you look at the bottom of many of the gravestones in the cemeteries and church yards of Ringstead and Raunds you will see the Partrick name carved discretely at the bottom. John and Eunice moved back to Raunds but Thomas and his wife stayed in Wollaston and ran a fish shop. I know this because Aubrey went to stay with them for a time to help in the shop and was, he believed, treated badly by Thomas.

We must beware, however, of putting too much weight onto the slights suffered by a young boy, recalled seventy years later. This is particularly true of Thomas because the First World War took both brothers into the army. Soon after returning to Raunds, John and his family moved back into the new houses In Marshalls Road that had been built for workers of *R. Coggins and Sons* factory. It was locally known as 'The Colony'. My father said they were cheaply built and always cold but they are still there today. Before central heating and insulation most terraced houses were freezing cold in winter with one coal-fired room sucking icy draughts from the rest of the house.

Both John and Thomas enlisted. Thomas joined up first, in Wollaston in 1916. He became a private in the Northampton Regiment and later a rifleman in the *15th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles*. John did not join up until 1917 and put his preferred option to be the *Essex Regiment*. He became a gunner in the *Royal Field Artillery* but I think that he was in the *4a Reserve Brigade* and never had to fight. Thomas was not so lucky and was killed on 15thOctober 1918 during the battle of Courtrai. Not only was he a few months from the end of the war but he was also resting, in reserve after being in the front line, when a shell hit the farm house where a group of the soldiers were sheltering.

John returned home and carried on with his life. He had been a talented runner and won many prizes over the years. He also played football until he was fifty. After his own career was over he trained some local runners including his youngest son Dennis who was born in 1917 and whose middle name was Verdun after the First World War battle., and his nephews, Harold and Len. This also shows another side of many shoemakers. He was an inveterate gambler. Amateur race meetings were organised but there would be a line of bookies also at the meets. My father told of one occasion which perhaps gives some insight into this:

> *I heard him say to a bloke once, 'Look, according to the stopwatch you've got the beating of my boy (my cousin Harold). If you let him win you can have the prize money – as long as we win.'*
>
> *And the bloke replied, 'No, I'll run and I'll win the prize!'*
>
> *'Well,' said Dad, 'I'll tell you now, before the race, you ent got a snowball in hell's chance of winning that race.'*

And he hadn't, because when it came to the bend he was shut out. Dad bet on Harold of course and he won the race easily. It was around three legs – I suppose it was about half a mile, something like that. Dirty work! This was amateur athletics!

The meetings were organised to raise money. They charged so much to go in, you see. There used to be a lot of running – athletics – in those days. What killed it was the gambling. There was a lot of gambling on it. And my father was one of the worst!

John with his running trophies.

This rough independence and occasional disregard for the law can be seen in another incident which made the local papers. In 1908 a piped water system had been established in Raunds. Water was taken from a well to a huge concrete tank or reservoir in Hargrave Road. All went well until 1921 when there was a long drought. I will let my father's words tell, what happened next:

Well, the farm next to the well was sold. A man from the north bought it. He dug another well at his side of the fence and his well tapped the same supply so that the Raunds well began to run dry. So a group of men from the Woodbine Club got together one night and marched down to the meadows – with Sid and me behind them. They got the pumping machinery and threw it all down the well that he had dug.

It made the national press. 'Bolsheviks Cause Damage in Raunds', or something like that. But after that there was no more trouble with the water supply. They never found out who did it. We had two policemen in the town. Although the police must have had a good idea who was responsible they probably thought it wiser not to take it up. I mean, after all, they'd got to live in the town with the rest of us!

I have an original copy of a photograph which fills in a little more of John's history. It shows him standing in a clicking room. The same photograph is in *Raunds, Picturing the Past* and it tells us that it was taken in 1929 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of John *Horrell and Son Ltd* of Wellington Hill, Raunds.

John (third from right) in Clicking department of John Horrell & Sons Ltd (1929).

The next glimpse of John came to me quite recently when I saw a copy of the *Rance Revisited* magazine in the local library. To my surprise I saw a piece on *Adams Brothers* by Paul Roberts. He movingly describes the clickers breaking into song as they worked. The would sing in harmony, with descant, songs from *Nellie Dean* to *Abide with Me* and *Crimond*, which was known locally as the 'Ringstead Hymn' because of its Dissenting associations. He goes on to tell of an incident involving Jack Ball (which seems to imply that he was working at Adams at the time).

> *They credited Jack Ball with causing Labour to lose the seat in the 1935 General Election. Wing Commander James, the Conservative candidate, had as his agent a Finedon man called Chapman, nicknamed 'Sugar Chapman'. They always introduced him at political meetings as a 'Conservative Working Man'. His presence at political meetings was like a red rag to some of the Raunds' Radical shoemakers. No one can recall hearing Sugar Chapman speak because of the uproar that his presence caused. As Wing Commander James left his Eve of Poll meeting in Raunds, Jack kicked his backside for bringing 'Sugar Chapman'. 'CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ASSAULTED AT RAUNDS,' said the headlines in the next day's Evening Telegraph.*

I first encountered John when I was a young child and I went on the bus from Wellingborough to Raunds to visit my grandparents. I remember my grandmother a little. She was a proud woman who

kept a neat house with polished brass jugs, full of wooden spills, in the fireplace. She had a special tiered plate for cakes and was mortified when I discovered a fly in my Tizer. Of my grandfather I have only two memories. One is of him standing in the workshop in his son Ronald's garden where he was still doing outwork. He did the old clickers' trick for me of taking a circle of leather, sticking it to the bench with a small curved knife and then pulling to make a shoelace. Magic and shoemakers are often associated. The other memory is of him sitting silently in the corner in Marshalls Road, as the grandfather clock beside him ticked the seconds slowly away.

He died on the 8th February 1953 aged 70 years to be followed by his 'beloved wife' Eunice on 21stAugust 1956. They are buried in Raunds Cemetery . In 1919 *The Shoe and Leather News Illustrated Biographic Dictionary of British Shoe and Leather Traders* listed six boot and shoe firms in Raunds: *Adams Bros.; R. Coggins and Sons; Tebbutt and Hall Bros Ltd.; The St. Crispin's Productive Society Ltd.; Regulation Boot Co. (Raunds) Ltd.* and *John Horrell and Son*. All have fallen silent and many have been demolished. Most of the backyard workshops have also disappeared. What was once the vibrant lifeblood of the communities is now archaeology.

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Chapter Twelve

Papermakers

William Mitchell (c 1800 - c1863) and Others

This biography started out as the story of papermaker, William Mitchell, but like others before me, I soon became embroiled in the complex history of the various mills along the Nene boundary of the Ringstead Parish. The 1835 and 1871 Ordnance Survey maps show on the Nene, working from the south, a mill at Cotton near the station, a Paper Mill due west of Ringstead, and Woodford Mill between Woodford and Denford. There is also a windmill SSW of the village in Ringstead Field.

So far, all is reasonably clear but the mills are, at times, called by the same name and tenants come and go, sometimes hopping from one mill to the other. The mills may also run two wheels powering different processes. Finally the usages of the mills also changes. So what started out as a brief history of a papermaker has become also a short and rather confused history of two of the mills.

Woodford Bottom Mill also known as Allen's Mill was used in the nineteenth century by the Hill family until about 1863 when Samuel Allen took over the premises. This was later demolished and as it is not, even in part, in the Ringstead parish it has been omitted from the story.

Woodford Upper Mill is the same as Willy Watt Mill which is also sometimes called Willett's Mill, and, confusingly, also Ringstead Mill and it is still there. This is the Paper Mill on a number of maps (by the position). Although it is in Woodford parish some to the millrace is in Ringstead Parish and it is nearer to Ringstead village than Woodford.

Finally there is Cotton Mill (or also Ringstead Mill) which was also used for paper production.

To avoid confusion I will use the names Willy Watt Mill and Cotton Mill wherever possible.

*

My first sight of the water mills of Ringstead came from a strange source. The website *The Exeter Working Papers in Book History* lists historical insurance policies taken out by people in the book and paper trade. There are three references to a Francis Tidbury. One for 1782 for £600 has the address as 'Willett Mill, Ringstead –papermaker. Also Miller'. 1783 is similar but for only £400 but 1785/6 is for £1700 and has the address as Cotton House. This poses questions to be answered. Did he mill corn and make paper in the same mill, perhaps according to the time of year. Also did he move in 1784 to new larger premises or did he invest in new machinery? Perhaps he installed a second wheel as was often done.

Googling idly, seeing if I could find anything on Cotton Paper Mill, I came across a site which had extracts from a book on Jane Austen's letters. It listed the watermarks on letters written by one of

England's most famous novelists who would have been writing in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two of the nineteenth. It includes in the list:

John Hall, Cotton Mill, Ringstead, Northamptonshire.

It seems that Ringstead was producing good quality writing paper which was sold to clients far away from Northamptonshire. Perhaps we need to revise our preconception of a little cottage industry in a backwater of the Nene. It may help if we first we look very briefly at the craft of papermaking and its gradual but accelerating industrialisation during this time.

Paper is a commodity that we now take for granted. With newspapers, magazines, computer printouts, books, advertising leaflets, bags, wrapping paper, bills letters, envelopes, banknotes, till receipts, wallpaper, toilet and kitchen rolls, disposable nappies, etc, etc ,etc we now use more paper in a week than our ancestors would use in a lifetime. When we remember how John Clare, the Northamptonshire poet, had to use scraps of paper such as the backs of bills or envelopes in order to write we see how the access to paper has changed. For many centuries, and well into the nineteenth century, paper was made almost entirely from rags and it was the speeding up of the process of pulverising these rags by mechanisation that first changed the trade. Also high taxation on paper and even higher duty on imported paper kept its product out of the reach of ordinary people but these taxes were gradually relaxed and finally abolished. It was only as the century progressed that paper could be produced on continuous paper rolls so it was for many years labour-intensive.

In 1800 there were a little over 400 paper mills licensed by the Excise authorities, mostly driven by waterpower, and small in scale. These mills took in rags and, originally, the colour of the rags determined the colour of the paper. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the only bleaching was by sunlight and by sprinkling with sour milk. One can only imagine the smell. They were steeped in water for weeks and then pulverised by a machine called a 'Hollander' before being laid onto wire screens and then put to dry into sheets of paper. This was a slow process taking some three months between the rags arriving at the mill and the finished paper leaving it The rags had to be sorted and graded, which was an unpleasant job, because different rags gave different grades of paper and a mixture would produce an uneven and blobby finish. Also at first only white rags produced white paper.

The paper was 'laid' by a man dipping an oblong, divided, wooden frame with a fine wire screen backing into a tub of pulverised fibre and water. He would swish it around and take it out so that he had left a thin layer of fibres laid on the screen. The mixture in the tub would gradually get thinner so he had to adjust accordingly. The size of the paper was limited by the distance a man's arms could stretch. In 1816 it was calculated that it was a day's work for three men to make 4000 small sheets of paper. This was after all the initial processing of the fibres. The amount of paper produced in the United Kingdom increased nearly five times in the forty years after 1820 and quicker mechanised paper production, printing and transport made it become affordable to an ever increasing circle of society.

Of course, as in many industries, the mechanisation and the cheaper prices tended to concentrate production into larger factories and the smaller mills, such as those at Ringstead, struggled to

survive. The new railways could bring cheap, good quality paper to the village, whether blue for the grocers to wrap the sugar in or white for the letters to go by the penny post.

When we look in more detail at the mills along the Nene we find that there was a history of paper making which lasted at least a century. As I have said, we shall have to consider both mills in order to get a clear idea of how the story unfolded for William.

Looking at Willy Watt first, there has been a mill on the site for over a thousand years. In the Domesday Book it states that (in translation):

> *In WOODFORD Roger holds 7 hides from the Abbot.*
>
> *Land for 12 ploughs. In lordship 2½ ploughs; 4 slaves*
>
> *12 villagers, 3 smallholders and 12 Freemen with 9½ ploughs.*
>
> *A mill at 2s; meadow 20 acres …….*

The mill was used for fulling cloth in the early eighteenth century. Before the Hollander was invented for mashing up the cloth for paper manufacture a system of water operated wooden hammers were used and it would not have been difficult to alter the fulling hammers for this process. A little earlier, in 1742, Henry Shuttleworth had married Catherine Bletsoe. She was the only child of Charles Bletsoe of Great Bowden. By the marriage, the couple had six water mills and one windmill (probably at Ringstead). We will hear a little more of this family later.

It was in 1765 that Francis Tidbury, who we first met obtaining his insurance, started making paper. He was married to Susanna and there is a floor slab in the tower of Ringstead Parish Church which has the epitaph:

> *In memory of SUSSANNA TIDBURY wife of FRANCIS TIDBURY who departed this life Nov'r ye 2d 1791. Aged 52 years*

Francis remarried Keziah Loveday (Loveden in the record) on 4th April 1793. Unlike most of the tenants of the mills, Francis was a well-to-do man who also owned a mill at Southwick. He lived in Cotton House and, at his death, in 1814, his estate was estimated as worth £3,500.

His widow Keziah Tidbury, took over Willy Watt but within two years she was bankrupt and one son became a baker in Raunds and another a farm labourer in Woodford. This was not the last time that comparatively well-off families were brought low by the mills. Then James Fernelly (various spellings) took over the mill for paper production.

The earlier history of Cotton or Ringstead Mill is not yet so clear and it is not until 1814 that I have found the name of a tenant, although we do know that the Shuttleworths owned both mills from the middle of the previous century.

We have mentioned John Hall of Cotton Mill whose paper was used by Jane Austen. The Morgan Library and Museum in the USA has a collection of 51 of the surviving 160 Jane Austen letters (it is

estimated that she wrote some 3000). It has put online the watermarks of the paper used and they have John Hall and also have the date of 1814 as part of the mark. Whether this was the date that he started business in Cotton Mill or if he changed his mark each year, I am not certain. It does show, however, that he was making paper in Cotton Mill at this date.

The next glimpse of a tenant comes from a number of bills and letters that have been preserved which relate to the repairs carried out, and not paid for, at 'Mrs. Bull's Mill' in 1829. In one of the bills it also refers to it as 'Ringstead Paper Mill' The letters involve a John Fisher of Woodford, who appears to be the brother of Sarah Bull, for he pleads on her behalf to the agent of Mr Shuttleworth, the owner, not to expect her to pay the cost of some other associated repairs. I have tried to transcribe it as faithfully as possible.

> *Sir*
>
> *The consult [import?] of my letter his to in form you that i have paid George Willson one pound in account on the 17th of October has he was so bad in wants of the money.*

He continues later in the letter:

> *I ham showing you the diferent expence i consider it will be verry hard for my sister to pay in [?] to the whole amount. i shall take it a faviour if you will do what you can for my sister. i hope Mr Shuttleworth will be at the expence of a new [pit?] well has the hold one will not last long.*

The repairs carried out must have been quite extensive because the bill came to £127.13s.11d and included bricks, lime, wood and iron and oak, as well as the services of a mason, millwright, plumber, blacksmith and sawyer. There also appears an amount of £2 16s for beer from Mrs Allen and five shillings to repay him because he, 'Gave men drink by way of encouragement.'

John Fisher seems to have acted as the building supervisor for his sister and the slow payment by Shuttleworth gave him some difficulty. The millwrights sent him a threatening letter on 27th November 1829.

> *Sir*
>
> *As our money is been due this 3 months wee think it is time it was paid and as you was our employer wee shall look to you to pay us. If you don't pay us or cause us to be paid between now and next Friday wee must see further about it As we had plenty of trouble About it.*
>
> *Geo. John and Wm. Wilson*

The years from 1829 to 1841 produce a large amount of documentary evidence, which although still sometimes confusing, does begin to give us some picture of the two mills. It is here that we first encounter William Mitchell, whose paper making activities straddled both mills but apparently, with no more success than most other tenants.

On 12th July 1840 William Mitchell wrote and signed a ‘Declaration’, although the language suggests that it was drawn up by a solicitor or Justice of the Peace. it was probably made to help the Shuttleworth family prove ownership ready for the Enclosure of Ringstead when all the parish was surveyed and allocated to specific individuals (and, more directly, for a sale to George Capron who bought up much of the land in the area).

In this Declaration, William states that he hired, of Nathaniel Shuttleworth, Willy Watt Mill from midsummer 1830 until midsummer 1834. He also records that it had previously been hired by Francis Tidbury and, on his death, by his widow Keziah Tidbury (although she may have had ‘under tenants’). James Fernley (Fernelly) then took it over. All had used it as a paper mill. After William quitted in 1834 it was lived in by Henry Shuttleworth Bellamy for a year before being succeeded by George Ivens, although the rent was paid by his brother, William, who farmed some adjacent land.

At about this time (1835-6) part of Willy Watt was turned into a bone mill. These mills were used to render down the bones from local slaughterhouses (and perhaps whale bones from the blubber factory in Kings Lynn). The bones were boiled down to make them brittle and to remove the fat, which was used as grease on carts etc. They were then broken into small pieces by hand, or by feeding them through a toothed cylinder. Finally they were ground into a fine powder by millstones powered by the water wheel. At Narborough Bone Mill, in Norfolk, human bones from cemeteries in Hamburg in Germany were shipped to Kings Lynn for use in the Mill. I am not sure if any came up the Nene to Ringstead. The fine bonemeal was, and still is, a valuable fertilizer but perhaps the cycle is not so complete.

In the month following William Mitchell's ‘Declaration’, George Ivens drowned in the Nene while looking for his brother's horse. He left a wife and eight children. The Nene, even more than today, often claimed victims both from accidental drownings and from suicides. In the story of John Ball, the quarry workman, Bill Warren told of the barn in Denford where the bodies were taken on hurdles when found in the Nene. A son of one of the Twentieth Century owners of Willy Watt Mill tells that in the 1930s, during the Depression years, that, on his way to school in the mornings, he would look out for bodies washed down the river. He got 7s 6d for every body that he reported to the police.

After George Ivens' tragic death, John Smith, a coal and timber merchant from Northampton, took over the lease and continued with the bonemeal production, which he sold from his riverside wharves in Stanwick, Irthlingborough and Wellingborough.

Returning to Cotton Mill, *Pigots’s Directory of Cambs, Hunts and Northants 1830,* lists two papermakers for the area, James Fernelly for Woodford Mill and Sarah Bull for Ringstead Mill. From the parish records we can deduce that Sarah was the wife of John Bull, and their children’s baptisms are recorded. The earlier ones are in the Ringstead Parish Register but the younger children are baptised in the Ringstead Particular Baptist Register. We see that, by 1830, Sarah was a widow and trying to carry on the family papermaking business.

By 1835 Sarah had left Cotton Mill, which was then taken over by William Mitchell, and by 1841 she is acting as a nurse for Eliza, wife of Henry Hill, who has two young children. Eliza is the right age to be Sarah’s daughter (born 28th October 1817) but this still has to be further researched.

It is here that other documents clarify the position a little more. If we look in the *Apportionment of Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the Parish of Ringstead (24 October 1838),*we see that in Cotton there are 5 acres of grass owned by Henry Shuttleworth but occupied by William Mitchell and a little further down it talks of:

> *A certain mill called Cotton Mill of which Henry Shuttleworth is owner and also payed a Modus (?) of customary payment of six shillings and eight pence yearly in lieu of Tithes payable to the said Rector. . .*

Soon after, in 1841, Ringstead was finally 'Enclosed' and all those who felt they had an interest in the land to be enclosed had to submit claims. We will look at this when we tell the stories of some of the agricultural labourers but there is one claim that is worth looking at here. George Capron, a London solicitor, bought up large areas of the land at this time, and also in 1841 bought Southwick Hall near Peterborough He put in a claim for:

> *A water mill and offices and a windmill*
> *A paper mill with dwelling house and offices and Mill Holliner [Hollander?] near or adjoining / Mitchel tenant*
> *Mill Cotton Close / Mitchel tenant*
> *Holiner [Hollander?] and meadow adjoining Lower Mill in the occupation of William Ivens*.

It still leaves open whether the paper mill was adjoining the corn mill, or a separate mill, although it implies the latter, it does make clear that William Mitchell was only the tenant, who, among other things, was a papermaker.

Below is part of the' Inclosure Award Map' of 1840. Woodford or Willy Watt Mill is the small mark right at the top of the map where the straight yellow road crosses the larger island. (Cotton Mill is shown as award 129).

Part of the Inclosure Award Map 1840 (ML 1550 NRO).
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office).

In the *Inclosure Schedule of Estates* it again lists George Capron as owning various lands previously owned by Shuttleworth which includes three islands, a (river) bank area, Cotton Orchard and homestead, and a 'Water Corn and Paper Mill' comprising 3 roods. Looking at the Inclosure map and the numbering it is clear that this refers to Cotton Mill.

I thought that I was beginning to clarify the usage of the two mills until I made another visit to the Northamptonshire Record Office. I read through a *Draft Schedule of Land at Ringstead [C(S)82]* which appears to be listing premises for a future sale, giving the rents payable and various acreages. Unfortunately there is no date but it appears to be around 1840. It includes:

> *The Royalty or Sole Fishery in the River Nene, otherwise Nen, on both sides of the River from a certain stone called the Red Stone in Raunds Meadow to the Mills called Willywatt Mills in the Parish of Woodford.*
>
> *The Fishery at per annum £5 15s 0d*

There is also the, '*Right of cutting Rushes in the said river at £3 3s 0d per annum'.* More importantly for our present story are two other entries:

> *All the Messuage now divided into two Tenements with the Water Paper Mill, Closes, Lands and Premises situate and being at Ringstead Cotton at present therewith let, in the lane of Great Addington within the county of Northampton.....in the tenure or occupation of William Mitchell.*
>
> *.....Also that Bone Mill situate and being at Ringstead Cotton aforesaid now in the occupation of John Smith.*

This seems to prove that there was a Bone Mill at Cotton as well as at Willy Watt Mill. Certainly the reference to the Bridge over Mr Mitchell's Mill Head which we will look at in the 1835-6 repairs makes more sense if the Bone Mill is at Cotton.

Returning to William Mitchell, the Northampton Mercury for 20th January 1844 reports that he is prosecuted for trying to evade the excise duty on paper. As we have said there was a heavy duty on paper and the paper was watermarked, and put into wrappers which were stamped as duty was paid. Three charges were brought against William but he seems to have had a smart lawyer who argued successfully that two of them should be dropped for technical reasons. The nub of the case against him was that:

> *A ream of paper was found on the premises of Mr T. O. Beale of Wellingborough which had been permitted to Northampton twelve months ago. The grounds of the suspicion were that the defendant had got possession of an old wrapper and re-filled it and sent it out again, thereby evading the duty.*

William's lawyer tried another technical challenge without success. He then called Thomas Beale who told the court that Mitchell would sometimes make up his order with paper that he would fetch from Northampton, if he did not have enough of his own manufacture. This was perhaps the way the wrapper had come to be there. The Bench, however, found William guilty and fined him £25 which was a large sum of money. It is difficult to compare with today's world because average incomes have increased so much faster than prices, but, according to the National Archives 'Currency Converter', in 1840, £25 would buy about 120 days of a craftsman's time (in the building trade), or 37 stones of wool, or 12 quarters of wheat, or 4 cows or 1 horse.

From the evidence we have, it is in Cotton Mill not Willy Watt Mill that William is producing paper in 1844. We have noted that Pigots Directory of 1830 gives two paper makers: James Fernelly at Woodford Mill and Sarah Bull at Ringstead (Cotton) Mill. We know, therefore that there were times when papermaking was carried out at both mills simultaneously.

The bills also, sometimes refer to it as a paper mill. It seems probable that William Mitchell left Willy Watt in 1834 and took over Cotton Mill for papermaking from Sarah Bull and her son Enos. Meanwhile Willy Watt (or part of it) became a bone mill. There was a long list of work done to 'Ringstead Flour Mill' by Edward Button in 1835-6 for H Shuttleworth Esq. These repairs were again extensive and include work 'on Mr Iven's house and Bone Mill,' 'a bridge over Mr Mitchell's Mill Head' and a laying of a new floor in the Flour Mill. Was this all done at Willy Watt (it was the year

after Mitchell had given up his tenancy of Willy Watt) or was work done at both mills and the bridge over the mill head was near Cotton Mill? Was the Flour Mill, Willy Watt? It is still very confusing.

Between 1829 and 1836 the water mills, Cotton Mill, Willy Watt Mill and the Bone Mill had extensive improvements and repairs. The letters and bills tell a story of estimates being questioned and reduced by Mr West, on behalf of his employer Henry Shuttleworth. Henry had married his cousin Eliza, daughter of George Shuttleworth, and on the death of his father, Nathaniel, he owned properties in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Gloucestershire.

We also see irate tradesmen complaining about late payment which caused some of them great hardship. William Mitchell also complains to the agent:

> *am sorry I have not got the balance by me at present and as rent day is soe near I pray let it be tel then. Sir, you promised me a new press and [???] there is great difficulty in carren on the business with out one.*

William was plainly struggling, which may explain his attempt to evade the paper tax. What, perhaps William and the others were not aware of, was that Henry Shuttleworth was being destroyed by debt and that in 1839 he had to declare himself bankrupt. A junior line of an ancient family was brought down by his attempts to ride on the new wave of industrial enterprise. It was, perhaps, the Light-Poole Mills in Gloucestershire where Henry, with his partner had bought the patent to a new pin-making machine and hoped to make their fortunes, which really destroyed his empire. It appears that he had been a solicitor in Market Harborough and he had dealt with money matters in a way that some considered fraudulent so perhaps his holdings were built on dodgy foundations.

Henry and his wife both died within a short time of each other and left eight children. Eric and Mary Humphries record that a letter was written to ask for subscriptions for the orphans and hoping 'that the follies of the parents would not operate to the disadvantage of the children'. What exactly do these words refer to? If we look some ten years after his bankruptcy, at the effect on some of Henry's family, the effect is clear. In 1851, Nathaniel at 16 is on trial as a grocer with Joseph Roberts in Leicester St. Martin; Georgina, at 25, is a teacher in Norfolk and Edward, by the end of the decade, is living in Victoria, Australia. There is a further story to be told but Ringstead was only a small part in Henry's fall from grace and his family's troubles. We must leave their stories for someone else to tell.

If we now return to the 1841 Census which records that Enos Bull and George Lovell are living at 'Ringstead Mills' and that they are papermakers. In 1841 too, the Great Addington parish register records that Henry William Lovell, aged two years, the natural son of Fanny Lovell papermaker at Cotton Mill was scalded to death in a vat. Women worked in the paper mills sorting and treading the cloth ready for the Hollander to pulverise it into fibres. One can only imagine that Fanny had to take her child with her to work, with terrible consequences. At best it was an unpleasant, smelly job with the constant threat of disease from the stinking, often imported, rags.

This Census records that a further four papermakers are distributed throughout Ringstead. The four are Thomas Mundin, Thomas Stanley, Robert Phillips and Benjamin Mitchell. It does not discriminate between master and worker or craftsman and labourer. It seems likely that Willy Watt was now a

bone mill so all were working at Cotton Mill. As we have seen, there may have been other workers living in adjacent parishes.

It looks as if, after Sarah Bull was replaced, as tenant of Cotton Mill, by William Mitchell that Enos Bull, the son of Sarah, continued to work for William. William's son, Benjamin was not living at the Mill but was working there, perhaps learning his trade.

By 1851 Enos Bull has disappeared and another son of William Mitchell called Samuel, aged 22 and born in Great Addington, is the only paper maker listed in the Ringstead parish. I have not traced George Lovell, Thomas Stanley or Thomas Mundin. Robert Phillips, the oldest worker, is still in Ringstead but, aged 66, he is a 'Road Labourer and Scavenger'. It is possible that scavenging might include the collecting of rags for the paper mill but we have no proof of this.

By 1861 Enos Bull is still a 'Papermaker and Packer' but now living at 5 North Street, Spitalfields, Middlesex with his wife, Sarah and their three children.

Returning to the 1841 Census we find William Mitchell, aged 40 living with his wife Mary, some ten years his elder. He is listed as a papermaker. He originally came from Romsey in Hampshire (usually Ramsey or Rumsey in the transcriptions) which had a number of papermaking mills so perhaps he learnt his craft there before moving to Great Addington.

As we have seen his son Benjamin is also recorded as a papermaker in Ringstead and his profession is confirmed at the baptism of his daughter Charlotte on 20th March 1842. He had married Dorothy Bateman on 12th September 1836 in Ringstead but by 1851 he has moved to Northampton and has become a shoemaker. Of course, this is not as sudden as it may appear. The Censuses, coming every ten years, tend to condense time.

Another son of William, called Samuel, became a papermaker and by 1851 he is the one remaining person in the trade living in the parish of Ringstead.

William Mitchell, living in Great Addington, is recorded as a 'Victualler'. It may be that he is taking a back seat. But Samuel too, for some reason, leaves the business and by1861 William is again a paper maker now lodging with Thomas Wadsworth and his family. Wadsworth is a Miller in Ringstead. It seems possible that William was making paper in the same mill, or an adjacent one to that used by Thomas Wadsworth to grind corn. It would be interesting to know how this arrangement worked for Paper Mills were known as messy unpleasant smelling places.

So William Michell carried on the paper business possibly doing it alongside the milling business of Thomas Wadsworth. Certainly the Tithe and Inclosure documents of the period around 1840 talk of a Corn and Paper Mill at Cotton. What we do know is that William's son, Samuel Mitchell, with his wife Naomi, moved to Stirchley in Shropshire as a Station Master and later became a railway guard on the London and North West Region Railway still living in Shropshire. In 1901 he is recorded as a retired Passenger Guard so it is unlikely that he returned to Ringstead to live. As an aside, in 1881, Samuel and Naomi are lodging with Thomas Gelson who was a skilled potter at the famous Coalport China factory. The factory had been taken into receivership in 1876 but Thomas Gelson became the General Manager and helped bring it back to profitability.

It seems most probable that William died in 1863 and some two years later Mary followed him to the grave.

In 1861, William, the eldest of William Wadsworth's sons, appears in Marylebone in London as a railway porter. Perhaps it is no coincidence that he followed the same route as Samuel Mitchell although in the opposite direction. If we look for Thomas Wadsworth, the father, he is 74 but still recorded as a 'Relief Miller' His wife is presumably dead but four unmarried children live with him and his sons Richard and George are now the Millers. Interestingly the residence is recorded as 'Flour Mill' and is sandwiched between Cotton Farm and the Railway Station in the Census. It seems that this must be Cotton Mill.

What happened next to papermaking in Ringstead? Did it die with William? The 1871 Ordnance Survey map still shows a paper mill but at Willy Watt. So far I have no evidence that paper was made there after William Mitchell left in 1834 so perhaps the map had not been properly updated. Plans of the two mills, drawn up for the sale of the two mills to Mr Eady in 1879, show that both existed at that date but, although they record the buildings, they do not tell us what state Cotton Mill was in and whether it was in use. We must look on the mills as power sources which were used in different ways as times and markets changed.

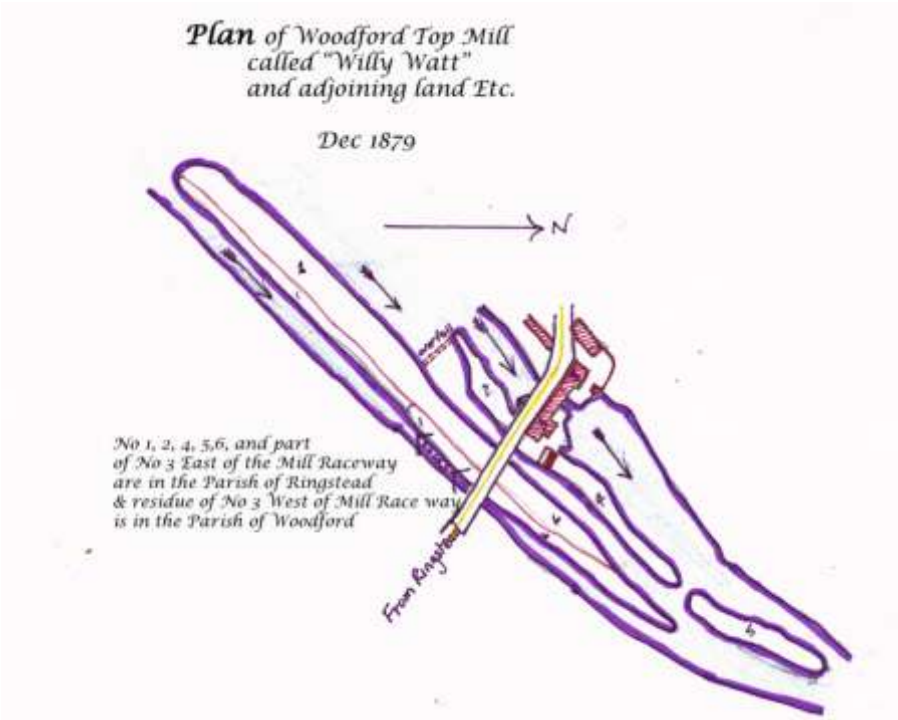
If we now look briefly at what happened to Willy Watt and Cotton Mills after the death of William we see the slow decline of both mills as first steam and then electricity, together with the new fast transport system made both mills uneconomic.

It seems possible that both mills reverted back to being corn mills. In Cotton Mill we have Thomas Wadsworth and his sons, Richard and George. In Willy Watt Moses Irons Eady became the miller. In 1841 a Moses Eady was living in North Mill, Burton Latimer. This was a windmill and in 1852 a thunderstorm destroyed one of the sails. In 1870 he was admitted to the Woodford Baptist Chapel as a Deacon but it appears that his membership ceased, possibly because he went to the Burton Latimer chapel. In 1884 a Mr Eady is advertising the North Mill for sale. Previously to this, in 1880, following the plans we have seen sketches of, Moses Eady had bought Cotton and Willy Watt mills.

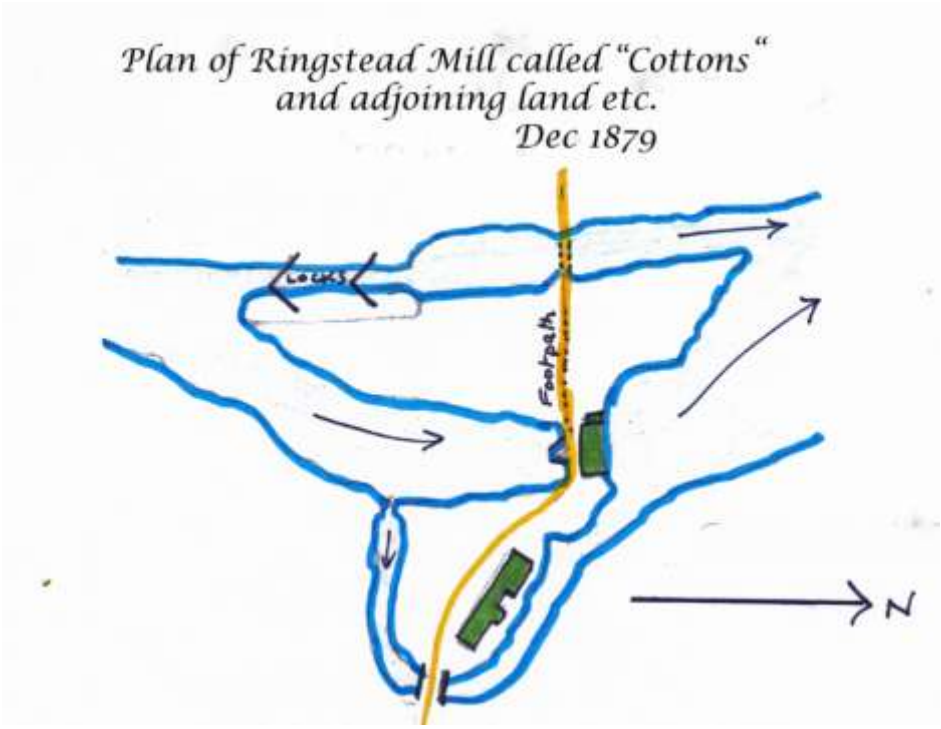
Ringstead Mill (possibly early 20th Century: Source of photograph unknown).
The Muirheads lived in one of the Mill Cottages but were shoemakers.

What appears to be same bridge (September 2011).
It has a stone marked 1840 not visible in the picture.

Something of their siting and working can be seen from the plans prepared for George Capron's sale to Moses Eady.



Sketch from Siddons map of Land sold to Eady 1879 [C(S)662].



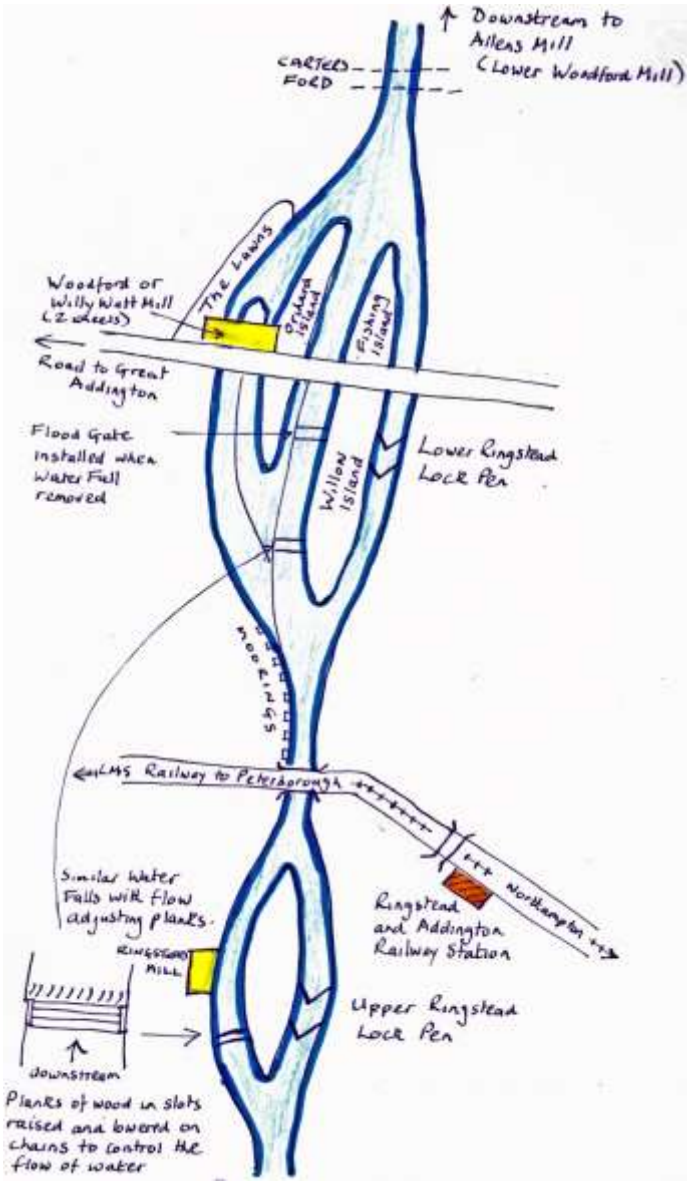
Sketch from Siddons map of Land sold to Eady 1879 [C(S)662].
Could this be showing the presence of two mills with a subsidiary mill stream?
Both plans by kind permission of Northamptonshire Record Office.

The owner, Mr. Hawes, carrying water outside Willy Watt Mill in the 1950s.

A tunnel from the church, built by Monks from Croyland Abbey in the 15th Century, was rumoured to emerge in the old elm tree which here casts winter shadows on the Mill.

When, in 1897, William Dodson bought the Willy Watt Mill it was to grind corn. He had been a baker in Great Addington, after previously running a public house and outdoor beerhouse in Little Addington. He bought Tithe Farm in Ringstead and Willy Watt Mill so that he owned the whole process from growing the grain to baking the bread. Before the First World War some 46 people were in the farm and mill. The last miller there was Frank Hart who was nearly a hundred when he died. It seems possible that both mills continued as flour mills alongside or adjacent to, the other activities such as paper making, throughout most of their working lives from the late eighteenth century.

By the time that William Dodson bought both mills, Cotton Mill was in a semi-derelict state. The only reason why he bought it along with Willy Watt was so that he could demand two heads of water (of about four feet each). This enabled him to run the Willy Watt Mill for much longer each day. It is possible that this was already the reality for the last part of the nineteenth century. The rough map below is based on one provided by a descendant of William Dodson.



This map simplifies the various arms of the Nene at Ringstead, with possibly two mill streams, so the position of Ringstead Mill should not be relied on. Writing in 1970 Geoffrey Starmer stated that Cotton Mill was reported as finally dismantled in 1920. It is also interesting to note that Carters Ford, near Willy Watt Mill, was, originally, the only crossing point before the railway came and new bridges were constructed. In the Twentieth Century the bridge outside Willy Watt Mill, which had only been built for horse-drawn vehicles, collapsed under the weight of lorry traffic.

It seems that Willy Watt Mill had had two wheels from the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century the smaller one was used to generate electricity from 1903 to 1947. Previously to this it had been used, probably by John Cave, who married Moses Eady's daughter Harriett, in the late Victorian period, for driving the mill machine shop which made cartwheels etc.

Today Willy Watt Mill is still there although the mill wheels have long stopped turning. It became increasingly difficult to make a living using waterpower and was used, among other things as a bed

and breakfast establishment. Ringstead Mills had been in ruins for many years by the mid twentieth century and now, apart from a few bricks and broken concrete among the tangle of bushes by the choked millstream show where once they stood.

Is this part of the old millstream?
(Photograph June 2010).

It may seem a sad end for the Mills but remember that both bone and paper mills were foul smelling places which polluted the streams that they used. It was more Dickens than Constable. In *Strapetona*, the magazine of the Thrapston District Historical Society, in 1989, one former resident of Willy Watt Mill told of his grandfather in about 1913 during floods following a snowmelt. The water almost reached the Dining Room ceiling, confining the family to the upper rooms. The drinking water was collected in an old milk churn from a well in Ringstead.

As the waters subsided a little his grandfather set out with the mill cart drawn by his largest carthorse. The strong current across the road took the horse and cart downstream and his grandfather had to jump for his life. Luckily the horse struggled out of the water near Woodford with the harness still attached to the broken shafts of the cart, which had probably acted as buoyancy aids. The cart was never found. Much later in the century, the writer returned home one Friday evening to find his parents, quite unconcerned about the rising water which was coming through the keyhole in the door.

If you have managed to struggle through all the confusion to this point I can only apologise for the lack of clarity. It is still unclear to me, at certain points in the history who was doing what in which mill. The river has changed but the many arms of the river lead us to believe that there were at least two mills at Mill Cottons. We do know that all have long ceased working, (although at the time of writing, in 2011, Willy Watt Mill is being renovated). As we walk or cycle or fish and look into the clear water perhaps, on reflection, they are better gone. Like many industrial places they are at their best in retrospect.

Postscripts:

1 *Films were made in Irthlingborough in the very early days of cinema and one, 'The Poacher's Sweetheart' described in an advertisement of the 8th July 1916 edition of the Poverty Bay Herald in New Zealand as a 'Three-Reel Masterpiece' featured a Ringstead Mill. Tony Ireson tells that, 'the villain imprisoned the heroine there but she escaped and swam the Nene, rushed to the courthouse on a newfangled motor-cycle and sidecar, saved the hero from the black cap and arranged the downfall of the villain'. Does the film still exist? Little of the more famous epic, 'The Battle of Waterloo' remains so perhaps it has gone.*

2 *A previous owner of the Willy Watt Mill also told of the past when it too was used for paper production. He remembers hearing that the workers would tread bark and rags to help soften it before it was made into a form of paper parchment. Two workers from Ringstead were said to have died as a result of working in this way, he believed from some disease or poisoning contracted from this treading process. Perhaps it was the bark itself but, increasingly, chemicals were used. Chlorine bleach was introduced to produce white paper and arsenic was also sometimes used to prevent mould from forming. In damp houses arsenic in wallpaper was known to poison people in Victorian times. It has even been alleged that this is what killed Napoleon in exile.*

3 *David Phillips states that Ringstead Lower mill - was demolished when the Blisworth - Peterborough railway was built in 1845 but all the three mills mentioned here are shown on both the 1835 and 1871 maps so was it another one?*

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Chapter Thirteen

Australian Journey

Susannah Arthur, formerly Lennell, neé Phillips (1826-1910)

Villagers in the nineteenth century wanted to emphasise continuity rather than difference when naming their children. This is the story of another Susannah Phillips who was the aunt of her namesake who married John Ball. In old age this Susannah was known as *Tiny Grandma* rather as Susannah Ball was called *Little Granny.* But there, the similarities end. This fascinating life story was sent to me by Robyn and Ned Knight and they have kindly allowed me to use it in this book. Susannah was born in Raunds but her parents came from Ringstead so she wins her place here.

Susannah, or Susannah Catherine as she was sometimes known, was born on 10th November, according to a family member's Birthday Book, and was christened on 24 December, 1826, at Raunds, Northamptonshire, England. Susannah always stated that she was born at Thrapston, which is about 4 kilometres from the village of Raunds. Her parents were John Phillips and Elizabeth nee Rands. At the age of 14, at the time of the 1841 Census, Susannah was working as a servant at a Public House called *The Red House* in Raunds.

On 16 October, 1843, at St. Mary's Church of England, Leighton, Huntingdonshire, England, Susannah married Edward Linnell, Labourer, son of Edward Linnell and Sarah (neé Coe). As far as can be determined, there were no children, for Susannah and Edward, born in England, prior to their departure for Australia, although her death certificate states that she had lost 5 sons and a daughter. Two sons were born and lost in Australia, leaving 4 children possibly born and died in England or on board ship.

Susannah and Edward travelled to South Australia on *La Belle Alliance*, initially leaving London on 28th February 1847. The ship proceeded as far as Madeira (Portugal), where a heavy gale damaged the upper rigging of the ship, forcing her return to Plymouth for repair. The voyage recommenced on 4 April, 1847, arriving in Adelaide on 5th July 1847, where she ran aground. She was refloated and arrived at the Queen's Wharf on the morning of 7th July 1847. On their arrival Edward and Susannah were recorded as 'Edwd Linnel and wife'. After arrival in South Australia, the name was mostly recorded as 'Lennell'.

Edward found labouring work at Pine Forest, South Australia, where their first two Australian children, John Phillips Lennell (1848) and Elizabeth Lennell (1850) were born. Unfortunately, John Phillips died as a result of Hydrocephalus (Water on the Brain) in 1850 at Enfield, South Australia. A second John was born in Munno Para in 1851, but he survived only 5 days, suffering convulsions. Another daughter, Sarah Catherine (Kate), was born at Little Para in 1853, and a son William was born at Munno Para in 1855. The family then moved towards Virginia, with son Frederick being born at Gawler Plains in 1857, however, their next son Thomas was born in Adelaide in 1859. By 1862, the family was living at Farrell's Flat, daughter Mary Ann being born at Mintaro. The last child, Matilda

was born in Kooringa (the original name for Burra, a major South Australian Copper mining town) in 1864, where Edward had found employment as a teamster.

Susannah was tragically left widowed in 1866, when Edward unexpectedly died from Pericarditis, in Kooringa. Her family ranged from 16 year old Elizabeth to 2 year old Matilda and the family were in dire straits. This situation was remedied on Christmas Day, 1866, when Susannah married, at Kooringa, recently widowed, Tribute mining team leader, George Arthur, a Cornishman, the father of six surviving children. George's youngest boy was also two years old. Susannah's 16 year old daughter Elizabeth married too that day to George Holmes, also a miner. The combined family then moved to Moonta Mines where George Arthur worked. (There is no recorded issue from this marriage, although Susannah's death certificate states that she had one deceased son from the marriage.)

Adopting the religion of her Cornish husband, Susannah became very active in her local church, becoming a Sunday School Teacher at the East Moonta Primitive Methodist Church. She had no formal education, and at the time of both her marriages, was unable to sign her name.

Tragically, in 1872, her daughter Elizabeth Holmes died at the Doora Mine, near Kadina, leaving two surviving children. Her son-in-law, George Holmes, who quickly remarried to provide a mother for his children, later died tragically in 1895, in a mine accident in Broken Hill, in which a number of former Copper Triangle miners were also killed.

Daughter Kate married, in 1872, James Henry Brown, who, although described as a miner on his marriage certificate, was a horseman of note, and who was eventually to take charge of the Wallaroo Mines' stables. James made the famous Easter horse and trap trip to Adelaide to register a mining claim for Captain Hancock, the mine manager.

Her son, William, married at Moonta, in 1877, Sarah Jane Medlen, known as Jane. Several of their children succumbed to Typhoid at Moonta Mines, and they moved, initially to Adelaide, and then to Kanowna, in Western Australia. Son, Thomas, was ambitious, and after his marriage to Susanna Coad in 1881in Adelaide, and after working at various mines in South Australia, he moved to Boulder, Western Australia where he became a Mine Manager and a Councillor.

Frederick remained at Moonta Mines, after marrying Emma Jerram in 1877, and several of his children worked in the mines. His first born son, Edward Austin Lennell married Florence May Verran, daughter of John Verran, who became a Premier of South Australia. Two of Frederick's sons served in the First World War, one, Leigh Treweek Lennell lost an arm in the fighting, and the other, Fred Jerram Lennell, is buried with Susannah at the Moonta Cemetery.

Mary Ann married William Curnow, another Cornish Miner, in 1879 at Moonta, and, after George Arthur's' death in 1895, Susannah lived with them in Wattle Street near the East Moonta Church. She was living with them at her death on 4 February 1910.

Six months after her stepfather's death, Matilda, Susannah's youngest daughter, at 30 years old, married Jonathon Sanders, a miner, at Wallaroo Mines. Jonathan, and later Matilda, was very active in the Salvation Army, and they moved to Port Pirie. (Jonathan's nephew, Charlie Sanders was a well known Moonta character, whose loss of an arm at 8 years old did not impede his active life.)

Susannah in old age

Susannah Arthur is remembered in her obituary as 'an old and highly respected resident of the district'. She became a legend in her family and was described by her family as tiny Grandma Arthur, and her photograph shows a short, but quite round lady. Susannah's family was very important to her and she would be proud of her family's achievements. She is the ancestor of war servicemen (one paying the ultimate sacrifice), doctors, nurses, lawyers, accountants, businessmen, miners, a Commonwealth Games gold medallist, three Mail Medallists (for Australian Rules football in South Australia), and a prominent Australian Football League (AFL) footballer. A significant number of her descendants were, and are, in community work in some way, and many are keen sportspeople.

Susannah was buried in an unmarked grave (Row 6, Plot 306) at Moonta Cemetery. Her descendants, after a family gathering in Moonta in 1997, placed a headstone to honour her memory.

*

We believe the above information is accurate, to the best of our knowledge. The research has been undertaken over 20 years and has been, where possible, verified by official records.

29 September 2008 Ned Knight, Great Great Grandson, and Robyn Knight.

Chapter Fourteen

New World Homes

Ball, Daniel (c1827 -), Ball, John (c1825 -) and Nobles (nee Ball), Sarah (c1823 -)

Daniel Ball and Phebe Whittering were married on 7th August 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. Daniel was a shepherd and over the next twenty years they produced their own flock of eleven children. It seems an ordinary, sedentary family welded to the country side of its birth but, as in the nursery rhyme, many of the sheep were lost, and it may be that only the youngest, Elisha, came home with his tale to tell.

George, the eldest, joined the Royal Marines and, perhaps, set the pattern for his brothers and sisters. Elizabeth, the second child was born in 1820 and I believe died in 1840. John, the second oldest boy, had been born in 1825 and died just one year later. Ann, the second oldest girl survived and married George Mays and stayed in the village Then followed Sarah, Daniel and a second John and it seemed that these formed their own group and took the leap together into the unknown. It is their story that we will be trying to piece together here.

It is worth remembering that, of the younger siblings, James born in about 1831 married Emma Storks and stayed locally and Samuel born in 1836 was buried aged just 7 on November 9th 1843 but that Thomas and Elisha whose stories we have also told left the nest before 1871, one to join the army and the other to seek his fortune in the New World and come back disappointed.

Chart to show where the three siblings of our story sat in family tree

Daniel Ball ……..Phebe Whittering

George b 1818	Elizabeth b 1820-40	Anne b 1822	John 1825-6	**Sarah** b 1827	**Daniel** b 1827/8	**John** b 1830	James b1831	**Thomas** b 1834	Samuel 1836-43	**Elisha** b 1836

All birth dates are approximate (and vary through the Censuses in most cases).
I have noted the dates of those who died very early and have also highlighted George, Thomas and Elisha who also left the area (although Elisha returned).

Of all Daniel and Phoebe's children, by 1861, only Ann (now Mays) and James were still alive and living locally. Why this scattering of the family? We can only speculate but we do know that in 1841 Ringstead was finally 'Enclosed'. It was a very late Parliamentary Enclosure but it had much the same effect as the earlier ones. Small farmers were bought out, cottagers and those with rights on the

common land lost them. The labourers lost the perks of the crops, the grazing and firewood that were part of their lives and became totally dependent on paid employment. Mechanisation also reduced the need for labourers and the new industrial towns and cities drew them in.

High prices and low wages were bringing many families to the breadline and the New World, a place of opportunity and goldmines, with cheap passages advertised in the local papers must have been an exciting if fearful prospect.

We know that, in the 1851 Census, Daniel and Phoebe are living in Ringstead with their children; Daniel, the son, is 22 and an agricultural labourer; Mary (24) is Daniel's new wife and a lacemaker; John (21) is an under gardener; Thomas (17), an agricultural labourer and Elisha, the youngest, is a scholar. We also know that Sarah (26) has married Thomas Nobles and is also living in Ringstead. She is an 'Ag Lab's wife' with her daughter Phoebe who is two years old. Thomas is away, possibly with his parents in Pilton.

By 1861 only Elisha is living with his parents and, apart from those we have mentioned, the others are nowhere to be found in England.

On 28th June 1852 the packet-ship *Jacob A Westervelt* arrived in New York from Liverpool. It had been built in 1849 and was a wooden hulled sailing ship named after the firm of its builder. It was part of the American *Black Star Line* and had first put into Liverpool on 10thJanuary 1850. She was a large three-decker, able to take 900 passengers, and was well equipped with a surgeon's room, bath rooms and separate hospitals for men and women. We know that in 1852 it did its fastest run from New York to Liverpool of 14 days 12 hours but that was with the prevailing westerly winds. Journeys to the United States could be much longer.

The sailing packets, unlike most passenger ships, ran to a timetable, whatever the weather, and had three, rather than the usual two, crossings a year. These fast times, in sailing terms, meant that as much sail as possible was maintained in all weathers. This did result, sometimes, in crossings that could be rough and fraught with danger.

In the previous year, on 31stMay 1851, the ship, with 800 passengers on board, bound for New York, grounded on the Old South Shoal within sight of Sankaty,(where a lighthouse had begun operation just a year earlier) in Nantucket. Luckily, the steamboat *Massachusetts* managed to put a pilot on board and she was guided to safety. In the following year, in December 1853, the *Jacob A Westervelt* foundered on the coast of Newfoundland but all 700 passengers survived. Later, on 12th April 1860, the New York Times reported on a fire, which had happened the day before on the ship while it was in the harbour, which it thought had probably destroyed it. In fact, it appears that in 1862 it was sold to the Black Bull Line and renamed Southern Empire and used on the long England to Australia emigrant route.

Incidentally, this report of the *New York Times* reveals something of the times, both the fear of new technology and the violence of the new cities. It, tells of one of the members of a fire service going to the blazing ship.

> *A brutal assault was made upon JOHN ROSS, a member of Manhattan Company No. 8 and a clerk in the General Post Office, who was running through Chatham-street to overtake his*

> *Company. When near the corner of Pearl street, his uniform attracted the attention of a gang of 'Dead Rabbits', who are hangars-on of an Engine Company who entertain sentiments of envy toward the steam-engines and one of the scoundrels dealt him a blow from behind with a heavy club, that laid him prostrate on the walk . . .*

Those that disembarked from that 1852 voyage were, therefore, lucky that they had arrived without serious incident. It still would have been an unpleasant and frightening journey for passengers, many of whom had probably not seen the sea before they reached Liverpool. There were conmen in Liverpool, known as the *Forty Thieves,* who preyed particularly on the Irish families that were escaping from the 'Famine'. They worked for crooked shopkeepers, money changers (for dollars) and landlords who tried to take what little money the emigrants had. The vast exodus of the Irish famine victims was beginning to wane and regulation was starting to improve the conditions for the waiting emigrants as well as the resident population. Liverpool, however, still had vast slums and cholera and typhus were rife. The emigrants had to keep their wits about them if they were not to lose their health and their money before they embarked on their journey.

Even the boarding of the ship could be a frightening experience, for some captains made sure the cargo was stored and the cabin passengers installed before they allowed the steerage passengers on board. The captain would also, by then, be making ready to cast off and there was often a mad scramble up the gangplank by the poor passengers, carrying their few boxes and possessions. Some did 'miss the boat' and some were drowned in the dock.

The crossing was planned to take between sixteen and thirty days according to the weather conditions. The' Saloon' or 'First Cabin' of the *Jacob A. Westervelt* was lined with satinwood, zebrawood and rosewood, with brilliant pier-glasses, and painted white and gold. These fortunate few would be provided with meals and all services. The steerage passengers, on the other hand, were only provided with 'coals, water and bread stuff' for their £5 ticket. They were crammed together in the lower decks with fourteen square feet of space allowed per passenger (half that for children and nothing for infants). They had to cook their own meals in the few places provided on deck and generally fend for themselves. The *New York Daily Times* of 13 December 1891, comparing the new steamships with the old sail packets, describes the earlier accommodation:

> *The steerage occupied the whole of the 'tween decks. Single and double and upper and lower berths were arranged all around the sides of the ship. As far as possible families were placed together and the women passengers given all the privacy possible in the limited space available. The steerage was reached by ladders at the fore and main hatches which were always open except in bad weather, and ventilators through the deck and a windsail or two [a sail designed to funnel air to the lower decks] furnished the fresh air of the steerage. Should weather become stormy and the sea heavy the hatches were closed and the poor emigrant had to make the best of his surroundings until the weather moderated.*

It was a harsh world where crew and stowaways could be flogged and beaten but certainly the Irish passengers were known to try to make the best of it, and help the time to pass, with music and dancing.

When they finally arrived, the emigrants would have looked at the new city with awe and, one would guess, with fear. It too had people trying to rob and cheat them but, by 1848, the State of New York had established immigrant reception centres and licensed boarding houses and in 1852 *Emigrants' Homes,* made from converted warehouses, were offering reasonable, clean temporary accommodation.

Among the passengers shuffling off that ship in June 1852 were a group of young country men and women who were noted briefly on the Passenger List. (it is not always clear to whom the 'Labourer' description applies.)

John Ball	***22***	***Male***	***Labourer***
Eliza Ball	***21***	***Female***	***Labourer***
Mary Ball	***22***	***Female***	***Labourer***
Daniel Ball	***25***	***Male***	***Labourer***
George Ball	***infant***	***Male***	***5 months old***
Thomas Noble	***24***	***Male***	***Labourer***
Sarah Noble	***24***	***Female***	
Phoebe Noble	***2***	***Female***	

As we have seen, Sarah Ball had married Thomas Nobles (13thJune 1849) so here we have the siblings and their spouses together in the port of New York. There is only one problem. Who is Eliza Ball, aged 21? Unfortunately the list does not include the marital status so we do not know if Eliza is a wife or a relation. We know that Daniel's wife was Mary, born in Warmington, from the 1851 English Census but we can find no sign of a marriage for John. He had a sister, Elizabeth, who was baptised in 1820, so she would have been some ten years older and we also believe that she is the Elizabeth Ball who was buried on 15thDecember 1840 aged 20. The Register does not give parents but she does seem to be the only Elizabeth Ball of this age in the parish. There is an Eliza Ball, daughter of Edward Ball, born and living in Denford in 1851. She may be a cousin, although we have not proved this. Could she have gone with the Balls and Nobles? We must look to America, to see if it provides any answers.

As Eliza is an enigma at the moment we will look at the three siblings first, to see if we can find their progress in their new land. So far, their movements in those first eight years, has not been established. Had they made plans before they left? Did they stay together at first until they could decide what to do?

We first find Daniel and Mary in the 1860 Federal Census living in Schroeppel, Oswego, New York State. Mary is 30 which is what we would expect but Daniel is 43 which is some ten years too old. With them is George, now 8, and shown, like his parents, as born in England. There are now two further children, Mary, 6, and James, 4, both born in New York State. Daniel is a described as a farmer.

The 1870 Census confirms our suspicion that the 1860 Census gives the wrong age, because he is now 44. Mary is 44 too, which is also the age we would be expect from the 1851 English Census. George is 19 and his occupation is now 'Farming', Mary is 17, with no occupation shown, but James,

aged 13, is also in farming. There are also Clara 7 and William 5 who are both at school. The family are living in the town of Palermo in the county of Oswego.

It seems that Daniel and Mary had found their home. In 1880 he is still farming in Palermo and all the children are still at home. George is at home in farming and his younger brother James is a labourer. Mary is a servant and the two youngest children Clara and William aged 16 and 13 are still at school. There is only one obvious cloud in that, beside George now aged 27, is the word 'Insane'. It may be that he had learning difficulties but we cannot be sure.

The 1890 USA Federal Census is largely lost, burnt in a fire, but in 1900 Daniel and Mary, both 73 years old, continue to live in Palermo Township. He is still a farmer and William, now 31, is a labourer and living at home. I have not found George. The Census records that Daniel cannot read or write but both Mary and William can. Daniel also has not naturalised but as the couple come up to their golden wedding anniversary it seems that the family is now American.

*

Let us now look at Daniel's brother, John. It seems certain, because of the evidence of his age and companions that John Ball did go to New York with his siblings. After his arrival the position is a little less certain than with Daniel and, at present, we have a lot of detailed fragments and like shards dug up from the past they could turn out to be from different pots. Gradually, however, the shape of a single human being seems to be emerging.

We will start with his early life. We first saw John at his baptism in Ringstead in 1830 when he was ten months old. The other details of the date of the christening are omitted. By the 1841 Census he is aged 12 and living with his parents and siblings, a few doors from the Vicarage, before the great dispersal of the family begins. He, like his older brother has followed his father as a shepherd. At first, Enclosure along the Nene valley had the effect of creating more pastoral land but sheep farming was not so labour intensive as arable in that time, still, mainly dependent on horsepower and limited but increasing mechanisation.

By 1851 he is aged 21 and an 'Under Gardener'. His older brother, Daniel, is married but he and his new wife are still living with the family. Only James has left to seek his living I believe - by a process of elimination - that he is wrongly put as John Ball, aged 19, born in Ringstead, a shepherd at Wold Lodges in Tansor which is downstream on the Nene, on the other side of Oundle. James moves first to Titchmarsh and then back to Ringstead by 1871.

John, on the other hand seems to disappear from all the Censuses. There is no sign of a burial either.

In desperation I began to scan the websites for news, however belated. Finally I came on a site, which had digitised a book called, *A memorial and biographical history of the counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura, California.* It was published in1891 and in it I found the following short passage.

> *JOHN BALL, whose fine ranch borders the Santa Ynez River, was born in Northamptonshire, England in 1831.*

His father, Daniel Ball, was a farmer, and subject lived at home until 1850, when he came to the United States and first settled at Lockport, New York, where for three years he was servant in a hotel. Then, in 1853, he went to Oswego County and farmed up to 1856, when he came to California, by way of Panama.

He then went to the mines in Nevada County and mined for three years with good success, but on account of failing health he was obliged to leave; so went to Monterey County where he rented from 200 to 400 acres and raised grain for sixteen years. In 1876 he came to Lompoc, and bought eighty acres of land, paying $35 per acre. The land was covered with brush and timber, but is now cleared and highly improved. He carried on general farming up to 1885, but since then has been an extensive breeder of hogs, of the Poland-China, Essex and Berkshire breeds, keeping about 150 head and fattening for market. He is about reducing his stock, to return to the cultivation of beans and mustard, and thus change his farming. Mr. Ball was married at Castorville [sic], Monterey County, in 1863, to Miss Elizabeth Staley, a native of Missouri. They have but one child living, Charles Ball, who was born July 6 1869, and he still lives at home. They lost their two daughters in 1879, with diphtheria, dying within four days of each other.

On the balance of evidence it seems this is our John. The date of birth is a couple of years wrong and he emigrated not in 1850 but in 1852 as we have seen. On the other hand, his father was Daniel Ball from Northamptonshire. It says Daniel was a farmer but that is an understandable upgrade. We cannot be certain, but looking at the lives at some of his siblings, it does seem very possible.

His brother, Daniel was in Oswego County as a farmer, where John's biography says he also farmed. It looks as if the two brothers were together at the start but either they fell out or John decided to try his luck in California. In the biography it also states that he had been mining in Nevada County, California. It seems likely that he went to seek his fortune in the gold mines that were in the county. At this time, the use of water to separate and find the gold had begun, with devastating effects, as this extract from a University of California website makes clear:

The Gold Rush, positive for California in so many ways, had a devastating effect on the state's environment. Many of these problems were directly related to gold-mining technology. The process of hydraulic mining which became popular in the 1850's caused irreparable environmental destruction….. California's largest hydraulic mine {was} Malakoff Diggings in Nevada County.

Dams (such as the English Dam in Nevada County) . . . which were constructed to help supply water to the mines during the dry summer months, changed the course of rivers. The sediment washed away by hydraulic mining clogged river-beds and lakes, threatening agriculture throughout the Central Valley. Conflicts arose between mining and farming interests. Hydraulic mining essentially came to an end in 1884 . . .

Checking the American Censuses, I have not yet found John in 1860 but, according to the biography he married Elizabeth Staley in Castroville in 1863 and, in 1868, in Monterey County, he became a naturalized United States citizen. In 1870, we find the family in Castroville Township, in the county of Monterey. There is Elizabeth aged 39, with the children, Mary 6, Narcissa 4 and Charles 1. John is

away but all around are farmers and farm labourers. It states that Elizabeth was born in Kentucky but this is possible, although it does introduce some uncertainty. There is also the possibility that this Elizabeth is John's second wife although, as yet, we have no evidence except his late marriage and the enigma of the Eliza Ball who was on the Jacob A. Westervelt with him.

We know, from the biography, that John moved to Lompoc in 1876. It seems that Lompoc was only founded in 1874 when the Lompoc Land Company bought and sold 43,000 acres to establish a temperance colony. The Lompoc History site reports that:

> *A land rush ensued with fierce bidding forcing land prices to skyrocket in just one day. The temperance colony flourished, despite being located on the stage line midway between the 'wicked' cities of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. Liquor inevitably found its way into the town via passing stagecoaches. Local druggists were also known to stock alcohol 'for medicinal purposes'. The city of Lompoc was incorporated on August 13th 1888. At that time the courts ruled that the temperance clause included in all deeds to that time was unenforceable, since there was no reversion clause. The lands could not revert to the Lompoc Valley Land Colony, since it was disbanded years earlier. Temperance, therefore, ended with the incorporation of the City.*

The biography tells us that in 1876 he bought land near the Santa Ynez River which he cleared and farmed there. The farm was on the river edge, west of Lompoc, and had a river crossing which is still called Ball's Crossing. By good fortune Armilda Carter Douglass also moved to Lompoc in 1876 and she has left her memories of that time. She tells of the droughts when, '*During that winter [1876-7] not enough rain fell at any one time to lay the dust'.* and the floods that meant the early farmers lived, in those early years, on the edge of starvation. She also tells of the farmers' inexperience that caused them great hardship:

> *When first beans were planted in the valley, no one knew just how ripe pods had to be before they should be picked. Consequently, the farmers waited until the pods were so dry that the beans would pop out if any effort to pick them was made during the day time. In order to gather the crop, pickers waited until night fogs moistened the pods and crawled down the furrows on their hands and knees in the dark picking beans all night long.*

She also tells, however, of people helping each other in times of trouble and sharing surpluses during those early years of famine.

In 1879 we know, from the biography, that John and Elizabeth's two girls died of diphtheria, which was during an epidemic which took the lives of other Lompoc children, and in the 1880 Census, Charley aged 10 is now on his own. We find him with his parents in Santa Barbara County, California. Elizabeth is 49 and born in Kentucky and John, now returned, is aged 50 and is a farmer. The Census was taken on 4th June 1880 so John must have been born between June 5th1829 and June 4th 1830. This would mean that his birth comes within the time span we would expect from his baptism in Ringstead rather than the one quoted in the book. It is a small point but it does show that many dates in family histories are not facts but best guesses.

Lompoc 4th July 1909 West Ocean.
With the kind permission of Lompoc Historical Society.

There is at least one further twist in the story of John Ball. Myra Manfrina has informed me, from the Lompoc Local History resources, that Elizabeth divorced John in 1892 and took back her maiden name. On September 28th 1895 the *Santa Maria Times* of Santa Barbara reported:

> *MARRIED Mr John Ball of Lompoc and Mrs. Della Gale of Santa Maria, September 25th 1895 at the residence of Rev. Jas. M. Smith.*

The Santa Barbara County marriage register 1887-1897 has been transcribed and digitised and it shows that John was 64, which is about the age that we would expect, and Della was 49.

In the 1900 Census a John Ball, aged 70, born in England in March 1830 is a widower and living by himself in Township 3, Santa Barbara, California. His marriage to Della was not a long one. The Census also records that he he had come to the USA in 1850 and was now a teamster. His son Charles married Alice Brookshire in about 1890 and they had two sons and brought up their family in the Santa Barbara area. His first wife, Elizabeth, is buried in the same plot as her two daughters.

John died on March 9th 1905 and the Morning Press newspaper on the following day was a brief statement:

> ***OLD RESIDENT DEAD***
>
> *John Ball, an old resident of this county passed away yesterday afternoon at the county hospital at the age of 75 years. He was a native of England but had lived in this locality for many years. He has been confined in the hospital for two years, the cause of his death being the natural decline of old age. He leaves a widow in Lompoc and a son in Santa Maria.*

I think that the assertion of a widow may be an error and may refer to Elizabeth. Two John Balls half a world apart who between them have crossed the Atlantic and then sailed around the USA through the Panama Canal to California. They have married and had the tragedy of the death of their two girls. It seems almost certain, with the evidence of the crossing with his brother and sister, the stated coming from Oswego County in New York State and his father being a Daniel Ball from Northamptonshire, that the two are in fact the same person.

*

Let us finally look at Sarah and her husband Thomas Nobles (or Noble). In 1860 Sara aged 39, the age that we would expect from the 1851 Ringstead Census, was living in Lysander in Onondaga County in New York State. Thomas (34) is a Farmer and Phebe (13) has two siblings, William (6) and Elizabeth (6). By 1870 they are living in Avon, Livingston, in New York State. Thomas is still a farmer, Sarah is 'keeping house' and the two younger children, William T (14) and Elizabeth (13) are still at home, both born in New York State.

In 1880 they are at Henrietta, in the county of Monroe, still in New York State and Thomas is 53 and Sarah 58. William, their son, is 24 and a farmer, presumably with his father and Elizabeth is a dressmaker. Sarah is still keeping house. We next see Sarah aged 74, now a widow, living with William, and his wife and children, in Rush also in Monroe county. Thomas had died on July 13th 1892 in the Halineramin Hospital in Rochester. William, like his father, is a farmer and his son Elwin is a 'farm labourer'. Perhaps surprisingly, considering the hard life that she must have had that is not our last sighting of her in the Federal Censuses. In 1910, aged 87, she is living with her eldest daughter Phoebe (60) and her husband Mathew Flowerday apparently some ten years her senior (although only 6 years older in earlier Censuses), in Brighton, Monroe County, New York State. None of them are working and let us hope that they were able to live comfortably in the land they had played a small part in making. Matthew and Phebe have been married 40 years but have had no children.

*

We cannot be completely certain, but it appears that the three siblings, Daniel, John and Sarah all stayed in the United States and made their lives there in farming. The younger brother, Elisha, who came a decade later, went first to Elmira in New York State and then on to Canada. For some reason, he and his family returned to Ringstead. Perhaps, as we have speculated in his biography, he came too late to get the land and the life that he wanted.

There is another important fact that we have so far not mentioned. The American Civil War raged from 12th April 1861 to April 1865. The War claimed some 620,000 lives, which is more than the combined American dead from all other wars between 1775 and 1975. New York State was not in the area of conflict between the Union and Confederate forces but volunteers were recruited from the area and many died in the vicious battles that characterised the war. As the History of Oswego County, written in 1877, states:

> *No portion of the Empire State exhibited more patriotism or responded with greater alacrity to the president's call for Volunteers than the county of Oswego.*

Many families in the area, as also in California, where John and his family were living, would have lost sons. The same book also reports on the boom years after the war and the great financial crisis which began in the autumn of 1873, and from which America was just emerging in 1877.

We cannot be sure how all this affected the Ringstead emigrants but certainly it would have been difficult times and any success in the New World would have been hard won. One wonders how their children and grandchildren fared but that is another story in another country and in another century. We must leave it there.

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My special thanks to Myra Manfrina who provided me with a raft of information on John Ball in the Lompoc area and to Helen Rydell in Santa Barbara who found details of his death.

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Chapter Fifteen

In Nelson's Navy

William Ball (c 1773 – 1852)

At the moment this is one of the biographies that is like one of those infamous cars that are really two entirely different vehicles which have been welded together. I have not yet managed to link the two parts of the story together completely. It just needs one more bit of information on either side of the story to be sure either way.

William Ball is one of the earliest of our Ringstead lives. He was born in about 1773 in Great Addington and crossed the Nene to get married and live. In his later years he was a shepherd with a family but the 1851 Census gives us the clue that his was not a life always spent in the pastures of Ringstead quietly looking after his flocks. In his old age, it describes him as a 'Greenwich Pensioner'. This was the naval equivalent of the more well known Chelsea Pensioner, which was a title reserved for men who had served in the army. There was a magnificent 'hospital' at Greenwich where those with in-pensions lived but the great majority of the pensioners lived at home and were paid a small 'out' pension based mainly on their years of service.

The records do have an entry for a William Ball giving his service so that his pension can be calculated. As there does not appear to be another of that name in the records we have to assume that he is our man. He was engaged on the 9th April 1796 as an Able Seaman acting as a Ship's Carpenter. His first boat was the *HMS Redoubt* which originally had been a civilian boat called the *Rover*. It had been purchased by the navy in 1793 and converted into a 20-gun floating battery and was intended to be used inshore to protect the coast. Its first task was to defend one of the east coast ports. The Napoleonic Wars had raised the fear of invasion. An alternative seat of government had been built at Weedon Bec in Northamptonshire in case London was captured. Also the coastline was fortified and the Martello towers built.

Kingston- upon-Hull, usually known simply as Hull, in the East Riding of Yorkshire was a major port where a citadel had been built in the seventeenth century to defend it against attack from the sea. Now the defences were reinforced and three ships, fitted out as floating batteries, were sailed to the Humber. The *Nonsuch* was anchored in White Booth Roads and the *Redoubt* and the *Nautilus* in the Humber.

We do not know exactly when the *Redoubt* was fitted out but it seems likely that William was helping with the completion of the changes needed for its new role. It does not seem that the three boats saw any action.

On 23rd September 1799, still listed as a carpenter, William was transferred to *HMS Ambuscade.* This was originally a French ship, *L'Embuscade* which had been captured on 12th October 1798 by Rear Admiral Sir J. B. Warren's squadron off the coast of Ireland. William was only on board for some five

months, until 14th February 1800. He is again listed as a carpenter and it seems likely that he was repairing and refitting the French boat ready for action as part of the British navy.

The wooden ships meant that often enemy vessels could be quickly recycled to become part of the British fleet. This, together with the purchase of ships from the merchant navy, which were also sometimes sold back when no longer required, meant that there were often a bewildering number of vessels with ever-changing names.

The Immortalité being captured by HMS Fisgard

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_frigate_Immortalit%C3%A9_(1795)

On 15th February 1800 William transferred to *HMS Immortalité* which, unsurprisingly, was also a former French ship. This Romaine class frigate, *Immortalité,* had been captured on 20th October 1798 by *HMS Fisgard,* shortly after the Battle of Tory Island. It was a 42-gun 5th Rate ship and saw active service on the Home Station. Once again it seems likely that William was involved in the recommissioning of the vessel but he also remained on the ship for just over five years, until 27th May 1805. A year later, in July 1806, HMS *Immortalité* belied her name and was broken up.

Meanwhile, on 29th May 1805, William joined the *HMS Diomede* which was a British boat launched in 1798 in Deptford. Soon after joining it appears that William was part of a secret operation far away from the main conflict in Europe. A small fleet carrying various regiments left Falmouth bound ostensibly for the East Indies. They stopped at Madeira and waited for a larger fleet which had left Cork, said to be going to the Mediterranean. It was under the protection of three ships of sixty-four guns, one ship of fifty guns, and two ships of thirty-two guns. The fifty-gun ship was the *Diomede.* Altogether an army of six thousand six hundred and fifty four men was aboard.

The destination was not the East Indies or the Mediterranean but the Cape of Good Hope. Of course, at the time, events in Europe were distracting the French and the Battle of Trafalgar in October gave

the British supremacy of the seas and stopped the threat of invasion. The Dutch were in possession of the Cape and a century later a bloody war was to be fought over the same ground between the two nations. Strong gales stopped the intended landing which was some sixteen miles from Cape Town. Then the *Diomede* with the transport ships of the 38th Regiment, the cavalry ships and a proportion of the artillery, preceded by *HMS L'Espoir* sailed to Saldanha Bay The wind abated overnight and on the afternoon of the 6th January the troops were landed with the loss of one boat which had ventured beyond the protection of the bay.

The action led to the capture of the Cape and, we read that, on 9th February 1806 William was promoted to Acting Master Shipwright at the Cape of Good Hope. Was his worth recognised or did someone die or leave the ship?

Here his record becomes a little confusing. If we look at the Diomede's progress after the Cape of Good Hope we find that she was part of a strange action in South America where, without government approval, an attack was made in the River Plate region of South America. An unsuccessful attack on Buenos Aires was followed by the capture of Monte Video.

After the capture of Monte Video the Diomede returned to England and was put out of commission in June 1807. The problem is that William seems to have left the service and possibly the Diomede in February 1807. We need to check if the Diomede had docked in England by that date. He then appears to lose his rank of Acting Master Shipwright and there also seems to be a break in his service record of some seven months. This may just be a confusion in the records.

Author's rough sketch of a ship's carpenter at about this time.

William joined *HMS Berwick* on 5th September 1807 and again there is something of a problem. The *Berwick* was commissioned in 1809 There seems to be at least three possibilities: he was stationed at a shipbuilding yard in Berwick-on-Tweed not on a ship; he was in commissioning the San Juan Nepomuceno which was a Spanish ship captured at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and was briefly renamed HMS Berwick but was then named San Juan (presumably when the new Berwick was launched), and acted as a supply hulk in Gibraltar harbour; he worked on the HMS Berwick, a 74-gun third rate ship of the line launched in 1809, both before and after it was launched.

More research is needed before we make too many assumptions about William's final years in the navy. He remained in, or on, the Berwick until he finally left the navy on 3rd October 1816. There is one last document from the Public record office which gives us a little more information and perhaps clarifies the situation. It records that on a ship named the Berwick a William Ball 'Passed for Lieutenant', on 5th January 1815 and became a Lieutenant from 6th March of the same year. He seems to have remained so until 1st July 1816. There is a slight discrepancy in the discharge dates so there is the possibility that there were two William Balls on the Berwick who were discharged the same year but it seems unlikely. Underneath the main details it records 7/= [35 pence]. Was this his pay or the contribution to his pension?

Returning now to William's civilian life, we know that William married Ann Weekley on 7th July 1814 at Ringstead Parish Church with, unusually, three witnesses, Henry Weekley, Eliza Goodwin and Hannah Park. He is described as a bachelor and she as a spinster. It also states that bride and groom are 'BOTP', (Both Of This Parish), but that did not mean that he had been resident long in Ringstead. It could have been a matter of a week or two. If we look at the most logical scenario, that William was on the HMS Berwick that was launched in 1809, she had taken part in the action that brought about the surrender of Genoa in April 1814. It had then returned to Portsmouth for a refit.

It is possible, therefore, that William could have been on shore leave for his wedding day. He was about forty at the time of his marriage and his bride was around thirty-three years of age. I have not found Ann's baptism, unless she was christened Mary on March 30th 1783, daughter of William and Susannah Weekley. Certainly their witness, Henry Weekley, was christened, two years later, of the same parents. (At the wedding it states the Banns are 'with Consent of Parents' which usually implies that one of the parties is under the statutory age. Both William and Ann are well over this age so either it is a mistake or William married two Anns and we have taken them as one. I can find no evidence of this second possibility so we must take it as a small error).

William and Ann were quite old to be starting a family but they lost no time and the children soon followed. Mary may have been the result of the same shore leave for she was christened on June 12th 1815 (worryingly William is described as a labourer in the Register). The records show that William's naval career possibly ended in 1816 and William Weekley Ball was baptised in 1818, John in 1821 and Henry 1824. By the time of the christening of John, William is described as a shepherd.

In general the two lives of William, although they overlap, do fit together reasonably well. The 1851 Census for Ringstead has William Ball, father of the head of the house, John Ball, aged 78 and a Greenwich Pensioner. Ann too, is still alive aged 76.

William and Ann both died within the next few years. William's death certificate tells us that he died of 'old age' on 15th June 1852 at Ringstead aged 78 years. At least he did not end up in the workhouse. Perhaps the pension helped them both enjoy a decent old age. He is recorded as a shepherd so we have no clue as to his naval past. Their youngest son, Henry had died as a young child but they had seen their other children, Mary, William and John prosper and join the Victorian middle class. However, the tragic affair of their son William and the disappearance of Lydia Attley would have soured their final years.

There are some worrying holes in the story of the, as yet, two Williams. The parish register never records him as a sailor, even when he was still in the navy. On the other hand there has been a story within my family that one of my ancestors was a sea captain and William is one of only two possibilities for this role. [Family stories often upgrade the importance of an ancestor]. We must wait to see if that elusive last piece of evidence needed emerges from the archives.

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Chapter Sixteen

Musicians, Baptists and Chemists

Abington, Leonard Joseph (1763-1842) and Herbert Joseph (1808-1884).

We have told the story of Jedidah (or Jedidah or Louisa) Abington who went to live in Manchester and then returned in middle age and married the butcher, John Ball. We also mentioned her father Herbert and this is his story but also, briefly, that of his father and two of his brothers.

Let us start with the father, Leonard Joseph Abington, who was born on the 11th June 1763 in St Marylebone, London. He was the son of another Leonard Abington who was a violinist and bass singer, possibly singing at Westminster Abbey. He also composed songs for Vauxhall Gardens, a notorious place of pleasure for the upper classes. Titles such as *The Luckless Lover, A Midnight Thought, Phillis's Resolution or The Power of Love* give some clue to the content of these songs. It seems, however, that he wrote the music to other people's words. In *The History of our Abington Ancestors*, Ian and John Abington reveal that, in the notes, written much later by Leonard Abington Vessey, Leonard by his first marriage 'had a good estate but by negligence and intemperance it was lost'. Leonard Joseph was the only offspring of this second marriage, in 1762, to Elizabeth Jenkins.

Not only was Leonard's father a musician but his grandfather, Joseph Abington Junior (1698 -1774), was a trumpet and harpsichord player (and a lawyer according to his great grandson's Memoir) and his great grandfather, Joseph Abington Senior (1668 – 1745) was one of *His Majesty's Band of Music.* All three are listed in *Mortimer's London Universal Directory (1763)* under the heading 'Masters and Professors of Music'. Leonard's address was given as, 'Great Putney-street', Joseph Junior as 'Compton-street, St Anne's, Soho' and Joseph as' Beauford Buildings'.

We know, therefore, that the Leonard Abington who came to Ringstead is the one listed in *A Musical Directory for the Year 1794* as his father had died only some three years after Leonard's birth, in 1766, of typhus fever. His mother was a widow for 56 years, although she 'enjoyed an ample annuity', as her grandson tells us later, which came as a result of her husband's membership of the *Royal Society of Musicians*. Nonetheless, his father's early death must have had an impact on the family, for Leonard, the only son, was apprenticed as a wood carver to a furniture maker from the age of 12 for seven years, which had been also sponsored by the Society. There is no evidence, however, that he ever followed this trade.

In 1794 Leonard was living at 6 Gilbert Street, Bloomsbury, London and his occupation was given as bass singer and musician. He was also a member of *the Long Acre Society*, of *the Choral Fund* and the *Surrey Chapel Society*. Some ten years before this entry, on 15th October 1784, Leonard had married Jane Bollard in the parish of St George, Holborn in the City of London. Jane was born on 28th February 1764 in Finedon, just a few miles down the road from Ringstead. Was it coincidence or was Jane the link that drew the couple back to Northamptonshire in their old age? How and where did they meet?

The fact that the wedding was in Holborn perhaps makes it more likely that it was Jane who had moved to London rather than the reverse. Jane came from an ordinary labouring family and many of her siblings died before reaching maturity and are buried 'in woollen'. This practice came from an act of Charles II designed to protect the English woollen industry, with a fine if any other cloth was used. Most churches would keep a coffin for use by the poorer parishioners to take the body to the graveside but it would be buried only in the woollen shroud and the coffin taken back to the church ready for the next body. [Another royal Charles is today advocating the use of woollen coffins].

Whellan's History, Topography and Directory of Northamptonshire for 1874 gives a brief biography of Leonard Joseph as being an important personage associated with Ringstead. It tells us:

> *He was of an ancient family and was a classical scholar of fair repute and the author of the works entitled, 'Letters from the Dead to the Living', Consummation' a poem, 'The Living Temple', 'The Rebellion of Korah', a sacred drama, etc.*

This does not mention any musical abilities but it does indicate a creative person. It also states that he was from an 'ancient family', so it may be that he had visited among the network of halls and mansions that the upper classes of the day moved among. Could this be how he knew of Northamptonshire or how he met Jane Bollard?

At this point we must introduce Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. In 1739 she joined the first Methodist Society in Fetter Lane, London. After the death of her husband in 1746/7 she threw all her energies into the revivalist movement of the Wesleys and others and George Whitefield became her personal chaplain. She reluctantly broke away from the Anglican Church and founded the *Countess of Huntingdon's Connection* which was a Calvinistic movement within the Methodist Church. Her family home was at Donnington Park in Leicestershire so around that area particularly, but also elsewhere, she founded some sixty-four chapels. In particular, in 1780, she took over a building called *The Pantheon* adjacent to her London home in Spa Field, Clerkenwell and converted it to a chapel. It had been opened some ten years earlier as a 'place of amusement' selling tea, coffee, wine punch, etc.

The complexities of the coming together and separating of various Nonconformist groups need not concern us here. The important point is that the 'New Connection' came to believe in adult baptism and that only some (not all) people could be saved. In this they were similar to the Particular Baptists.

This relevance of this to our story is that after Leonard James (born 27 November1785) whose baptism we have not yet found, the next five of Leonard and Janes's children were christened at Spa Fields, Lady Huntingdon's, Clerkenwell. These were Benjamin [Edmund] (born 24 Sep 1787; baptised 16 Dec 1787), Jemima (born 6 May 1791; baptised 29 May 1791, Letitia (born 27 May 1793; baptised 30 June 1793), Ebenezer (born 8 August 1795; baptised 20 Sept 1795), and Rebecca (born 18 May 1800; baptised 14th Sept 1800). As both the birth and baptism dates are given we can see that these are infant christenings.

There is another son, Edwin, born in about 1803 in London whose birth or baptism we have not yet traced and then Emma Jane born on 3 January 1806 and Herbert Joseph born on the 28 October

1808, both of whom had adult baptisms in Ringstead Particular Baptist Chapel. It seems therefore that at some time after 1800 Leonard Joseph became a believer in adult baptism, perhaps, as part of the movement of the ' New Connection' to this belief, or perhaps he was accepted into the Particular Baptist Church.

The Ringstead Particular Baptist Church Book records that Leonard came from 'Mr Stevens' Church of London'. This probably refers to the Rev. John Stevens, a leading preacher of the Particular Baptists, who until 1813 worshipped in Grafton Street, Soho, then in Duke Street, St James and from 1824 in Salem Chapel, Meard Street, Soho. As we have said, the Nonconformist sects were very fluid at this time and changes were often associated with specific preachers forming new congregations. There is evidence that Leonard helped his son, Leonard James, with the restoration of the Baptist Chapel in Hanley and he certainly preached around the area. I have found no proof that he moved completely to the Potteries but that is the belief within the family.

We know from later Censuses that Leonard and Jane's youngest children, Emma, who married shoemaker Samuel Farey and moved to Rushden, was born in St Pancras and Herbert in Somers Town (which is essentially the same area).

Somers Town, by the middle of the nineteenth century belied its name and was a notorious area around St Pancras. For most of the eighteenth century this large triangle of land between the Hampstead, Pancras and Euston Roads was mainly pastoral. Towards the end of that century the rapid covering of the area with, mainly badly built, houses began and by the 1820s it was just another part of the metropolis. Earlier it had been filled with French artisans escaping from the *Reign of Terror.* By the middle of the century the area contained some of the worst housing in London with overcrowding, crime and disease. Plonked in the middle of this was Billingsgate with its street sellers and hucksters: a heaving mass of people from all nations and backgrounds trying to survive on their wits.

What was it like when Herbert was growing up? It was certainly well built-up by 1823. The earlier children of Leonard and Jane had been born in London but whether Somers Town represents a change of home is not clear. Did his father, Leonard Joseph, continue as a musician and scholar or had he become a full-time Baptist Minister or was there another intermediary job? It is possible that he was a man of ‘independent means’.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is recorded that his son, Leonard James, who became a well-known radical minister in the Potteries was influenced in his path by his grandmother Elizabeth Abington (nee Jenkins), not his father. She had been converted to Christianity under the ministry of George Whitefield. It was about the year 1800, when he was some fifteen years old, that Leonard James joined the Baptist church. This may be that it was part of the same family conversion, in 1802, that saw Leonard Joseph, his father, become a Baptist and so decide not to give his younger children infant christenings.

Leonard Joseph probably moved to Ringstead, aged 67, to take up the vacant ministry at the Particular Baptist Church. His gravestone in the small Baptist Burial Ground records:

Here are laid the bodies of Leonard Joseph Abington 17 years [sic] Pastor of the adjoining Chapel who died April 12 1842 aged 79 years. Also Jane his beloved wife who died December 24th 1849 aged 85 years.

The Ringstead Baptist Church Book states that Leonard 'was received into this church on 26th Sep 1830...' so the gravestone should read 12 years for his time as Pastor. Certainly the memorial in the schoolroom confirms the lesser time.

It seems likely that Leonard and Jane's youngest children, Emma and Herbert came with their parents to Ringstead as both married local people. Herbert married a local girl, Kezia Bull on 13thSeptember 1835 in Ringstead Parish Church (The Baptist Church did not yet have a licence to conduct marriage ceremonies at that time). Kezia was the daughter of John and Sarah Bull who had been paper-makers at Ringstead Water Mill (not Willy Watt – see the William Mitchell biography). She had been baptised on September 11th1814 at the Parish Church with her sister Susannah. By 1835 John had died and Sarah had just given up the mill to William Mitchell. As we have described in the Mitchell story, a paper-making mill was a far from idyllic place to live. It was noisy, damp, smelly and dangerous. The Bulls became involved in a number of shops and life in a village grocery shop probably seemed a great improvement for Kezia.

Herbert's eldest brother, Leonard James, who we mentioned earlier, had been a co-deacon of the Baptist 'Little Wild Street Church' in Bloomsbury. Little Wild Street is now called Keeley Street and is a few streets away from Gilbert Street where his father was recorded as living in 1794. [You can still see on Amazon.co.uk individual copies of the famous sermons preached there during the eighteenth century]. Leonard James had become a pottery modeller and worked on the decoration of Drury Lane Theatre and the Bank of England. His first wife had died just a year after their marriage and he had then married Sarah Sandys, the daughter of a Baptist Minister.

In 1819 he had moved away from London for health reasons and settled in Hanley in the Potteries. This would seem an odd choice if 'health' was the real reason. The Potteries, with the smoke belching from the close-packed, coal-fired bottle kilns, as well as the usual housing, water and sewage problems of the nineteenth century industrial towns, meant early mortality was higher than the national average. Even up to the 1920s respiratory diseases were the commonest cause of death.

The local Particular Baptist Church in New Street (now Goodson Street) had closed down in around 1803 but Leonard James bought it and re-opened it in 1820 in an attempt to revive the Baptist movement in the area. He became a radical Baptist preacher and his father Leonard Joseph, also preached in the New Street Church. Is it possible that the family, including his parents and brother Herbert also moved to Hanley before Ringstead? We have no proof and certainly Leonard Joseph appears to have come from London to Ringstead according to the Church Book.

Leonard James became a well known local figure in Staffordshire, editing the *Pottery Mercury* newspaper and, in partnership with two generations of the Ridgeway family, he ran an important pottery. The Ridgeways were 'New Connection' Methodists and with them, on New Year's Eve 1819 he helped set up the *Pottery Philosophical Society, '*for the purpose of propagating and extending useful and scientific knowledge'. The nineteenth century was the one when science and religion met

head-on, most dramatically with the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Ascent of Man.* Devout Christians, especially those who proclaimed the absolute literal truth of the Bible must have found it a difficult line to walk. Leonard James was a Baptist Minister, but he also gave many of the lectures at the Society and in less formal settings. Steven A Shapin reports that he lectured on:

> *....geology, mineralogy, metallurgy, conchology, entomology, chemistry, astronomy, heraldry, pottery, the chemistry of pottery, Egyptian antiquities, meteorology and (pausing for breath) revealed religion.*

Shapin also relates that the writer of his Memoir tells us that:

> *While many good and able men trembled for the safety of the Ark of God, and shuddered lest the facts Geology was unfolding should conflict with the Mosaic Record, he looked calmly on, reposing in the assurance that the investigation of Science would strengthen rather than weaken the evidence of its Inspiration. From this steadfast conviction he never swerved and lived to see his fond anticipations fully realized.*

In fact he found it more difficult as time went on to support the new discoveries and theories of science and still believed the Mosaic view, that the earth came from water, rather than in the geologists' assertion that it was from 'fire'. Leonard James embodies the two aspects of nineteenth century life, religion and science struggling through unsettling but dynamic times. One imagines there were long conversations between Leonard James and his father, musician and classical scholar as well as Baptist minister.

In the 1851 Census Leonard James is listed as ‘Earthenware Manufacturer employing 438 men’ and there are two female servants He has also became the Pastor of the Hanley Baptist Church and in 1834 was appointed Chief Bailiff of Hanley. Altogether he seems to have had a very full and busy public life.

As an interesting aside, George Whitefield, who had first converted his grandmother, was probably the most famous preacher of his time, both in England and the United States of America and is, by many, considered the founder of the Evangelical Movement. He held views, however, which most people today would find difficult to reconcile with his charitable work and Christian faith. He lived much of the time in America and was a slave owner and actually helped persuade the state of Georgia to re-legalise slavery in 1751.

A little over a hundred years later in about 1858 Leonard’s firm of *Ridgway and Abington* produced a fine stoneware jug. It depicted scenes based on the hugely popular book of the time, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ and is often called the *Anti-slavery jug.*

'Anti-slavery jug' by Ridgway & Abington .
© 2011 Leicester Arts & Museums Service.

Some aspects of Leonard James' life may give clues to the lives of his Ringstead relatives. In the story of his niece Jedidah, we told how she suddenly appears in the Manchester Census as a servant of Carlos Chamberlin (Chamberlain). The *Manchester Guardian* of 25th May 1840 reports on the Anti-Corn Law Conference being held in Manchester. One of the delegates, a Mr Abington, had just arrived from the Potteries and told of the violent strikes there. This was Leonard James, or perhaps more probably, his brother, Edwin Bollard Abington This may give a clue to the connections that took Jedidah to Manchester later. Manchester in general, and Victoria Park (where she worked), in particular, was closely bound up with the Ant- Corn Law League. It seems possible that it was through her uncles' connections that Jedidah's position was secured.

The other piece in the family jigsaw, that Leonard James may give some help with, is to do with his work. As well as being a partner in the firm he was also the 'Works Chemist' from 1831. His brother Edwin was also an 'operative chemist' in the Hanley pottery industry. This may have some connection with their younger brother, Herbert's later career, as we shall see.

Although his links with Ringstead are tenuous, Herbert's brother, Edwin Bollard Abington, had a life story that is, briefly, worth the telling.

Like his brother, Leonard, Edwin was also a 'Corn Law repealer'. We know this because he gave evidence against the Chartist lecturer and firebrand Wesleyan preacher, Thomas Cooper who, on Friday March 24 1843, had been accused of setting fire to a magistrate's house in Hanley as well as sedition for his preaching in the market square before serious riots and arson took place. The troubles in the area arose from industrial disputes by the coal miners and pottery workers. At the meeting Cooper had read out his poem which included the lines:

> *Shout as one man, - 'Toil we no more, renew*
> *Until the Many cease their slavery of the Few!'*

Edwin had, at first not come forward with his evidence because:

> *There was a good deal of excitement in the town, and many threats were used towards persons coming forward to give evidence on the part of the Crown.*

As far as we can tell this may have been the end of his political career but, some eight years later, more domestic matters brought his world crashing down. On 18th March 1851, at Stafford Assizes, he was found guilty of, 'feloniously attempting to procure the miscarriage of his child by Emma Williams'. Judge Thomas Noon Talfourd sentenced him to ten years transportation for his crime.

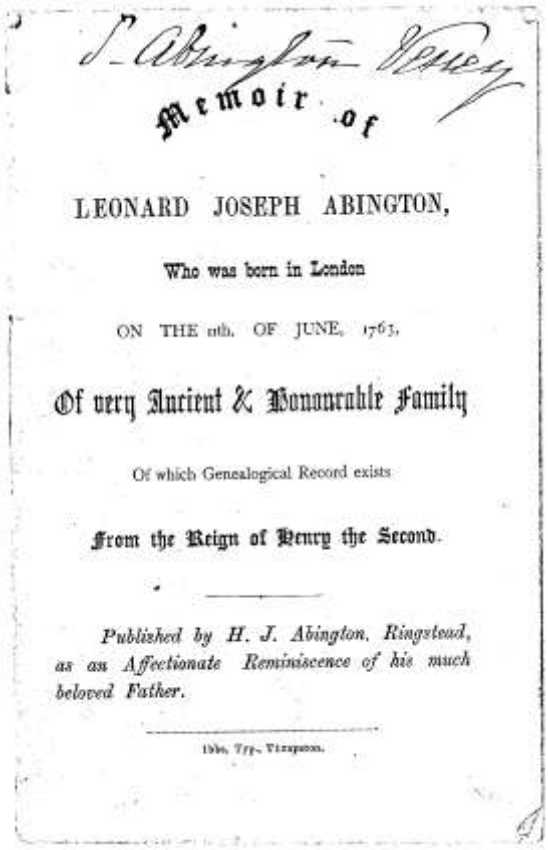
Edwin was fortunate in that he was sentenced at a time when the Tasmanian and Australian authorities were refusing to receive any more convicts. To find a place, in England, for all those prisoners who were previously transported, a number of convict establishments were built. The first was on the Isle of Portland on the south coast, which was designed 'for the employment and reformation of offenders'. The *Penal Servitude Act* of 1850 substituted prison sentences for all crimes formerly visited by sentences of transportation to a period of less than 14 years. Thus, it was to Portland that Edwin was sent, rather than Australia.

On 5th June 1855 a licence was granted for Edwin's early release after just four years in prison. He was then, it seems, head-hunted by Petrus Regout who had, in 1836, opened a modern mechanised earthenware factory in Maastricht in the Netherlands. The factory struggled to match the quality of the English earthenware but, significantly perhaps, it started to improve at the time when Edwin replaced William Crisp, who was from Sunderland, at the factory. His job was to teach the owner's son, Lodewijk Regout, how to produce quality earthenware. Edwin's pay rose to 432 guilders a month when the average pay was 100 guilders so his worth to the company was recognised. The *Regout-Sphinx* company then went from strength to strength. It may be that Edwin played a vital part in this and it probably would not have helped him to be welcome again in the Potteries. He finished working for Regout in 1873 and died in Maastricht, aged 77, on 18th November 1881.

Our story must return to Ringstead and the brothers' father, Leonard Joseph Abington. It seems likely that, as we have said, he was a classical musician and came from generations of musicians. It is possible that he moved with two of his sons, Leonard James and Edwin, to Hanley, but certainly we know that by 1830 he had moved with his wife and Herbert to Ringstead to take up the post of pastor. It is also possible that he only visited Hanley to preach at his son's chapel. He was already, by the standards of the time, an old man when he came to Ringstead and he became frail during his time as Pastor and in his later years was allowed to preach only, ‘when he felt able’. He was still paid £4 a quarter and received a gift of £10 from the Baptist Fund.

***Photograph by Agnes Burton (with her kind permission*).**

The memorial to Leonard, shown above, is on the wall of the schoolroom of the chapel. Someone, unused to Baptist rhetoric, might read into the words of the memorial that Leonard's life had perhaps once been ungodly but that he had been saved and become a good man. In fact the inscription was dictated by Leonard before his death and tells of his gratitude to Jesus Christ for his conversion. His son, Herbert, described it as 'rather unique and striking'. We know this from a little booklet that Herbert published after his father's death. It is a strange 'Memoir' to modern eyes . It is titled as, *An Affectionate Reminisce of his Much Beloved Father*, but most of it is concerned with listing his father's, (and his), connection to a, 'very Ancient and Honourable family' dating back to Henry II. Perhaps he wanted to make clear to the people of Ringstead that the frail old man that they had seen at the end of his life was a man of importance and breeding. He tells us of Leonard's irreproachable life and that at his funeral there was an 'extraordinary assemblage of people'.



L. Abington Hanley

Memoir of

LEONARD JOSEPH ABINGTON,

Who was born in London

ON THE 11th. OF JUNE, 1763,

Of very Ancient & Honourable Family

Of which Genealogical Record exists

From the Reign of Henry the Second.

Published by H. J. Abington, Ringstead, as an Affectionate Reminiscence of his much beloved Father.

1910, Typ. Thompson.

Leonard and Jane had, we believe, nine children. Leonard James, as we have heard, moved to Hanley as a potter. Benjamin Edmund, the second eldest, was born in 1787 and died on 29thMay 1830 in London (His son, *Cousin Samuel*, figures prominently in Herbert's son's diary). Could his death have been one of the reasons why, a few months later, his parents moved to the Northamptonshire countryside of his mother's birth? Their two elder daughters both married, Jemima to John Cooper and Letitia to John Winter. They seem to have remained in the London area.

Herbert Joseph, the youngest of the family, is the child who made Ringstead his home. He and his wife Kezia had, like his parents, nine children although one I have not yet confirmed. These were Jedidah, Mary Jane (who probably died in infancy), Leonard, Ebenezer Edwin, Mary Jane, Edmund, Herbert, Joshua and Samuel. Herbert Joseph became a shopkeeper in Ringstead for some forty years and his sons became butchers, bakers, publicans, pawnbrokers and tailors. One daughter, the second Mary Jane, married a shoemaker and Jedidah, later, a local butcher. Henry II was a long time ago. [the Memoir of Leonard James tell us that the main [male] Abington branch of the family lost its lands during the reign of James II when a sister, Mary Abington, married Walter Compton and became a Roman Catholic and obtained *the inheritance of estates in the counties of Worcester, Salop, Hereford, Cambridge etc.]*

We first see Herbert in 1841 as a 'Tea Dealer' living with Kezia and three of his children, Jedidah, Leonard and Edwin. Two years later, as we have told in the story of his daughter Jedidah, Herbert was brought before Wellingborough magistrates and fined 12 shillings for having deficient weights and measures. He was not alone for many shopkeepers were fined for similar offences at this time. It was part of the centralising and standardising of all measurement from Greenwich Mean Time to the

scales in small village shops. Before this many shopkeepers and street traders used deliberately inaccurate scales as well as contaminating foodstuffs to add cheap bulk. It was the poor that mainly suffered. In this case the police and then a Weights and Measures inspector began to check all premises for the first time. Herbert was probably just caught by this new bureaucracy rather than any deliberate wrongdoing. A grocery competitor in Ringstead, James Whiteman was fined £3 12s 0d, some six times greater, so perhaps his reputation was not harmed too much.

By 1851 he is a 'Tea Dealer and Grocer' in Shop Street and there are three more children Mary Jane, Edmund and Herbert. In the 1861 Census two more children are recorded, Joshua and Samuel, but all the older children except Herbert, who is, at 13, a baker, have left home. Mary is only a few doors away working as a servant to the elderly widower John Williamson and his three daughters. Jedidah is now in Manchester. Herbert, aged 62, is still a grocer in 1871 and living with Kezia. Only their son, Herbert, is living with them. As we will see in a later chapter, Herbert junior was very ill and he dies in 1872 aged just 25 years.

Their youngest son, Samuel Edmund also died, aged 18 years, in 1875. He had been working, with his cousin Sarah Vessey and her husband as an apprentice pawnbroker, in Bristol. His death was on the 8th April 1875 of *Phthisis pulmonalis* (T.B.) in Ringstead. It seems that, like his brother, he had come home to die. At least Herbert would have been in a good position to alleviate his suffering, but he would also have had to accept the limitations of his patent medicines. Even the best hospitals had few weapons in the fight against tuberculosis at this time. [See later chapter on Herbert]. The death is reported by his sister Jedidah who was present at his death. It seemed, at first, that she had come home later to look after her widowed father but perhaps it was Herbert and then Samuel who first brought her home from Manchester. Three years after the death of Samuel, on April 1st1878, Kezia, aged 67, followed Samuel to the grave. Her death certificate records that she had suffered from dementia for five years prior to that. It must have been a difficult and tragic time for Herbert.

A Conveyance of 1874, in which the Joseph Driver estate sold two cottages in the High street to Herbert Abington makes no mention of a shop. It does state, however that Herbert was occupying one cottage and Widow Cottingham the other. We know that this document refers to two ironstone and limestone cottages next door to the present post office. These are now made into one house but much of the original building can be seen. Was it Herbert's shop as well? There is no evidence that it was, although the present owner has found many medicine bottles in the garden. It may be that the shop was elsewhere in the High Street and he moved into this cottage in his old age. On the other hand he may have been a tenant who took the chance to purchase the property. Although he had previously been put down as Shop Street, this was just an alternative name for the High Street. We do know that Herbert had to take out a mortgage to buy the houses; £100 from local farmer David Beeby and £60 form Oundle grocer John William Bullivant.

In 1881 Herbert, now 73, is living in High Street with his daughter Jedidah, a 43 year old spinster. It must have been a surprise when, just a few months after the death of John Ball's wife he married Jedidah. Was John the reason she went away to Manchester in the first place? We may never know for official records rarely record much about the unofficial human heart.

Herbert's profession is now 'Chemist'. He is not in many of the century's Directories for Northamptonshire but *Slater's Directory* of 1862 and *Kelly's Directory* for 1869 describe Herbert as a

‘Chemist and Druggist’. The *Slater Directory ,* which wrongly calls him John, also has him as a 'Shopkeeper and Dealer in Sundries'. This quick trip through the Censuses tends to underplay what would be today a large leap from ‘Tea Dealer and Grocer’ to ‘Chemist and Druggist’. Tea was considered then to be a leisure drink but also to have medicinal properties, not least because it was not alcohol or opium based and the making necessitated the boiling of water which was an important preventative measure in itself. Tea Rooms and especially Coffee Taverns were an important part of the temperance movement. [There was one built in Marshalls Road, Raunds which is now a private house].

Herbert’s house in High Street which he purchased in 1874 but may also have been his shop.
It was originally two cottages and has been much altered, (2011).
With the kind permission of Lynn Harris.

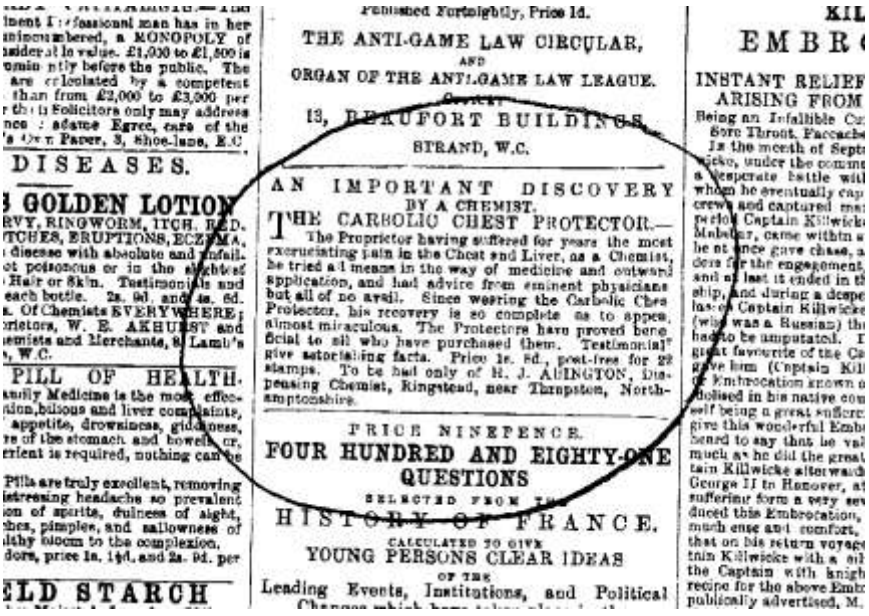
It is possible that Herbert was not the first 'Druggist' in Ringstead for the 1841 Census has Jabez Gulliver, aged 25 (approximated to the nearest 5 years), 'Druggist', with his wife Catherine and their baby Catherine, just six months old. They are living next door to Catherine’s widowed mother Catherine Cox, who is of independent means. The new baby Catherine was born in Ringstead but at the couple's wedding on 9th July 1839 in Ringstead, Jabez, or Walker Job Gulliver, to give him his correct name, is stated to be a druggist and chemist of Lutterworth (and Catherine is a 'lady' daughter of a 'gentleman deceased'). Certainly, by 1851 Walker J Gulliver, aged 38, is a chemist and Druggist in High Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire. Walker and Catherine have only the one child, but there are two apprentices and a servant. 1861 finds them with two assistants and two servants at 24 High Street, next to the Town Hall in Lutterworth. Walker died on 24th September 1868, a comparatively rich man.

It seems most likely that Walker may have traded as a druggist for a time in Ringstead before returning to the larger town of Lutterworth to earn a better living. It is even possible that he worked for Herbert Abington but, at the moment, this is just speculation.

The nineteenth century saw the gradual rise of professional and medical practitioners, together with an increasingly scientific approach to treatment. Yet, as Hilary Marland has pointed out:

> *…rich and poor alike continued to resort to a variety of 'unqualified' or 'fringe' sources of medical aid. For some, such forms of medical treatment supplemented treatment by a 'regular' practitioner; for others, with limited access or money, or with a preference for fringe methods, these were the sole means of medical relief.'*

If you look on the front page of most local and national newspapers at the time what you may notice first are the advertisements for a whole range of medical remedies to cure most of the diseases known to man. Herbert himself also used the small adds to sell his wares. In the December 14th 1872 edition of *The Lady's Own Paper,* nestling among the advertisements for Killiwicke's Embrocation; Four Hundred and Eighty-One Questions selected from the History of France; Frampton's Pill of Health; Inexpensive Hair Restorer; An Essay on the Admission of Women to the Electoral Franchise; Akhurst's Golden Lotion - Positively cures Scurvy, Ringworm, Itch, Redness etc. is the following small box:


DISEASES.
GOLDEN LOTION
PILL OF HEALTH.
Published Fortnightly, Price 1d.
THE ANTI-GAME LAW CIRCULAR,
AND
ORGAN OF THE ANTI-GAME LAW LEAGUE.
13, BEAUFORT BUILDINGS,
STRAND, W.C.
AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY
BY A CHEMIST.
THE CARBOLIC CHEST PROTECTOR.—
PRICE NINEPENCE.
FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-ONE
QUESTIONS
HISTORY OF FRANCE.
YOUNG PERSONS CLEAR IDEAS
Leading Events, Institutions, and Political
EMBR
INSTANT RELIEF
ARISING FROM

Herbert had obviously seen the opportunities that the post office and the railway could bring to his business. It also probably tells us that he had endured some ill-health through his life although it seems very unlikely that a, *Carbolic Chest Protector*, could have much effect on 'excruciating pain in the Chest and Liver'. A descendant, Will Abington, recorded later that he was 'the originator of the locally famous *Abington's Pills* which became popular in the district as a panacea for most of the ills afflicting the human race'. Significantly, perhaps, we do not hear them mentioned in the treatment of his son, Herbert's, illness.

Another hint at the way country people still had to try to gain relief from their ills is given at the trial of William Weekley Ball, where labourer Henry Dix told how he pulled one of the teeth of the heavily pregnant Lydia Attley shortly before her alleged murder. We also see Emma Kitchen in the 1881 Census who is described as a 'Vendor of patent medicines'. Every village would have its person selling herbal and other folk remedies (and in earlier days some would have been hung as witches). By the mid nineteenth century, however, Chemist and Druggists had become the most important first points of call for many sick people who could not afford the doctor and had managed to stay outside the workhouse.

From this time the Chemists began to become more professionally organised and under the 1868 *Pharmacy Act* compulsory training standards were introduced. Just where Herbert stood in terms of professional expertise we cannot be sure. With his background it is almost certain that he would be literate probably in English and Latin and have some scientific knowledge. Did he make up prescriptions for a local doctor or did he sell his own concoctions alongside the increasing number of patented and pre-packaged remedies. It seems most likely that it was the over-the-counter trade that provided the bulk of his work and income although he almost certainly also prepared prescriptions and his own concoctions. Hillary Marland, again, states that:

> *…a typical chemist's shop of the nineteenth century would, in addition to a wide range of pharmaceutical preparations, stock a selection of toilet articles, tobacco, snuff, tea, coffee, herbs and other foodstuffs, oils, candles and dyes. In some cases the chemist combined with his pharmaceutical enterprises the activities of a grocer, bookseller, insurance agent, tea or lead merchant.*

[We should not be too surprised about this list. A walk round any small town or village chemist shop today will usually show a bewildering range of non-medical items for sale].

This list is written, looking particularly at two large industrial northern towns but one can imagine how Herbert gradually expanded the range of his business from tea merchant, to grocer, to chemist and druggist. Nevertheless we must not forget that in the advertisement he describes himself as a 'Dispensing Chemist' which implies that he made up prescriptions from doctors.

Of course there was a darker side to the chemist's trade because many of the nineteenth century medicines contained opiates. Large quantities of *Godfrey's Cordial*, *Atkinson's Infant Preservative, Peace and Steedman's Soothing Powders for Children* and other laudanum and opiate based products were sold. In the summer of 1871, Alfred Mayes, aged one month died from an overdose of *Syrup of Poppies.* Further, it was common practice, in some areas, for opiates to be sold for, what we would now class as, 'recreational' use. The men would buy a 'pennyworth' tab on pay day and have it with their beer.

Nevertheless, the village Chemist and Druggist became a respected member of many communities and it is likely that Herbert fell into this category. It is possible that his brothers, Leonard James and Edwin, assisted him in his transition to Chemist although they used the science in a very different field.

Herbert died on January 18th1884 aged 75 years and was buried in the Baptist Burial Ground with his wife Kezia and their two sons who had died as young men. Jedidah is buried with John Ball and also remembered on her sister's grave in the new 'Council' cemetery. Leonard James had died in 1867 and is also recorded as being buried in Ringstead although I have not found his grave. The *Wellingborough News* for 26th January 1884 gives a moving obituary of Herbert. It tells us that.

> *Mr. Abington had followed the business of chemist and druggist and grocer, and by his skill in the treatment of various diseases had obtained a wide reputation in the surrounding country, and his loss in this aspect will be much felt.*

It also states that he came to Ringstead between fifty and sixty years ago which confirms that he probably came with his father in 1830. We learn that he had been an officer in the local lodge of the Oddfellows and a Superintendant of the Baptist Sunday School. We also discover that in his last years he had endured a long and painful illness.

He had maintained his strong faith until the end and, in great pain, he had, on his 75th and last birthday, just a few months before his death, written a poem telling of his enduring belief:

Thou hast not forsaken me, O God
now I am old and grey headed.
Dear Lord at thy footstool I bow,
And own thou hast led me till now;
When tempests may beat at my head,
And all earthly comforts art fled,
Afflicted, pain'd, pursued to Thee I flee
For succour and comfort O Jesus to Thee.

Joseph Abington, musician and classical scholar and two of his sons, Leonard James, newspaper editor, pottery works owner and chemist, and Herbert Joseph, Grocer, Druggist and Chemist, span much of the nineteenth century. They had very different lives, reflecting the changes during the century but they were finally united by the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church.

On his death, Herbert's Will stated that his properties should be sold and the proceeds divided between three of his four children still living. Jedidah was singled out to be left just £100 (which was probably the largest bequest). Was this to recognize a loan from her, or her nursing of him in his last years? Without knowing the full story we cannot be sure. We do know that his son, Edwin Ebenezer, purchased the two houses at auction for £240 and this sum was divided between Edwin, Mary (Lovell) and Joshua. It seems that the house stayed in the Abington family until 1926 when it was sold to Mr. C.M. Burgess.

Grave of Herbert Joseph Abington and his wife Kezia and their two sons who died young).
The face of the stone is slowly peeling away (Photograph: September 2011).

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My thanks to Vivienne Marshall for her help with this biography: to Lynn Harris for the chance to read and copy the old deeds to the Abington cottage. (I feel that there is more to learn from them): also to Ian and John Abington for the privately published The History of Our Abington Ancestors 1668-1923 (May 2011) which I have used to amend and add to the original story. Any errors are mine alone. Jane May of the Leicester Arts & Museums Service kindly photographed the 'Anti-Slavery jug' and allowed me to use the image.

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Chapter Seventeen

Enclosure

William (c1781 - 1849) & Richard (1817 – 1900) Warren

At the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864, for the murder of Lydia Attley, one of the witnesses was a farm labourer called Richard Warren. He was the man who found, in a ditch, the bones that were first thought to be the remains of Lydia. In his testimony he tells of his find but he also, perhaps, betrays a nostalgia for the times before Enclosure came to the parish.

His testimony was recorded in the *Northampton Mercury* on 27th February 1864:

> *I am a labourer at Ringstead and have lived there forty-seven years. I recollect the Ringstead fields before they were enclosed. I know the road leading from Mr Peach's house towards Keyston. That was in an open field state long before the enclosures, with a hedge of the Denford side but none on the Ringstead side. For a long time after the enclosure was a very rough bad road. In the present month I was in the employ of Mr Peach. On Wednesday 3rd, I was set to digging out the ditch on Keystone Lane. I was digging the ditch on the Ringstead side, which, with the hedge, was made after the enclosure.*

John Hill, another labourer who gave evidence, also recalled that the field was enclosed in 1840. It was obviously a change that was still an important event in their lives.

In some ways the changes to the world that the Ringstead villagers inhabited in the nineteenth century was even greater than in the following hundred years. Change, although not necessarily predictable became expected, as the way of the world in the years after Victoria. For those agricultural labourers who had grown up with the settled certainties of rural life the industrialisation of the English landscape came as a profound shock.

A young man, writing in 1820 some thirty miles downstream in the land between the Nene and the Welland bitterly wrote of the impact on the village life:

> *There once were lanes in nature's freedom dropt,*
> *There once were paths that every valley wound –*
> *Inclosure came, and every path was stopt;*
> *Each tyrant fix'd his sign where paths were found,*
> *To hint a trespass now who cross'd the ground:*
> *Justice is made to speak as they command;*
> *The high road now must be each stinted bound:*
> *- Inclosure, thou'rt a curse upon the land,*
> *And tasteless was the wretch who thy existence plann'd.*

This attitude is important because it is the voice of one of those affected. It is a rare report from an agricultural labouring man, even if a very unusual one. He goes on to say, 'And parish –slaves must live as parish-kings allow.' It is little wonder that John Clare's rich patron preferred the descriptions of nature and found verses like this too radical.

Ringstead had originally been mooted for enclosure in the late eighteenth century but it was not until towards the middle of the nineteenth that it finally happened, although all around them had earlier succumbed.

One by one the parishes all around had fallen: Woodford in 1764, Denford in 1765, Raunds in 1797, Great Addington in 1803, Islip in 1804, and Little Addington in 1830. Of these the large parish of Raunds put up the most resistance and its smaller commoners and landowners counter-petitioned. When they were ignored there were riots led by the village women and shoemakers who pulled down fences and dismantled gates with which they made huge bonfires and celebrated long into the night. Nevertheless the enclosure went ahead and, finally, only Ringstead stood alone.

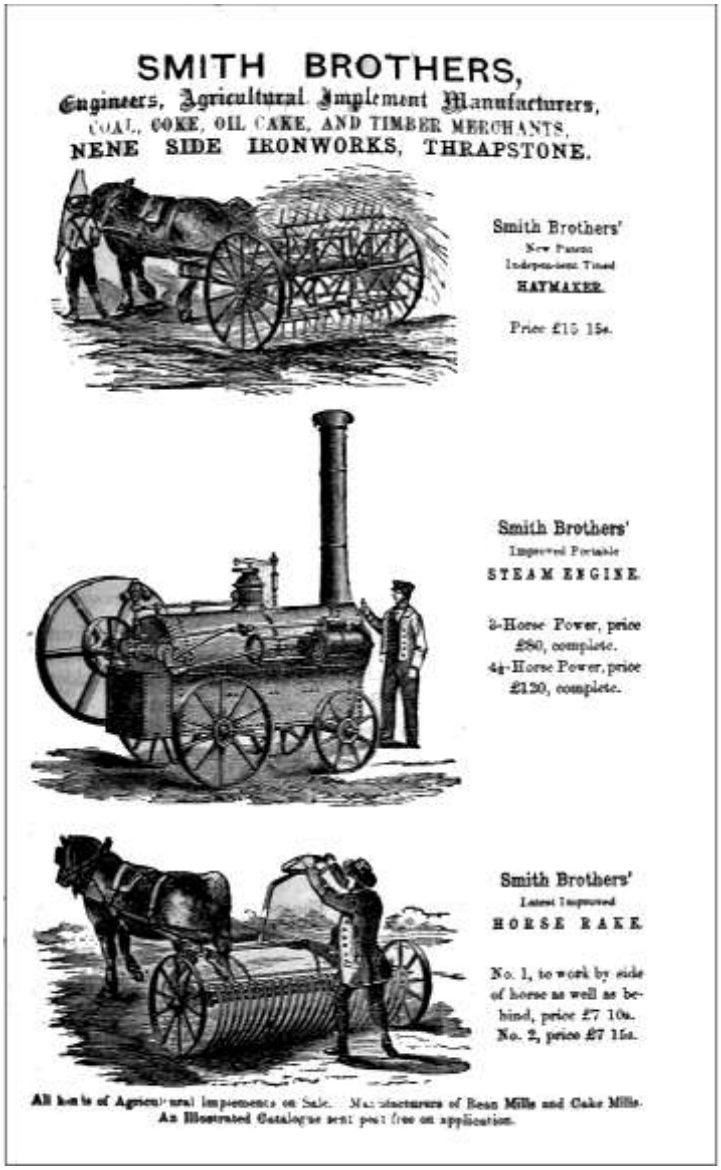
The Ringstead Commons came under the aegis of the Raunds Manor Court and Ringstead men railed against the orders and fines that were imposed upon them for overstocking or releasing their stock from the pound without paying the fine due. A recent study of 'Commoners', much of it based on Northamptonshire, by J.M. Neeson has shown that right up to Enclosure there was a sophisticated system of rights and obligations which affected most of the villagers. There were *haywards* and *fieldsmen* who tried to ensure that land was not overgrazed and that stock was kept healthy and also to ensure that ancient rights were protected. In the mid eighteenth century a number of Ringstead men were fined in the Raunds Court. Neeson records that James Weekley was regularly fined both for trespass and for pound breach and two Ringstead farmers were fined for neglecting and refusing to scour the watercourse running from Lubering Spring in Ringstead to Oak Ditch in Raunds 'to the very great detriment and damage of the Meadow ground belonging to the inhabitants of Raunds'. It was not a free-for-all and even the disputes were part of the fabric of village life. Enclosure supporters naturally tended to disparage the old agriculture. What even some of these supporters did allow was that enclosure brought many of those who depended on the commons into destitution and the workhouse.

We can only guess at what Richard and the other villagers would have made of all this. What was life like for agricultural labourers before enclosure? What changed in their lives as a result? The first thing to say is that it is sometimes alleged that it was the end of the peasant farmer in England. What the term' peasant' really meant was that paid employment was, at most, only one strand of the work that a 'commoner' family did to keep from want and starvation. So the shoemakers and lacemakers might keep a cow on the common or have a small piece of the arable common land or a woman might collect firewood. Also men and women would take rabbits and birds as well as mushrooms and berries. Suddenly these 'rights' were taken away and, as Clare writes, the land was protected by the law from those who thought it was part of their birthright. This is why poachers were often supported by the villagers. They saw it as a man taking his due.

I picture it rather like an old woman living in the house that she and her ancestors had lived in for generations. It is rather tumbledown and has few modern conveniences and she is cajoled or forced to leave it and go into a residential home. Now she is well fed and warm but she has lost her

independence, the thing that gave her life meaning. This is only a partial analogy for, at enclosure, many lost not only their independence but their livelihoods as well.

These changes were imposed by the wealthy on the poor and, at the same time, they also brought in more and more terrible punishments for those who challenged the new order. Of course at the same time we have the steady mechanisation of farming, meaning fewer workers on the land. The lot of the agricultural labourer, never an easy one, became desperate.



An advertisement in Directory of Northamptonshire 1861 by Melville & Co.
Smith Brothers were a few miles down the Nene in Thrapston.
We see the increase in horse drawn implements and the coming of steam

(By kind permission of Northampton Record Office)

As a result there was, throughout the century, migration to the large towns and cities, emigration to Australia, Canada and the United States and insurrections by agricultural labourers which reached

their height in the Captain Swing riots of 1830. Northamptonshire, although not at the forefront of these riots, which were centred along the south coast and as far north as Buckinghamshire, was affected by the unrest. A group of ten men from Finedon were brought to trial in 1831 for breaking up a farmer's threshing machine. There were also isolated cases of rick burning and other damage throughout the early part of the century as demonstrated by the 1824 'Arson' poster that we showed in the first John Ball biography.

That poster offered a reward of sixty guineas, a considerable sum of money. It would be the equivalent of some £2,500 today, or, because incomes have increased faster than costs, the wages of a craftsman, in 1824, for some eighteen months. It must be remembered that the French Revolution was not too far in the past and risings throughout Europe were not so distant in the future. Many people in the Establishment feared that England was on the brink of revolution.

Now let us return to Richard Warren who we left giving evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864. He had been baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 1st February 1817 the son of William and Ann. William was an agricultural labourer, born in about 1781, near the time when the first Ringstead enclosure was mooted.

As I have tried briefly to show it was a very different world from that after Enclosure, both in the look of the countryside and in the way the agricultural community went about its day-to-day business. It has been described by J.L. & Barbara Hammond in the following words:

> *The old village was under the shadow of the squire and the parson, and there were many ways in which these powers controlled and hampered its pleasures and habits: there were quarrels, too, between farmers and cottagers and there are many complaints that the farmers tried to take the lion's shares of the commons but, whatever the pressure outside and whatever the bickering within, it remains true that the common field system formed a world in which the villagers lived their own lives and cultivated the soil on a basis of independence.*

There had been Warrens in Ringstead in the early eighteenth century but they seem to disappear from the Parish records after 1723. I have not yet found William's baptism or marriage but we know from the Census that he married Anne, who was born in Irthlingborough. We also find Richard, born to William and Anne, and baptised on 1st February 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. Other children followed and, at each, William is described as a labourer but at his daughter Mary Ann's baptism on November 5th 1830 he has become 'cowkeeper'. He was now approaching fifty years old and perhaps his experience had been rewarded or perhaps he was growing old and not up to the hard physical labour of arable farming. The cowkeeper is likely to have been employed as part of the commons system to look after the cows of the individual villagers who were entitled to use the common. The commons would usually consist of three types; the arable land (often divided into strips), the common meadowland and the common or waste. The 'waste' might be woods or roadside verges or common in the sense we use it today.

William would collect the cows from the closes and fields of the villagers and herd them on to the common grazing for the day. At the end of the day he would bring them back. The routine would vary with the seasons but it was an important part of village life.

Enclosure was still hanging over Ringstead and some ten years later the inevitable happened. When we look at the Enclosure map of 1841 we see the names of the old fields. There are Ham Meadow Short Meadow and Great Meadow along the Nene. There are also Middle Field and Round Field where presumably the arable strips had been. A survey of Ringstead in 1837 gives us some idea of the small strips of land in these Open Fields. We see Backride Furlong, Dicks Willow Furlong, Page's Corner Furlong, Crawl Hill Furlong Crook Slade Furlong, Woollen Slade Furlong, Long Witch South Furlong and Plug Dug Furlong. We also see the Water Lands, the Strong Red Lands and the Tongue of Full Stone. There was an intimacy with the land which did not disappear overnight but the Enclosure was the start of its rapid decline.

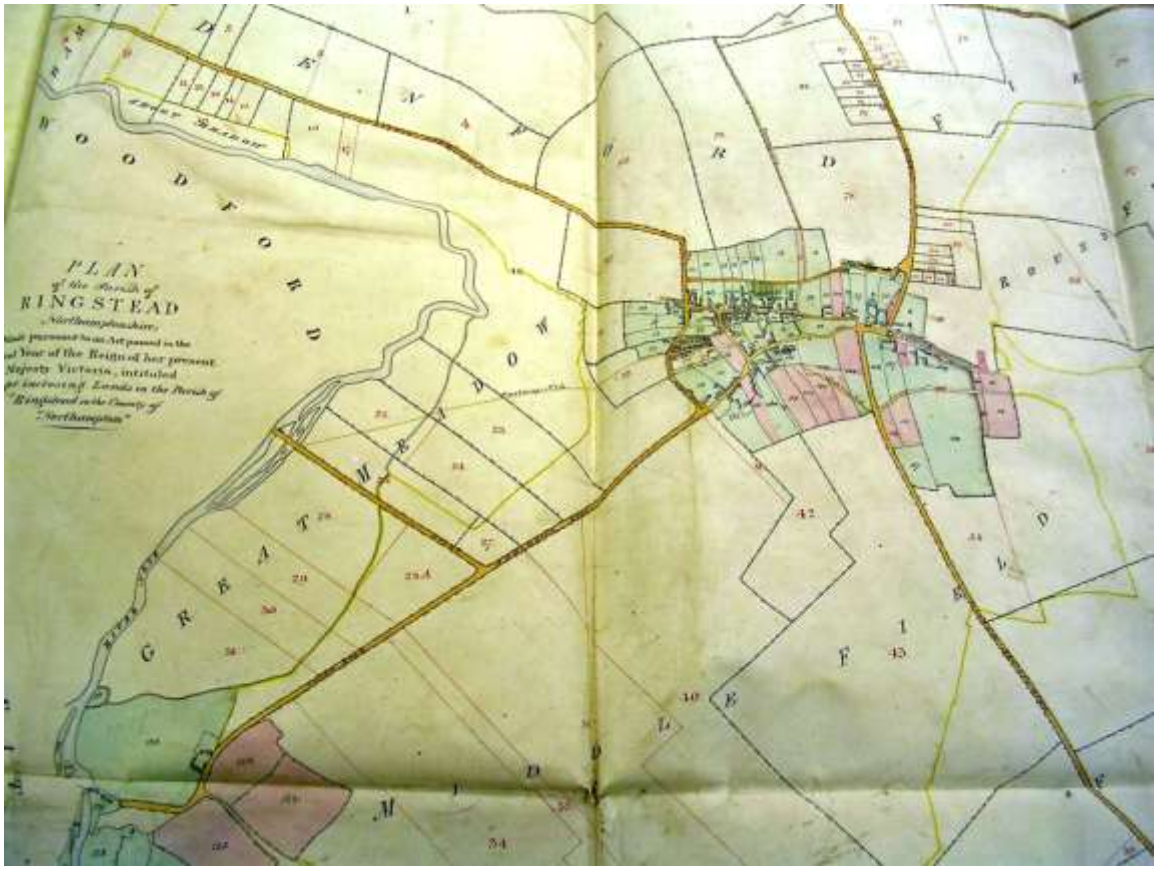
The execution of the 'Inclosure Award' was:

> *Proclaimed on Sunday the seventh day of March one thousand eight hundred and forty one at the Outer Door of the Church of the said Parish of Ringstead immediately after Divine Service as required by the said Local Act by me*
>
> *Jno Baker*
> *Clerk to Mr Archbould*
> *Solicitor Thrapston.*

The parish had some 1,982 acres and by 1841 some 1,594 of these were owned by eight people. The Lord of the Manor of Ringstead, Thomas Burton had 122 acres 1 rood and 32 perches and Charles Sackville-Germain, 5th Duke of Dorset, who was soon to die without heirs, some 227 acres. The largest landowner however became George Capron a London solicitor who held 802 acres and 3 perches. He had bought the former holdings of Coy, Disbrave, Shuttleworth (Lord of Cotton Manor), Blake, Lady Booth, Coleman, Sheepshanks, Bland, and Ringstead Charity. He also bought Southwick Hall in 1841 and had acquired the manor of Stoke Doyle some ten years earlier.

Can we see what effect that this had on William and the other villagers because, we must remember, it was not necessarily only those whose main work was on the land who would be affected? Other would also use the common fields for stock, firewood, wild food, including rabbits and other meat. They would also by custom glean the field after harvest picking up the lost ears and grains. It was said that some families could feed themselves until Christmas on the gleanings.

What many expected, including some supporters of the Enclosure movement, was increased poverty for some agricultural workers, an increase in those who became reliant on the Poor Law and a flight from the land. Unfortunately without further evidence it is not usually possible to attribute any one event to Enclosure. For this, far more detailed research would be needed, although in general, looking at England as a whole, historians agree that these hardships did occur, even though they may disagree on the degree of hardship and whether it was an essential change.



Ringstead Inclosure Map

By kind permission of Northampton Record Office (Ref ML 1550)

The three arable fields (Middle Field, Round Field, Denford Field) can be seen with the meadows (Great, Short and Ham). No clear sign of common 'waste'.

We have seen, in other biographies, that Daniel Ball was a shepherd with a large family, most of whom were connected to the land. We have also seen that the majority of them had either emigrated or left Ringstead forever over the next twenty years. It seems unlikely that they were the only ones. How far this was due to the natural movement of population or to the increased mechanisation of farming will be difficult to assess. Perhaps by the accumulation of separate individual events we may get some idea of the truth.

When we read in the Parish Register for May 20th 1840: the following burial:

> *Thomas Bates otp aged 61 Buried in the churchyard without any service – fallen by his own hand on Sunday 17th May by cutting his own throat in a most deliberate manner. Verdict unsound mind.*

Do we see someone who sees little for himself when Enclosure takes away his livelihood or could it be that life had become intolerable for other reasons? We can only guess. A surer measure would be to look at infant mortality, a good indicator of poverty in the twenty years either side of 1841. The burials of children under 16 years of age in the Ringstead Parish Register are set out in the table below:

Census Decade	Burials (under 16yrs)	Totals
1820 -1829	**34**	
1830 - 1839	**37**	**71**
1841 Enclosure	***Enclosure***	***Enclosure***
1840 - 1849	**39**	
1850 - 1859	**51**	**90**
	Total	**161**

Does it show an increase in child mortality due to Enclosure? One would expect health to be generally improving during the century away from the industrial cities but 1852 had 13 deaths which really skews the results and that could be due to one of the epidemics that still carried away many children. All we can say is that it is possible that Enclosure had some effect but we cannot be sure, without further research.

William was buried on May 13 1849 aged 69 years and His wife, Anne, followed him on June 20th 1852 aged 63. Richard, his son had married Elizabeth Hilson on 16th October 1837 in Hargrave Church. Both are shown as twenty years old. Elizabeth was born in Stanwick where her father was a farm labourer. She was a lacemaker like many women in the local villages in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The 1841 Census for Ringstead finds the young married couple in Ringstead with their daughter, Ann, who is just eleven months old. Then, as the decades pass, the Censuses give no clue to any changes except that five children are born and leave their home in London End, Ringstead. The only time that Richard seems to have come into the public arena was when he gave evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864.

In 1891 Richard is shown as a retired farm labourer aged 74. It is quite unusual for labourers to be shown as having retired so perhaps he was now incapable of work. He just saw the start of the new century for he died on 13th January 1900 and in 1901 his widow Elizabeth, aged 85, is living with her granddaughter Elizabeth Ellen at 10 London End. At some stage after this she was forced to go into the Thrapston Union Workhouse where she died on 20th November 1902.

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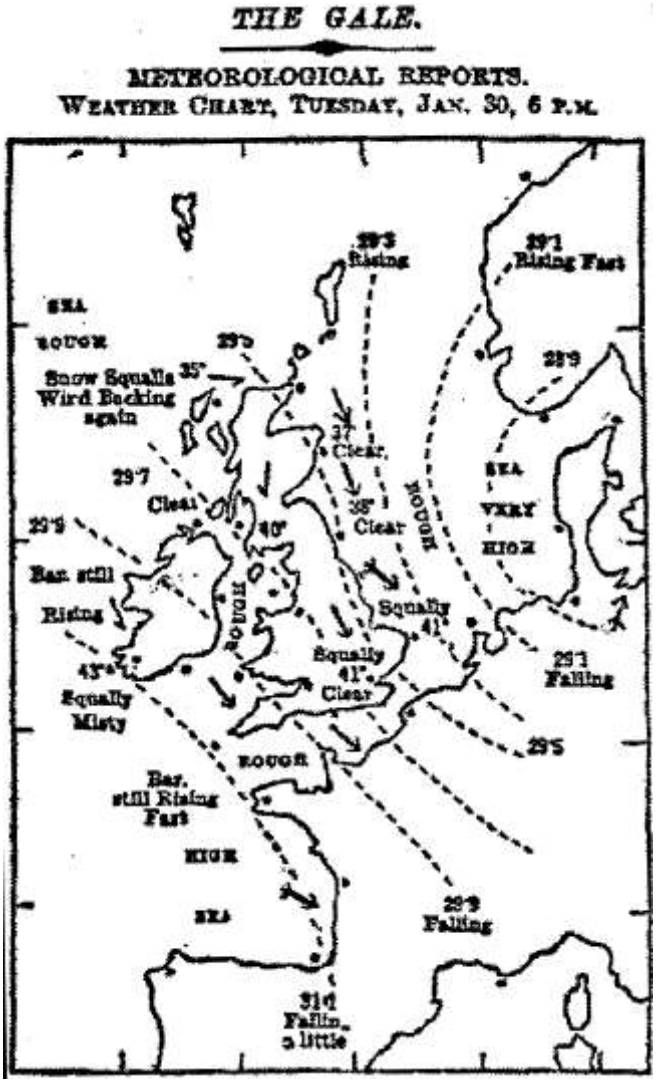
Chapter Eighteen

Gale Tragedy

William Clayton (c1861 – 1877); Albert Fensom, (c1863 – 1877); William (S)Craxton, (c1860 – 1877)

The start of the third quarter of the nineteenth century was marked by extreme weather which caused much hardship and grief across England. Baking hot summers and wet harsh winters meant bad harvests and miserable working conditions, especially for the agricultural labourers.



From The Times 31st January 1877.

The winter of 1876-7 was remembered particularly, for the terrible storms that pulsed across the islands that year. *The Times* had started weather chart for the previous day on April 1st 1875 and the one for Tuesday 30th January 1877 showed the strong westerly winds of the previous day veering to

'squally' north-west winds which raked across the country. All over England, from Liverpool and Hull to Bath, London and Portsmouth a trail of destruction was reported. Scaffolding collapsed in Lett's Wharf Lambeth where the City Commissioners of Sewers were erecting buildings for the sorting and storage of the dust and refuse collected in the city of London. One woman was killed and many injured.

Also on January 31st, the *Manchester Guardian* recorded some of the devastation that had been caused when the storms had hit the north in the early hours of the previous day. In Manchester itself, part of the roof of the *Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company's* Potato Market gave way and the River Irwell was some 8-9 feet above its normal level. The force of the winds can be seen by its description of the damage done at a local public park:

> *A large semicircular iron roof which covered the grand stand at Abbey Hey Gardens, Gorton was carried away by the wind. Such was the violence of the gust that it lifted the foundation stone at the bottom of the solid iron columns, the wall plates to which it was fastened and the whole roof intact over the adjoining wall. Three men who were under the roof escaped.*

Similarly, at Preston, at 7.15 am:

> *A terrific gust of wind…..tore off the whole of the western side of the [railway] booking offices, which had been previously loosened, and turned it upside down, broken into fragments.*

Two men were killed at Milnrow when a mill roof collapsed and at Liverpool boats and the pier were damaged. It was at sea in the west that the greatest loss of life occurred. In the Irish Channel the steamer *Alexandra* of Glasgow sunk with the loss of twelve lives. Everywhere across the country there was a similar pattern of damage and deaths. The national newspapers at the time missed the worst of the tragedy which was the loss of many fishing smacks from the Norfolk and Suffolk ports. It was only later that the full story emerged as vessels failed to return to port.

The *Norfolk News* for the 10th March 1877, in a sentence reveals the terrible happenings of that January night when it reported:

> *An appeal for the Widows and Orphans of men lost in fishing vessels in the Gale of 30th January 1877; 116 men and boys: 50 widows, 11 aged parents and 115 children destitute.*

These storms, which continued into February, were part of a winter of wind and rain. An observer at Castle Ashby noted for January 1877:

> *Excessive rainfall, which, following the very heavy fall in December 1876 of 5.42 inches produced almost continuous floods in the Nene Valley.*

It would have been a miserable time for farm labourers, slogging away in the cold wet mud to earn enough to survive the winter and help keep their families from the workhouse. Three of these families concern us in this story and we need to briefly tell a little about them.

Pearcy (or Peacy or Piercy or Pearsy) Childs had been baptised in the local Baptist Church and married Thomas Craxton (or Scraxton) in 1853. Unfortunately they seem to disappear from the 1861 Census and are certainly not recorded in Ringstead but we know that they had at least four children. The older two boys were baptised in Irthlingborough, Thomas Robert on 3rd April 1859 and Benjamin on 4th August 1861, but the two younger children were both baptised in Ringstead, Samuel on July 25th 1864 and Ellen on May 21st 1868. It seems likely, therefore, that the family had moved to Irthlingborough and returned to the village in the early 1860s. Then tragedy struck and Thomas, the father, died on July 21st1869 aged just 39 years. The 1871 Census shows newly widowed Pearcy on Parish Relief and living in Butcher's Lane in Ringstead. All her children, even Robert who is thirteen, are put down as scholars. The 1870 Education Act had just made attendance compulsory at school until the age of twelve years for all children. It may be that Robert was just finishing his time at school or it is also possible that he had not managed to obtain work because of the poor state of farming. Benjamin was just ten years old and presumably attending the National School which had been erected in 1867 at a cost of £860 and was further enlarged in 1874 when it had an average of 100 pupils attending.

It must have been a difficult time for Pearcy and perhaps she hoped the worst was over and her life might gradually return to some sort of normality as her children got older and could help support the family.

In 1861, Stephen and Charlotte Fensom, lived at New Road, Denford with their son John. By 1871 they had moved to Spring Gardens in Ringstead. Stephen was now 35 and Charlotte 31 and they already had five more children, Thomas, Albert, Herbert, Amelia and Joseph. Stephen was a shoemaker and his eldest son, Thomas, aged 12 was a 'Shoe Boy', probably helping his father as an assistant, errand boy, and perhaps fetcher and carrier to the factory. The other children are not put down as scholars, even Albert who is 8 years old. Other children, on the same page of the Census, who are eight are called 'Scholars', (a term that sometimes merely meant, 'not working'). This could be an oversight or perhaps they did not go to school. At this early stage, after the 1870 Act it was patchily applied. Denford had built an Infants School in 1872 for 60 children and had an average attendance of 40 in 1885. The older children, however, had to walk to Ringstead. Albert would have been born too late to attend the new school. He would have had to walk the flat but often flooded road to Thrapston or, more likely, the steep climb up the hill to Ringstead.

Another mother and her family were living further up the Nene at Rushden. Sarah Bailey, daughter of a mat maker, had married William Clayton, a labourer on the 27th September 1853 in St Mary's Church, Rushden. The 1861 Census shows the couple in Church Lane, Rushden, with their children, Mary Ann, Elizabeth, Hannah, and William who was just one month old. By 1871 William, the father, is a gardener and they have moved to Duck Street. The oldest girl Mary Ann has presumably left home but Elizabeth (16) and Hannah (15) are in shoe work. William, now 11 years old, and his younger siblings, Eliza, Herbert and Fred are still 'scholars'. There is also another baby, Emily just five months old.

At the end of January in 1877, boys from each of these families found themselves together in that miserable winter of rain and wind. Benjamin Craxton and William Clayton were sixteen and Albert Fensom was just fourteen years old. The older boys had probably been at work for a number of years. They may have enjoyed the outdoor life but must have wished, on a day like this, that they

were working in the dry with their siblings, many of whom were in the shoe trade. The three of them had managed to get some work with William Dearlove the young farmer who had taken over the farm on the death of his father, Joseph on November 5th 1874. Joseph had been born in Yorkshire of a well known 'County' family and had moved from a farm in St Neots to one of 500 acres in Ringstead. He was a widower in 1871 with a family who seemed in no hurry to get married and leave home. His death at the early age of 60 had left William running the farm although it is more likely that, Mr. Warren, his bailiff, would have been the man the boys would have been hired by. They were working in what would have been part of the old Ringstead Field before the Ringstead Enclosure Act some 38 years earlier. They would have made their way through the dark of the early morning and were probably soaked to the skin before they arrived at the field to work. Below them the Nene valley was flooded and the field would have been wet and muddy and facing into the driving north-westerly winds. There was a large group of men and boys working on the field so what could they have been doing on that January day?

The *Handbook of Farm Labour* by John C. Morton, written in 1861, gives a calendar of operations on a farm. For January it lists:

> *Drainage operations; carriage of manure to heaps in fields, also of lime and marl, also of grain to market; threshing grain for sale; ploughing, probably the last of the stubbles for root crops; applying clay and marl, carrying lime etc; attendance on cattle and sheep road and fence mending; to-dressing pastures.*

The list for the farmworkers, for the early part of February, is not very different, with the addition of 'gathering stones off the meadows which are to be mown'. Of c course it is possible that the bad weather had delayed operations. The *Victoria County History* in 1937 records that much of the parish was under grass but the chief crops were wheat, beans, barley, oats, turnips and roots. Looking back at the various Directories there was little change from the nineteenth century. The *1885 Kelly's Directory* gives the same list but without the oats. Could they, like the tragic heroine of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* have been harvesting turnips and swedes, after the sheep had eaten off the tops?

We can only guess at the work they were doing in Ringstead Field. We do know that on that Tuesday morning the storm began to increase in fury. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 3rd February later reported:

> *Tuesday last will long be remembered in this village [Ringstead] as a day of hurricanes, for storms of wind, hail, rain and snow came rapidly one after the other with scarcely any intermission. Trees were uprooted and large branches blown off others along the Ringstead-road, and many pranks played during the height of the various gales. In fact it was with difficulty that people keep on their legs and maintain their equilibrium.*

About 9 o'clock on that Tuesday morning of 30th January 1877 the men and boys working in the fields decided to have what the *Northampton Mercury* called a 'luncheon break' although it was an early hour for lunch even for farm workers. It is likely that the force of the wind and rain had made working almost impossible and they hoped that things might improve later. Certainly the *Peterborough Advertiser* reports that they had 'taken refuge from the rain.'

They all made for the shelter of the farm buildings and gathered in a small hovel and watched the rain lashing down in the increasing gusts of wind. They had not been there long when 'the wind blew such a gale as to take the tiles from the roof'. The younger ones decided that it was time to move and five of them, ranging in ages from 12 to 17 years ran into a nearby barn where they hoped that they would be safer. It seems as if it was a substantial structure because the *Advertiser* describes it as 'stone built and thatched and stood in an exposed position.' The *Mercury* continues the story:

> *This barn stood with its frontage to the south-west and with the doors open. No sooner had these boys and young men got into the barn than the storm had attained the terrific force of a hurricane; a few moments more there came a whirlwind of such force as to at once take the roof completely off the barn, and threw it into the farm premises beyond. One of the gable ends immediately fell in and also the side walls burying three of them in the ruins.*

High winds and hidden fears often produce high spirits in young men and you can imagine them joking and jumping about as they watched the gale lashing about them. Then, in an instant, their small world fell in on them. Those still in the hovel saw the barn cave in and they rushed to the scene as the storm still raged.

Two of the boys had managed to escape. One was near the door and got out uninjured. Charles Scraxton, Benjamin's younger brother, had been injured but also managed to get out of the ruins. Three of the lads, Benjamin, William and Albert, were buried under the debris of thatch, beams and masonry. The storm would still have been howling across the valley and one can imagine the group, with the wind catching and driving loose debris about them, as they desperately dragged aside the fallen timbers and masonry to find the boys. Someone was sent to fetch Dr. McIntyre from Raunds while they searched frantically for the three who were buried. The *Advertiser* tells us that:

> *The news of the accident speedily spread and a force of men from the adjacent ironstone diggings at once set to work to clear away the rubbish.*

Albert Fensom and William Clayton were first pulled out but seemed already dead. Finally Charles's elder brother, Benjamin Scraxton was drawn out, still alive but with a fractured skull.

Dr McIntyre, when he arrives, seems to have gone quietly about his business among the chaos of the storm. He checked the two boys and pronounced them dead from suffocation. The *Mercury* says that the bodies of the two boys were taken home to their families. Benjamin and Charles were also taken home. Charles was not too badly injured and soon recovered but Benjamin only lingered a few hours, possibly until the Wednesday morning, when he also died of his injuries.

A week later the *Northampton Mercury* reported on the inquest that had been held the next day, on the three deaths, at the *Axe and Compass Inn* in Ringstead. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned. It also reported on the funeral.

> *On Friday the bodies of William Clayton, aged 16; Benjamin Scraxton, aged 16; and Albert Fensom, aged 14, were interred in the parish graveyard in one wide grave side by side. Amongst the followers were Mr. W. R. Dearlove and his farm bailiff, Mr. Warren; also the Misses E. and M. and A. Dearlove. There was a very large number of people present, estimated at not less than 500, and many were the tears of those who witnessed the last*

tribute of respect paid to those who had been cut off in the morning of life by that melancholy tragedy. Wreathes of immortelles were placed on each coffin by the Misses Dearlove as the coffins were lowered side by side in their last resting place.

The old bass bell, cast in 1682, would have been tolling out from the church tower, rattling the windows of the school next door. The inscription on the swinging bell read, ' *I to the Church the Living Call, I to the Grave do Summon All*'. The funeral is not mentioned in the School Log Book but one cannot believe that the children did not, in some way, acknowledge the deaths.

In the national press, the death of the three boys does not appear to have been reported. Perhaps notice of the deaths came too late to be considered 'news' among all the terrible loss of life caused by the hurricane across the country. Locally, however, they made a deep impression on the local communities and sermons were preached on the tragedy at Ringstead Parish Church on the following Sunday afternoon and at the Wesleyan Chapel in the evening, on both occasions to packed, weeping, congregations. The Reverend Oyston also preached at the Raunds Wesleyan Chapel the following Tuesday.

A Committee was formed for defraying the funeral expenses and £23.11s was raised, any surplus to be distributed among the families. The reports of the funeral and the collection only mention the great and the good. It is the three Misses Dearlove, unmarried daughters of the late Joseph, who place the 'wreathes of immortelles' on the three coffins in what must have been a touching scene. We hear nothing of the grieving families or even whether they were at the funeral. We hear nothing about the boys who were killed.

A few days after this tragedy a young boy aged 12 called John Ball, from Denford was also killed in the driving wind and rain. After finishing his work at Woodford Lodge he was walking along the *London & North Western Railway* towards where it crossed under the *Midland Railway*. He was going to meet his father who worked on the *Midland line*. In the noise of the wind and rain he did not hear the train coming behind him and was killed instantly.

In the turmoil of the three boys' deaths, his single death almost went unnoticed, as did the death of Ambrose Fensom, aged 4 months a little over three weeks later.

Some deaths seem to affect a community or a nation and stir them into grief whereas others leave the families to grieve alone.

Photograph of the grave near the gate into the church yard taken September 2010.

The quotation at the base of the headstone reads:

'What is your life. It is even a vapour that
Appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.'

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This story was prompted by an article written by Janice Morris for Strapetona (Thrapston District History Society) which she kindly sent me).

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Chapter Nineteen

Blood on the Stubble

William Roberts (1767 – 1836)

William Roberts was born in about 1767. He does not show up in Ringstead Registers and it is rumoured that he came from Wales. We first see him in Ringstead when, on 12th October 1788, he married Ann Roberson in the parish church. Ann was soon pregnant and the couple must have looked forward to the beginnings of a happy family life.

Their first child, Lydia, was baptised on 3rd June 1790 but it must have been a difficult birth and, for William, tragedy was to be his companion for some twelve years. His wife, Ann, died on 8th June 1790, just five days after the baptism. Some six weeks later Lydia too was buried. William was just twenty-three years old.

He met Elizabeth Jacks, some eight years his senior, and married her on 1st February 1791, just seven months after the death of his wife. Elizabeth too, was quickly pregnant and their first child, John, was baptised on 15th June 1792. He was followed over the next few years by Mary, Samuel and Hannah. 1798 came and went with no recorded incident but then, in January 1799, a terrible tragedy struck the family. Mary was buried on the 6th January and Samuel and Hannah followed just three days later.

What an unhappy few years the young couple had had and only John, the eldest child, remained of their family. They had another daughter and, as was often the custom, she was also baptised 'Hannah', some six months later, in honour of the baby girl whom they had recently buried. We do not know what effect all these deaths had on William, nor do we know what caused them, exceptional even in those days when infant deaths were common. In Ringstead another infant had died in the previous December but there was not a spate of other deaths to suggest an epidemic. Perhaps it was a cottage fire. We may never know.

What we do know is that less than two years later William was in a dispute. It was on Tuesday 18th August 1801 and the harvest was in full swing. At some point William and another labourer, Matthew Teat, began to row. Whatever the cause of the argument, it soon became heated and burst into violence. Was Elizabeth also there? The harvest field was known as a place of flirting and ribaldry. A line of men with scythes needed to work together in a rhythm if they were not to get in each other's way or cause injury. It may be in the heat and toil of the cutting , one of the men, either as a joke of by accident clashed scythes with the other. Whatever the reason, the two men began to strike at each other with their scythes which would have been sharpened like razors to make the work as easy as possible. In *The Feast of July,* H.E. Bates tells of a similar fight between two brothers in the harvest field. In Bates's account one knocks the blade from the head of the shaft to use it like a sword. Did the novelist know, through local folklore of this case, over a century earlier, or was it a

not uncommon occurrence. In the novel the fight is stopped by the mother coming between them but nobody intervened in the Ringstead field, possibly taken by surprise by the sudden eruption of violence.

We can only surmise at the exact way that the men fought but we do know that the two of them hit out at each other just two or three times with their scythes. This was not two hot-headed youths fighting, for William was about 34 and Matthew was some eight years older. A newspaper reporting the later case stated that:

> *Teat, unfortunately received a deep cut across the inside of the lower part of one leg and bled to death in the space of a few minutes.*

The nature and place of the injury seems to indicate that the two men were using the whole scythes and not just the blades. Can we imagine William, suddenly distraught, watching his adversary's life blood staining the just cut stubble? Were any final words exchanged as the wounded man lay there, slowly dying?

Matthew Teat was buried two days later, on August 20th1801, in the Ringstead churchyard but the parish register records nothing of how he died. He left a widow, Hannah and four children.

At the inquest, also held on that grim Thursday, by the Coroner, Thomas Marshall, William was charged with *feloniously killing and slaying Matthew Teat*. He was committed to gaol where, it seems, he had to stay until the Lent Assizes in Northampton some six months later. Possibly on March 2nd, but certainly before 3rd March 1802, William was found guilty of criminal homicide. Looking through the Northampton Mercury for the months up to the trial one sees the banknote forgers and burglars hung and sheep stealers transported for seven years. It comes as some surprise to see, on Saturday 6th March 1802, that the Mercury sums up the Lent Assizes and briefly lists William's sentence, together with that of another killer.

> *William Roberts and John Holmir[?], convicted of manslaughter were severally fined one shilling and ordered to be imprisoned in gaol, the former for two and the latter for one calendar month.*

This seems amazingly lenient, especially when we see it in the context of the other cases. William had probably been in custody for the five or six months leading up to the trial which would have been taken into account. This was a long period from offence to trial, for the criminal law was often quick if not always fair. Why was the sentence so lenient? Was it felt that the provocation was extreme, or that it was done in the heat of the moment with both men equally involved? Was it because it was a scrap between two labourers that went wrong? If William had killed a ‘gentleman’ in similar circumstances one suspects that he may have paid with his life? It may be that, along with the other extenuating circumstances, that the history of William was laid before the court and it was felt that he and his wife had suffered enough?

It must have been a difficult winter for Elizabeth without William or much of the harvest money. Unfortunately, the couple's suffering had not finished with the release of William because a son, also named William, was born to them in 1805 and died a year later and another son, Thomas, was buried on 24th June 1808 aged just 13 months.

Of all the eight children of William that we know of, only two survived into adulthood. Their second child named Hannah married William Barfield on 2nd February 1823. John, their eldest child, married Rebecca Horsford in Swineshead in 1818. They had three girls before the untimely death of Rebecca, on 13th March 1828, aged just 38. One of them, May married Thomas Stains in the first wedding held at Ringstead Baptist Church. [See the chapter on Joseph Ball]. Like his father, John married again, to Alice Page, some two-and-a-half years later and had six further children. One of these was also christened John and he was baptised on 19th May 1833. It is this John's son, Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts, whose story is also told in another chapter.

William died on 3rd April 1836 aged 69 years and Elizabeth followed on 2nd May 1838 aged 79 years.

Looking back, at the end of their lives, they must have wondered if they had been cursed, losing almost all their family as infants. It is strange how history is made by such small chances. It was John Roberts, the only son to reach maturity, whose descendant would become the first woman Prime Minister of England.

The readers must make up their own minds as to what this tells us about the universe.

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My thanks to Carol Jones for the information on William's marriage.

Chapter Twenty

Modern Times

Cottingham, Edwin Turner (1869 – 1940)

Edwin Cottingham would not have wanted to be a man before his time. He was a man on time. He also has a strong claim to be the most eminent man born in Ringstead in the nineteenth century. His story may not have the elements of tragedy like that of William Weekley Ball and Lydia Attley but by intelligence, skill and hard work he became an important and respected man within his chosen profession. On his death he was praised for his work by Cambridge University but during his lifetime he was also cursed by some of its students as we shall hear.

William Cottingham was born in Ringstead in about 1828, the son of Thomas and Susannah. Thomas was an agricultural labourer and the 1851 Census has the couple living with their five children. It is a family similar to many others in the village except that William, the eldest at twenty-three, is described in the Census as a 'Cordwainer'.

A cordwainer is often said to be just another name for a shoemaker. In the Ringstead Census, however, it is only used on a few occasions among all the shoemakers. An alternative view is that a cordwainer was a maker of fine or luxury shoes. Perhaps William, or his father, is emphasising that he is a craftsman and something above a jobbing shoemaker. Living next door, on one side, lives John Roberts with his wife Alice, a 'Church Sunday School Mistress'. On the other side lives Herbert Abington, son of a Baptist Minister, a 'Tea Dealer' and later to be a Chemist. These are likely to be families with learning and aspiration.

Some time after this, it seems, that William junior spends some time in London for he marries Harriett Frost at St Mary's Church, Whitechapel in Middlesex on 1st November 1859. Harriett had been born in Langford in Norfolk in about 1837 and in 1851 she is living in Whitechapel with George Weston and his wife as a 'Monthly Nurse'. George is a delivery clerk yet, although they have no children, he has a general servant as well as Harriett in his household. They seem to disappear in 1861 but by the 1871 Census George, at sixty-four years' old, is alone and an 'Almsman' in the Licensed Victuallers Asylum' in Peckham. He was born in Kent and there are number of entries in that county's criminal records for a 'George Weston'. Is it the same man? Whatever the truth, there seems to be a story to be told – but by somebody else.

A 'monthly nurse' was usually an untrained helper, often an older woman, who looked after a woman for a short period after the birth of her baby (i.e. a month). This does not seem to be the case here but as we have not found the Weston's in the 1861 Census we cannot be sure. Did William meet Harriett when he went up to Whitechapel to get work or to improve his skills? There is a long established shoe-making industry in the area and we know that other shoemakers from Ringstead

ended up in London In 1851, Henry Manning, another shoemaker was living in Lower Belgravia Street just a mile-and-a-half across town.

However they met, by 1861 William was back in Ringstead with his young wife and their two sons, Joseph and William. Joseph is five years old so, if the marriage is correct, he predated the wedding by three years. Ten years later and Joseph is not with the family but there are three new additions. William is called Willie Frost Cottingham and there are also Letitia (7), Herbert C. (4) and Edwin T. (1). Later Jessie and Annie completed the family. William, the father, is now a shoemaker among shoemakers.

It is Edwin T Cottingham whose life is our subject and it is made all the more remarkable by its start which was not unlike many others in the village.

Perhaps we ought to first clear up the 'Turner' which was the Christian name of his mother's brother and is likely to have been a family name. He was born on 9th April 1869. It is said that after leaving school he was apprenticed to a tailor. The phrase 'after leaving school' seems an obvious one but it was just two years before Edwin's birth that:

> *Close to the church there was built, in 1867, a very handsome and commodious school, with master's residence which serves for this and the adjacent parish of Denford, the site being presented by George Capron Esq. and the expense defrayed by contribution, assisted by Government grant.*

An Education Act was passed in 1870 which was the first step in bringing in compulsory attendance for children between the ages of five and twelve. It was also unusual in that female householders could stand and vote for the School Boards that were set up where there insufficient school places provided by the churches and other charitable organisations. Edwin was possibly one of that first generation of working class children to benefit although he may have attended the Wesleyan School in Raunds. Whichever school he went to, it seems that he made the best use of his opportunity. He was not the only one, for his brother, William Frost Cottingham is shown in the 1881 Census as, at twenty years old, a teacher in Gloucester.

The story of William is a rather sad one. The Wellingborough and Kettering News reported on 4th April 1885 that on the previous Sunday a service of presentation and farewell was held for William. He had been living in Sleaford but had just been accepted for missionary work in the Congo. He had been a scholar and teacher in the Sunday School and the president, Mr. G. Smith, said:

> *. . . that he had known the school for something like 60 years. Some who had belonged to it had turned out very badly, a great number had turned out well and some had gone forth to preach the Gospel but, so far as he knew, this was the first time that one who had belonged to them had gone forth to be a missionary.*

William sailed the following Wednesday from Liverpool. He arrived in the Congo on May 15th 1885 and died on June 8th: a missionary life of twenty-three days. On Sunday 2nd August, the Reverend I. Near preached a special sermon, to a large congregation, in remembrance of William.

How long Edwin's career in tailoring lasted is not clear but it was not the measurement of cloth and inside legs that was to be his life's work. By 1891 he and his older brother, Herbert had moved to Thrapston and were lodging with a widow, Elizabeth Read and her two grown-up children. The two brothers were both 'Watch Makers'. Herbert, soon changed his career and by 1901 he had moved to Corby where he is a 'Commercial Traveller in the Boot Trade'. Edwin, however, had found his life's work.

The brothers had been working for Augustus Allen, a Watch and Clock Maker in Thrapston. He had been born in Kenninghall in Norfolk in about 1811 and married an Alice Clark, who was born in North Shields in 1839. We do not how or when Augustus came to Thrapston but he is already there in 1841 and his trade is set. Through a series of Post Office and Kelly's Directories he continues as a watchmaker and jeweller for over forty years. The last time I have found him as a watchmaker, 'employing one man', is in the 1881 Census where he is living by himself in Market Place, two doors away from the White Hart. A little mysteriously, Alice is living as a lodger in Twywell and shown as a retired tradesman's wife. In the meantime they have had a large family of some eight children including four boys. For whatever reason none of them took over the family business and by 1890 Augustus is shown as a 'Private Resident'.

There seems to be a gap of some ten years in this for Edwin was only some eleven years old in 1881. It may be that Augustus employed a manager to whom the two boys worked initially. At the moment we can only guess at the exact path of Edwin's remarkable rise to competence and maturity.

In 1894 Edwin married Elizabeth Smith and locally people would have said that he had made a 'good marriage'. The Smith family were Engineers and Iron Founders, originally from Stamford, who traded under the name of *Smith & Grace.* Elizabeth's father, George was a partner in the family firm which was a significant local employer. He was a man of some wealth.

Mr Allen retired and Edwin took over his shop and business. It seems likely that Smith money was involved in the name 'Cottingham' going over the shop window in Bridge Street and in the purchase of 3 Midland Road, *The Limes*, as Edwin and Elizabeth's family home. The 1911 Census, completed by Edwin, tells us that it had seven rooms, excluding any bathroom or scullery. The house was just around the corner from the shop and he could go from one to the other through his garden, which also contained his workshop.

Many of the life stories on this website, such as those of Herbert Abington, William Mitchell and Richard Warren show the way the new science and thinking moved the old established rural world into the new industrial age. With Edwin Cottingham, we see the move from Victorian science into the world of Einstein.

Edwin must have looked set fair to continue a comfortable life as a small town watch maker, repairer and seller. It was a life and a standard of living that many people in Ringstead would have envied. He had made good. But Edwin was a more ambitious and talented man than that. His skill and reputation would take him half way round the world and make him a figure of national importance in his chosen field. His story takes us well out of the nineteenth century so we will tell it briefly.

We cannot be certain as to the extent of Edwin's education but must presume that it started and ended at Ringstead School. Nor do we do the training he received under the guidance of Mr Allen. We do know, however, that he must have been a gifted and diligent pupil for he rapidly became a clockmaker of note and one well away from the normal domestic field. In this the engineering influence of his in-laws must have been important. It seems likely that he also had some influence of their business. Although never a shareholder of the family firm he was party to an agreement to form the new company of *Smith & Grace Screw Boss Pulley Co. Ltd.* As part of its new incarnation it took the power to:

> *….carry on at Thrapston in the County of Northampton and elsewhere in England the business of an Electric Light Company*.

It was the bringing together of his clock-making, engineering and electrical skills that led him to comparative fame and fortune.

Edwin outside his shop with the clock he designed for Thrapston Church. *The Rector is on the left and I believe that Edwin is the man standing next to him (or could he be the man in the white coat?). With the kind permission of the Antiquarian Horological Society.*

One of his first ventures in this new field was to make for Thrapston Church a clock, with a chime regulated electro-magnetically. He also became fascinated by astronomy, one of the most ancient sciences but reinvigorated by the new discoveries of chemistry and physics. It was also one in which the very accurate measurement of time became of paramount importance. On March 12th 1905 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

By 1909 he was being asked by the Society to report on the state of a Harrison Clock. This was published in the Astronomical Society's monthly newsletter and in the *Horological Journal*. It must be remembered that Harrison's great importance had been that he had designed and made a chronometer which was so accurate that it could be used in precise navigation and in the scientific measurement of the earth and particularly of longitude. Cottingham was from similar roots to Harrison and had the same mixture of theoretical and practical skills. He made a clock for Edinburgh Observatory around the year 1916 which had electrical components. He was helping to move time measurement to the next stage of accuracy and reliability.

It was an exciting time for scientists and engineers and Edwin must have spent most of his waking hours in reading, inventing and making clocks and scientific instruments. He was fascinated by everything mechanical and in 1910 bought a second-hand motorbike. It is suspected that he took this to bits and was involved in the design of the Clyno Motor Cycle, originally an offshoot of the Smith family business. He also designed, made, and had manufactured, scientific recording instruments.

It must have been at about this time that Edwin cleaned the clock of Trinity College Church in Cambridge. There had been a tradition for students on the day of the Matriculation Dinner to try to run around the Great Court of Trinity, some 341 metres, while the clock struck 12 o'clock (in fact it struck 24 times). This event was made famous worldwide by the film *Chariots of Fire* which told the story of the future Olympic athletes, Liddell and Abrahams, racing each other. The *At Random* column of *The Observer* later observed:

> *To change the pace of a public clock is akin to the sin of removing one's neighbour's landmark and the famous horologist who has just died, Mr Edwin Cottingham, played at least a small part in deranging records. In tending the clock of Trinity Church, Cambridge, he speeded it up slightly, spoiling the sport of the undergraduates…*

In fact, no-one was then able to beat the chimes until Lord Burghley in 1927. That is why we must assume that E.T. Cottingham's careful work was cursed by a generation of students.

Where was his wife, Elizabeth, in all this? The couple had one child, Leslie Guy Cottingham, born in 1897. Was she a clock widow while her husband beavered away in the shop and workshop or attended the Masonic Lodge meetings? Did time pass slowly for her?

The nature of time itself had changed. In 1843 Mr Hill a beer-keeper in Ringstead had escaped a conviction at Wellingborough Petty Sessions for selling beer after ten o'clock, when it was found that the church clock had not been working on that evening. In 1910 Edwin is paying Thrapston Post Office an annual rental of £5 for the 10 a.m. time signal to be transmitted by a single wire circuit to his premises. He was also the second person in Northamptonshire to be granted a wireless licence so

that he could receive a time signal from the Eiffel Tower. In 1914 his set and aerial, along with all other domestic radios across the country were confiscated for security reasons, whereupon Edwin started making a crystal set.

He continued to work on Greenwich and Admiralty chronometers during the First World War and also became more and more involved with Cambridge University Astronomy Department. This led to a project that was, perhaps, the pinnacle of his career. Rather as Captain Cook had gone to the South Seas as part of an expedition to view the transit of Venus across the Sun in order to discover the true distance of the latter from earth, Edwin was to go as part of a Cambridge University expedition to prove, or otherwise, Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Cambridge University and the *Royal Astronomical Society* had set up a *Permanent Eclipse Committee*. This had decided to send a party to Principe, a Portuguese island in the Gulf of Guinea to view the eclipse of May 28th/29th 1919 to test:

> *….the deflection of a ray of light by a gravitational field. As predicted by the theory of relativity.*

Professor A. S. Eddington and E.T. Cottingham were the observers. Edwin was responsible for much of the calculation and for the clock mechanism on which the camera was mounted. Although, on the day, they encountered some thundery weather there was enough clear sky for the measurement to take place and Einstein to be proved correct.

On 14th July 1919 Edwin, with Professor Eddington, returned home on the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's ship *Deseado*. In November 1919 H. H. Turner from the Oxford University Observatory wrote to The Times about the expedition in which he recorded:

> *….And it is a pleasure to acknowledge the great assistance of Mr. E. T. Cottingham, a clock enthusiast of great skill with mechanical parts.*

Edwin was fifty years old. Through the inter-war years he continued to work on scientific clocks and instruments including a new clock for the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. He retired from active business in 1928 but continued to dabble in clock making.

He died on March 20th 1940. His obituary in *The Times* concentrated on his technical achievements:

> *He had a wide reputation for scientifically built instruments with special pendulum compensations and airtight temperature-controlled cases. One such clock, which was used as standard timekeeper at Greenwich Observatory, had a guaranteed mean daily variation of not more than one-hundredth of a second. In partnership with Messrs. C. Mercer and Sons, St. Albans, noted chronometer makers, Cottingham produced three more astronomical clocks. One went to Hong Kong Observatory, and one was exhibited at the Palace of Industry in the first British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The clocks are believed to be the only English refler escapement clocks in existence.*

Other obituaries were by friends and colleagues and said more about him as a man. His great friend David S. Torrens wrote in the *Horological Journal:*

> *He was the most modest and unassuming of men, who had never learnt the art of displaying his accomplishments to the crowd. He was at his best in the workshop in the company of some appreciative friends.*

The obituary in the Royal Astronomical Society journal was written by Professor Eddington, who first wrote of his work for the University:

> *To Cambridge Observatory he was a good friend and benefactor. For more than thirty years he was in fact, if not in name, an honorary keeper of the clocks, visiting them regularly and freely undertaking their cleaning, repair and adaption for varying needs.*

He also records in a sad but revealing note:

> *The first clock which he made was the Thrapston church clock, including the whole chiming mechanism. It was his favourite 'child' and his last exertion, though ill at the time, was to put it forward for Summer Time in 1940.*

Postscript

On a sunny autumn day, in late October 2010, I wandered the streets of Thrapston looking for the shop of Edwin Cottingham. I tried the coffee shop, the library, the solicitors, the jewellers, the street cleaner who was known to have a lot of old postcards. None knew where the shop had been. In fact, none of them had heard of Edwin T Cottingham. Eventually a man did confirm that he had vaguely heard of him and he might have had the last shop before the mini roundabout.

The shop, somehow, did not look substantial enough and I could not find the tiles with his name on which were supposed to be on the floor of the doorway. They were not under the large doormat but there seemed to be some slabs beneath that. Perhaps they were under them. I took a photograph of the premises without much hope but at home that evening I compared it with the picture shown in the text which is from Dennis Jones's booklet. Sure enough the features matched: the split front windows; the loaf shaped top to the columns; the high wall at the side. ***Cottingham, Watchmaker and Jeweller*** *is now (2011) the* ***Bonoful Balti Hut.*** *I must go back and peek underneath the slabs laid under that doormat to see if E.T Cottingham still has a foothold in Thrapston.*

Edwin Cottingham's former shop (taken 27th October 2010)

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Chapter Twenty-One

Wifebeater

Korah Dicks (Dix), (abt 1813 – 1873)

Korah is not a common boys' name in nineteenth century England. This may be, in part, because people better understood the context of biblical names. Like our Korah, the ancestry of the biblical Korah is confused. He was either the son of Esau and, or, the son of Izhar. Both are remembered for rebellion against Israel and for being punished. It is Korah, son of Izhar who rebelled against Moses, disbelieving that the Ten Commandments actually came from God. The earth opened up and swallowed him.

In the Jewish version of the story, Korah told a parable of a poor widow to his followers which was a tale of the greed of the church and the establishment:

> *At the time of the harvest the widow had to leave unreaped the parts of the field prescribed by law while the harvested grain she had to give the priest the share due to him. The woman sold the field and with the proceeds bought two sheep. But the first born of these she was obliged to give to Aaron the priest and at the time of shearing he requested the first of the fleece also. The widow said, 'I cannot hear this man's demands any longer. It will be better to slaughter the sheep and eat them. But Aaron came for the shoulder, the two cheeks and the maw. The widow then vehemently cried out, 'If thou persisteth in thy demand I declare them devoted to the Lord.' Aaron replied, 'In that case the whole belongs to me,' whereupon he took away the meat, leaving the widow and her two daughters wholly unprovided for.*

Is it too fanciful to believe that Korah Dicks was deliberately named because of the name's association? At a time when Little Addington and many other local parishes had been enclosed and the church still took its tithes did his parents knowingly christen him with a rebel's name? It is possible that his father, William, later became the Ringstead Parish Clerk. I say, 'possibly', because, like the biblical Korah, the ancestry of Korah Dicks is difficult to entangle. This is not necessarily due to any problems within the family. It may just be the product of large families, same name couples and multiple marriages.

William Dicks was the son of Joseph and Mary and was baptised on 21st March 1762 at Little Addington. He married Ann Smith at Cranford St. John on 26th September 1785. The young couple had one child, William, baptised in Little Addington on the 20th August 1786. Sadly, Ann died a few months after the baptism. William then married Martha March, also from Cranford St John, on 27th November 1787 in Little Addington Church. They lived in Ringstead and had three children, John (baptised 14 June 1789), Daniel (baptised 7 April 1793) and Thomas who was born 25 March 1802 and baptised in September of the same year. Was the gap of some nine years in the children

anything to do with military service in the Napoleonic Wars or did the couple move away for a time. At present we have no way of telling.

What we do know is that Martha died on 15th December 1808 aged just 41 and was buried in Ringstead. So far the family line is reasonably clear but from now it becomes difficult to untangle. If only William and Ann had not named their son after his father. Perhaps, more importantly, if only father and son had not both been carpenters, and married women of child-bearing age with the same Christian name and in the same year. Had they no thought for their genealogist descendants?

William senior was first and just six months after the death of Martha he married Sarah Eakins (or Ekins) on 30th May 1809 at Ringstead Church. William was still a comparatively young man, of around 47 years of age, and his new bride was some sixteen years his junior. His son, William, then married Sarah Wyman at Irthlingborough on 4th December 1809.

Suddenly, the Ringstead Parish Register is littered with the children of William and Sarah. Altogether there are fourteen christened in the twenty years from 1810. In the early years particularly, the children came thick and fast. In 1810 itself, two were born some eight months apart (the birth dates are given in the parish register). It seems clear that father and son were both producing children, at least through the earlier part of this period. Some births have the father as William, 'Parish Clerk' and some have William, 'Carpenter' but the first 'Parish Clerk' reference is not until 1825 so it does not seem a clear way for separating the two Williams.

When we come to Korah, whose story we are really telling, the birth is shrouded in further mystery because we know, from later Censuses, that he was born in about 1812 in Leicester. Of all the children of the two Williams he seems to be the only one who was baptised away from Ringstead. He was christened on 16th October 1812 in Leicester St Margaret's, the parish where the union workhouse was later built. Is this significant? The Register shows him as the son of William and Sarah Dicks and appears to have his name as 'Korias' but it seems certain that he is our man.

Korah's marriage to Sarah Ann Atley (Attley) was on 8th November 1835 so by 1841 he is head of his own household. If his marriage had been two years later we might have a certificate to prove his parentage. As it is, it is only on balance that we can say that he is the son of one of the Williams. Time may change that opinion.

Sarah Ann Attley also came from a difficult family, one which might have attracted the attention of Social Services today. We must beware of jumping to hasty value judgements and, certainly, few families went through the nineteenth century without having a least one child 'born out of wedlock'. And yet . . . Her sister Elizabeth had six illegitimate children before marrying Joseph Groom and having one more (and her daughters, Hannah and Mary Ann had seven illegitimate children between them). Another sister, Lydia, had one illegitimate child and was bearing another when she disappeared suddenly, leading to the trial for murder of William Weekley Ball. At this trial Joseph Groom was accused by the defence of having an 'improper intimacy' with Lydia.

None of this is conclusive evidence of a 'problem family' but it is an indicator that Sarah may have not had the best of upbringings. We know no more about Sarah and she may have been a good and

hardworking wife and mother. What we do know is that Korah Dicks turned out to be a bad husband who bullied and victimised his wife.

Their first son, William, (what else!) was born in about 1836 followed by John and then David, who is the first one to be baptised in the parish. In the 1841 Census Korah is shown, as an 'Agricultural Labourer', with his young family. There is no hint of the troubles that were assailing Korah and spilling into the lives of his wife and children.

It is in 1841 that Korah first appears in the *Northampton Mercury.* It reports that he was sent to the 'House of Correction' for one month for assaulting Henry Hitchcock, a young blacksmith living with his wife and child in Ringstead. Unfortunately, we do not know the cause of the assault. Was it a crime of passion or of drink?

It is another five years before Korah, once more makes the official records for the wrong reason. The *Criminal Register for Northamptonshire* records that he was tried on 1st July 1846 at the Northampton Quarter Sessions and sentenced to six weeks imprisonment for larceny. His 'degree of instruction', which means his ability to read and write, is described as 'Imperfect'. The *Northampton Mercury* had, some five years earlier, given a brief report of a talk on Education and Crime, given at the *Greenwich Society for the Acquisition and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* by Dr. Murdoch in which he stated:

> *It is calculated that the chances of a person without education becoming a criminal were 2,200 to 1; those of an individual with an average education 10,000 to 1; and those of men having received a superior education 50,000 to one.*

Dr. Murdoch would have found evidence to back the influence of education for, on the same page as Korah in the *Criminal Register,* seven have had no education, eleven imperfect education and one was well educated. Among other reasons, this was part of the driving force towards establishing a compulsory Primary Education system.

The *Northampton Mercury* also reports briefly on the case. The 'larceny' was at Tansor, a few miles north-east of Oundle and involved the 'stealing of a pig's cheek, the property of John Siddons'. The *Mercury* has his sentence as six **months** hard labour but one would expect the *Criminal Register* to be correct.

John Siddons was a young farmer and, perhaps, Korah was in the district looking for work, or perhaps he was roaming the countryside trying to make some money any way he could. Certainly he seems to be wandering far from home when he is once again guilty of larceny at the Hertfordshire County Court Session of 14th February 1848 and imprisoned for two months. These wanderings or 'tramps' and their consequences may explain a stretch of years without children for which Sarah may have been grateful. It was not unusual for small groups of young men to go on the 'tramp' looking for work and to see a little of the world. It was the labourers' Grand Tour.

At first, Ringstead Parish Register, apart from David, shows no sign of children for the couple but then, suddenly, on the 29th July 1849 all five of Korah and Sarah's children are baptised in a, not uncommon, family pack. We can only estimate their birth years from the 1851 Census. The children

were William (1835), John (1837), David (1839), Noah (1841) and Lod (1843). In fact David appears to have already been baptised already on 19th March 1840 but better safe than sorry!

Was this a sign of a return home and reconciliation? We cannot be sure, but certainly Hod (or sometimes Odd or Had) appears as eight months old in the 1851 Census and was baptised on 4th January 1852. All are together in the 1851 Census with all the children as 'ploughboys'.

It was a large family, all boys, but on July 11th 1852, David, just thirteen years old, was buried in the local churchyard. At about the same time, however, Sarah must have been pleased to finally give birth to a girl who they named Sarah Jane. She must have also looked forward to some help with the domestic chores when her daughter grew older.

It must not be forgotten that in 1850 Sarah had had the sadness and turmoil of the disappearance of her sister Lydia and the strong possibility, which was certainly believed by many villagers, that she had been murdered by her lover, the local butcher. People searched the parish for her body and there were even predictable rumours that she had ended up in the meat pies.

Korah seems to have returned but it was, at best a mixed blessing. It may be that Sarah had had to endure many years of unrecorded abuse by her husband before she finally snapped. The first sign is in the *Northampton Herald* for 30th December 1854:

> *These sessions commencing Wednesday next [i.e. 3rd January 1855] Ringstead. Korah Dicks 43 for want of sureties in a breach of the peace towards Sarah Dicks.*

The January 6th issue of the *Herald* records that he was 'discharged there being no prosecution'. The *Herald* also recorded the Crime Statistics for Northamptonshire and on 13 January 1855 it tells us that in 1854 there was a total of three crimes which took place in Ringstead which were brought before the Quarter Sessions. This does not take into account the Petty Sessions but it shows that either Ringstead was a far from lawless place or matters were sorted out outside the legal system. Perhaps both statements are true.

Korah had been taken to gaol in Northampton on December 5th 1854 and this led to one other, almost comical incident. He was taken there by Samuel Figgis, the Ringstead Parish Constable. The rural police force was still in its infancy and the constables were not yet a professional force. In the 1861 Census Samuel is shown as 'New Inn and Carpenter'. William, Korah's father was a carpenter and one imagines that Korah was no stranger to the inside of the New Inn. It seems likely that Samuel knew him well and, perhaps, that led him to give a character like Korah too much rope.

The *Northampton Herald* later reported on a case of the 26th January 1855 when Constable Figgis found himself up before the Wellingborough Petty Sessions. The magistrates gave a caution to:

> *Samuel Figgis, Parish Constable of Ringstead for neglect of duty on 5th December, by allowing Korah Dix, a prisoner, to remain at a public house at Northampton two hours before taking him to gaol, in a state of drunkenness. Mr Bayly, the Chief Constable said he would not press charges for a heavier fine; the evidence was laid as a caution to other parish constables who are not aware that they ought to take the prisoners to gaol immediately on arriving in*

Northampton. Mr Grant, governor, provided that the prisoner was drunk when delivered into custody.

Poor Figgis was convicted in the mitigating penalty of 10s and costs. One wonders where Korah got his money from to get himself drunk. Did it come from the long suffering Sarah's meagre income or did Samuel treat him. Was Samuel Figgis with Korah in the public house helping the condemned man enjoy his last hours of freedom for a time?

The *Calendar of Prisoners* for Northamptonshire and the *Northampton Herald* for 1855 reveal that Korah was a regular guest at the County Gaol. He appears at the Quarter Sessions in January, April, July and October of that year. Each time the charge is 'No surety to keep the peace' and he is discharged. It appears that he is mistreating his wife, Sarah, who complains of her treatment and he is taken to gaol. When the case comes around, however, she relents and does not bring any evidence and so the case is dropped and he is freed.

It may be that his heavy drinking had got out of hand and he was taking his drunken rages out on Sarah. Whatever the truth of this, Korah is finally convicted at Wellingborough Petty Sessions and it may be that she had a friend in high places that brought the matter to a head. The Northampton Mercury of 2nd December 1855 reported that:

Korah Dicks, labourer of Ringstead, was charged with beating his wife Sarah Dix in a violent manner and turning out of doors on the 14th November. The defendant, who behaved rudely in court, was committed to prison for six months hard labour.

Things had obviously turned sour in their marriage. The trial was at the Wellingborough Petty Sessions on 19th November 1855 and the chairman of the magistrates was T. Wilkins Esq.. This is relevant because at the later trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864, Sarah states that in 1850, at the time of Lydia's disappearance, she was staying with Mr Wilkins.

The 1851 Ringstead Census lists Thomas Wilkins, aged 64 as a 'Landed proprietor and one of HMJP'. With him lives his son, a 'Clerk, Clergyman and curate of Slipton' and his unmarried daughters together with a footman and three house servants. Was Sarah Dicks there as a servant or was she given sanctuary from her husband. Where were her children? Was it this relationship, however innocent, that was the cause Korah's rudeness to Thomas Wilkins in court?

After 1855 Korah does not appear again in the criminal records. Had he learnt his lesson or was he just lucky? Did Sarah forgive him and they became a happy middle-aged couple or was she forced to grudgingly accept him back into the family home. Without his income it must have been a difficult time for her and her children.

In 1861 Korah and Sarah are together in Ringstead with their children. William, the eldest at 26 is a shoemaker but Noah (18) and Lod (12) are agricultural labourers and Hod is a ploughboy. Sarah Jane, the only girl is eight years old and still a 'scholar'.

Sarah was to receive another blow when Sarah Jane, still only eight years old, died a few months later on July 26th 1861.

By 1871 Korah and Sarah are living in Carlow Street and he is unable or unwilling to work and, at sixty years old, is a 'Pauper'. Sarah is trying to earn a living as a needlewoman and Hod, the only child at home is now 20 years old and a labourer. The Criminal Register tells us that on 8th March 1869 Hod had been imprisoned for two months hard labour for house breaking.

It may be that Korah was genuinely unable to work for in the spring of 1873 he died, although there is no sign of his burial in Ringstead . His drinking partner and guard, Samuel Figgis, died soon after, on 1st May 1873 aged just 52.

In 1881 Sarah, now a sixty-seven year old widow, is living with her two unmarried sons, John (44), an ironstone labourer and Lodd (36) a drover. Two doors away is her son Noah (38) a farm labourer with his wife Emma and their five children.

Old Dicks, [most likely Hod or Had, for his widow, Sarah, and her children are staying with his older brother, John] died on February 24th 1886 aged thirty-five years and a few months later his mother, Sarah died aged seventy-five. It must have been 'a good age' considering the life that she had been led.

After the death of Korah, his son, Noah, named his own son James Korah Dicks in honour of his father. So, even though he was petty thief, drunkard and wife-beater, strangely Noah wished him to be remembered. It may be that, when sober, he had other good qualities. We have no way of knowing. Sadly, James Korah Dicks, just six months old, died on 1st July 1879.

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My thanks to Brenda Hazel for her help with the genealogy of the Dicks family.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

The Railway Children

William Leveratt (1813- 1893) & family

The railway, along with the bicycle, the great enlarger of many villages' gene pools, came quite early to Ringstead. *The Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, the first really successful railway opened in 1830. In the next twenty years railway fever laid an irregular web of lines across the country, with London at its centre. Ringstead became part of this network just fifteen years later.

Not every landowner was pleased to see this new driver of trade and prosperity cross his land. Many saw it as a noisy, dirty despoiler of their view and, without the sepia glasses of nostalgia, one can understand their concern. It was rumoured that the large landowners around Northampton forced the railway around the town so that Blisworth, some five miles away, became its nearest station on the Euston to Birmingham line. In fact, opened in 1838, it was engineered by Robert Stephenson and he by-passed Northampton because it would have involved steeper climbs than he thought that the locomotives of the time could bear.

Northampton businessmen realised that, without the railway, they would not be able to compete with other towns. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1842 *the London and Birmingham Railway Board* was approached with the idea of a line from Blisworth, via Northampton, Thrapston and Oundle to Peterborough. The first notification of the intention to build the line was in November 1842. Events then moved with an astonishing speed.

It was realised from the start that the line would not be profit-making by itself but it would give the LBR a way into the east of the country as well as feeding traffic into its main line. Surprisingly, Peterborough was not yet part of the network but it was obvious that it would be on a major line from London to the north very soon as well as being a possible hub for traffic to the East Coast.

There was, initially, strong opposition by some local landowners, including Lord Lilford and Mr Archbould, the Thrapston solicitor who had steered the Ringstead Enclosure through only a couple of years earlier and who was also a landowner. The six main objections included one which modern day protest groups against new developments may have some sympathy with. They argued that:

> *The aim of the proposal was not really to benefit the area but to produce more profit for the London and Birmingham main line.*

Nevertheless, The Times could report on January 1843:

> *LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY. – On Monday a special general meeting of the proprietors was held at the Euston Hotel, Euston-station, for the purpose of authorising the directors to make a branch line from the Blisworth-station in the county of Northampton, to*

the city of Peterborough……..All the large landowners were in favour of the line…. A series of resolutions was then passed to carry out the objects of the meeting.

By the 4th July 1843 the necessary Bill had passed through three readings of the House of Commons, the Committee Stage and a further three readings in the House of Lords and had received the Royal Assent. Of course the fast movement of stock, agricultural produce, iron ore and limestone from the area and the transport in of coal, fertilizer, oil and other goods must have been a great incentive to the business side of a landowner's thinking.

Construction on the line, under the overall control of Robert Stephenson, started almost immediately. The level route along the Nene valley was a comparatively simple engineering task although it did include 26 level crossings, 13 bridges and a 616-yard tunnel at Wansford. By the summer of 1844 there were some 1000 navvies working on the line many of them on the construction of the tunnel. This of course caused local problems but it was over remarkably quickly.

The speed of construction came at some cost and injuries and deaths were not uncommon in the rush to complete in an age of few safety rules. Ringstead lost one of its sons to the line before it had opened. William Wittering (Whittering) was killed on the 6th March 1845 at Titchmarsh. He had been a shoemaker but is shown on his death certificate as a labourer. It seems likely that he had taken the opportunity of the building of the line to earn more money. The cause of death is just listed as, 'Accidentally killed on the Railway'. At this late date, with the opening of the line just two months away, it seems most likely that he was killed by a train or truck rather than a fall of earth. He was 44 years old and the 1851 Census finds his widow, Mary, aged 58 and daughter, Ruth , 16, trying to survive as washerwomen.

The 38-mile line had twelve stations and Ringstead, as one of the lesser stops, probably had only a wooden building, in the Tudor style. If this was the case, it was quite soon replaced by a substantial brick building. The whole branch line cost some £70,000 under the original estimate of £500,000 and. on the 3rd May 1845. a special train, carrying company directors and other officials, made an inspection tour of the line.

The Times of June 2nd 1845 reported that on the previous Saturday (30th May):

A special train conveying a party of the directors and their friends left the London terminus on Saturday morning at half past 9 o'clock for the purpose of opening and inspecting this additional line of traffic which is, we believe, the longest branch yet made from any trunk-line.

At Northampton the party:

. . . received an accession by the arrival of the mayor and other corporate authorities; and the train, now increased to 15 first-class carriages, proceeded on its route.

The article also describes the route in glorious terms but also reveals that not everything was yet completed.

> *By a rather circuitous course, following the meanderings of the beautiful river Nene, through a country picturesque and highly cultivated, studded with pretty villages and churches of architectural pretension, we passed unfinished stations at Castle Ashby, Wellingborough, Ditchford, Higham Ferrers and Ringstead and again paused at Thrapstone.*

The *Northampton Herald* of 7th June, rather disparagingly, states:

> *Between Wellingborough and Thrapston, a distance of eleven miles, there are three stations. Ditchford, which may be called a third-class station, or mere booking office, at which trains only stop when there are passengers to be taken up . . . and Ringstead, another third-class station.*

The Grand Opening of the line to general passenger traffic was just three days later on Monday 2nd June 1845. This was a chaotic occasion because of the large numbers wanting to travel on the line as well as the throngs of sightseers on the platforms. Some did not relish the heaving mass of humanity and had their ticket money refunded. All along the line were crowds of people cheering and waving flags.

The *Herald* again reported that:

> *It would seem too, that along this new line the population, men, women, and children, do not yet stand sufficiently in awe of the terrific monster steam. They have the hardihood to gather directly in his path, as if his dashing among them would not, before you could say Jack Robinson, crush every bone in the skins of rash hundreds.*

The speed, with which the project was conceived, designed and built, using only explosives and manual labour is astonishing. It was less than three years between the company being approached by the landowners and the railway being open for traffic.

The canal and river authorities realised that the railway posed a threat to their livelihood. The same edition of the *Northampton Herald* that reported on the opening of the new branch line also had an advertisement from the Commissioners giving notice of a 'Reduction of Tonnage River Nen Navigation' between Thrapston and Northampton. It gives the cost per ton at each lock, including:

	s.	*d.*
Cotton Mill Lock	*0*	*2*
Paper Mill Lock	*0*	*2*
Woodford Mill Lock	*0*	*2*

The railway line passed some distance from the main village at Ringstead but one suspects that many villagers would have walked down past the church to see the progress, especially during that spring of 1845 when the line and the station were being completed. Among those interested onlookers must have been William Leveratt, his wife Mary and their young family.

Drawing produced for George Capron by George Clarke and now at Southwick Hall
(With the kind permission of Christopher Capron)
Telegraph wires connected the stations along the route only 7 years after its invention.)

Taken from approximately the same spot on 27th October 2010. (Gate as if across track)

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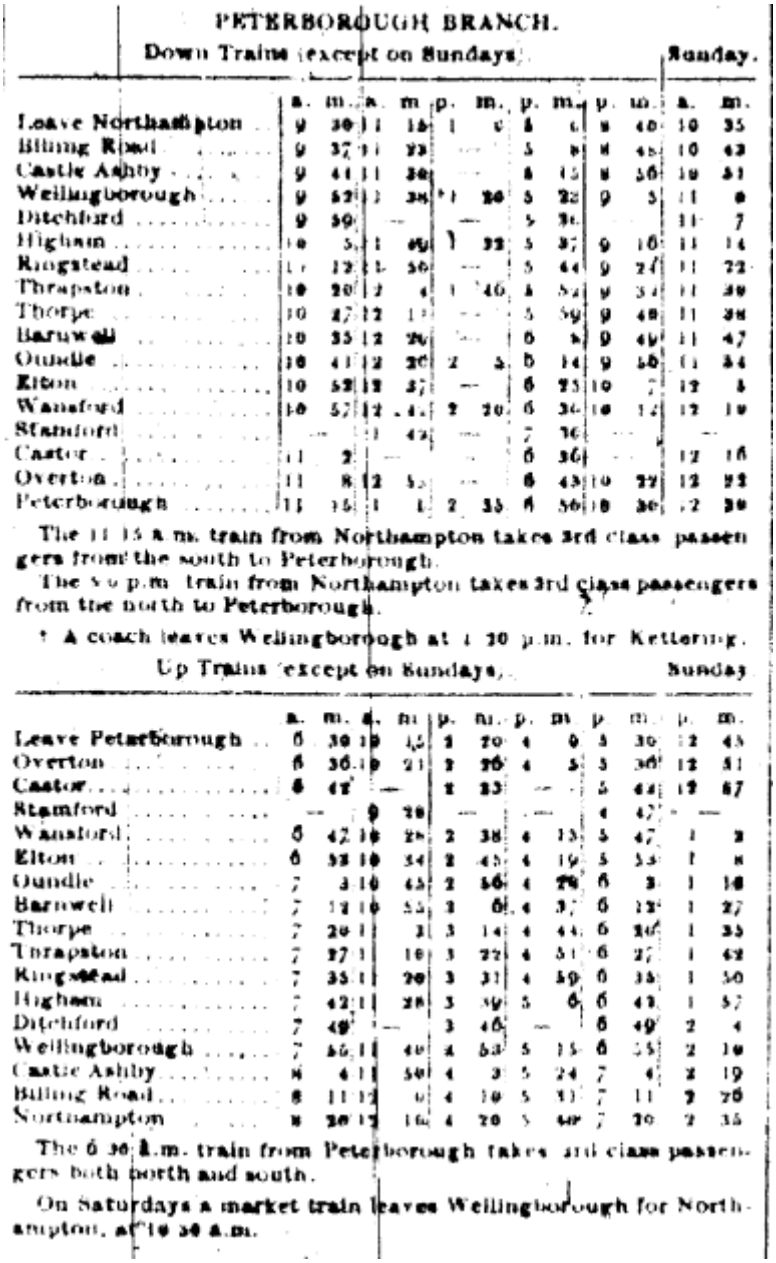
The site of the original track bed, looking towards the road bridge near Willy Watt Mill.
This is on the horizon in the original 1847 drawing
Photograph taken 27th October 2010

William had been born in Thrapston in 1813, the son of Charles John Leveratt and his wife Sarah. He was one of twelve children and often we see that some of the children of such large families have to leave home early and look away from their local area for work. We see in other biographies that many, such as the children of Daniel Ball, had to seek their fortunes in Canada, the USA and Australia. William did not travel so far. At the time of his marriage in St Giles Church, Northampton to Mary Agutter on 9th July 1838, he was a servant living in Whitechapel in Middlesex. His wife, Sarah is variously said to be born in Lowick and Islip. She is living in St Giles Street, close to the church and is not shown as having any occupation although her father is shown to be servant. As both groom and bride were from the Thrapston area, it is probable that they had met each other there, rather than in Northampton, but we cannot be sure..

By the 1841 Census the young couple are shown, with their two young daughters, Mary and Rebekah, staying with Thomas Agutter, a farm bailiff and his brother John, a labourer, at Ringstead Lodge, which is beside the road from Ringstead Mill and the future station. Thomas is probably Sarah's brother and it may be that they are staying there between jobs as no occupation is shown for William.

In 1849 a *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Northamptonshire* has the entry, *Leveratt, Wm. station master,* so it looks possible that he was in the post from the very start. The 1851 Census has him as a 'Station Clerk' but it is likely that this is a misunderstanding of this new work title. He would now be working for the *London & North Western Railway (LNWR*) formed by a merger between the London and Birmingham Railway and a number of other companies in 1846. The line of his life was now set and a number of his children also followed along the same track.



PETERBOROUGH BRANCH.

Down Trains (except on Sundays).

	a. m.	a. m	p. m.	p. m.	p. m.	Sunday. a. m.
Leave Northampton	9 30	11 15	1 0	5 0	8 40	10 35
Billing Road	9 37	11 22	—	5 8	8 48	10 42
Castle Ashby	9 44	11 30	—	5 15	8 56	10 51
Wellingborough	9 52	11 38	1 30	5 22	9 5	11 0
Ditchford	9 59	—	—	5 30	—	11 7
Higham	10 5	11 45	1 37	5 37	9 16	11 14
Ringstead	10 12	11 56	—	5 44	9 27	11 22
Thrapston	10 20	12 4	1 46	5 52	9 37	11 30
Thorpe	10 27	12 11	—	5 59	9 48	11 38
Barnwell	10 35	12 20	—	6 8	9 49	11 47
Oundle	10 41	12 26	2 5	6 14	9 56	11 54
Elton	10 52	12 37	—	6 25	10 7	12 5
Wansford	10 57	12 44	2 20	6 30	10 12	12 10
Stamford	—	1 42	—	7 16	—	—
Castor	11 2	—	—	6 36	—	12 16
Overton	11 8	12 53	—	6 43	10 27	12 22
Peterborough	11 15	1 1	2 35	6 50	10 30	12 30

The 11 15 a.m. train from Northampton takes 3rd class passengers from the south to Peterborough.

The 5 0 p.m. train from Northampton takes 3rd class passengers from the north to Peterborough.

† A coach leaves Wellingborough at 1 30 p.m. for Kettering.

Up Trains (except on Sundays).

	a. m.	a. m.	p. m.	p. m.	p. m.	p. m.	p. m.	Sunday p. m.
Leave Peterborough	6 30	10 45	1 20	4 0	5 30	12 45		
Overton	6 36	10 51	1 26	4 5	5 36	12 51		
Castor	6 42	—	1 33	—	5 44	12 57		
Stamford	—	9 28	—	—	4 47	—		
Wansford	6 47	10 28	2 38	4 13	5 47	1 2		
Elton	6 53	10 34	2 45	4 19	5 53	1 8		
Oundle	7 3	10 45	2 56	4 29	6 3	1 18		
Barnwell	7 12	10 55	3 6	4 37	6 12	1 27		
Thorpe	7 20	11 3	3 14	4 44	6 20	1 35		
Thrapston	7 27	11 10	3 22	4 51	6 27	1 42		
Ringstead	7 35	11 20	3 31	4 59	6 35	1 50		
Higham	7 42	11 28	3 39	5 6	6 42	1 57		
Ditchford	7 49	—	3 46	—	6 49	2 4		
Wellingborough	7 56	11 40	3 53	5 15	6 55	2 10		
Castle Ashby	8 4	11 50	4 3	5 24	7 4	2 19		
Billing Road	8 11	11 57	4 10	5 31	7 11	2 26		
Northampton	8 20	12 16	4 20	5 40	7 20	2 35		

The 6 30 a.m. train from Peterborough takes 3rd class passengers both north and south.

On Saturdays a market train leaves Wellingborough for Northampton, at 10 30 a.m.

Timetable in Northampton Herald 17 February 1855.

By permission of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service.

In 1861 William is a stationmaster, probably living in the station house with Mary and their children, Ann, William, Martha, Samuel, Elizabeth and Charles.

The job of a stationmaster varied with the size and importance of the station. The smaller the station the more 'hands-on' and jack-of-all-trades he would have to be. John Farrington, in *Life on the Lines,* gives some idea of his duties.

> *In the case of the smaller stations as well as his duties in running the station and its goods yard, level crossing, etc., he was responsible for acting as the railway company's agent and*

for securing traffic for his company in competition with other companies and, later, with road transport. His station would deal with both passengers and goods traffic.

As we can see from the timetable shown above, there were basically only five 'up' trains and five 'down' passenger trains and one of these each way did not stop at Ringstead. There were, however, also goods trains and the station, in 1871 also gained a network of sidings on its south side. In *The Nene Valley Railway*, John Rhodes explains:

Butlin's ironstone mines were near Ringstead village. At first, 1000 tons of ore a week were produced here and transported in horse-drawn trucks [i.e. on rails] where it was transferred to standard gauge wagons. The system closed down after 20 years and was then dismantled.

Other ironstone workings had sidings leading to the line between Ringstead and Denford which lasted for a short period in the last years of the nineteenth century.

Although it might have felt isolated and lonely, especially on wet winter days, it would have been a busy life and not always a quiet one. Besides the trains, the crossing gates, and the noisy, dusty loading of iron ore there was the call of his clients. The upper and middle classes would have expected preferential treatment and might also treat him as an equal – unless they did not get it. He was also 'living on the job' and people would tend to call on him when it suited them, with little regard to his nominal working hours. John Farrington quotes from *Memoirs of a Station Master* which was published in 1879 and shows, unintentionally, the view of many in society.

.... the clerks and stationmasters were for the most part supplied from the middle class of society and able to hold their own in a gentlemanly way…. At the present day they are, for the most part, the descendants of the porters and policemen who, having been educated at the British and Free schools, have been drafted into the Telegraph Office and thence to the clerk's appointments. There is nothing sharpens the wit of a lad like a telegraph office, but it cannot be expected that the associations of their homes will make them conversant with the habits and manners of gentlemen.

Where did William sit in all this? He was the son of a shoemaker and his wife's father is shown on the marriage register as a servant. Nevertheless one senses that the Agutters were of farming stock and many of her children are given the middle name Agutter. She may have been aware of her middle class associations. Whatever the truth, in his work, William would have had to walk the tightrope between authority and deference.

Stone sleepers did not prove suitable and were replaced by wooden ones. The original ones were laid as stepping-stones from the station area to Addington through the water meadows. (Taken 4th March 2011).

In the 1871 Census William and Mary are still in the Station House but only their nineteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, remains at home. On the 14th May 1878 Mary Leveratt died, aged sixty-five, and was buried in Ringstead churchyard. Her epitaph bears the text:

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

While understanding that many Christians would believe that, before God, the best of us must recognize our inadequacy, it is not an obvious epitaph to put on a loved one's gravestone.

A later postcard of Ringstead & Addington Station (Frederick George is now the stationmaster). It looks as if the station house extends at the back. When the second line was constructed a second platform was built on the other side of the crossing. By 1957 only the shack to the left of the building (or a similar replacement) remained. The original had probably been demolished after a fire.

Photograph from Railways in Northamptonshire by Andrew Swift (Reflections of a Bygone Age). With the kind permission of the publishers.

1881 finds William's railway career over. He 68 years old and living in Chapel Road, Ringstead with his unmarried daughter, Rebecca (40), acting as his housekeeper. She seems to be also looking after her sister, Martha's eight-year-old son, John C Hill. Martha had married a soldier and followed him to Aldershot. It appears that she had died, perhaps with complications after the birth of her second child.

William is now a 'poulterer'. It was not unusual for stationmasters to rent a small plot of land from the railway company to grow some vegetables and keep a few chickens to help their income, and the Agutters were local farmers, so perhaps he saw an opportunity to earn a little money in his retirement. Old age could be a difficult time for the poorer middle classes who were not of substantial independent means. By 1891 he is aged 78 and is just shown as a retired stationmaster, still living in Chapel Road and being looked after by Rebecca. He was obviously beginning to decline in health for on 4th June 1893 he died of 'Senile Decay' aged 81 years. Rebecca was present at his death and his occupation is given simply as 'house proprietor'.

Perhaps surprisingly, he was not buried with his wife in Ringstead but, rather, in Denford churchyard. It may be that the local churchyard had ceased to be used and only the public cemetery was now available. This would have been close to where he had lived his life but perhaps his daughters wanted him buried in a churchyard and the Agutter connection gave them the opportunity.

The ‘family business’ had continued, however, and his son, Charles Agutter Leveratt, had taken up the position of station master at Ringstead. Charles had been baptised in Ringstead church on 29th September 1866 aged thirteen but disappears from the Census some five years later. We learn from later railway records that he started work first at Northampton Station on 27th December 1868 as a (possibly ‘parcel’) porter. By 20th April 1869 he had moved to Harrow, still as a porter. There he met Elizabeth, ‘Betsey’, Johnson and on 10th January 1874, aged 21, he married her in the Harrow Parish Church.

He returned with his new wife to Northamptonshire and became the station master at Higham Ferrers. This may have happened as early as 1871 although the records are a little ambiguous. His sister, Elizabeth, worked with him there as a booking clerk at least from 5th May 1872. The staff records show him as earning £50 from 1st February 1877 and his sister, by July of the following year, £25. If this is a year it is very poor pay so could it be per quarter? This seems too much!

It is possible that Charles and his family moved back to Ringstead, while working at Higham but usually the stationmaster would need to live on the job. Certainly, he had moved back to Ringstead and taken over from his father by 1877. His daughter, Martha Eva, was baptised at Ringstead on March 17th 1877 and Charles is noted as the 'Station Master’ and this is reinforced by the *1877 Post Office Directory of Northamptonshire* .

Although the 1881 Census does not give his residence, it is next to the miller, Richard Wadsworth. As Charles's father was earlier recorded as the neighbour of Thomas Wadsworth, it seems certain that he too was living in the station house. Betsey is there and, looking at the children, Elizabeth is six and born in Harrow and Annie is three and born in Ringstead so they moved back to Ringstead between 1875 and 1878. Probably, as William retired, his son took his place. Charles received a bonus for signalman’s duties, for which he required a police certificate of competency after May 1887.

Ten years later Charles, now thirty-eight, is still the stationmaster with Betsey (42) and the children Annie, Nellie, Frederick, Christopher and Florence. Also lodging with them is James Mayes (25), a signalman. Altogether the couple had twelve children three of whom died in infancy. It must have been a sad blow when the twins, Arthur and George died on 29th March 1890 aged just five months. The couple then, almost immediately, had another set of twins, Herbert and May, baptised in Ringstead on 27th May 1891, and this time they survived.

It would have been a hard and lonely life for Betsy in the station house with all her children and few close neighbours. Did she hanker for the life of the town again? We know that Charles was not well and that, when he improved, he transferred to Euston Station, between 26th December 1892 and 31st January 1893. He was once again ill and moved to Shilton.

William Bodger replaced Charles as station master on 23rd December 1893 so there may have been a temporary station master in the interim. *Kelly’s Directory* for 1898, records William as still the stationmaster.

Charles, at some point after 1893, gives up the railway, perhaps forced to do so by his ill-health. The 1901 Census shows Charles Leveratt, and his family, living in Queen’s Terrace in Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex, running a ‘General Grocery Store’. This is where they were married so perhaps Betsy has

inherited it from her parents or a relative. Of course, William Leveratt had died in 1893 so perhaps the links with the past were cut for Charles and he looked for a new life, and one not too strenuous, as he does not seem a well man.

By 1908, at his daughter Nellie's wedding, Charles is 55 and the couple are running the Royal Oak Coffee Tavern in Crown Street, Harrow. By 1911 they had moved to 168 Cricklewood Lane in Hendon and are running a small boarding house. Just a month later, on 4th May 1911 Charles died of a heart attack: ('Morbus Cordis' on the death certificate, which was a catch-all medical term).

William and his son, Charles had worked at Ringstead station for some fifty years, possibly from its opening and almost to the end of the century. The railway had been an important part of the industrial transformation of England into the first modern industrial nation although it was already being superseded by the USA by the end of the century.

The other children of William and Mary had varied lives. Mary, the eldest, married a groom, Martha married a soldier and died young, Rebecca became a servant before moving back to the village to look after her father, William and Samuel probably emigrated to America and the first John and Edwin died in infancy. We will briefly look at the second John and Elizabeth who also followed their father onto the railway.

In 1893 William had left a will in which he was described as a 'yeoman'. He had effects to the value of £233 19s. 7d. The two trustees were John Agutter, farmer and John Leveratt, railway guard.

John was born in about 1843 and is with his parents in 1851 but seems, like many young men, to have disappeared from the 1861 Census. He married Sarah Rebeccah Frankton, a dressmaker from Long Lawford, at Newbold on Avon in Warwickshire. His sister, Elizabeth, was one of the witnesses. He is noted as living in Peterborough and the 1871 Census confirms him as a railway porter and living at 4 Highbury Place, Peterborough. His wife, Sarah Rebecca and their seven-month year old son, Thomas William are living with her parents in Newbold-on-Avon in Warwickshire. It may be that she was there temporarily while her husband found suitable lodgings.

The Newbold on Avon Register has the christening of John Frankton Leveratt on 26th May 1872, [he probably dies in infancy], and shows that John has been promoted to Guard. Certainly, by 1881 they are together in 35 Delhi Street, Finsbury, Islington and Thomas has two sisters, Edith and Lizzie, both born in Islington. It confirms that John has been promoted to Railway Guard. Just before the Census, on 9th February 1881 John had been involved in a frightening accident. The early railways had many accidents and only gradually were signalling and braking improved. The Rail Inspector's Report, on April 30th 1881, tells us that:

> *In this case the 7.35 p.m. passenger train from Moorgate Street to High Barnet, - consisting of tank engine and 10 vehicles, - which left King's Cross suburban platform at 7.54 p.m. came into collision at 7.56 p.m. with a train of 12 empty carriages which had left King's Cross for Holloway at 7.50 p.m., and had been brought to a stand at Belle Isle starting-signal waiting until the line was clear, with the break-van at the rear of the train about 25 yards outside Maiden Lane tunnel.*

> *The engine of the passenger train left the rails and the break-van of the train of empties was broken up.*

John Leverett [sic] was the guard in that 'break-van' and gave evidence:

> *After standing at Belle Isle two or three minutes I looked out on the right-hand side, and saw the white head-light of a train coming from King's Cross on our line of rails. I said to Swan [a shunter driver getting a ride in the break-van], 'For God's sake, jump; here is a train coming.' I jumped and Swan followed.*

The driver of the second train had gone through a signal which he had not seen change. John and Swan both escaped with minor injuries and ten passengers complained of being 'shaken'. John had had a lucky escape.

The Newbold on Avon Parish Register show a that as well as a John Frankton (Thomas ?) in 1872 Edith Ann was baptised on 1st September 1878 and Florence Nelly and Lily Frankton were christened on 14th September 1884 and 18th September 1887 respectively. The register records, for the last two christenings, that the couple were living in Leicester.

By 1891 they have moved to Doncaster, another great railway town, and are living at 36 North Street. He is still a guard. It also confirms that Florence and Lily were both born at Leicester.

1901 finds them still in Doncaster and living at 62 Somerset Road. All the family are still at home. Thomas, the eldest is 30 years old and a 'Carriage Pickup Labourer' which one would guess is a job on the railway, while Eliza and Florence are dressmakers. His life then follows the pattern of his brother, Charles, for he moves back to his wife's parents' area, in this case Long Lawford near Rugby and sets up as a greengrocer. By 1911 his wife has died and, aged 67, and he runs the shop with the help of his unmarried daughter, Edith, who is thirty-three. He dies in the Rugby area in 1917.

Perhaps the child of William, whose life most shows the new world that is coming, is his youngest daughter, Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt. She was baptised at the same time as her brother Charles on September 29th 1866, aged 15, and we learn, from her railway record, that she was born on the 1st September 1850. In 1871 she was the only child living at home and, at nineteen, has no occupation given. The February 10th 1877 edition of the *Peterborough and Huntingdonshire Standard* had the following short news item.

> *Some of our railway companies have it in contemplation to take a leaf out of the book of the Telegraph offices and employ respectable females as clerks at stations. The work is such that delicate females can perform it just as well as men. At several of the Metropolitan railway stations female clerks are already employed and the practice is found to answer.*

Elizabeth was one of the trailblazers for these 'delicate females'. As we have seen, it is likely that she started work as a booking clerk on 5th May 1872, first at Higham Ferrers and then at Ringstead with her brother, Charles, as the station master. In the 1881 Census her father has retired, her mother has died and her older sister, Rebecca is now looking after the house. Elizabeth is 29 and still a 'Railway Station Clerk'.

Railway workers were considered among the aristocracy of the working classes. John Farringdon in *Life on the Lines* has pointed out that when a boy [or girl] applied for job as a railway clerk he [or she] had to show a keen intelligence and have references from persons of good standing such as a local clergyman or Justice of the Peace. He also makes clear that in the nineteenth century it was a demanding job and was not well paid. He tells us:

> *In the second half of the nineteenth century the nominal working day of the clerk might be from 9am to 6pm with a half day on Saturday and the pay might be between 15s and £1 per week.*

In 1891 Elizabeth is staying with her widowed sister, Mary Ann Robins, a grocer in Wellingborough. She is still a booking clerk on the railway but whether this was now at Wellingborough is not clear.

In the Census she is thirty-seven years old and people must have presumed that she was a confirmed spinster. Then, a few months later, in the summer of 1891 Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt married John Agutter. She was now Elizabeth Agutter Agutter. John was probably her cousin and a farmer in Ringstead, not far from the railway station. Unfortunately their time together was limited and just before the next Census, on 4th February 1901 John died, in his fifty-first year. He was buried in Denford churchyard and the grave also remembers, 'Bessie Mary, their infant daughter who died September 9th 1893 aged 5 months'. We understand now that her father, William Leveratt was buried next to what was to be an Agutter grave for his son-in-law and daughter.

Tithe Farm (Now two cottages: September 2011).

It was originally thatched and had fallen into disrepair.

The 1901 Census reveals Elizabeth as a widow aged 49 years, living at Tithe Farm, Ringstead, and with her only living child, Frances aged six years. She also has a farm manager and a general servant.

Elizabeth, too, died on February 1907 aged just fifty-five and was buried with her husband and infant child in Denford.

It was usual for children to follow their parents into work on the network so we would expect to see some of William and Mary's grandchildren also working on the railway but we must leave the dynasty here. In the 1950's Ringstead Station was described as 'merely a couple of platforms, a hut and a cast-iron lavatory a few yards down the permanent way'. In 1964 the station and the line closed.

William Leveratt's grave in the foreground with the cross of his daughter Elizabeth (and her husband and baby daughter) standing next to it in Denford Churchyard.
Photograph taken 27th October 2010.

Postscript
We have seen in the story of Elizabeth how women were overcoming prejudice and were gradually gaining access into traditional male jobs. Although we are straying away from the railway, the story of another Elizabeth Leveratt, the eldest daughter of Charles and Betsey is worth the telling. Born in Harrow in 1875, Elizabeth Emma Leveratt was living in Ringstead with her parents in 1881. The family returned to Harrow and in March 1895, aged 20, Elizabeth travelled to the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies to work for the Governor-General, Sir Harry Thompson. She met Joseph Dopwell in the Botanical Gardens there and they were married in 1898 amid great scandal as it was a 'mixed' marriage.

Elizabeth Emma Dopwell (nee Leveratt).

1875 – 1903.

They had three children but Elizabeth died of Typhoid in 1903 aged 28. It is believed, in the family, that Elizabeth's parents had disowned her after her marriage but, at her death, they offered to look after the three children. Joseph Dopwell, with some reason, felt that they would not be treated well because of their mixed race. He went to Kenya to work and the children were raised by his mother in St Vincent. It seems likely that Joseph did go to visit his wife's mother in Cricklewood Lane in 1915 (her father had died by this time). One wonders just how that meeting went.

[My thanks to Liz DeCaul in Grenada for the photograph and the story of her great grandparents].

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My special thanks to Neil Leveratt of California who has allowed me access to his very authoritative family tree to back up my research (there are some incorrect ones on Ancestry.co.uk).

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Chapter Twenty –three

Village Schoolmasters

William Harding, John Bannister, Albert Crew &Thomas Johnson.

The schoolteachers who came to Ringstead in the second half of the nineteenth century were part of a new breed of young professionals who emerged from the working and lower middle classes. They came to Ringstead from all over England, served the community for a time and then, usually, moved on to another step in their career. Some stayed for less than half a year and some for half a lifetime.

It would be wrong to think that Ringstead did not have any schools before the building of the National School that still serves the village today. In 1818 the Select Committee on Education of the Poor reported that there was:

> *A Sunday school supported by voluntary contributions in which about 40 boys and girls are taught. Two day schools kept by women in which about 24 children are taught, at their parents' expense.*

It does, however, add:

> *The generality of the poor cannot afford the means of education for their children, and would be glad to possess them.*

There is no sign of a schoolteacher in the 1841 Census but this is probably due to the general lack of female occupations given, unless they were head of the family, and any men teaching would probably have been attached to the church or chapels and would have done it as part of their other religious duties. The more comprehensive 1851 Census gives us a better picture We have Alice Roberts aged 45, wife of agricultural labourer John, who is a 'Church Sunday School mistress', Louisa Hannah Weekley, 31, wife of Shoemaker William, a Daily Schoolmistress and Elizabeth Gunn,54, wife of Isaac, a gardener, who is an 'Infant teacher'. We can only guess that we have a mixture of Dame and Sunday Schools in the village.

The Dame Schools varied greatly in worth. Some were merely child-minding places, held by a woman in her cottage and were overcrowded and with little or no teaching or learning taking place; others were an early form of trade school where lace or straw plaiting would be taught in, what was often, a junior sweatshop. Some, however, did teach the basics of reading and writing with perhaps some religion instruction as well. With no qualifications needed for the teachers, they varied from the Dickensian to the enlightened.

Ten years later, in 1861, Elizabeth Gunn is still a Schoolmistress and, although Alice Roberts is no longer shown, next door to her, Sarah Cunnington is a schoolmistress. Hannah Weekley also is not recorded as a schoolmistress but perhaps it is because she has another child, just three years old.

William Kitchen, soon to marry again after the death of his first wife, is put down as a 'Particular Baptist Minister and School master'. There was a battle during much of the nineteenth century between the Nonconformists and the Church of England to provide schools for the working classes. The two organisations, The British and Foreign School Society (Nonconformists) and the National Society (Church of England) competed with each other to found schools across the country and this rivalry may explain some of the local animosity that surfaced in Ringstead towards the end of the century. It may be that William Kitchen was teaching at a Baptist Sunday school in the Manse but it is just possible that he was running a day school and this is one factor that spurred the local church into the founding of the Ringstead and Denford School. Another important factor was the increasing national pressure for the state to set up a secular 'Board School' system to replace or complement the religion-based schools.

Although the Church of England *National Society* was by far the largest provider, this tussle over the schools was evident throughout the century and in some parishes, open warfare broke out between the sides as this report from The Times of 8th April 1897 illustrates.

> ***A VILLAGE SCHOOL IN DISPUTE. -*** *An extraordinary dispute has occurred at Sulgrave, in South Northamptonshire, where the village school, owing to the proceedings of contending parties is little more than a wreck. Two committees, differently appointed, are contending for the control of the school, and a week ago one of these bodies gave public notice that the school, which had been closed for about six months, would be reopened. The opposite committee, however, had the keys and refused to give them up. The aid of the police was sought without effect, and the place remained unopened. The next morning the iron gates were battered in, and, a window being broken, entrance was effected and the doors were opened from within. School was formally begun, a lady teacher from a church school at Northampton being installed as the mistress. During the night the opposite side fastened the doors with iron bars and screws, so that in the process of reopening in the morning the doors like the gates were seriously broken. Fresh locks were put on the door and the vicar of the parish followed up this by effecting an entrance into the school at the rear, having a hole made through the brick wall into which a wooden door was promptly fixed. One of the church wardens, as a manager of the schools, has obtained two summonses against the vicar fro damaging the building, and, in reply, a numerously signed document is going the round of the parish expressing the greatest confidence in the vicar. The dispute appears to have arisen largely from the uncertainty of the right of control of the school owing to the deed by which it was transferred by purchase to a responsible committee only ten years ago being lost. The schools were closed for nine months during a similar dispute four years ago.*

Whatever the driving force to the new school, it began under William Harding, and the first entry in the school Log Book is dated September 18th 1865. The school started in the Temperance Hall which had been 'Erected to promote the Temperance, Intelligence and Happiness of the People' in 1861.

It is possible that the school had started earlier with other 'Non-Certificated' teachers but for the moment we must presume that this was the start for Ringstead School. William, the pioneer, tells us that he was 'Certificated Teacher 4th Class 2 Div. Prov.'. Gradually, during the nineteenth century the training and accrediting of teachers was codified and improved. Often the career route was from

Monitor or Monitoress, to Pupil-Teacher, to Certification with a mixture of experience and examination at each step. It is a system that is beginning to find some favour again.

William came from Marlborough, near Salisbury in Wiltshire, home of a famous public school. One might imagine a classically trained, middle-class young man descending on the labourers and shoeworkers' children of Ringstead, but one would be wrong. The new Elementary School teachers almost all came from the social classes which they taught. He was a shoemaker's son, himself and in 1861, aged just fifteen, he was already a pupil-teacher. In fact his father did employ one man and the household had a young girl, of William's age, living in as a general servant so he had already taken a step up the English class ladder. Was it the shoemaking connection that led William to Ringstead or did his background recommend him to the school managers?

By 1865, and not yet twenty years old, he is running the new Ringstead School, albeit in temporary premises. On the first day he records that there were thirty-five children present. Over the next few years the pages are filled with his clear, brief entries. If we select a few from that first year it gives a good flavour of what was to come.

Oct 2nd Four boys and three girls admitted

4th Decided that the girls should be instructed on needlework from ½ past 2 till 4 o'clock instead of from 2 till 4

5th Gave the first class a lesson in Geography

11th Found the 2nd class very deficient in Notation

20th Found a few of the first class backward in the multiplication tables.

26th Several of the Denford children absent owing to the bad weather

The recurring themes were: the lateness or absence of children, especially those from Denford; Scripture lessons given by the Vicar or Curate; the giving of home-lessons; new work; and the general results of various tests. The shared accommodation also had its problems:

March 19th 1867. Holiday given. Room wanted for a tea party.

For the most part it is surprising how little the outside world intrudes into the Log Books but occasionally it hints at troubles in the wider community.

March 19th 1865 Fast day for the Cattle Plague.

All this time, and unrecorded in the Log, the school buildings were being planned, financed and built.

George Capron, who had bought up much of the land just prior to, and during, the Ringstead Enclosure and now living in the comparative splendour of Southwick Hall, gave part of 'Pound Close, next to the church, amounting to 3 acres 1 rood 10 perch, leasehold for a term of 1000 years from the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel 1620', for the building of the school. The great and the good raised subscriptions and the Reverend Percival Sandilands of Denford Vicarage applied for a grant from the Lords of the Committee of Council on Education on their behalf.

It was, of course, in many ways, a noble enterprise but the villagers of Ringstead may have had mixed feelings about the stated purposes of this new school:

. . . intended for the instruction of the children of the labouring poor in the united parishes of Denford and Ringstead which are three miles in length and two miles in breadth and which are chiefly employed as shoemakers and agricultural labourers.

We are told that, 'the school is to be in connection with the Church of England' and is to be called the *Denford and Ringstead School*. Perhaps more controversially, the submission alleges that:

Two thirds of the families of the labouring population within the area from which the children will daily attend the proposed school from their own homes are members of the Church of England.

The grant application form asked the applicants to state any *special* reasons for the grant to be given. Now, as somebody who, more recently, has had to apply for a National Lottery Grant, where rural deprivation is an important criterion, I can sympathise with the need to make a compelling case. However, the Reverend Sandilands might have found life a little difficult locally if two of his stated reasons for assistance in building the school had been revealed generally to the villagers.

The third special reason given is that the parishioners have spent all their money, 'having within the last 14 months all but rebuilt their dilapidated Parish churches'. This seems reasonable enough but the other two reasons would certainly rankle with many locals. They are:

1 *The extreme ignorance and low moral tone of the population, particularly of the inhabitants of Ringstead.*

2 *The absence of any resident Gentry to exert a healthy influence on the lower orders.*

This was not just said to procure the grant, however, for on December 6th 1864, Percival Sandilands wrote to the 'chief Inhabitants of Ringstead', asking them to work with the landed proprietors and

him to establish a Parish School. It is worth quoting his letter at length for it gives some facts about the village and the opinion of the vicar to the ordinary people.

> *You perhaps know, better than I do, the grievous want of education among the young of the labouring classes in this Parish; but I must say that with my varied experience in country parishes of other counties, I have never met, in the youth of both sexes, with such appalling ignorance, such defiance of parental authority, such impatience of restraint, moral and religious, as we daily witness in Ringstead. But there are other evils, touching most closely the interests of all, which a good school, if it cannot directly cure, will gradually and indirectly assist in remedying.*
>
> *The chief of these are -*
>
> *1. The high rate of mortality.*
>
> *2. The excessive poor rates.*
>
> *1. According to received statistics the average annual number of deaths in a moderately healthy place is 20 in the thousand. In Ringstead it has of late been 29 in the thousand, or nearly fifty per cent in excess of the average. The local medical men I have consulted attribute this in a great degree to thriftlessness, dirt and drink. Surely a school would do something to counteract these fearful banes of human health and happiness*.
>
> *2. Again, the Ringstead poor rates are exceedingly high compared with those in other Parishes of similar size and population. Now the causes of pauperism are very much the same as those which produce disease and death, and poor rates must be high when the lower orders have no means afforded them of rising morally, socially, or intellectually; or of bringing up their children otherwise than in ignorance and sin.*

Whatever we may think of Percival Sandiland's attitude, he put a great deal of energy into the project. George Capron and others received constant black bordered letters about progress. He tried to persuade him to not insist on a wall between the school and his remaining land but accept railings (which were cheaper) and was obviously exasperated at the slow progress in signing the lease for the land.

His efforts were successful and a grant of £186 5s 0d was given by the Committee towards the total cost of the building. As this was £907 15s 0d you can see one reason why the government did not want to move over to a totally state funded system. Of this sum, £543 18s 6d was raised by local voluntary contributions and £27 3s 6d by collections in the church. The school was opened on 13th November 1867 and by May 1868 there were 85 pupils. We know this because, on 'Certificate A', a 'majority of the Committee appointed by the Subscribers to superintend the erection of the School house and Teacher's House' wrote to the Committee to say that they had carefully inspected the building and everything had been completed 'perfectly satisfactorily' to the specifications deposited in the Council Office. It was signed by:

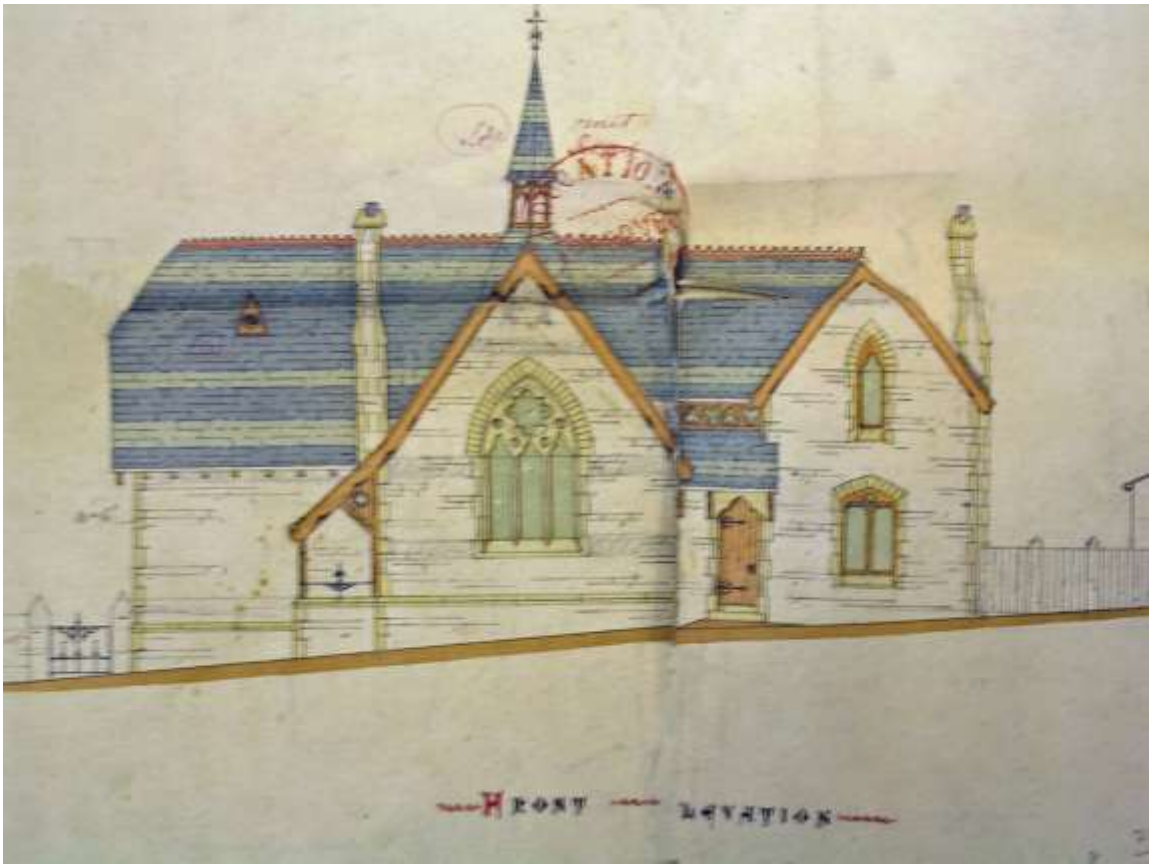
Percival Sandilands *Trustee and Manager*
Thomas Freeman *Trustee and Manager*

Thomas Peach	*Trustee and Manager*
William Briggs	*Trustee*
Edward Kitson	*Manager*

The original grant application made clear that the school was for boys and girls, including infants, that a certificated master would be appointed and that:

Arrangements will be made for the master's wife to teach the girls sewing and cutting out.

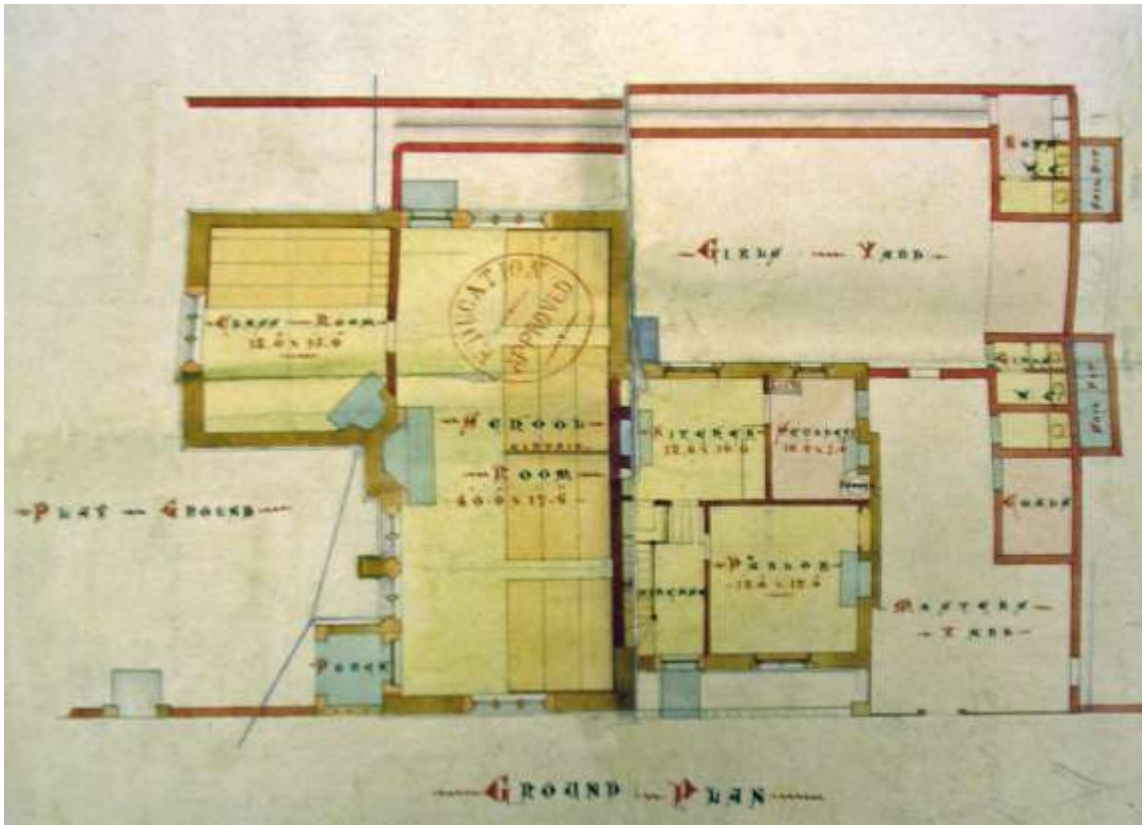
It must have been exciting for William and his young wife Annie to move into the well-built house and also to have now their own purpose-built school to work in. I say that it must have been exciting but you will search the Log Book in vain for any sign of the move or William's feelings about his new home and workplace.



Plans of Ringstead School 1865 (SBD61)
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

These delightful plans, which make even the soil pits look attractive, are stamped 'Education Approved'. In the main School Room we can see the central fireplace facing the three tiers built for pupils' desks. There is a curtain shown across the room to separate the classes, while still allowing the master to see both sides. This large room is 40ft by 17ft 6inches, with a classroom off for the infants, 18ft by 15ft 6inches.The ceiling is fashionably high to allow any unhealthy miasmas to rise and it is well provided with windows which was important in those days before the electric light. The

'Girls Yard, is separate from the 'Playground, which is presumably for the boys, who have an alleyway to their outside toilet.



Plans of Ringstead School 1865 (SBD61)
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

The master's house has a kitchen, 12ft by 10 ft, a scullery with a sink, and what looks like a cooking range with a clothes boiler, next to it in the corner. Upstairs there are three small bedrooms each provided with its own fire and small window. He also has a garden some fifty feet square.

The front of the school faces the church rather than the road and its main window mirrors its gothic east window.

In November 2010 I met a lady in Denford Church (and whose name I am sorry to say I have forgotten) who told me that her great grandfather had helped move the furniture from the Temperance Hall to the new school. It would have been a busy time and certainly Annie would have had little time for the ‘sewing and cutting out’. Fitzherbert Colin Harding was baptised on December 25th 1865, Emmeline on May 26th 1867, Amy Helena on October 25th 1868, Agnes Ann on November 14th 1869 (who sadly died on February 24th of the following year), Hugh Llewellyn on January 1st 1871 and Leopold Geoffrey on June 11th 1872.

All this passes by without an entry in the Log to indicate this great change in the life of the village. There was a grand opening by the Bishop of Peterborough on Wednesday 16th November 1867. He preached the sermon stating:

The interest of religion required that knowledge should be widely extended. Druids, priests and hierophants ruled only where ignorance existed.

To the Mercury reporter it was obviously a marvellous occasion but slightly marred.

The only drawback was the coldness of the church, which was in no way mitigated by the door being left open during the whole of the service.

In all this, there is no mention of William, the new headmaster, so perhaps he decided to concentrate on his work with the pupils. We hear that on February 14th 1868 Charles Leveratt, the son of the Station master, and a future station master himself, began compound division.; or that the first class, which is, confusingly, the top class, wrote dictation on paper. Chalk on slate remained the cheapest form of writing and expensive paper was not used most of the time. It may be also that the youngest children used sand trays in which to form their early letters.

It seems that William was a thorough if unimaginative schoolmaster but he had given a solid start to the new school. The Inspector's Report for 1873 which put in the Log in his successor's time states:

The Reading of the Upper Standards is very mechanical and devoid of intelligence. Spelling is rather weak, arithmetic is good in the First and Second Standards but defective in the Higher ones. The Discipline is good.

We must remember that school attendance was very much a hit-or-miss affair, often dependent on the needs of the parents, and also their means, because there was still a small charge of a penny or tuppence a week for each child and some families could not afford the loss of a child's income or the payment.

William leaves as clearly and briefly as ever. On January 29th 1874 he writes:

Resigned the charge of the school after eight years and four months duty.

It was not the end of William's school teaching career but just the beginning. Later Censuses find him and his family on the south coast at Portsea where he is still pursuing his profession. The new 'certificated' teachers were part of the movement of people into villages following their jobs or professions around the country.

Immediately under William's last entry is one by John Bannister on February 2nd 1874 which simply states:

I commenced my duties as master of this school.

John had been born at Oakworth, near Keighley in Yorkshire. He was a 'Certificated Teacher of the second class'. Perhaps he had seen the earlier entry by William. He was not married, so had no wife to do the sewing classes. He brought with him, instead, his older sister, Martha Bannister who had been a worsted weaver in 1871. Just a day after he first signs himself in, he reports:

The girls were instructed in needlework by M.A. Bannister for the first time.

Besides the two Bannisters there were also two pupil-teachers, Martha Cave, a pupil-teacher of the 4th Year and Beatrice Morris, pupil teacher of the 1st year. It is the former woman who appears most significantly in the Log Book. We have the usual entries:

> *May 4th 1874 A small attendance in consequence of the Club Feast. Holiday given in the afternoon*
>
> *May 5th Thrapston Fair Holiday in the afternoon*
>
> *May 25th A small attendance on account of the festivities in the village. Gave a holiday*

At this time there was not really compulsory attendance as there were so many loopholes, especially for the older children during harvest times, that one must surmise it was thought better to keep discipline by awarding holidays than have a nearly empty school.

In 1874 also, the school was extended to cope with the increasing numbers. The only reference is that on June 30th a holiday was given, 'on account of workmen being in school'. One cannot be certain but judging by his inspections and other documents on record Mr. W.E. Curry, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, seems a rather sour character. In September 19th 1872 he wrote making a case for there being no need to extend the school. He also states that 'there is a school kept by Mrs. Abbott in the Temperance Hall which may be improved if required and would accommodate 40 or 50 children'. He concludes:

> *I consider that there is no deficiency in the District.*

This does beg the question, what was the school being run by Mrs Abbott? She does not appear in the School Log so it may be that it was an alternative school. Was it being run on behalf of the Nonconformists? An Infants School had been opened at Denford in 1872, probably to solve the problem of the Denford children's poor attendance, especially in bad weather. By August 1873 it accommodated 74 children. Despite Mr Curry, the Rev Sandilands wrote on 23rd September 1873 to say that the Managers are prepared to provide for thirty-two more children but:

> *…they do not propose building until the Harvest Holidays of 1874 on account of the interruption and disorganisation of the School which alterations at any other time would occasion.*

To return to Martha Cave, the pupil teacher, on October 2nd 1874, following the giving of a 'Holiday all week on account of the Ringstead Feast' on September 18th, John Bannister notes:

> *M Cave not at school this week. Taking charge of Denford Infants School.*

On October 30th we have a more puzzling entry:

> *Martha Cave was removed from her office of pupil Teacher by Stephen Cave her father who paid the penalty of £6.*

This, unusually, was written and signed in the Log Book by Edward Sandford. On November 6th 'Miss M.A. Bannister [John's sister] left off teaching Needlework.' On November 9th and 10th there was a 'Holiday on these two days', and on November 12th Mrs Bannister began duties as 'Sewing Mistress'.

Was this the reason for Martha Cave's removal? Her parents Stephen and Sarah Ann had moved from Lincolnshire to Denford at some time between 1861 and 1871 and the latter Census finds them in a farm house there with Martha, aged just 14, a 'Scholar and pupil-teacher'. It looks as if she was working with William Harding although he does not mention other teachers in the School Log. John Bannister and Martha Cave married during that two-day school holiday. He was still only some twenty years old and Martha only seventeen, or just eighteen. Perhaps her father had heard rumours of an attachment and considered her too young and had removed her from her post. 1881 finds Stephen, a Farm Bailiff, back in Lincolnshire and it may be that he moved up there in 1874 and just wanted his only daughter to go there with him.

Did she go home and the distance convinced the young couple that they could not bear to be parted? If so the whole process was very rapid. The young couple were married and their first child, Maud Emily, was baptised on 26th September 1875. Cyril John follows on the 19th January 1879 and Ella Margaret on 10th September 1882. Was there any local disquiet about this marriage? The vicar and his family, the Sandfords, did visit the school very regularly in the period following the marriage. For example, in November 1874 members of the family visited and sometimes tested children on the 10th, 12th, 16th and 18th. Edward Sandford had only taken over the incumbency in 1874 so it may be that this was just the enthusiasm and support of someone new in post. (Confusingly, his son, also Edward, took over from him, in 1880, for a further five years.)

It must have been a great help to John, to have Martha as a support both at home and in the school. If the pupil-teachers were absent she would sometimes miss out her teaching of the sewing class and take over the absentee's class. Of course there were also the problems of having a young family (Ella followed in 1883). There were also the annual epidemics of diseases, which today we have largely conquered, both for the pupils but also for the staff and the staff's children and at times this dominates the entries in the Log:

January 8th *Beatrice Morris absent all day of account of sickness.*

March 5th *A great many children away on account of the whooping cough.*

April 16th *Several children away on account of measles (pupil teacher S. Griffin got measles)*

There were other reasons for absence, however, some more allowable than others:

April 30th 1875 *Only a few children at school this morning because a menagerie was coming through both villages. No school was kept.*

May 21st *The week being very wild and wet many children stayed at home – also on account of Whitsuntide many were absent all the week. Average low.*

We must not underestimate the problems of weather because many roads were badly surfaced and lacked proper drainage. It did not always deter, perhaps less welcome, visitors:

> *July 21st 1875 Very wet about the time for closing school in the afternoon and the streets were much flooded. Most of the younger children were carried away [not by the water one hopes]. All the children did not get away until a few minutes after five o'clock.*

> *July 22nd W.E. Currey Esq., H.M. Inspector came to school this afternoon at ten minutes to four o'clock. Prevented by floods from coming sooner. He examined the Pupil Teachers in Reading, teaching and needlework. Heard one give a lesson on the snail. Only about seventy children present owing to the heavy rains and continued floods.*

In general we find that the school broke up in the second week in August and returned about the third week in September for the 'Harvest Holidays'. In fact the various harvests were obviously very dependent on the weather and many older boys would be away before school broke up for the barley and grain harvests and at the start of the new term for the potato harvest. The girls too could often be away, one suspects, to help their mothers. On November 22nd 1875 John notes wearily:

> *Re-admitted Annie Saddington, Ellen Ball. Both children come for a few weeks and then stop at home for a few weeks.*

Among all the illness and absence, admissions and re-admissions, there are notes on the work done.

> *January 19th 1876 First class did their composition well especially fourth and fifth standards. Subject 'Dignity and Impudence' – a tale.*

> *April 4th Many children in the Second Standard spell very badly – not able to spell correctly words of one syllable*

> *April 7th Home lessons were very well done by the 1st class.*

> *June 13th Three boys and one girl began to learn vulgar fractions*

> *Sept 26th Taught Domestic economy to the 1st and 2nd class girls*

The grant the school received was dependent on a number of factors including the number attending and the Inspector's Report. Initially this was based almost entirely on the 'Three Rs', although Religious Instruction and Needlework (for the girls), were also compulsory. At the time that the school was built specific grants were also offered for English Grammar, Geography and History. From 1875 it was the performance of the whole class, rather than individual tests, which were judged. On 22nd July 1876 the school received the unwelcome news that:

> *The grant is reduced by one tenth for the defective instruction of the Infants*

Is it just coincidence that the Inspector's Reports improve when another Inspector takes over from W.E. Currey? Some Inspectors were known to be autocratic bullies but we may be doing him an

injustice and the teaching was rather mechanical and dull. Pamela Horn has recorded that in 1875 Curry wrote of the schools in Northamptonshire:

> *Geography and history are generally got up in the 'cram' system… The revision of papers in history is about the most monotonous that an inspector has to do. . .*

Perhaps the Inspector was championing more relevant, stimulating teaching and his criticisms were fair and valid.

The years roll by with little mention of the outside world. On 3oth January 1877 the Log records:

> *A very stormy morning in consequence of which numbers were low.*

There is no mention of the death of the three boys in the barn that day, and the large public funeral, or of its effect on the children. In 1878 there seems a subtle change in the Log with much more emphasis on lateness and also of cleanliness, or lack of it, among the boys and of the punishments for these misdemeanours. Attendance was increasing with, on May 20th, an attendance of 144 in the afternoon. And on June 18th 1880 an average attendance for the week of 157.4. John's brother, Smith Bannister, had joined the school as a pupil-teacher and progressed well. We also have much more reporting of 'Object lessons' given by one of the teachers and drawing, (technical rather than artistic), becomes an important part of the curriculum, especially for the boys.

On September 22nd 1882 John writes:

> *Gave notice that the school would commence in the Afternoon at 1.30 pm instead of 2pm during the winter months.*
>
> *The school was carried on during the week by the Pupil-teachers – the Vicar calling several times and taking occasional lessons - owing to the illness of the master.*

On September 25th he reports:

> *I resumed my duties after a week's illness.*

These brief, stoical, statements cover a personal tragedy for John, which was to affect the rest of his life, but was never mentioned in the Log Book either at the time or later.

It is when we look at the local newspapers that we find out what happened to John that caused his 'illness'. In 1882, Ringstead Cricket Club was formed and had played its first season. The last quarter of the nineteenth century was when many of our national sports became codified and, in some cases, professionalised. Many or the major football clubs were formed and working people, for the first time, had the time and the money to play and watch sport on a regular basis.

John Bannister was playing for the Ringstead team in a game late in the season, on 13th September 1882. During the century underarm bowling had gradually given way first to round arm (at shoulder height). At the Oval, in 1864, each ball of an over of overarm bowling was no-balled by the umpire. The professionals in the England team walked off the field as they had planned before the game. The

cricketing establishment gave way and overarm bowling was officially recognized. The earlier forms of bowling persisted, however, especially at local level. My father told me that his Uncle Harry, who lived locally, was one of the last of the underarm bowlers. Nevertheless, by 1882, overarm bowling was likely to have been the norm, especially among the younger players. For John, just at the start of the academic year, the result was a personal tragedy. The Wellingborough News for the 23rd September 1882 tells the story:

> ***CASUALTIES AT CRICKET*** *– The 'National Game' yearly claims its list of victims, due possibly in some measure to the terrific style of modern bowling. We regret that during Feast Week the master of the National Schools, Mr Bannister, was hit on one eye by a cricket ball, and after suffering severe pain for some days travelled up to London to consult an eminent oculist. The latter found the eye irretrievably destroyed and advised its removal in order to prevent the other one becoming affected. We understand that the operation has been effected and that the sufferer is doing as well as might be expected. It is stated that the accident resulted from a medium pace ball. We regret also to report that, one of the Grafton team was badly injured whilst playing with Ringstead, a ball striking him in the lower abdomen when batting. We are, however, pleased to be able to report that the injury is not so serious as had been anticipated.*

A month later, at the Cricket Club Annual Supper, after various toasts, the Chairman presented John with a purse containing £8 3s 6d:

> *…as a small token of their esteem, and as an expression of their sympathy with him in the serious loss he had sustained.*

Mr Knight also spoke of the presentation and stated that:

> *…it had been his lot to take part in several public subscriptions but he had never known one that had been so heartily and cheerfully responded to.*

John thanked him for his sympathy and also for the gift, as 'his loss had been attended by great expense'.

We can see that the Bannisters had become part of the community. John's younger brother, Smith was treasurer of the club and John and Martha, as well as Smith, took part in singing at various village events. On Thursday December 28th in the same year as his accident, among the other party pieces at the Church Tea and Entertainment were:

> *Mr J Bannister song, 'Who's that tapping at the garden gate' (encored), Mrs J Bannister; song 'The Midshipmite'…duet (encored) Mr and Mrs Bannister, song, [The list is a little confusing so I may have matched the Bannisters to the wrong songs.]*

Similarly, at a concert given at the Temperance Hall, 'for the purpose of supplementing a subscription to pay for the expenses of lighting the village with oil lamps during the winter' the young couple sang an encored duet, '*Money Matters*', and they and Smith also sang solos. Singing was obviously an important part of their life and for most of his time at the school he reports on the songs that he is teaching to various classes.

His brother, Smith left on December 20th 1883 but it seems that John just got on with his work again. Each year we have the list of Recitations for the examinations. In 1891 these were:

Standards I & II	The Beggar Man
Standard III	The Wreck of the Hesperus
Standard IV – VII	Richard I Shakespeare

Object lessons for the year included:

Animals	*Vegetables*	*Miscellaneous*
Camel	*Flax*	*Candle*
Ostrich	*Mustard*	*Looking-glass*
Cuckoo	*Rice*	*Sponge*
Whale	*Wheat*	*Honey*
Hive-Bees	*Barley*	*Chalk*
Owl	*Cocoa*	*Coal*

Lessons on form and colour

He also records on September 21 1891:

School fees not taken. The first school meeting since the free Education Act came into force.

The usual business of the school continues with notes on lessons, attendance and the Attendance Officer's visits, examinations, his own and outside ones. On October 13th 1891 he opened a Night School at which, perhaps among other things unrecorded, he taught Reading, Arithmetic and Shorthand. Martha now seems more often away through unspecified illness, neuralgia and an injured right knee but John seems to have settled into his post and the Inspector's Reports are generally very good.

We do get a few more examples of boys being rude or stubborn and being caned for it. On November 29th 1887 he reports that:

Gave a short lecture to all the school in the morning on 'Good Manners'.

This was done because several boys have lately showed a sad deficiency in this part of the education.

It may be that although in 1891 it became 'free schooling' it was also becoming 'compulsory schooling' over this period and tensions were beginning to build. Incidents include:

> *July 3rd 1888 Permission to leave school at 10.45 refused to Flossy Childs for the purpose of attending Raunds feast. She was afterwards taken away without my leave. Warned the parents that such a thing must not occur again.*

> *July 30th 1889 For a very bad case of insubordination after many others not quite so bad a character William Bates dismissed from school.*

On a happier note On July 7th 1890 the Log tells us that:

> *Holiday given on account of most of the children being away at the seaside (Lowestoft). [Presumably on a rail excursion].*

On August 10th 1892 we have a minor incident when:

> *Several girls in the first class seem very anxious to evade the rule of making curtseys when marching out of the room at the end of the school day. When questioned about this they answered 'father told me not to'.*

When we search other sources we find, as often the case, there is a great deal going on which goes unrecorded and this refusal to curtsey is part of a much bigger problem which was debated in the House of Commons. On 30th May 1892 Mr Channing, the MP for Northampton East, asked Sir W. Hart Dyke, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education:

> *. . . whether he has received a Memorial from certain parents of children attending the National School at Ringstead, Northampton, stating that they have withdrawn their children from the religious instruction at the school under the Conscience Clause, and that their children have been in consequence treated as absentees and placed at the bottom of the class; and asking redress of their grievance; whether this putting down of children to the bottom of their class is a violation of the 7th clause of The Education Act 1870, providing that children may be withdrawn from the religious instruction without forfeiting any other benefits of the school; and whether he will have directions sent to the school managers to discontinue the practice of imposing this penalty on the children of Nonconformists?*

Not satisfied with the answer that he received, he raised the issue again in the House of Commons Questions on 10th June of the same year. The Vice-President of the Council tried to answer the question by alleging that it was those who had wanted no religious education who had been so punished and that they should be provided with alternative secular education, and the school had been so informed.

An important side issue of this dispute was that the marking of children as absent, as latecomers, could have consequences as to when the child was allowed to leave school. From September 4th 1892, no child between the ages of 13 and 14 was allowed to work unless he or she had reached the exemption Standard (usually IV or V) or held the, nicknamed, '*Dunces Certificate'* which, Pamela

Horne tells us, allowed a child to leave at the age of thirteen if they had made 250 attendances a year for the five years prior to reaching that age.

Sir W. Hart Dyke did, finally, admit that the rules had been broken at Ringstead and that a 'condemnation of the practice had gone forth. Later, in 1899 when a dispute arose at Northampton about the wearing of Nonconformist 'medals', the Ringstead judgement was cited in support of their case. Of course, much more recently, the wearing of clothes and badges connected with a pupil's religion has been a matter of great controversy.

Looking at John Bannister's time at the school he seems a competent teacher and disciplinarian who attempted to introduce his charges to the wider world. He also started evening classes to help those who needed to make up for their failings at school or who wanted to learn shorthand and gain one of the increasing number of office jobs. He seems a well-respected member of the community who helped raise funds and who put on school entertainments to benefit pupils and the village. He also was a sportsman and had borne his accident with stoicism and did not allow it to interfere with his calling.

When the Bannisters finished on December 31st 1892 they had been at the school for some eighteen years. As we have seen, John's entries were brief and did not always tell us all that was happening but we do see, from all the evidence, that he was increasingly having to hold the lid down on pupil and parent reluctance to observe the old deference to the accepted hierarchy. Trade unions in the Boot and Shoe and Agricultural industries were growing in power and the shoemakers were known to radicalise any community that they lived in. The Bannisters followed the Hardings to the softer climes of the south coast, this time to pretty village of Waldron in East Sussex where, in 1901 and 1911, John and Martha are still schoolteachers and Emily, their daughter is a pupil-teacher. One can imagine that many children and parents were sad to see the, still-young, couple leave but it was clear that for anyone taking over that it was going to be a difficult time.

Two days after John Bannister signed off, on January 2nd 1893, the Log records in a new hand:

> *I - Albert Crew – commenced duties as the Headmaster of this school today. Miss Emily Crew (Art 50) commenced duties as 1st Assistant Mistress.*

Albert and his sister Emily were, once again, the children of a bootmaker. They were born near Bath and the 1891 Census has their father, Edward, now the 'Manager of a Boot Warehouse'. At the time Albert is 19 and a student in a training college and Emily at 17 years old, is a pupil-teacher. Less than two years later they have the responsibility for a village school. One can imagine the excitement when they were given the positions and the pride of their parents. One can only surmise that they came by rail and they and their baggage were brought by cart up the long, straight road from the station to the schoolhouse. They had little time to settle in and Albert obviously wanted to put into practice the training that he had so recently finished.

The attendance was 'very meagre' on the 2nd January when Albert, Emily and Miss Dickenson, the '2nd Assistant Mistress (Article 68)', with two young girls as monitoresses re-opened the school. On the 5th the Managers granted a day-and-a-half holiday to enable the Headteacher and the Assistant Mistresses to 'review the books, apparatus etc for the work of the coming year'.

The 5th must have been a Thursday for it was not until the 9th January that the school again re-opened and the Headmaster decided not to follow the normal timetable but to:

> . . . *organize and classify children and make arrangements for drawing up a new timetable.*

Some 80 children were absent and notes were sent home to parents, 'enquiring the reasons for their children's absence.' Children, used to the familiarity of repetition and routine, had had it disrupted by this new young schoolmaster and, before his arrival, as we have seen tensions between some parents and the school had already worsened.

The die had been cast and Albert was on a collision course with part of his community. He tries over the next few months to write in the Log about his proposed school museum which was to include:

> *… specimens showing the process of the manufacture of different articles and other objects of interest. The headmaster had decided to lend weekly a few curios from his own private collection.*

But it is the serious conflicts with children and parents that now take over the Log Book. To make matters worse heavy snow had fallen. Just one week after Albert had declared his presence in the Log, the first battle broke out:

> *During the dinner hour about 1.15 the school children were snowballed by a party of youths from the village. When the Headmaster entered the school at 1.20 to commence afternoon school he found the school floor near the entrance hall exceedingly wet and quite unfit for any children to stand upon. It appears that when they were attacked they sought refuge in the school room and were followed there by these youths. A quantity of snow was found against the south wall and one of the maps was damaged and discoloured by the snow which had been thrown in. When the school-door was opened to admit the children they were found huddled together and frightened at the ruffianly conduct of these youths.*

As a result of all this the Managers and the Vicar were called and the police summoned. He writes after this entry:

> *Pupil –Teacher lessons will be held every morning from 7.30 – 8.30.*

It is clear that is not through any lack of effort or enthusiasm of Albert's part that the problems came, but they did come with a sad regularity. On January 13th he writes:

> *The Headmaster has found that the manners of the children generally are exceedingly lacking in respect – they often omit the usual forms of politeness and courtesy as 'sir' etc. The children are exceedingly restless, talkative and much concerned about other children's work.*

The scene was set and it was only going to take small incidents to bring Albert's hopes and dreams come tumbling down. The older boys were expected to salute the master as they left school. As we have seen John Bannister who had set this rule had already had trouble with the girls. George Archer, one of the older boys, did not salute and laughed as he left, knowing what he had done.

Albert called him back but George tried to run away. Now the Log Book explodes into long essays charting increasing mayhem.

> *He was brought back to the classroom, took the cane and broke it up.*
>
> *Archer refused to receive any punishment and the master was compelled to resort to force. Archer lay on the ground and refused to get up. He was punished with a small cane, which was split halfway, as left by the late Headmaster. This cane has not and will not be used until after the 24th Inst.*
>
> *The master had to use forcible means for administering punishment as the boys was extremely violent. After he was punished he (Archer) stood and returned the usual master salutation – with a salute of 'Good morning, Sir'.*

Once again one of the Managers was sent for. George's mother then came into the school and demanded her child. Her talk was also, 'very violent' so she was ordered off the premises. She went, but only to summon reinforcements, for George's father and elder brother then appeared and the brother became, 'extremely violent' and:

> *. . . threatened the Master with assault and endeavoured to take from the Master's person a key – the property of the school. He thereupon seized the Master and violently forced him (backwards) from the master's door (school playground side) to the school itself, a distance of about 20 yards. Miss Emily Crew being witness to the assault. No doubt other violent means would have been adopted, had not by this time (Mr Wyman) a manager arrived.*

George Archer was expelled and perhaps it was hoped that life would begin to return to normal but on January 17th another minor incident escalated into crisis.

Percy Roberts was the illegitimate son of Rebecca Roberts and was brought up by his grandparents, William and Fanny Roberts. The *Wellingborough News* for 24th February 1883 reported on a case in the Thrapston Police Court where Rebecca had claimed against G. Bull of Leicester for the upkeep of her illegitimate child who was born on 2nd October 1880. George Bull had paid 2s 6d a week but had stopped paying in the previous September. He was a tailor, the son of William Bull, and perhaps had gone to Leicester to get away from Rebecca. He had obviously considered it 'hush money' but Rebecca, like her mother, was a feisty woman. Mr. Rawlins, the defending counsel, contended that the:

> *. . . complainant publicly insulted the defendant at Ringstead Feast, and had also written him abusive letters. Mr Rawlins also asked for a reduction in the sum paid, as his client was unable to continue payments of 2s. 6d.The Bench made an order for the defendant to contribute 2s per week toward the support of the child with the ordinary costs, 16s. 6d.*

By 1891 both parents had married: George Bull, still living in Leicester, to a Birmingham born girl and Rebecca to local shoemaker, Luther Mayes. At the Census she is living with Luther and her young family next door to her parents, William and Fanny, who are looking after Percy. William was a coal merchant and shoe agent living in Shop Street.

The School Log tells us that Percy had been repeatedly warned for 'talking in school and was placed in a classroom so as not disturb the work of the school.' Albert emphasises that, 'no corporal punishment was administered to him in any way.'

It appears that he went home after school and told his story for, soon after, a 'relation, probably his grandmother, Fanny Roberts, came to the school house and, 'abused the Master and the Managers'. He writes in the Log that she said that:

> *. . . she would not allow her child*
> *I To be caned (She dared the Master to do this).*
> *II To do any Musical Drill (which is very popular amongst the boys and girls).*
> *lll To say 'Sir' to anyone in school or to perform the usual forms of politeness to anyone who entered the school.*
> *lV To obey any rules of the school which she did not deem fitting.*
>
> *She also said that if he was expelled she would send him to this school.*

The next day Percy came to school and promised the Chairman and Managers to obey the rules of the school.

On Tuesday January 24th, at the Thrapston Petty Sessions, four of the village lads who had taken part in the snowballing were accused of damaging a map of the Holy Land, (which was produced in court). One child was acquitted and the other three, Oliver Rowlatt, Leonard Smith and Earnest Whittering, were fined five shillings with four shillings costs. George Archer withdrew his charges against Albert Crew who in turn withdrew his charges against George's older brother, William. The case was on the 24th and we now understand the significance of why Albert had earlier pledged not to use the cane before this date. We hear that the accused boys refused to apologise because they maintained that they were innocent, even though the Reverend Leadbitter said that if they did no further steps would be taken, because, they said, they were not guilty. Among the evidence we also hear that these snowballing fights between the village lads and the schoolboys were 'the usual practice'. Perhaps the most significant sentence of the *Northampton Mercury* report comes at the end. 'There were between 200 and 300 people from Ringstead in the Court'. We can imagine that many in the village would have thought that this should never have come to court for 'a bit of snowballing fun'. It would have been a largely hostile audience for Albert Crew in the court that day.

He then received a police summons to appear before the Bench on a charge of unlawfully assaulting and beating George Archer. All the time, his tormentor, George Archer keeps appearing at school and is sent home again with a note until finally he signs a statement.

> *Geo Horace Archer promises to obey <u>all</u> the rules of the school and if he at any time disobeys them the Headmaster will punish him as he thinks fit (cane or otherwise).*

On February 24th Horace [George] Archer refuses to receive punishment and is sent home.

The Log Book deals at length with the fracas with George Archer but rather skates over the problems with Percy Roberts but it was this case which reached Government level and is now housed in the National Archives at Kew. Albert Crew had written a letter to the Reverend Leadbitter (now Vicar of

Denford and Ringstead) which details much of what he had written in the Log Book about Fanny Roberts's diatribe. He tries to draw in the Managers by stating:

> *I told her that I would inform the managers which remark she sneered at, calling them anything but complimentary names.*

As a result of this, on January 18th 1893 the Reverend Leadbitter wrote to the Secretary of the Education Committee enclosing Albert's letter, about Percy Roberts, aged 12 Standard V telling him of the expulsion. In his letter it is the grandfather William who roundly abused the Managers and the Master. It is perhaps worth remembering that William's mother was Alice Roberts who in 1851 is listed as a Church Sunday School mistress. He may have heard her views on teaching children.

We do not hear what happened when Albert came up before the Bench, and he continues teaching, but it is obvious that his position was irretrievable. On May 27th 1873, less than five months after he has arrived he writes, briefly for once:

> *A and E Crew terminated their engagement as Master and Mistress respectively*.

How did he fare after all this turmoil? 1901 finds Albert with his wife, Nellie Queenie, still a 'Certified master' living in Huish Episcopi in Somerset. It seems that he has made a new start in his career.

Grave of Percy Roberts in Ringstead Cemetery.
It was obviously a great loss to his family and there is something almost defiant in the inscription:
MISSED MOST BY THOSE WHO KNEW AND LOVED HIM BEST

Percy Roberts had little chance to make use of any learning that he had gained for on 16th February 1899, aged just 18, he died and was buried in Ringstead Cemetery.

Flora Thompson writing of about this time on the Northamptonshire-Oxfordshire border tells of boys such as Percy and Horace George Archer. With a little updating it is a truth that many teachers and parents would recognize:

> *Boys who have been morose or rebellious during their later schooldays were often transformed when they got upon a horse's back or were promoted to driving a dung cart afield. For the first time in their lives, they felt themselves persons of importance. They bandied lively words with the men and gave themselves manly airs at home with their younger brothers and sisters.*

Some three weeks after the hasty departure of the Crews, on June 19th 1893 Horace William Johnson and his wife Frances came to the schoolhouse. Following the turmoil of the last five months life in the school began to settle back into normality as they re-established order and routine.

One of his first acts was to re-admit George Horace Archer. George, unlike his alleged partner-in-crime, Percy Roberts, was to lead a full life, serving in the 498th Siege battery Division of the Royal Garrison in France and Germany. He survived the Great War and died in 1962 at the good old age of eighty years. I wonder if he ever told of his school days and Albert Crew.

Thomas William Johnson was, comparatively, a local boy, He was born a few stops up the line in Peterborough in 1867. His father, George, worked on the railways, first as an engine fitter and then as a foreman for the Great Northern Region. Thomas was the third oldest of the family of eleven children of George and his wife Priscilla. By 1891, now aged twenty-three, he had moved to Seaton, near Uppingham, in Rutland, where he is a 'Certified Schoolmaster'. Living with him is his sister Agnes, at 21, an Assistant Teacher, and his younger brother Arthur, still a scholar.

Somehow, during this period he met Frances Charlotte Beardmore who was the daughter of a Staffordshire farmer, overseer and Registrar. George Beardmore was a widower in the 1881 Census and soon after he too died. I have not yet managed to find her in the 1891 Census but, in the Uppingham area, in the summer of 1892, she married Thomas Johnson who, a year later, announces himself in the Ringstead School Log.

Thomas's introduction of himself is much more informative than those of the previous schoolmasters:

> *June 1st 1893 I, Thomas William Johnson take charge of this school. Pupil Teacher Great Northern Railway School, New England, Peterborough. Trained Carmarthen 1887-8. Last school Seaton National, Rutland.*

Thomas has had the advantage over his predecessors of having held a similar position in a village school so he has had a chance to make his mistakes and to be not too naive about the problems and pitfalls of being a head teacher. At first we may worry that he is going to be engulfed by the problems of the past few years. On June 23rd he reports:

The time table has not been kept during the past week, the Master spending much time teaching the children orderly habits. He has also cautioned the children about climbing about the school premises as they have already made sad work with the school buildings. The whole of the work in the school is very backward.

The residual problems of the 'Conscience Clause' dispute also rear their heads for just five days later he writes:

Five parents came to school this morning to ask permission for their children to leave school at 11.25 viz when the Instruction in religious Subjects commenced. The Master told them that we could not grant their request as the Bye-laws stated the children must attend school the whole time the school is open but that their children would take secular work as Time-Table.

One imagines that the Vicar had briefed him as to the possible problems and he had prepared his response carefully. On August 1st Frances, his wife, starts her teaching duties as an Article 68 mistress.

We hear very little more of either ill discipline or the Conscience clause so it seems that Thomas manages to settle the pupils and their parents to the normal routine of the school On 1st June 1894 the Infants moved into their new room as the school was being once more enlarged.

Local man, Roy Dickens, dug up, in his garden in Ringstead, a School Attendance Token, which may date back to the nineteenth century. Sometimes these tokens, elsewhere, had a penny value on them so perhaps they could be redeemed for money, or for the school charge before it was made a 'free' education system in 1891. In this case it was issued every week rather than being, the more usual, attendance medal for a term or year.

By kind permission of Roy and Sheila Dickens.
Photograph by Janice Morris.

We do notice during this period the epidemics that pass through the school and community. These include Scarlet Fever, Whooping Cough and Measles. These may not be very different to those that had already been noted earlier but, possibly, the increased mobility of the population made their

spread more rapid. Certainly the way of dealing with them became more drastic, perhaps because the Medical Officer of Health now has an important role. On February 8th 1897 Thomas received:

> *. . . notice from Dr Elliott that he had advised the Thrapston Rural District Council to close schools until March 1st owing to epidemic of Measles. School accordingly closed.*

Returning to 1895, on 15th March the annual summary of the Inspector's Report is written into the Log book and the first few sentences tell us that Thomas and his wife have quickly brought order and good learning to the school:

> *The promise of improvement made by the School last year has been amply fulfilled and the children have now passed a very good examination. Reading is becoming more intelligent, writing is good. Arithmetic deserves high praise.*

Very little fault is found is found although it is noted that:

> *Needlework is well taught but buttons should not be sewn so near the rim.*

The male Inspectors notoriously found it difficult to judge the standard of the sewing and perhaps this is one trying to show his mettle. The Infants class of Miss Belton is also praised, the children being 'intelligently taught' and are,' attentive and well behaved and take interest in all their work'.

The whole staff seems to have quickly pulled the school back from the brink. There are still the interruptions of the feasts (including now the Baptist and Wesleyan School treats) as well the harvest time falls in attendance. On 11th August 1896, for example, Thomas writes, rather wearily:

> *More children away owing through illness and as only my children are present school closed for the usual harvest holiday.*

I think 'my children' must refer to the children in his class as I can only find one child for Thomas and Charlotte. Their son, George William Beardmore Johnson, was baptised on 1st May 1899.

A more surprising reason for low attendance is given on October 1st 1896 when there is an, 'Ambulance Demonstration in the village'.

It may be, now that he had found his feet, rather than needing the support of the vicar, Thomas sometimes found his visits not always helpful. Are the two entries below to be read together?

> *July 23rd 1897 The Vicar was present from about 2 o'clock until 3.30 pm on Wednesday. Before leaving he made a few remarks about Miss Standen's and Miss March's work*

> *July 30th Miss March terminated her engagement today.*

In fact, a number of the young assistants came and went very rapidly, some only lasting a matter of weeks. We also note that Miss Belton, the Infants Mistress is travelling each day from Northampton for she keeps arriving late, having missed her train. Apart from these staffing problems the Log is mainly about the small everyday matters of school life, of examinations and Inspections, of the

regular outbreaks of diseases and summer feasts. The Nineteenth Century and the Victorian Age were drawing to a close. In the week of May 25th 1899 there was a half-day holiday for the 'Relief of Mafeking' and three days later for the Queen's birthday. It was to be almost her last.

The end of the century was in the Christmas holidays and goes unrecorded. We too must leave Ringstead School in the capable hands of Thomas William Johnson. Ahead lay the First World War the coming of the age of the car, the aeroplane and the wireless. Little of this will be reflected in the School Log Book. We do know that he was a strict disciplinarian, as was expected at the time. An anonymous poet writing years later told of Thomas Johnson's teaching style, in the years after the First World War

The school where I once learned to read
I stood outside awhile
And thought of Daddy Johnson
Who seldom wore a smile

His cane was always near at hand
And often it would fly
If arms unfolded did become
Or one but blinked an eye.

(My thanks to Roy Dickens for this: Poet not yet discovered.)

Thomas's last entry is as clear and brief as most of his others:

30th September 1927 I, Thomas William Johnson cease duties today as Head Teacher after having held this office for 34 years 4 months.

Ringstead School. (Date unknown).
With the kind permission of Ringstead School.

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My grateful thanks must go to the Head teacher and staff of Ringstead C. of E. School for allowing me to view the School Log Books and for their hospitality.

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Chapter Twenty-four

First Post

Noah Green (1799 - 1887), William Bradshaw (1826 - 1879) and John Green (1840 - 1913)

'Posts' were first set up by Henry VIII. They were a series of places along a few strategic routes to enable the royal messengers carrying letters to change horses and so deliver the king's message as rapidly as possible. Post roads were maintained along these routes (only four for many years). Charles I allowed the public to use this service and the places, where the horses and later mail coaches were changed, developed into coaching inns and those running them into the first postmasters.

This connection between innkeepers and the postal service continued through the eighteenth century. The service was still out of the reach of most of the population but, gradually, the penny post was introduced into the major towns and the mail coaches began to cover much of the country. In 1840 Rowland Hill's famous nationwide 'Penny Post' was introduced and the 67 million letters posted in 1839 rapidly increased to 242 million. The era of the modern postal service had begun.

There were some rural post offices throughout the nineteenth century but it was mainly in the towns and was very hit-and-miss and it was not until 1854 that Ringstead had its first sub-post office. Before this, in the 1847 *Post Office Directory*, it states that, 'Letters received through Thrapston'. The 1854 Kelly's Directory does not name the postmaster but, it seems likely, that it was Noah Green who was entered below as a grocer and draper.

The Green family had once been important landed gentry whose principal seats had been at Greens Norton and Lowick but, like many such families they lost much of their standing and land during the religious turmoil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had owned land in Ringstead and continued as yeoman farmers locally. In the second half of the nineteenth century a branch of the Green family went to Africa, endured the Siege of Mafeking and produced some distinguished military men. Incidentally, Samuel Wells Green, as caretaker, turned the cemetery for the diamond mine workers in South Africa, into a 'little paradise', albeit a coffin-shaped one.

It is not with these Greens that our story is concerned. We will be looking at some of the family who stayed in the village to serve the community. Thomas Green, who was born in 1759, was probably a yeoman farmer. He married Jane Meadows in 1783 and the couple had eight children. A double page spread of the 1841 Ringstead Census is a sea of Greens. Living next door to each other we have the families of five of the sons: Noah, draper; Thomas, vittler; Edward, farmer, Lot, farmer and John, butcher.

Each has a story to tell but we will only tell of two here. Noah, first and then, later in the century, one of the sons of his brother Thomas, called John.

Noah was born in Ringstead on 16th October 1799 and baptised nearly a year later. His parents John and Jane Green were both Baptists and were buried in the Ringstead Baptist Burial Ground. Whether their faith was the reason for the tardy church christenings is not clear for late christenings were not unusual.

Noah married Sarah Wells, across the river in Woodford, on 7th June 1821 and their first child, Ann, was born on 3rd September 1822. She was followed by Eliza Ellen (born about 1825), James (about 1832) and Mary Jane (about 1846). Ann's baptism is a Nonconformist one and the others have so far eluded us so it is possible that they never took place. The long gap between the final two children may be just one of those surprises that nature has in store for us, or because there are missing siblings through infant mortality or, perhaps, the grandparents have taken a grandchild as a daughter.

We also have not discovered how Noah made a living at first. We do know that in 1841, at some forty years of age, he is recorded as a draper and in 1847 and 1854 Directories he is also put down as a grocer. One suspects that the village shops were fighting to make a living and, as still happens today and they 'poached' each other's stock in trade in order to make a better living. By careful selection a grocery has a fast turnover and not too much money is tied up on stock for long periods. Drapery, on the other hand might have a longer period between wholesale and resale. A village draper's shop would vary from place to place. In 1847 he is listed as a 'linen draper' but one suspects that his shop might include clothes and hats as well as fabrics. There would probably also be a 'beer trade' of haberdashery: ribbons, buttons, cottons, needles and pins.

It seems likely that Noah decided that the new Penny Post offered another opportunity to increase his profits a little. We know from the Kelly's Directory of 1854 that in Ringstead, 'Letters through Thrapston arrive at 9 am dispatched at ½ past 3 pm.' As we have said, it seems likely that this was via Noah's shop and certainly by 1861, in Melville's Directory, Noah Green is the postmaster.

After the Penny Post was introduced in 1840, a simplified fee was paid, by the sender to replace the old system which required the recipient to pay according to the number of sheets of paper and the distance travelled. In the new system, which was nationwide, the sender paid one penny (1d) per half ounce, whatever the distance. This led to a huge increase in mail and ordinary people in small villages like Ringstead now found the sending of letters was within their means.

In 1843, Sir Robert Peel had laid down the principle that, 'All places, the letters for which exceed one hundred per week, should be entitled to a receiving office and a free delivery of letters'. Later, the new criterion for the establishment of a 'post' was its chance of financial success and between 1851 and 1857 Post Office surveyors went around every village and hamlet to review the postal arrangements. New postal routes were established and it seems likely that Ringstead was one of the new sub-post offices that was authorised as a result. The surveyors also set area boundaries and the local postmaster was responsible for ensuring that letters were delivered within that area at no extra cost to the sender or recipient. In order to become a postmaster one had to provide references but one would imagine that a man from a well-connected family such as the Greens would have had no problem with this.

The sub-postmasters were appointed by the Treasury if the cost to the Government was less than £175 per year and by the Paymaster-General if more than this figure. It would have nearly always been a local shopkeeper, of good character, who could provide some counter space. They also had to provide a slot in a window or box, initially locally made, for the letters to be handed in. At first the service would only have been for the receiving and distribution of letters and Noah would have been paid a small annual sum based on the number of letters that he dealt with. It could not have been a business by itself and there were grumbles throughout the century that the allowance was not enough to cover the expenses and work done by the sub-post masters.

In the 1861 Census Noah's entry seems to be 'Draper etc' which perhaps indicates that he did not see the post office as the major part of his income. We do not know when he gave up the post office and drapery business but it may have been when he was sixty-five which would have been around 1865. We do know from an 1869 Directory that by that date the Post Office had been taken over by a William Bradshaw.

The 1871 Census has Noah, now aged 71, as a, 'retired draper', living with his wife Sarah. Ten years later he is still retired but his wife Sarah, at 79, together with their widowed daughter Eliza, are working as milliners. Eliza had married her cousin Luke and, it is believed, taken her sickly son John Lot Green to South Africa. But, as we have said, that is another story. It seems likely that the draper's shop had also sold hats and now the two women were, once again, having to earn a little to help them all survive in the couple's old age. Some indication that they, like most other people were finding it hard in their old age can be seen from the *Ringstead Gift Charity* books which shows that the couple received nine shillings, the couple's rate, in December 1879 and 1880. The charity used one quarter of its income for the 'the inhabitants of Ringstead, over the age of 60 who are, in the opinion of the Trustees, deserving and necessitous'.

Noah and Sarah died within months of each other in 1887. They were buried in Denford Churchyard, like a number of other Ringstead people, once the small Ringstead Churchyard (The Baptist Burial Ground finally closed for burials in 1894) had stopped being used. Their epitaph reads:

> *Sacred to the memory of Sarah the beloved wife of Noah Green of Ringstead. Born Feb 8th 1803 died January 20th 1887. Also of Noah Green Born Oct 16th 1799 died Nov 12th 1887. 'Here they bore the cross. There they wear the crown.'*

Although they were buried in the churchyard of a parish church, the use of the birth dates and of the biblical text perhaps hints at a Nonconformist background.

If we go back to William Bradshaw, he had been baptised on 30th April 1826 in Thrapston, the son of John Bradshaw, blacksmith, and his wife, Sarah. The 1841 Census finds them living in Titchmarsh Lane, Thrapston with William's six siblings. We must guess that William is following his father's profession for the Census only tells us the work of the 'Head of the Household'. We do know that in a few months in 1850 the family is turned upside down. On 10th July, Sarah Bradshaw dies and within three months John Bradshaw, the widower has married again, to Emma Parsons, a farmer's daughter from Little Addington. She is some twenty years his junior.

In the following year the Census informs us that the newly married couple are still living in Titchmarsh Lane. John is not only a blacksmith but also an occupier of 23 acres of land. Living with them are three of his children, a nephew, a grandson and eight lodgers. By 1861 the couple have five new children. Mysteriously, Emma has only aged three years. Perhaps the age gap between her and her stepchildren was, originally, deliberately widened. The only two of John's first family now living at home are Thomas (32) who is a blacksmith and Susan (22) who is put down as a 'general servant'. Is this last description just the enumerator's shorthand, did she work elsewhere, or an indication of how the older family were treated by John?

The family appear to be living in the same house as before but now the Census tells us it is the 'White Hart' and there are five lodgers. Next door are a number of houses in 'Bradshaw's Yard' so perhaps John has developed some of his land or outbuildings. John dies soon after the Census and by 1871 Emma has remarried and, as Mrs. Hubbard, has three more children.

What William made of all this we can only guess at. William had set up himself as a blacksmith in Ringstead by 1847 and had married Ann Beeby of Raunds before his mother's death. By 1851 the couple were living in Ringstead. Did he decide to leave because he saw what was happening around him or , perhaps the more likely explanation is that he needed to move to set up on his own. Certainly, Flora Thompson records that it was usual for the sons of blacksmiths to leave the family forge and become journeymen smiths, learning and earning a living, before returning to the family business. Of course it was not far from Thrapston and it seems that there was a need for a new blacksmith in the village.

There were other blacksmiths recorded in the village during this time including John Tomlin, Charles Hitchcock, and a local journeyman called John Fairey. We write a little more about these in the biography of John Fairey. Some of these did not have their own blacksmith's shops and may, at one time, have worked for William.

William Bradshaw seems to have been an energetic and talented man who realised that he would need to diversify for his business to survive. In 1861, he is listed in the Census as, 'blacksmith, parish clerk and grocer employing one man and one woman'. His wife, Ann is not recorded as living in the house but perhaps she is visiting relatives. A stonemason and his wife from Doncaster are lodging with him. It is about this time that the Ringstead and Denford churches were being repaired so perhaps that is why he was lodging there. It may be that William was taking in the lodgers as part of his parish clerk duties.

This was before the establishment of the secular Parish Councils in 1894 as part of the elected local government of England. Before this date the parish clerk was part of a church system going back a thousand years. He was appointed by the rector, approved by the archdeacon, and acted as clerk to the rector and, sometimes, to the vestry. In some parishes he also assisted in church services and led the congregation's responses. A few pulpits still remain that have lower tiers where the clerk stood. He might also act as the sexton and even dig the graves and look after the churchyard. One can imagine that a blacksmith would be very useful in these practical capacities. William would have received a small annual fee for his clerical duties and presumably would have also been paid for any graves that he dug.

Growing up in Thrapston, William would have had access to a number of schools and it seems that he received an education mostly denied to children in Ringstead before the establishment of the school.

As we have seen, the Post Office Directory of 1869 records that William is now also the sub-post master so he has added one more string to his bow. ‘Letters arrive through Thrapston at 7 am and are dispatched at 4.35 pm. There is no delivery on Sundays. The nearest money order office is at Raunds.’

Sunday working was a major issue in the later Victorian period, opposed by religious groups and the emerging trade unions. In the middle of the century about half of the rural posts did not work on Sundays and about half of the remainder had their walks shortened and, in some cases, a substitute was provided on alternate Sundays. In the 1870s The Government made easier for Sunday services to be discontinued. Among Post Office employees, Sunday working was one of a number of grievances which led to unrest throughout the second half of the century with strikes, especially in London, in the last decade.

Front of popular music hall singer Arthur Lloyd’s ‘The Postman’ song for voice and piano (c 1866).

‘Oh her heart it always goes pit pat
When she hears the Postman’s loud rat tat.’

Coloured lithograph by H.C. Maguire .
By kind permission of The British Postal Museum and Archive.

The sub-post offices were subject to inspection twice a year by the head postmaster of the area and also by higher officials in the Post Office hierarchy. Flora Thompson tells of one such 'Surveyor' who arrived in a top hat and immaculate morning suit. After inspecting the post office, he then interviewed one of the postmen who was refusing to work on a new Sunday evening collection on religious grounds. It was a brave stance for he was not a young man and 'knew that his post and his pension he had so nearly earned hung in the balance'. Despite the Surveyor's report the man was allowed to not work on Sunday evening. It must be remembered that, as is still the case, the sub-postmaster was self-employed, running a business, but the postmen, who were earlier called 'letter carriers', were employed directly by the Post Office. Post women, like Laura in Candleford Green, began delivering letters towards the end of the century.

A blacksmith's shop and a post office may seem an odd combination but it is just this same joint enterprise in Candleford Green that Flora Thompson writes about. Dorcas Lane did not run the blacksmith's shop personally but she employed the blacksmiths and fed and housed the young journeyman smiths. It seems likely that William too, could not have done both jobs.

The 1871 Census has William as Parish Clerk and Sub-Postmaster but also records his wife Ann as Sub-postmistress. This is an unusual recognition of the increasing role of women in such businesses, although far from unique, and one suspects in this case that Ann did much of the work. It seems that the couple did not have any children so perhaps she had more time than many Victorian wives. Working for the Post Office was not taken lightly as Flora Thompson, perhaps the best source for what working in a rural post office was like in the last decade of the nineteenth century, tells us about her first day at work:

> *Once, when there had was a brisk demand for penny stamps . . . she tried timidly to sell one, but she was pushed gently aside, and afterwards it was explained to her that she must not handle a letter or sell a stamp until she had been through some mysterious initiation ceremony which Miss lane called being 'sworn in'. This had to take place before a Justice of the Peace, and it had been arranged that she should go the next morning to one of the great houses in the locality for that purpose.*

Laura duly goes to see 'Sir Timothy' and, before signing, she had to read out the oath:

> *'I do solemnly promise and declare that I will not open or delay or cause to suffer to be opened or delayed any letter or anything sent by the post', it began, and went on to promise secrecy in all things.*

William and Ann were living in Chapel Road and next door, Frederick Bradshaw, probably William's nephew, was a 'master blacksmith'. He is just 22 years old and living with his young wife, Emma and their baby son. It seems that William has passed on the role of blacksmith and it is possible that he was beginning to have health problems. Blacksmiths do not seem often to have lived into old age which, when you consider the atmosphere that most worked in, is not so surprising.

The 1877 Post Office Directory records that William is still the postmaster. Everything is much as before but there are now two deliveries a day, at 7.15 am and 2.20 pm. There is still only one collection time, at 4.55 pm.

William died on January 30th 1879 aged just 52 and was buried in the churchyard although no stone now marks his grave. He left a will with a value of under £100. He is listed in the National Probate Calendar as, 'shopkeeper and parish clerk' only. Ann became a housekeeper for a farmer in Brigstock and then lived with her nephew, Harry Beeby, and his wife Ellen in Raunds. Ann died in the spring of 1907 aged 83 years.

The post office was taken over by John Green, a nephew of Noah, the first Ringstead Postmaster. Noah's brother, Thomas, had been an innkeeper or 'vittler' (victualler). He had married Katherine May from Oundle and John was their youngest child, born in about 1840. The other children had been apprenticed to a number of trades including dressmaking, carpentry and butchery. John, himself, had first become a shoemaker and the 1861 Census has him living in his family's public house, the *Axe and Compass* but still working at that trade.

In 1865 he married local girl, Mary Weekley, and the 1871 Census has the couple living in Shop Street (as High Street was sometimes called) and still a shoemaker. They also have a six-month-old son, John Albert. All around them are shoemakers and farm labourers, apart from widow Matilda Wilson (43), who is 'mangling' to try to keep her, and her elderly mother, out of the workhouse.

It seems very likely that John took over the Post Office on the death of William Bradshaw in 1879. Certainly, the 1881 Census has John's occupation as 'Postmaster and Shoe Agent'. He and Mary now have three children, John A (10), Charlie (8) and Lizzie (5). A young local bootmaker, Joseph Smith, is also boarding with them. Perhaps he is working for John. Next door are his Uncle Noah and Aunt Sarah. Noah is now 81 and, as we have said his wife and daughter are working as milliners to earn some extra money. The elderly couple would have been still able to offer some advice although the work might have changed a little since they had run the post office.

Kelly's Directory of 1885 records that letter still arrive from Thrapston but now at 6.55 am and 2.15pm and are dispatched at 5.25 pm. The working day has been stretched further although there is still no delivery on Sundays. It also records that the nearest money order and telegraph office is at Raunds. The telegraph first came to Ringstead in 1845, which was very early in its history, but it was only for the use of the railway. It looks as if this usage had not been extended.

Originally there had been a mishmash of companies, small and large, offering telegraph services. They tended to only offer their services in the profitable places and rates tended to vary widely. Many argued for a comprehensive service across the whole country and under Government control. In 1868 an Act of Parliament enabled this to happen and telegraphs were added to the Post Office services. Nevertheless Ringstead remained too small to be linked to this system during the nineteenth century.

John continues as a shoe agent so, as is the case in many places today, the sub-post office had to piggy back on to some other retail business.

By 1891 John remains 'Shoemaker and Postmaster', and his sons, John Albert and Charles, are shoe riveters and his daughter, Lizzie May, a closer. Again, one suspects that John's wife, Mary would have run the shop for much of the time but we have no way of telling. The 1894 Kelly's Directory entry for the Post office is very similar to the 1885 version although the second delivery is now 1.15

pm. It also records that Post orders are issued but not paid. As with the telegraphs, the money order business first started as a private venture, in 1791, to help prevent the frequent theft of letters containing money. It became part of the post office business in 1838 and by 1879 twenty-nine million pounds was sent in this way. During the century postal orders began to be issued at Ringstead but were never redeemed locally. For that you had to go to Raunds. One guesses that the Greens did not want to have to hold too much cash for this purpose.

In 1901 the couple are still running the Post Office. John Albert is the only child still at home and working as a shoemaker. Ten years later, John and Mary, both 70 years old continue to serve in the Post office. John Albert, their son, is 40 years old and still single. He is now an Insurance Agent and one wonders if this is part of the scheme introduced by the Post Office in 1864 to offer small life insurance policies (£5 to £100) and annuities aimed at the poorer people in the community. The charges were less than those of commercial companies and the scheme had some success in helping ordinary working class people to make their lives a little more secure.

The Enumerator's Schedule for the 1911 Census tells us that the Post Office was at No. 3 High Street, next to some farm buildings, and a few houses before Chapel Yard. There is a photograph which, judging from the clothes, was taken at about this time. It shows John and Mary standing outside the shop where they had lived and worked for well over thirty years. It may be that it was taken when John retired at 70 years old and handed over the business to his son, John Albert.

Ringstead Post Office with John and Mary Green in the doorway.
(Probably taken in about 1911.)
With the kind permission of Martin Parfett.

John died, aged 73, in 1913. The directory of 1914 tells us that John Albert Green is now the sub-postmaster. It also records that there is a wall letter-box near the New Inn which is cleared twice a day. We know that letters would be delivered over the next few years to families which they had desperately hoped that they would never receive.

As anyone who has read, or watched on television, *Lark Rise to Candleford* will know, the post office became, through the latter half of the nineteenth century, a trusted and respected institution which was the hub of many villages. It was one of the few institutions that had an integrated network across the country and revealed itself in the day-to-day lives of villagers like those in Ringstead. It has continued in some villages in this role to this day but the internet and recent Governments' thinking has put the existence of many under threat.

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Note: I think John Green (vittler, victualler or innkeeper), the brother of Noah, is the one mentioned in the case of the stolen will in Eric Jenkins's book (see below).

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Chapter twenty-five

The Village Blacksmith

John Fairey (1804 - 1869) and Elizabeth (1800 - 1885) and their daughters.

The art, if you want your descendants to find you, is to have an obscure Christian name and, most importantly, an unusual surname. When you come across the name Fairey it would seem that it is likely to meet this second requirement. Unfortunately, in Ringstead in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, you would be wrong. Every garden seemed to have one at the bottom and, just to confuse matters a wide range of variations were used including Feary, Fairy, Farry and Farey. Even more annoyingly, the various families seem to keep their distance from each other and we end up with a shrubbery rather than a tree.

It appears that there were at least two lines which may be completely separate or join sometime in the seventeenth century. Broadly there were the blacksmith Faireys and the shoemaker Faireys and it is with the former that we will be looking at in this story and, in particular, at a black sheep member of the blacksmiths.

The Faireys were an old Ringstead family which reaches back at least into the seventeenth century. We will start with John and Elizabeth who married in Ringstead Parish Church on 1st January 1700. We are in the reign of William and Mary and a new century has just begun. They have a son, Samuel who is baptised on 19th December 1703 and lives long enough to have three wives. He first married Elizabeth Desborough on 12th November 1730 and has at least one child, a daughter, Elizabeth. His wife dies in June 1735 and within six months he has re-married, to Ann Jones, and has a further four children. It seems likely that Ann died in giving birth to her fourth child, Joseph in 1754. Just two months later he marries again, to Keziah Pell and has two further sons.

We do not know Samuel's profession but his son, the oldest child of his marriage to Ann, who is called William was a blacksmith. He was baptized on 12th September 1737 and married Ann, probably when he was about twenty, although I have not yet found their marriage. They had at least five children before Ann died in 1774, but it may be that only one girl, Mary, survived into adulthood. William re-married on 3rd May 1779 to Mary Wright and had a son, William who was baptised on 25th December 1780. It is at the death of William, the father, in 1784 aged about 47, that we find him described as a blacksmith. His widow dies some twenty years later in 1804 so we have to wonder how she managed until her children grew old enough to work. Did she employ men to run the forge or did it pass into other hands?

When we look at these rapid re-marriages we may see it as callous and perhaps sometimes it was. We must remember, however, that, unless there were available older children, aunts or parents to take on the raising of a young family, a father, or mother, often had a choice of re-marriage, child neglect, or pauperism.

Whatever happened in the intervening years we know that William, the son, continued with his father's trade and married Elizabeth, probably some time after the turn of the century. Again I have not yet found the marriage but we know, once again from his entry in the Burial Register that he was a blacksmith. They had some six children, four of them were girls and the youngest son, William, born in 1811 died just twenty years later. In fact, one wonders at the sudden burst of deaths in the family. After William's death on 17th November 1831, his father died aged 53 almost exactly a year later and, in the following month Elizabeth his mother also died aged 52. Was it from these clusters of deaths in a family that Ringstead's reputation for witchcraft grew?

Before these sudden deaths, John, the eldest child had married, on 24th December 1828 to Eliza Betts, across the Nene, in Woodford Parish Church. By the end of 1832 he was a husband, a father and the head of the family left by his parents, although even Lucy, the youngest surviving sister, would have been nearly eighteen. Unfortunately he was not equal to the task. We must be careful in defining someone's character by a few bad actions but it does appear that John was a feckless man who literally ran away from his responsibilities.

As Henry VIII looked to succession and wanted a son, so a blacksmith would have hoped for a boy to learn the trade, to help his father and, finally, take over in his old age. We see the sadness of Joe Gargery, in Great Expectations, when Pip blithely leaves the forge to become a 'gentleman'. John, like Henry, struggled to father boys and he had between 1830 and 1839, six girls in quick succession, none of whom were christened as children. Is this a sign of Nonconformism or negligence? One also wonders at the mindset of parents with the surname Fairey who call their first child Mary (and their last child Fanny). Perhaps it may indicate that they pronounced their surname more like 'Farry' or 'Feary'.

As might be expected, the Faireys struggled to feed and clothe their family. The Ringstead Charity Account Book reveals that in 1837 John received 8yards of cloth at 9½d a yard and 3yards at 13d a yard: also one handkerchief. In 1838 he again received sheets and other cloth items.

It is when we get to the first personal Census, in 1841, that we realise that something is really amiss in the Fairey family. We find Eliza aged 35 with her six girls; Mary (11), Emily (9), Louisa (7), Sophia (5), Hannah (4), and Maria(h) (2). There is no sign of John, and Eliza is described by that feared word, 'Pauper'. When we search for John, we finally find a John Fairey (34) blacksmith, living in the small town of Thorney, on the edge of the Huntingdonshire fens. With him live William and Mary Wood and Henry Harvey.

It is possible that he is away getting work to feed his family but when we look at the Northampton Mercury we find the truth. It reports that John Farey from Ringstead was sent to the House of Correction for running away and leaving his wife chargeable to Ringstead. Perhaps absconding once, overcome by the recent deaths and his responsibilities, we might excuse his inability to cope. The following year, in 1842, it happens again. John is sent, this time, for two months 'to the House of Correction for neglecting to support his wife and family, whereby they became chargeable to the Parish of Ringstead'. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had attempted to stop outdoor relief and force recipients into centralised 'Union Workhouses' where conditions should be harsh enough to deter paupers using them. The local workhouse was at Thrapston but the Parish would still have to pay for their upkeep and, as the vicar Percival Sandilands pointed out in 1864, Ringstead

considered that it paid a very high Poor Rate. William Howitt, who was no radical, was appalled by this new harsher regime and, writing in 1838 in the '*Rural Life in England*, stated:

> *…. Every poor man's family is liable, on the occurrence of some chance stroke of misfortune, to have their misfortune, bitter enough in itself, added the tenfold aggravation of being torn asunder, and immured in the separate wards of a POVERTY PRISON. The very supposition is horrible; and, if this system, this iron and undiscriminating system, - a blind tyranny, knowing no difference between accidental misfortune and habitual idleness, between worthy poverty and audacious imposition, between misfortune and crime, - be the product of Philanthropy, may Philanthropy be sunk to the bottom of the sea!*

John would have been called one of the 'undeserving poor' and it was his wife and children who suffered.

When we look at the blacksmiths that worked in Ringstead a pattern emerges of a group of young men travelling around the countryside and sometimes getting into mischief. Flora Thompson writing of the blacksmiths tells us:

> *….it was the custom at that time that after apprenticeship, a young smith should travel the country and work in various shops to gain experience. That was why they were called 'journeymen', Miss Lane said, 'because they travelled about.'*

This may not be the whole story. Certainly for some young smiths it was part of their apprenticeship where they gained skills working away from the 'home forge' before returning to the family business. These groups of travelling young men were not uncommon in a number of professions, from agricultural labourers to shoemakers. Most travelled to find work rather than to improve their skills. In those days when holidays, as we know them, did not exist for working people the 'tramp' would also be a time when the young men saw the world and perhaps sowed their wild oats. In this they were not so different from the rich young men who went to Italy. It is also true that, although some blacksmiths prospered, many found life increasingly difficult.

Of course there were horses to shoe but this was not always work for the blacksmiths. The 1851 Ringstead Census has George Buckby, 'farrier', living with William Teel, a gamekeeper from County Fermanagh in Ireland. Many larger farmers brought in specialised farriers to shoe and attend to their horses. The blacksmiths' other stock-in-trade had been the production of all the ironware for the home and farm. The agricultural implements became increasingly more mechanised and were produced in centralised factories. The well-named 'Smiths of Thrapston', was a large local producer of farm implements for horse and, as the century progressed, for steam engine. The home and garden goods; the gates, door furniture, tools, nails, kitchen implements, etc. were likewise made cheaply in the new industrial cities or imported from abroad. The village blacksmith was left mainly with minor repair work and some horse-shoeing and, for many, this was not enough to make a good living.

Going back to the 1841 Census we find two young blacksmiths, John Hitchcock (25) and his wife, Sarah (nee Hewitt) with their young son, John; and John Jeffrey, with a Mary Jeffrey who is only shown as fifteen (although this has been probably rounded down) who may be his sister or wife.

It is in the life of another black sheep, Korah Dicks, that we first met Henry Hitchcock. Korah was sent to the 'House of Correction', for one month for assaulting Henry. He was an outsider, from Kimbolton and one wonders if this is part of the reason for the assault. By 1851 Henry and his family have disappeared from Ringstead and we find him, by 1861, in Plaistow, London and still a blacksmith.

Returning to John Jeffrey, he too disappears from Ringstead and possibly moves to Linton in Cambridgeshire. We cannot be sure because the 1841 Census does not give places of birth and 'John Jeffrey' is a popular name for smiths from Cornwall to Scotland.

Our final example is John Tomlin who is listed as a blacksmith in Ringstead in Whellan's 1849 Directory. It also records that a 'blacksmith's shop has lately been converted into a Methodist Chapel'. John Tomlin is one of those elusive people who seem to dodge between the official records. He is, almost certainly, the John Valentine Tomblin who married Caroline Wallis on 12th September 1847 in Alconbury-cum-Weston in Huntingdonshire. The couple have a child, William, who was baptised in Ringstead on 25th April 1849 and buried two years later in Thrapston. It seems possible that John had already left Ringstead for there is no sign of him in the 1851 Census. On 30th November 1856, a John Valentine Tomlin, 'a traviling Blacksmith Aged 35 years', was buried in Lincoln.

John Fairey was, therefore, part of a constant movement of young men around the countryside but he was no longer so young and he had many dependants. It seems that John did return home and the couple were, to some extent reconciled, because another daughter, Fanny, was born in about 1845 and baptised on 12th August 1849 with her older sisters, Louisa, Hannah and Maria. Is this a sign that John has finally become a proper family man? Certainly, the 1851 Census has John with his family in Ringstead. He is working as a blacksmith and Eliza is making lace, as many women in the area did in the first half of the nineteenth century. Her daughters, Sophia (16), Hannah (14) and Maria (12) are also lacemakers and Fanny, the baby of the family is just five years old.

By 1861, however, we find the rift between John and Eliza has opened up again. He is a journeyman blacksmith which, at 56, means that he is still working how and when he can. He is living by himself. Meanwhile, Eliza, and her youngest child, Fanny, are living elsewhere in the village. She is still trying to earn a living as a lacemaker.

John dies in 1869, aged 64, which seems a reasonable age for a nineteenth century blacksmith. Perhaps his lack of time in the blacksmith's forge added years to his life. If we look at some of the blacksmiths that we have encountered, we see that many died in middle age or earlier. John Fairey's grandfather, William, died when he was about 47 and his father William was 53: William Bradshaw, who later became the postmaster, was 52 and his nephew Frederick 53, and John Tomlin just 35 years old.

Former Blacksmith's shop taken by Roy Dickens in 1980s.
(Carlow Road end of High Street).

Roy remembers Mr Davies working there and, with few horses to shoe, finally having to spend his day making rods with screw threads each end to reinforce ladder rungs.
(By kind permission of Roy Dickens).

It is easy to have an idealised view of the village blacksmith (albeit from America) 'under the spreading chestnut tree'. Richard Jefferies, another lyrical writer of the countryside from the Victorian era, gives a more realistic picture of what a typical smithy would have been like.

> *Twisted iron, rusty from exposure, lies in confusion on the blackened ground before the shed. Coal dust and the carbon deposited from volumes of thick smoke have darkened the earth, and coated everything with a thick crust. The windows of the shed are broken, probably by the accidental contact of long rods of iron carelessly cast aside, and some of the slates of the roof appear gone just above the furnace, as if removed for ventilation and the escape of the intense heat. There is a creaking of stiff leather as the bellows rise and fall, and the roar of the blast as it is forced through the glowing coals.*
>
> *A ceaseless hum of wheels in motion comes from the rear, and the peculiar crackling sound of a band in rapid revolution round the drum of the engine and the shaft. Then the grinding scrape of sharp steel on iron as the edge of the tool cuts shavings from the solid metal rotating swiftly in the lathe. As blow follows blow the red hot 'scale', driven from the surface of the iron on the anvil by the heavy sledge, flies rattling against the window in a spray of fire. The ring of metal, the clatter, the roaring, and hissing of steam, fill the air, and through it rises now and then the shrill quick calls of men in command.*

This may have been a larger blacksmith's shop than the ones in Ringstead but, like the water mills we have written about elsewhere, they were not always the fragrant, healthy places that the poets and artists depict.

Interior of a Forge
(Country Life Journal March 1904. MERL P DX1091/8)
With the kind permission of The Museum of English Rural Life

The 1871 Census finds Eliza, aged 69, a visitor at 20 Russell Street Cambridge. It is the house of Alfred Pateman, a railway servant and his wife Emma (38). It seems likely that 'Emily' is Eliza's daughter Emma. Eliza may be already losing her sight, perhaps, like many other women, through the making of lace for years by the dim light of a candle. Certainly in 1881 she is, I believe, in Thrapston Union Workhouse, although it gives her home town as Stanwick, and it records that she has been blind for eight years. On 25th September 1885, aged 85, she dies at Thrapston Workhouse but is buried back in the Ringstead churchyard.

Postscript: The Daughters.

Eliza Fairey had had a hard life, with a large family of girls which she had to bring up, it seems, with little help from her wandering husband. I wondered what had happened to these daughters. Did they manage to shake off the effects of their difficult childhoods and enjoy a fulfilled adult life? We can only look for hints that the records give us.

Mary, the oldest child, probably married John Hale in 1855 in Meldreth in Cambridgeshire, and the 1861 Census finds her living in nearby Melbourn with their two sons, John and George. It is difficult to find her after that as there are a number of alternatives, none certain. It could be that her

widower, John, with his children, George and Eliza, is in the Cambridge 1881 Census but we cannot be sure.

The life of Mary's sister, Emily, is also somewhat confusing at present. She is probably the Emma Fairey who married William Stockridge in 1857. William died a year afterwards and just a few months later she married railway servant, Alfred Pateman. We have seen that Eliza, her mother was staying with her in Cambridge in 1871. There is also a niece, Emma, the daughter of Mary. They are together in 1881 but Emma died in1883 aged about 52, the same age as her grandparents. In 1891 Emma Hales, aged 27 is Alfred's niece and housekeeper.

Louisa, after working as a farm servant for Henry Gale at Denford, married John Underwood in 1856 and moved to Finedon. She spent the rest of her life there. Her husband, John, was an agricultural labourer and it would have been a tough life. She had six children and also worked as a charwoman. Her husband became a railway labourer, then a 'higler's labourer' (perhaps for his brother-in-law) and finally, in 1901, a farm labourer again. In this Census we find her and John in Pear Tree Row, Finedon. She died in 1905.

Sophia Fairey married John Griffin in 1855 in Ringstead and she was the only daughter to remain in her home village all her life. Her husband was an agricultural labourer and we finally find the couple in 1881 with John an unemployed waggoner and Sophia a laundress. In 1911 she is a seventy-seven year old widow visiting Leonard and Laura Bryant at 28 Regent Square, Northampton. She probably died a year later.

Hannah, the fifth child, had one of the most interesting lives. She had been born in about 1837 and was the only daughter never to marry. In 1871, she is with her mother visiting her sister in Cambridge and her profession is given as a 'domestic servant'. By 1881, her mother has gone blind and is in Thrapston Union Workhouse. Hannah, however, has moved to London and, at 44, is a 'Matron' in Reverend C.H. Spurgeons's Orphanage in Clapham Road, Lambeth. She is still there, in 1891, where she is one of seventeen' matrons'.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a charismatic Baptist preacher in London. By 22 he was the most popular preacher of the day who regularly preached to crowds of 10,000 people. A clergyman's widow who was a member of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle Church had seen an article in the *Sword and Trowel* (the Tabernacle magazine which is still published) for August 1866 advocating the establishment of schools for' 'our poor adherents'. The widow, a Mrs. Hillyard wrote to Charles Spurgeon telling him that she would fund an orphanage where boys could be 'trained in simple Gospel principles'. Spurgeon went to her modest house with another man and said that they had called about the £200 she had mentioned in her letter. In his biography of Spurgeon, W.Y. Fullerton continues with the conversation:

> *Did I write £200?' exclaimed the lady. 'I meant £20,000.'*
>
> *'Oh yes,' said Mr. Spurgeon, 'you did put down £20,000, but I thought perhaps there was a nought or two too many.'*

The orphanage was opened in 1869 with a girls' wing added ten years later. Hannah, who one would have expected to have become a recipient of the charity given by the great Victorian philanthropic

movement, became, instead, one of its agents. If we judge from the experiences of Peter Paterson, who was a boy there much later, in the years before it was bombed in the Second World War, it was a harsh and cruel regime with regular beatings but one where the 3 R's were taught. We can only hope that Hannah was a kinder matron than the one that he encountered.

It is possible that Spurgeon had preached in Ringstead and this had inspired Hannah, although he was, perhaps, too big a fish for the Ringstead pond. Certainly, Rev C, Spurgeon Junior, his son, preached in the Baptist Chapel in May 1882 and again in 1883. We do not know just how long Hannah worked at the orphanage but, in 1901, she is still in Marylebone, staying as a friend, with a woman 'living on her own means' and her lady companion. She does not appear in the 1911 Census.

Maria married Thomas Smeathers Pettit in 1859 and, like her sister Louisa ended up in Finedon. Thomas was, a carter in 1861, a General Dealer at Wilby in 1871 and a 'Rag and Bone Buyer' in 1881. By 1891 they are living in a' Railway Carriage' with their four children, in Finedon, next to the Co-operative Field. Thomas has a 'Dealer Shop'. By 1901 he is a 'Rag and Bone Merchant' again and they are living in Thrapston Road, Finedon. Maria dies in 1904 aged 65. Thomas was obviously a colourful local character for a rhyme about him, under his nickname of Tom Tottles, was recorded in a local book.

Tom Tottles breaks bottles
Sifts cinders, mends winders,
Goes round with his bags
To collect your old rags.
He mumbles and moans
As he buys your old bones
And kicks up a din
As loud as sin
When he hollers 'Rag-bone!'
Rag-bone! Rabbit skin!'

[From 'Pageant of Finedon'.]

Finally we come to Fanny, the last girl, perhaps a product of John's temporary return to the bosom of his family. She married Charles Frederick Coggins from Raunds in 1864 when she was just eighteen. Seven years later she has four children between two months and six years old and is in Thrapston Union Workhouse. I have not yet found Charles (or Frederick as he is usually called) in 1871 but perhaps he is away looking for work. In 1881 Frederick, Fanny and their family are living in St John's Place Marylebone and he is working again as a shoemaker. 1891 finds them still there, and with two extra children, bringing the total that Fanny has given birth to, to at least nine. They are now living at 87 Devonshire Street, Marylebone with three other families. Charles Frederick Coggins died in 1892 and the 1901 Census finds Fanny a widow at 54 and having to work as a charwoman, with her youngest daughter, May, who is just 14 years old. She is probably the Fanny Coggins who died in the Paddington District in 1911 aged sixty-five.

So it is that names come and go. William Feary baptized in 1737 had six children and his son William had six also and his son John had seven more, yet by the end of the century no-one from that family branch was named Fairey. Such is the power of the male name in ancestry.

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Chapter Twenty-six

INNKEEPERS & BEERSELLERS

Thomas (c1775 – 1837) & Mary Hill (c1777 – 1842): James (c1785 – 1856) & Ann (1787 – 1871) Hill.

We usually view the nineteenth century as the great time of the temperance movement. An era when the 'demon drink' was confronted and the Coffee Taverns, like the one in Marshalls Road, Raunds, were established to help save the working man. But it was not quite as clear-cut as that. For many reformers it was cheap gin that had been the ruin of mothers and fathers alike. For some, even in the temperance movement, beer was seen as a wholesome drink and part of the English labourers' tradition.

As William Cobbett tells us, in *Cottage Economy*, which was written in 1821, up to the1780s almost every labourer, who had the space, would brew his own beer. Cobbett saw beer as a healthy and nutritious drink and was scathing about the new tea-drinking fashion.

> *I view the tea drinking as a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth and a maker of misery in old age.*

He blamed the heavy taxation on malted barley and hops which had stopped the home brewer from producing, 'the cheapest drink that a family can use except milk'. Instead, he alleged, the labourer tended to drink less beer, but it was the much more expensive ale sold at a public house where young men might be corrupted and the beer contaminated with chemicals. Of course we must remember that both beer and tea were ways of making water of uncertain purity, safer to drink and much of the home-brewed beer was very weak.

It was to encourage the small, 'beer or cider only', establishments that the 1830 Beer House Act was passed. This enabled anyone to brew and sell beer, ale or cider, whether from a public house or in their own homes, upon obtaining a moderately priced licence of just under £2 for beer and ale and £1 for cider. Nor did they have to go to the Justices of the Peace to obtain one. In the six months after it came into force nearly 25,000 excise licences were taken out. This is the reason that we see so many *King William* or *King William IV* public houses today.

We cannot be completely certain what impact the new law had on the local sellers of alcohol. It does seem likely, however, that until at least 1828 there were only two recognized alehouses in Ringstead and that they were the *Axe & Compass* and the *Swan. The Ale House Keepers Recognizances* had to be taken out every year until 1830 before the local Justices of the Peace. Unfortunately the Wellingborough Quarter Sessions did not record the name of the alehouse. Looking at the names of the people concerned it does seem most likely that the *Black Horse* came after the 1830 Act and the *New Inn*, as its name implies, came later still. There are, however, other sellers of beer who crop up in the Censuses and other sources which we cannot link directly to one of these four named houses. Some may have been innkeepers of the main houses who, because of missing details, we are unable

to allocate. It may also be that some were beer-shops, which, after 1830, as we have heard, could be in somebody's front room, had no name, and may have been short-lived.

In his eulogy to the English Inn, William Howitt makes a clear distinction between the two types.

> *There is nothing more characteristic in rural life than the village ale-house or inn. It is the centre of information, and the regular, or occasional rendezvous of almost every-body in the neighbourhood. You see all sorts of characters, or you hear of them. The where-about of every-body all around is there perfectly understood. I do not mean the low pot-house – the new beer-shop of the new Beer-bill, with LICENSED TO BE DRUNK ON THE PREMISES blazoned over the door in staring characters - the Tom-and-Jerry of the midland counties – the Kidley-Wink of the west of England. No, I mean the good old-fashioned country ale-house; the substantial well-to-do old country ale-house- situated by the village green or by the road-side, with a comfortable sweep out of the road itself for carriages or carts to come round to the door, and stand out of all harm's way.*

When we look at the records of the 1795 *Ale House Keepers Recognizances* for Ringstead there are only two names. One is John Green, almost certainly at the *Axe & Compass* who gave a surety of £10 and was supported by 'Richard Whiteman of Ringstead' who had to put up a similar amount. If the house was run properly during that year, the money was returned or taken forward into the next year. If the innkeeper was found to have allowed 'disorder or unlawful games', then the money could be forfeited. The other alehouse keeper, probably at the *Swan*, was John Mason, supported by Charles Chapman of Wellingborough.

In 1800, John Green is again there, with John Colby who is probably at the *Swan.* This time both are 'seconded' by John Mason of Rushden (presumably the *Swan's* innkeeper in 1795). Ten years later, it is still John Green at the *Axe & Compass* and John Mason is back at the *Swan.* (Of course we could have a father and son here).

John Green died in 1821 and when we look at the 1822 *List of Licensed Victuallers* for Ringstead it gives four licensees with Thomas Green, son of John, at the *Axe & Compass* and Thomas Hill at the *Swan.*

Thomas Green	***Axe & Compass***
Thomas Hill	***Swan***
Lot Green	***-***
Thomas Lee	***-***

The Hills and the Greens form a double helix of bloodlines in Ringstead. We have Lots of Green and Hill and, not far away a Green Hill. In this 1822 List, Lot Green is the brother of Thomas at the *Axe & Compass* and by 1841 is shown as 'Independent'. It may be he was brewing for his brother or for his own needs. Thomas Lee was a baker and, again, brewing was probably something of a sideline.

The Justices met at the *Hind Inn* at Wellingborough and almost all the innkeepers seem to have attended the session because, occasionally, one is recorded as not present. One imagines that it was something of a social occasion with all the innkeepers, from across the district, having an annual get-together. In the early *Recognizances* the innkeepers had to agree to, 'suffer no disorder or unlawful games,' but by 1825 this had developed into a lengthy inventory of wrongdoings to be avoided. It authorizes the named persons to sell:

> *. . . Bread and other Victuals, Beer, Ale and other Liquors in his, her or their house and shall not fraudulently dilute or adulterate the same and shall not use in uttering or selling thereof any pots or other measures that are not of full size and shall not wilfully or knowingly permit drunkenness or tippling, nor get drunk in his, her or their house or other premises nor knowingly suffer any gaming with cards, draughts, dice, bagatelle, or any other sedentary games in his, her or their house or any outhouses, appurtenances, covernments [?] thereto belonging by Journeymen, Laborers, Servants or Apprentices, nor knowingly introduce, permit or suffer any Bull, Bear or Badger baiting, cock fighting or other such sport or amusement in any part of his, her or their premises, nor shall knowingly or designedly and with a view to harbor and intertain such, permit or suffer men or women of notoriously bad fame or dissolute girls and boys to assemble and meet together in his, her or their house or any of the premises thereto belonging, nor permit or suffer any drinking or tippling in any part of his, her or their premises, nor shall keep open his, her or their house during the usual hours of Divine Service on Sundays nor shall keep his, her or their house or other premises during late hours of the night or early in the morning for any other purpose than the reception of Travellers . . .*

Much of this is humane and right but many suspected that the local J.P.'s were using their powers to create a cosy cartel and restrict the growth of beerhouses for working men. The reference to Journeymen, Laborers, Servants or Apprentices', may give some credence to this view. Notice also the lack of 'u's, in words such as' labor', which the emigrants to America retained. At first both versions were used and the divergence seems to have come partly from the different choices of the early dictionary writers (Samuel Johnson and Noah Webster), in the two countries.

As a small village, off the main turnpike roads, Ringstead did not have one of the larger coaching inns such as *The George* at Huntingdon. It seems, of the three main contenders, that the *Axe and Compass* was the nearest to the traditional alehouse that Howitt praised. Before the advent of the village hall, it was often in the inns that inquests took place, house and land auctions were held and Enclosure committees met. In the case of the Ringstead 'Inclosure' it was in a Thrapston Inn that the appointed Commissioner met claimants and decisions were made. A poster advertising an 'Auction of the Freehold Property' of John Green (occupied by Josiah Groom) is said to be happening at the *Cross Keys Inn,* Ringstead but I have not found any evidence that such a public house existed and I think it was a mistake and should have been the *Axe & Compass.* Later in the century, on 2nd December 1882, an inquest for the stillborn child of Rhoda Warren was held at the *Black Horse* and two years later an inquest into the sudden death of Mary Barker was held at the *New Inn*.

Axe & Compass

The left side of the building is the original. Notice the beer barrel over what was once the front entrance. (But was it the original entrance?)

Photograph 29 March 2011 with the kind permission of the owner.

As we have seen, Thomas Green, born in about 1795 in Ringstead is the 'victualler' of the Axe *& Compass* from before 1822, until at least 1871 where, in the Census, at the age of seventy-six he is still shown as the innkeeper. His wife Katherine died soon after, in 1872, and Thomas followed her some five years later. It is not the lives of Thomas and Katherine Green that we shall be looking at here but those of the Hill family to whom they are linked. We will also not be looking at the Figgis family, first landlords of the *New Inn*, which, as its name implies, was built later, probably in the 1860s. It is worth briefly showing here just how interrelated the innkeepers were. Samuel Figgis had married Maria, the daughter of James Hill (who kept the Black Horse) in 1852. James himself had married Ann Green who was the sister of Thomas Green (innkeeper of the *Axe & Compass*).It seems very likely that Thomas Hill of the Swan, born about 1775 and James Hill, born about 1785 were brothers or at least cousins.

Let us start with the *Swan Inn* in Carlow Lane, on the edge of the village but facing down the High Street and but a stone's throw from the *Axe and Compass*. Its name may be derived from the arms of the Creed family of Oundle who were lords of the manor in Ringstead in the eighteenth century. Their shield showed, 'Azure a cheveron between three swans argent'.

The Swan (*Now a private house).*
Notice where the pub sign was once fixed. It once had a steeper roof, probably with thatch.
(July 2005) Used with the kind permission of Andy and Chris Havers.

Thomas Hill was born in about 1775. We only know this from the Burial Register which gives his age. I have found no other sign of his birth and it may be that he was christened elsewhere. Perhaps surprisingly, for innkeepers, the Greens and Hills have Baptist connections and this may be the reason for them not appearing in the Parish Baptism Register. He married Mary Richards on 27th February 1797 in Ringstead Parish Church and it appears from the Register that they had four children: Lot (baptised 11 Sept 1798) – who later married Lydia Green (sister of Thomas Green of the *Axe and Compass*); Susannah who died in infancy; John; and Elizabeth.

At present, the first we hear of Thomas is in the *Licensed Victuallers' List* of 1822 but he may have been the landlord there for many years before this date. Fifteen years later, on 9th September 1837 Thomas died and was buried in the churchyard. The 1841 Census records Mary Hill on her own at the *Swan Inn* with just a fifteen-year-old servant girl to help her. She would have walked up and down many stairs for, Alan Clipston remembers that, in the middle of the Twentieth Century, The *Swan* had no beer pumps and the landlady had to go down into the cellar every time to draw a pint from the barrel.

Also, in 1841, the *Northampton Mercury* records that William Barnard from Brampton in Huntingdonshire was sent to the House of Correction for two months for, 'wilful damage and injury to certain windows in the house of Mary Hill, Ringstead. It may be that this was revenge for her not having paid a bill, for William was a carpenter, but the wording is ambiguous.

On 23rd March 1842, Mary too died aged sixty-five and within six months, her son, John, aged just forty years old also died. The Mercury writing of his death, records that John Hill of the *Swan Inn*, son of Mr Thomas Hill and Mary Hill, 'died on Sunday last after a short illness'. The newspaper also states that this is the third death in the family in the last twelve months. Thomas had died some five years earlier so who is this third death? The Burial Register gives no obvious answer.

That is the end of the Hill family at the *Swan*. The inn does not appear again in the Trade Directories until 1861 when the landlord is Ekins Dickens. The *Northampton Mercury,* of 22nd August 1863, has a notice advertising *The Swan* for let with about seven acres of pasture land and three acres of arable land. Potential lessees are directed to' Mr Woolston, Brewery, Wellingborough', so it looks as if it was a tied house perhaps to *Dulleys* who started in 1840 and were taken over by *Campbell Praed* in 1920. Amos Mason and Samuel William Bull followed as landlords and the latter is there as the century draws to a close.

The *Swan Inn* is now a private house in Carlow Road but if you look carefully you can still see the square on the bricks where the pub sign once hung. Inside, the old beer cellar is now blocked up.

The New Inn.
(February 15th 2011).

The Black Horse *(now a private house).*
The single storey part was a butcher's shop.

February 2011 (with the kind permission and assistance of Alan Clipston).

The *Black Horse* is also now a private house, towards the other end of the High Street, nearly opposite the *Temperance Hall*. It does not appear by name until an 1847 listing in the Post Office Directory. It is likely, however, that James Hill who is in the 1841 Census, aged 55, with his wife Ann, and described as a publican is living at the Black Horse.

James Hill had been born in 1785 and married Ann Green (sister of Thomas of the *Axe & Compass*) on 1st March 1810 in the Parish Church. It is likely that the *Black Horse* was always more of a Beer-House than a traditional inn and that James did other things as well as being a landlord, in order to make a living. His will describes him as a horse dealer and we know that, on some occasions at least, that it was Ann who ran the bar by herself.

The first time that the newspapers talk of James Hill, it is of a lucky escape. The *Northampton Mercury* of 13th May 1843 reports that, at Wellingborough Petty Sessions:

> *Mr. Hill, a beer shop keeper at Ringstead, was charged with keeping his house open after ten o'clock. It was proved that the church clock at Ringstead was not going on the night in question, and the magistrates gave Hill the benefit of the circumstance, and dismissed this charge.*

The church clock must have been visible from the *Black Horse* window but it also implies that there was no clock in the house. It is likely that this incident was part of the new county police force flexing

its muscles and we have also seen that it prosecuted a number of shopkeepers for having incorrect weights. James, perhaps, made overconfident by his clever defence, was caught once more. Superintendant Knight again charged him with 'serving beer after the stipulated hour', and this time he was found guilty and fined forty shillings.

One suspects that keeping a public house would, almost inevitably, lead you to minor skirmishes with the law. They may also arise from the publican's problems with the customers. In an incident, a few years later, we learn a little about the strength of Mary's character and also about her physique.

The *Northampton Mercury* for 5th July 1845 reports on the case of two young men, John Watts aged seventeen and James Allard, aged eighteen, who believed that they had discovered a foolproof scam to make some money while enjoying themselves.

They started off their travels at Islip on 28th April where James Allard went into the shop of a Mrs. Clark and asked for an ounce of tobacco. He paid with a half-crown piece and was given his change. At this point Watts came into the shop and asked Allard why he had used his half-crown, when he (Watts) had the coppers needed to pay for it and he put them on the counter. He asked Mrs Clark to give Allard back his half-crown who then returned her two shilling pieces and the rest of the change. She took up the coppers and all seemed fine.

It has some of the elements of a famous Abbott & Costello sketch of the twentieth century. It was, however, in the various movements of the coins that the trick was played, not in the amount of money which she received for the tobacco, which was correct. All this elaborate playacting was to confuse the shopkeeper so that, when Allard gave her back two shilling pieces, she did not notice that one of them was counterfeit. If they had given a single shilling at the beginning she might have realised that it was a dud coin.

They played the same convoluted trick on Abigail Talbot who kept a shop in Denford and, warming to their game, went to a public house there and bought a pint of beer each and went through the same routine. They must have been feeling more confident because this would have involved more time for the person behind the bar to discover the counterfeit coin. Continuing up the Nene they arrived in Ringstead and successfully played the same trick on Mrs Major who kept a beer shop there (I am not sure which one). The *Mercury* tells us, however, that, 'their career was drawing to a close because they went to a second beer shop kept by a shrewd little old lady named Hill'. This must have been Ann Hill at the *Black Horse* who would have been about fifty-eight years old at the time. Here we will let the reporter tell the story:

> *. . . they had a pint of ale, gave the same half-crown, received the change, and repeated the request that the half-crown might be returned as on the former occasions. But Mrs Hill had taken a keen look at her customers. She had lived long enough in the world to know that all is not gold that glitters, nor all half crowns of silver. It was her custom therefore, to examine all monies offered to her carefully, and the habit of examination had so grown that she also examined those she had paid as well as those she received. In the present instance this habit stood her in good stead: she observed that the two shillings which she gave in change for the half-crown were coined, one in the reign of William IV., and the other in that of his successor, our present sovereign lady. Her parting glance at her coin had not escaped the notice of the*

prisoners, and it seems to have instantly struck them that a little variation of the patent name would be necessary. When, therefore the request to restore the half-crown was made, it was not deemed safe to substitute for one of the old lady's well examined respectable shillings one of their own base coin, lest the exchange should be at once detected. Watts, therefore offered the bad shilling in place of the half-pence. Mrs. Hill, however, who evidently had her wits about her examined this shilling also, and when she had done she refused to alter the character of the dealing and give back the half-crown The prisoners grew angry and some altercation followed, which ended in Allard boldly charging Mrs Hill with having given him a bad shilling back. She admitted that the shilling was bad, but insisted that it was the one which the prisoner had given her, and that she had refused his request precisely for that cause. This renewed the altercation in the course of which Mrs Hill's husband came home and having learnt of the quarrel expressed a wish that he had possession of the shilling as in that case he would transfer both the shilling and its owners into the presence of a magistrate.

The young men left but were later apprehended by the constable. He found some bad shillings on Watts but, when he tried to get the bad shilling from Allard, he:

. . . thought it more prudent to get rid of such a witness against him, so he swallowed it; at least so the constable presumed for he did not think it prudent to carry his search within the range of the prisoner's well-armed jaws.

Allard and Watts were found guilty and were sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

It seem that Ann was nobody's fool and perhaps her carefulness had been increased because, not long before, she had seen one of her children nearly robbed of some money. James and Ann had eight children. One of these was named Green Hill in honour of her maiden name and he was baptized on 10th January 1813. One gets the idea that he was, perhaps, a little simple-minded but this may be unfair.

What we know of the incident comes from *The Times* of 19th July 1844 which has a report on a Crown Court case. It appears that, on the 6th July, Green(e) was sent by his master to Bythorn, to take, to the wife of Mr Ashby, her Sunday bonnet. He carried out the errand and Mrs Ashby gave him some beef and ale before he set off home. She handed him some money in a sealed envelope which she told him to give to his master. She also gave him 2d to buy a pint of beer at the public house at Keyston on the way back. The report continues:

Thus furnished, he set out, and to be sure, he did not forget that part of Mrs. Ashby's instructions which went to his procuring a pint of beer. At the public-house at Keyston it was his misfortune to meet the prisoner whom he had known in years gone by, and who offered to treat him to more beer than he seemed inclined to bestow upon himself. He, however, remembered the parcel wherewith he was intrusted, and, like a faithful messenger, declined to drink with the prisoner, but, like an imprudent one, told him the reason for declining – namely, that he was the bearer of a sum of money of which he must take especial care. The prisoner thereupon asked him some questions relative to the money, in which pocket he

carried it and so forth; and not only got all the verbal information that he sought, but induced the simple man to show him the wondrous parcel; and soon afterwards the prosecutor[Green] took his leave. The sun had gone down o'er the lofty fir-trees of Keyston when the prosecutor left the public-house and, like a prudent and well-furnished traveller, he pursued a noiseless tenor as he continued his course towards Ringstead, fearing lest he might attract the attention of some thief. The prisoner accompanied him through one or two fields and bade him good night at a stile which parted two 'lonesome' closes. In a few minutes the prosecutor was aware of the approach of some person from behind, but before he could turn round the prisoner had come upon him and threw a handkerchief over his head, and effectually blinded him. The traveller struggled in vain to get free and presently felt one of the assailant's hands at the pocket which contained Mrs. Ashby's letter and money; and with the hope of saving the treasure, he threw himself on the ground, dragging the prisoner down with him. A struggle then ensued, and the prisoner took out his knife and 'jabbed' it into the face immediately under one of the eyes of his opponent. Fearing for his life, [Green] now exerted his utmost strength, threw the prisoner from him and wrenched the knife out of his hand receiving, however a severe cut on his own at the same time. The prisoner, finding that he was getting the worst of it, then ran away, leaving his knife and handkerchief in the possession of the true man, who in due time arrived at Ringstead and delivered into the hands of his master the letter it had cost him so much to preserve.

The attacker, who was called John Elliot was apprehended and at the trial was found guilty and sentenced to be transported for 15 years. Green Hill might have been a rather simple, trusting young man but he was also a brave one.

James and Ann Hill continue at the *Black Horse* and the 1851 Census shows them still there. James is now sixty-six years old and Ann is sixty-four. Living with them are their four unmarried children, Green is thirty-seven, Harriett is thirty, Lydia is twenty-eight and Maria, the youngest is twenty-four. There is also a visitor Elizabeth Sharman who may be the daughter of their married daughter, Elizabeth. Green is put down as a 'publican's son, Harriett and Lydia are straw-bonnet makers and Maria is a milliner. Is it possible that Green Hill's delivery to Mrs Ashby was connected with the hats produced by his sisters?

On 16th May 1856 James Hill died, aged seventy-one years, and his will reveals that he was a horse-dealer. Perhaps surprisingly, by 1861 all the unmarried daughters have now left home and Green, still unmarried is working as an agricultural labourer. A sixteen-year-old girl is living in as a house servant to help Ann.

We know from an 1869 Directory that Ann is still selling beer then but just a few months before the next Census, on February 22nd 1871 she died. She was eighty-four years old and we can only surmise from what we have seen of her life that she was a tough, hard-working little woman.

The *Northampton Mercury* for 25th February 1871 advertised the *Black Horse* for sale, freehold, by auction at the *New Inn* on March 13th. We see from the details of the sale that James and Ann certainly were more than just publicans. Like many innkeepers they needed other income to survive or prosper. Besides the house containing: 'Parlour, tap-room, kitchen, cellar, five chambers and private sitting room,' there were also listed:

barns, stables, piggery and out-offices thereto belonging together with the Paddock adjoining, the same containing with the site of the building three roods and one pole, more or less.

A second lot contained' three roods and one pole, more or less', of arable land.

The son, Green Hill, by 1871, has become a drover, lodging with William Bull and his wife, Susannah. William is a shoemaker and grocer and the Bull family are dominating the High Street almost as the Greens and Hills controlled the public houses. Green too dies on 28th December 1878 aged sixty-five years.

The *Black Horse* is now run by the Robinson family. First it is Elijah and his wife Sarah Ann. He is a carrier, born in Denford, and at some time between 1871 and 1879 he becomes the innkeeper at the *Black Horse*. 1881 find him still there, publican, farmer and carrier, with his family. By 1891 he is just described as innkeeper and three years later his oldest son, William has taken over the business and Elijah has become a shepherd. He dies a year later.

We have taken the Ringstead public houses through to the end of the century. By the end of the next century, as with the local shop, the changing world was removing many of these village meeting places that help to make a collection of houses into a community.

Below is a list of Innkeepers and Beer Sellers. (Note: Abbreviations – fuller title when first used). It is not complete.

House & Date	Name	Source	Is Pub Named?	Notes
Swan Inn				
1822	Thomas Hill	L Victualler's List (LVL)	No house name given (NHNG)	
1837	Thomas Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	
1841	Mary Hill	N Mercury (NM)	NHNG	'Broken widows' court case
1842	Mary Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	Son John also
1847	John Fox	Directory (D)	YES (Y)	
1861	Mr Dickens	D	Y	
1862	Ekins Dickens	D	Y	
1871	Amos Mason	C	Y	Innkeeper farming 9 acres
1877	Amos Mason	D	Y	
1881	Jane Mason (widow)	C	Y	In Butchers Row
1885	Samuel William Bull	D	Y	Also Brazier and shopkeeper
1897	James Braybrook	Letter to G Capron	Y	
1901	James Braybrook	C	NHNG	Coal Merchant & Inn Keeper

1910	William Robinson	D	Y	'S. M Bull :beer retailer' but no inn
Black Horse				
1841	James Hill	Census(C)	NHNG	
1845	James Hill	NM	NHNG	'Counterfeit shilling' case
1847	James Hill	D	Y	
1851	James Hill	C	NHNG	
1854	James Hill	D	Y	
1856	James Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	*Will Register* calls him horse dealer
1861	Ann Hill	D	Y	
1862	Ann Hill	D	NHNG	
1869	Ann Hill (Mrs)	D	Y	
1871	Ann Hill dies	Burial Register	NHNG	
1877	Elijah Robinson	D	Y	And Carrier
1885	Elijah Robinson	D	Y	And Carrier
1894	William Robinson	D	Y	
Axe & Compass				
1822	Thomas Green	LVL	Y	
1841	Thomas Green	C	NHNG	Licensed 'Vitlor'
1847	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1854	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1861	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1862	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1871	Thomas Green	Census	Y	
1877	Thomas Green died	Burial Register	NHNG	
1877	Joseph Whittering	D	Y	
1885	Amos Mason	D	Y	
1894	Freeman Gaunt	D	Y	
1901	Harry G Bailey	D	Y	
New Inn				
1869	Samuel Figgis	D	Y	And Carpenter
1877	Henry Figgis	D	Y	
1885	Henry Figgis	D	Y	
1894	Arthur Archer	D	Y	
1910	Arthur Archer	D	Y	
No Inn Name				

1822	Lot Green	LVL		
1822	Thomas Lee	LVL		
1841	Elizabeth Forscutt	C		Beerseller. Nephew Henry shoemaker
1843	William Dolby	NM		Selling beer after hours
1845	Mrs. Major	NM		Counterfeit shilling case
1847	Henry Forscutt	D		Beer Retailer
1851	Thomas Austin	C		Tailor/Publican
1894	Alfred Sawford	D		Beer retailer & Carrier
1910	S. M. Bull	D		Beer Retailer but no inn

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Chapter twenty-seven

Lacemakers

Mary Dicks (nee Bates) (c1818 – 1859)

In 1919 Thomas Wright called his book, which concentrated on hand-made lace of the East Midlands including Northamptonshire*, The* ***Romance*** *of the Lace Pillow*. We also see photographs, from around this time, of old women sitting outside their cottage doors, in the Indian summer of the hand-made lace industry. Ten years after Wright's book, Miss C. L. Dalton, in the *Northampton County Magazine*, wrote:

> *Once upon a time the wayfarer passing through Northamptonshire villages would always find pillow-lace makers at the cottage doors in summer; at other seasons, if he had the curiosity to peer through the lattice, they would be seen by the fireside; the pillow spotlessly clean with its gay print drawter*, worker and cover, supported on the well-made stand of oak, ash or beechwood, familiarly called the 'The Maid'. On the dull gray parchment a fairy web would be growing, minute by minute, as the shining beads, twist and turn, the linen thread dexterously kept in place by a forest of pins.*
>
> *[* a 'drawter' was a cloth to cover the finished lace because grubby lace was unsaleable.]*

Hannah Peach. Taken in Photographic Studio 1884 -1900

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It has been written that, at one time, the lace worker could earn more than the agricultural labourer, so that women would make more at lace than the men working on the land. I have found no sign of this. Rather, we see poor home-workers, paid a pitiful piecework rate, trying to keep themselves and their families from the workhouse. Writing earlier, on July 8th 1780, the poet and hymn writer William Cowper, told his correspondent, Joseph Hill that:

> *If you ever take the tip of the chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the . . . lace makers. I am witness to their poverty and do know that hundreds in this little town [Olney] are upon the point of starving; and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it.*

There would have been little romance for Ringstead lacemakers, although there may have been some pride in their work.

Lace was, an unusual craft in that, from the start, it was seen as a gentile occupation for upper class ladies and a useful money-earner to teach paupers. Northamptonshire was not as renowned as Buckinghamshire or Bedfordshire, but it did have a significant lace industry from the early seventeenth, stretching into the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth, centuries.

Why these Midland counties together with Devon became the heartlands of the lace industry is not clear. Theories, from the influence of Katherine of Aragon, to the migration of Flemish workers fleeing the Inquisition, have been put forward but none have any hard evidence. But, as G. F. R. Spencely points out:

> *. . . the common feature among all rural workers, no matter what the time or region in which they are employed was poverty. Poverty had always created the necessity to supplement family income and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century this situation did not change.*

Where there was not sufficient other work for women and children, lace became a way of keeping off 'the Parish' and some workhouses encouraged the craft. Daniel Defoe, writing in 1730 wrote of lacemakers coming from:

> *The most idle, useless and burthensom part of our people, viz the younger women and female children. These were a real charge upon the diligent poor such as the husbandsmen, the farmers and the handicrafts of other trades . . . and were now made able to provide for themselves.*

I wonder what Mary Dicks and her fellow workers would have made of such a comment.

The *Northampton Militia list of 1777* states that there were between nine and ten thousand young women and boys employed in lace making around Wellingborough and about nine thousand involved in the trade around Kettering.

As we have heard there were concerns about the plight of the lacemakers in the eighteenth century and this continued into the nineteenth with concerns expressed about the effect of cheap foreign imports.

Our particular story starts with a marriage, on 23rd December 1813, at Raunds Parish Church. John Bates married Susanna Shaw and it seems likely that they are our subject's parents. John, we learn later, came from Piddinton or Paddinton or Puddington or Podington. On balance it is likely that he was the John Bates baptised on 27th December 1789, in Puddington or Podington, near Rushden although it is just over the county border in Bedfordshire. There is also some uncertainty about his bride but the best candidate seems to be the Susanna Shaw baptised in Brigstock on 23rd November 1788, the daughter of William and Elizabeth.

What we do know is that a John and Susanna(h) Bates had children baptised, and probably born, in Denford. The first child was Dinah, baptised on 17th September 1815 and again on 16th June 1816. Either the first child died (although her burial is not recorded), or she was baptised twice, the first one being a private one, as sometimes happened. Mary, the second daughter was baptised on 1st February 1818. Then followed twin girls, Susannah and Hannah, baptised on 1st July 1821.

If there was happiness at the birth of the twins, it very quickly turned to tragedy. Their mother, Susanna died some ten days later on the 11th July and the twins quickly followed, Hannah on August 18th and Susannah on 2nd September.

At some stage John had become a shopkeeper. We are not sure when this happened, or if it was a way of coping with his two young daughters while making a living. Unusually, for a man with a young family he did not marry again and we know that, on 14th April 1838, at his daughter Mary's wedding at Ringstead Parish Church, he was described as a Denford shopkeeper.

It is Mary who is the main subject of our story and she was marrying Henry Dicks, a farm servant, from Ringstead. Mary is described as a lacemaker and one wonders if she was taught by her mother or at a local 'Lace School'. Her older sister, Dinah had married in 1837 to Thomas Crane so John had no help for the shop or house and in 1841, now aged about fifty-three, we find him living alone and a labourer. Whether the loss of his daughters as helpers had any part in this we may never know. It is likely that he would have found labouring hard after his time as a shopkeeper and certainly by 1851 he is living with Mary and her family and is classified as, 'unable to work'. Ten years later he dies in Thrapston Union Workhouse. His death certificate states that he died of *Hydrothorax*, a condition which can still be dangerous, mainly in babies and old people, where the lung cavities are filled with liquid. It can often be a result of kidney or heart problems. He had probably been sickly for some time and the best hope he would have had of nursing and medical care was in the workhouse. It is the Bates women, however, who tend to die young and, unusually for the nineteenth century, it is the men who have long 'widowerhoods'.

In 1841, Mary is in Ringstead with her husband, Henry Dicks, and their first child, Susannah, just two years old. Unfortunately this Census does not usually give the woman's work unless she is the head of the household but we would expect Mary to have to continue with her lacemaking as long as her young child allowed her the opportunity.

Is it a coincidence that Henry and Mary's first child, Susannah, is baptised in Leicester on 12th April 1839 just as her uncle, Korah Dicks, had been baptised some twenty-seven years earlier?[see separate biography of Korah] Was there a family connection? Other children soon filled the house and Mary's time. First there were twin girls, Elizabeth and Mary Ann, baptised on 11th November 1841 followed by John on 28th January 1844, Joseph on 31st December1848 and Thomas in 1850.

It was in 1850 that Mary's husband, Henry, had pulled out the rotten tooth of Lydia Attley shortly before her disappearance and probable death [see story of William Weekley Ball]. Henry told the court that:

> *I am a labourer at Ringstead and have lived there all my days.*

He also reveals that he was, 'in the habit of drawing teeth', so it may be that he earned a little extra income by this work. Lydia, who in the 1841 Census is shown as a lacemaker, was a regular visitor at his house so perhaps the women would talk while they looked after the children or worked at their lace.

By the Census of 1851 Mary was thirty-four years old with six children, aged from eleven years to three months. Mary is now shown as a lacemaker, as are the three eldest children, Susannah (11), Elizabeth (9) and Mary Ann (9). It may be that they were taught and worked with their mother, perhaps also helping to look after the younger children. It is also possible, however, that they worked at one of the unofficial lace schools which were usually run by an older woman.

The 'National School' had not yet been planned but, as we saw in the story of the schoolmasters, there were, possibly, some 'Dame Schools', run by local women. In the main lacemaking areas these schools were often 'Lace Schools', where young children were taught the rudiments of lacemaking and sometimes a few basic letters and arithmetic. In some areas boys and girls would have attended, the boys usually even more unwillingly than the girls. In Ringstead the only record of a male lacemaker, that I have found, is one five-year-old boy, called Joseph Saddington in 1851. It was considered important to start the children working on the lace as young as five in order to get their fingers nimble enough to do the work.

A Mrs Roberts, who had lived as a child in Spratton, told of her experience of the lace school, which the children attended from the age of eight, in the middle of the nineteenth century:

> *. . . here the hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the winter. Half an hour was allowed for breakfast and for tea, and one hour for dinner so that there were ten hours for actual work. The girls had to stick ten pins a minute, or six hundred an hour; and if at the end of the day they were five pins behind, they had to work for another hour. On Saturdays, however, they had a half-holiday, working only to the dinner-hour. They counted to themselves every pin they stuck, and at every fiftieth pin they called out the time, and the girls used to race each other as to who should call out first.*
>
> *They paid twopence a week (or threepence in winter) for lights, and in return they received the money realised from the sale of the lace made and they could earn sixpence a day. Pay-day was a great event; it came once a month.*

> *In the evenings eighteen girls worked by one tallow candle, value one penny; the 'candle-stool' stood about as high as an ordinary table with four legs. In the middle of this was what was known as the 'pole-board', with six holes in a circle and one in the centre. In the centre hole was a long stick with a socket for the candle at one end and peg-holes through the sides so that it could be raised or lowered at will. In the other six holes were placed pieces of wood hollowed out like a cup and into each of these was placed a bottle made of very thin glass and filled with water. These bottles acted as strong condensers or lenses, and the eighteen girls sat round the table, three to each bottle, their stools being upon different levels, the highest nearest the bottle which threw the light upon the work like a burning-glass. In the day-time as many as thirty girls, and sometimes boys, would work in a room about twelve feet square with two windows, and in the winter they could have no fire for lack of room. The makers of the best lace would sit nearest the light and so on in order of merit.*

There are one or two schoolmistresses in Ringstead who may have run lace schools, such as Elizabeth Colston, originally from Sudborough (a lace-making village), who became the second wife of Isaac Gunn on 27th July 1840 when she was about 43 years old. In 1851 she is shown as an 'infant teacher' but we have no proof that she kept a lace school. (Elizabeth gave evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball).

It may be, as in Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise*, that the children learnt their lace within the community of women:

> *Queenie, in her childhood, had been 'brought up to the pillow', sitting among the women at eight years old and learning to fling her bobbins with the best of them. They would gather in one cottage in winter for warmth, she said, each one bringing her faggot or shovel of coals for the fire, and they would sit all day, working, gossiping, singing old songs, and telling old tales till it was time to run home and put on the pots for their husbands' suppers. These were the older women and the young unmarried girls; the women with little children did what lacemaking they could at home.*

Even if the children were at home it is likely that they sang the little rhymes or 'tells' to help the hours pass and establish a rhythm for the work. Thomas Wright tells us that the:

> *Northants tells have none of the gruesome features that characterize those of Buckinghamshire and they are less hoydenish and more sentimental than those of Bedfordshire. The Northamptonshire maidens do not gloat over ghosts, corpses, black coffins and gibbets, not do they throw turnips at the heads of inoffensive gentlemen who happen to be passing on horseback.*

I would be surprised if, given the chance, the Ringstead girls would not do all of these things. He does quote from some Northamptonshire 'tells' including this one which does help you picture the girls all working together:

Twenty pins have I to do,
Let way be ever so dirty.
Never a penny in my purse,
But farthings five and thirty.

Betsy Bays and Polly Mays,
They are two bonny lasses;
They built a bower upon the tower,
And covered it with rushes.*

*[*Custom of carrying rushes and garland to church on Rush-bearing Day.]*

For all the customs and mythology that surrounded the craft, it was tedious work for children. Pamela Horn records that many were only able to read or write very little, and their bodies were weakened by the bent posture they had to adopt over the bulky 'pillow'. Some girls even wore a wooden busk in their stays to support them in their work and this distorted their young bones and contracted their chests for life.

The people who might make good money from lacemaking were the dealers, who would usually own the patterns, provide the materials and buy the finished product (if it was satisfactory). In lace centres, such as Olney, some dealers became rich men. We do know that Ringstead had a lace-dealer in 1837. This fact emerges because the dealer, William Smith, left a will in which his profession is given. The will was read to the family by Mr Williamson, a local farmer. When he reached the part where William Smith had bequeathed the house, orchard and, 'all that pertained to it', to the son of his daughter, Mrs Partrick, his son, also William exploded in fury. Being the younger son, he would not have expected to inherit, himself, but he was furious that his eldest brother, who was married with three children, had not been left the property. William snatched the will and left and it is likely that he destroyed it as he threatened.

He was tried and sentenced to seven years transportation. Luckily for William, and to the great annoyance of Thomas Wilkins, the magistrate, the sentence was commuted to three months imprisonment.

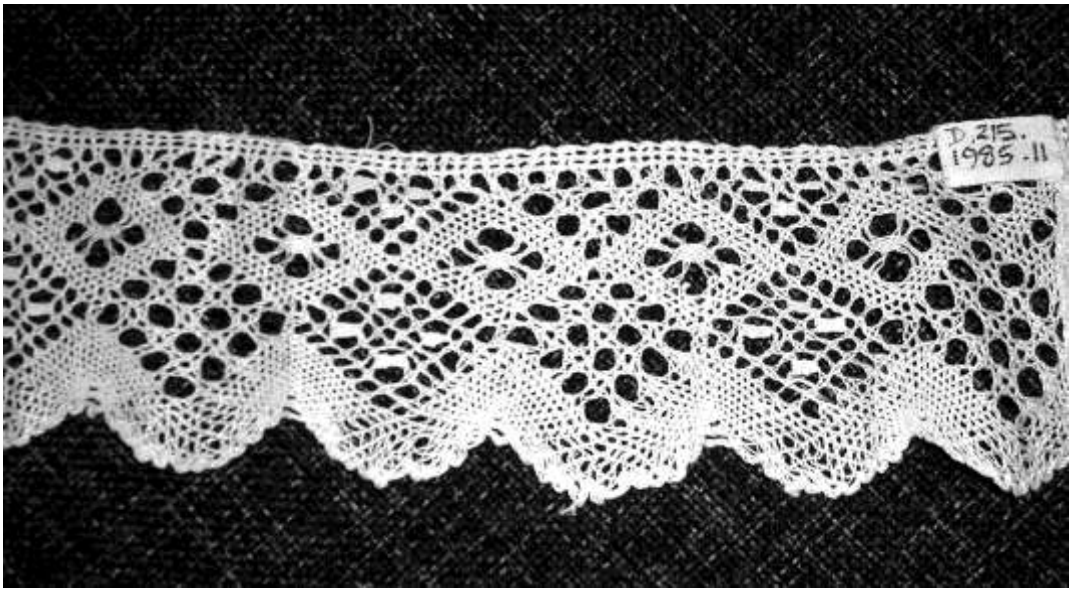
After the death of William I have not found another lace dealer but it is possible that a shopkeeper, such as Noah Green, the draper, carried on this work as an addition to his main source of income. On the other hand, a dealer from Wellingborough may have taken over the village. The 1840 Pigot's Directory does not show one in Thrapston but there are three 'Lace Manufacturers and Dealers' in Wellingborough and one of these, William Sears is definitely described as a 'dealer'. Flora Thompson tells us that in 'the hamlet', on the Northamptonshire/Oxfordshire border, Queenie used to store her lace away in blue paper and sell it once a year to the dealer at Banbury Fair.

Returning to 1851, the Census came at a time when handmade lace was struggling to compete with machine-made lace and foreign imports. The original Northamptonshire lace was a version of Buckinghamshire lace but there were subtle differences. Miss Dalton, writing in 1929 tells us:

> *Northamptonshire had its own characteristics. The clothwork of the Mechlin lace was utilised for small designs of conventional trend and geometrical shapes combined with the vagrant thread of Lille. The little points d'esprit, which also hailed from France, took the fancy of our county and we called them leadwork or plaits.*

I have found it difficult to find a clear illustration of Northamptonshire lace showing these characteristics and the local lacemakers would have made what the market, and their dealer, demanded, as far as they had the skill to do so. The lace and photographs that we have are almost entirely from the end of the century, or early in the next, and may not reflect the piecework products that Mary, and her like, made in Ringstead.

The first photograph below shows lace which, to my untrained eye, is chunkier and coarser than the fine Mechlin type lace produced earlier. It is perhaps a form of Bedfordshire Lace influenced by Maltese lace. It was probably produced by Mrs Jacques, or her daughter-in-law, of Rushden in the late nineteenth century. The donor had had to learn lace from Mrs Jacques, who was her grandmother, 'which she did not enjoy'.



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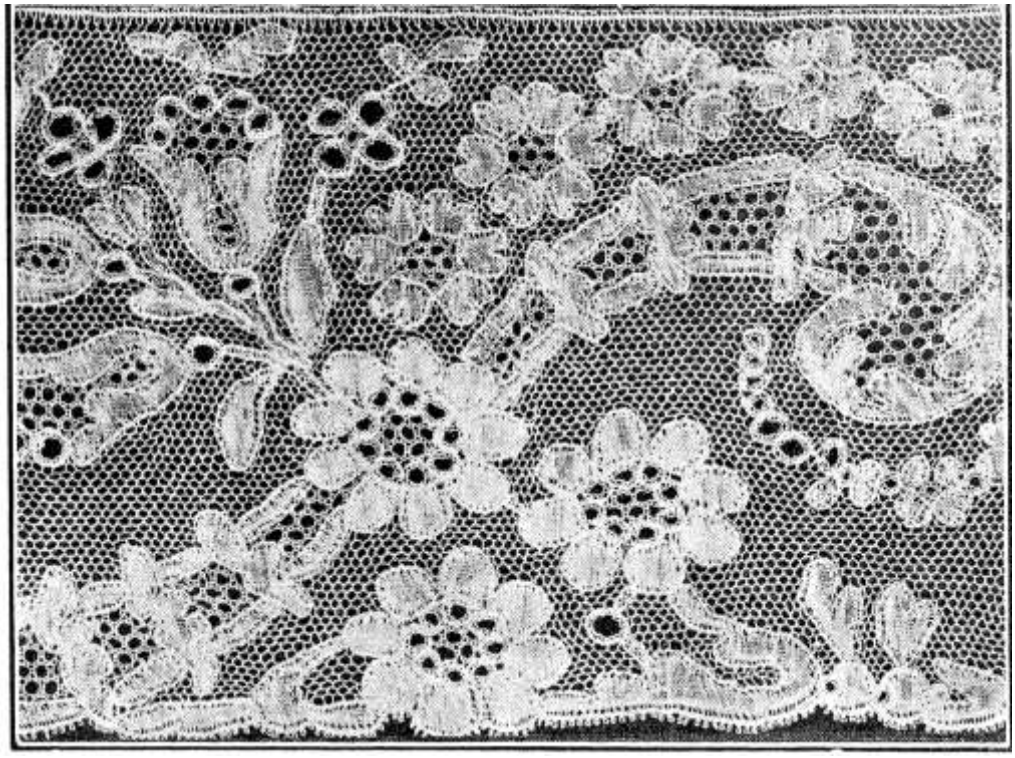
The second illustration is from Mrs. Dalton's article and shows fine Buckinghamshire style lace. This would almost certainly have been much more complex and finer than Mary and her children would have produced. It was made by Jane Onions (nee Storey), a shepherd's wife born in about 1842 in Upper Dean Bedfordshire, which is only some eight miles from Ringstead. At nine years old Jane was already a young lacemaker like Mary's children, as is her mother and sister. After marriage she lived in Newton Bromswold in Northamptonshire (although further away from Ringstead). She made lace for the infant robes of the future King Edward VIII which would have been some time after 1894. The piece below was made by Jane as she sat in a large shop window in London demonstrating her craft.



Buckingham Lace by Mrs Onions of Newton Bromswold.
From Art and Industry by Miss C. L. F. Dalton.

Much of the lace in the nineteenth century was for baby's clothes and pillow edging and, after 1840, for wedding dresses. The wedding of Queen Victoria had helped revive the declining lace industry. She had worn a white dress and had lace trimmings as well as a lace veil. Perhaps surprisingly, white had not been used for wedding dresses prior to this as it meant the dress was almost unusable after the event. Although the lace for the Queen's dress was Honiton lace (from Beer in Devon) it started a new fashion which helped the whole industry. It is reported that men began to make lace, because they could earn more from its production than their other work, but I have found no evidence of this in Ringstead. The trade was boosted again when Maltese lace, a form of plaited lace, was shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851. This was a rather showy, but quicker to make, type of lace and versions of this were produced in the East Midlands to meet this new demand.

Pamela Horn records that in the 1851 Census for Northamptonshire there were 10,322 female lacemakers of whom 754 were aged five to nine years and 2,124 aged ten to fourteen and that this is probably an underestimate as some part-timers would not have been recorded. This is a surprising figure, twice that quoted elsewhere but appears to be the correct one. It makes the Northamptonshire workforce on a par with Buckinghamshire and twice that of Bedfordshire and Devon. The 1841 Census, which only recorded seven lacemakers for Ringstead, the majority of them fifteen-year-olds, is not a reliable source, for most women's and part-time jobs went unrecorded unless the woman was the head of the household. In 1851, however there were 79 lacemakers (including eight hair lacemakers). This figure was made up of 6 aged five to nine years; 27 aged ten to fourteen; 17 aged fifteen to twenty; 27 aged twenty-one to sixty and 2 over sixty. In Ringstead, therefore, over 40% of the lacemaking workforce was under fifteen years old and almost entirely female. For most it was an additional family income and when a woman is a lacemaker and head of

the household she is often also a ‘pauper’. Thus it is with Ann Barker aged 52, Elizabeth Fairey, 78 and Jane Childs, 36, (whose husband is ‘away’).

By 1861 the fashion peak had passed again and machines were beginning to produce a type of Maltese lace and there are only six lacemakers shown in the Ringstead Census and shoemaking (mainly ‘closing’) had become most working women’s profession of choice. Mrs Bury Palliser, in her History of Lace, reported that:

> *In the Juror’s Report of the International Exhibition of 1862 the number of lacemakers in the counties of Buckingham, Northampton, Bedford and Oxford is estimated as 25,000.*

If this figure is correct, it is also true that, in the case of Ringstead, this does not reflect the sudden decline in laceworkers in the years before 1861 and, one suspects, that this was true across much the shoemaking areas where homeworking was the normal practice.

The Census figures for Northamptonshire mirror this decline in lace workers, until, by the end of the century there were only a few hundred left in the whole county who were earning a living by the craft.

Returning to the Dicks family, after the 1851 Census, more children kept arriving. There was William in 1853, Sarah in 1856 and finally Ellen in 1858. Mary was giving birth, on average, every two years. In their small cottage there would have been some six children for much of the time, with Mary trying to produce lace, while feeding and looking after her children, unless she could afford to send them to one of the small Dame Schools. Nevertheless, Thomas was her only child to die very young, being buried in November 14th 1854 aged three years. The Register also records that their house was in London End which was where many of the poorer villagers lived.

It would have been a hard, tiring existence. It is important to remember the conditions that Mary would have lived in, with almost certainly a communal dirt toilet outside; no running water or sewerage; probably only one room heated by an open fire or stove which would have served also for cooking; earth, brick or stone floors. Add to this poverty and then imagine being pregnant and ill in these conditions in cold wet weather. It must have been a miserable, debilitating time for Mary as she came to termination of another child towards the end of 1859. We know that the birth went wrong and that on 25th November 1859 Mary died and was buried in Ringstead churchyard. Like too many women at the time, including her own mother, she died from childbirth. Her death certificate records that she was forty-five years old and that she 'died of exhaustion, parturition, [childbirth] 44 hours'. It would have been her tenth child.

The older children would naturally have been, by this time, marrying and leaving the nest but, perhaps, their mother’s death accelerated this process. Mary had lived long enough to see the wedding of her eldest child, Susannah to William Samuel Bull, a shoemaker and grocer, in the spring of 1859.

The 1861 Census finds Henry a forty-eight year old widower with his daughter Mary, aged 19, acting as his housekeeper. His son John, aged 16, is a shoemaker and Joseph (12) is an agricultural labourer. There are still three children, William (7), Sarah (5) and Ellen (3) for the younger Mary to look after.

In 1863 Elizabeth married a shoemaker called James Braybrook and a year later, Mary, who had been looking after the house for her father, married George Bird Warren. John, the first son to leave, wed Caroline Stanner (or Starmer) in Kettering in 1866 and his brother Joseph married Sarah Ann Major early in 1871. The two younger daughters also left the family home to work as servants, Sarah Emma, aged sixteen to a Higham Ferrers grocer and Ellen, just thirteen years old, to the *Forester's Arms* in Thorpe End, Raunds.

So it was that in the 1871 Census, Henry, aged fifty-eight is living with only his son William still at home. His son John and family live next door and most of the rest are still living in the area.

Sarah married Josiah Branston in the year after the Census and Ellen married James Foskett in 1878. Finally William, the youngest son married Mary Ann Manning in 1879. By 1881, aged 68, Henry, Mary's widower, is living with his widowed daughter Elizabeth Braybrook and he is a 'rag and bone gatherer'. Henry died in 1890 aged seventy-eight.

Nowhere, among Mary's children, is there a sign that any of them continued to earn a living by lacemaking. In Ringstead, it had probably disappeared as a paid craft by 1870. The 1867 Factory Act had severely restricted the use of child labour and from 1870 a procession of Education Acts gradually forced children out of the workforce. Perhaps some people still made lace for friends and family but, probably, it had to wait to be revived, both as a craft and as a hobby, in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Following on from the work of William Morris and others hand crafts became popular again as a reaction to industrialisation and many books were written of its practice and history during this period.

In the Pall Mall Magazine of March 1896 Alice Dryden was able to write:

> *The custom of wearing lace, which has lain dormant for many years was revived in 1893 because Her Gracious Majesty has so often appeared in her own costly lace, or from a mere caprice of fashion; certain it is that lace is now a very important item in a well-dressed woman's wardrobe.*

She asserted that a woman with a family to look after could still earn between fourpence and sixpence a day, enough to pay the rent of her cottage. For the elderly, frail and 'crippled' the work could be done when they were able and so provide some income when little else was open to them. It is from this later flowering of the craft that the pictures of old ladies outside their cottages mainly come.

This Indian Summer of pillow lace came too late for Ringstead and the homeworking tradition was carried on into the boot and shoe making industry until that also declined and died because of mechanisation and cheap imports. In a sense, for all their drawbacks, the two crafts carried on the independence of the home and family-based peasant tradition.

From Pillow Lace in the Midlands by Alice Dryden.

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My special thanks to Brenda Hazel for information on the Bates and Dicks families. Also to Janice Morris for her article on Traditional and Modern Crafts: Lace-making.
Victoria Davies at the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery could not have been more helpful and went to great trouble to show me the relevant lace collection and photographs for which I am very grateful.

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Chapter Twenty-eight

Transported ?

John Hardy (c 1796 -?) & George Smith (c 1802 -?)

The two men whose stories we are telling in this piece are like figures caught by a car's headlights in a dark country lane. We are unable to see where they came from, and after their brief time in the headlights, they disappear into the darkness again. It may be that other people may recognize their stories and tell us a little more about who they were and what happened to them.

***

Among those who were born, worked and died in the village, Ringstead had other people who stayed there for just a short time and moved on: the navvies for the railroad, the men who repaired the church and its bells, the vicars and schoolteachers. There would also be the drift of hawkers and gypsies, itinerant labourers and vagrants. And there would be those looking for easy money, the thieves and vagabonds.

We are not sure if John Hardy came into this last category for, as yet, we have failed to find him with any certainty either before the events in Ringstead or after he left Portsmouth some four years later. We know that he was born in about 1796 but we are not sure how local was his place of his birth.

We learn from a report in the *Northampton Mercury* of 21st October 1837 that a James Smith, who was a cordwainer, living in Ringstead but working for Mr. Mark Sharman of Wellingborough, took some leather goods to his own home. He saw them safe on Monday 21st August but then went harvesting on the Tuesday and did not return until the Wednesday. It was on the Thursday morning that he realised that the leather goods were missing. It appears that John Weekley who was a shepherd employed by Mr Hill, a local farmer, had seen the 'shop' (probably workshop) broken open on the Tuesday and found a pair of tops lying on the threshold of the door.

It was alleged by Ezra Weekley that he had also had leather goods stolen. He had been in his 'shop' on the Sunday 20th and then, like James Smith, went harvesting with his son for two or three days. When he returned he found a quantity of leather and shoemaking materials had gone. His son, John Weekley, found the shop door open on the Tuesday morning at 7 o'clock. [The newspaper states the Monday but I think this may be wrong] and some pieces of leather belonging to Mr Sharman lying on the threshold.

So we discover from this evidence that the men were collecting their leather, from a factory owner or dealer in Wellingborough, and making up the shoes and being paid presumably on a piece-work rate. It may be that James Smith acted for Mr Sharman and was the carrier and middleman. We also see that they combined the shoemaking with working on the harvest. One would imagine that they

were working in the Ringstead open fields, soon to be enclosed, but the fact that neither returned home could imply that they had gone to a nearby village to earn extra money by bringing in the harvest**.**

Ezra Weekley might well have needed to earn extra money. His first wife, Susannah Major, with whom he had six children, had died in 1834 and just before the theft, on 20th June 1837, he had married Mary Bates. Mary was just twenty-five and half Ezra's age. It seems possible that Henry, a child born to Mary two years before Susannah's death, was Ezra's child and certainly he has the surname Weekley in 1841. Ezra went on to have five children with Mary before his death. In 1841 Ezra is put down as a labourer although in subsequent Censuses he is a 'shoemaker'. Did the Ringstead Enclosure of 1841 make it difficult for him to combine his shoemaking with other jobs as he had done previously?

John Hardy, the alleged thief, after leaving Ringstead had travelled to Tansor, further up the Nene beyond Oundle, and tried to sell the leather goods in the *White Horse* there. Unfortunately for John, the person he tried to sell the leather to, was John Garner, the local constable. Garner may also have been a shoemaker for he realised that the goods were worth some three times the fourteen shillings that Hardy was asking for them. He told John that they must be stolen by him or by somebody else. Hardy insisted that they were his own property and, in some desperation, offered them for ten shillings. The constable whereupon took the goods off him and detained Hardy while he made enquiries.

The jury did not believe his story, that he had found the goods, and he was found guilty. On the 19th October 1837, he was sentenced to transportation for seven years and taken back to the Northampton gaol. Later, all those men so sentenced, were taken from Northampton to Portsmouth ready for transportation. Along with John were John Sykes and George Baker sentenced to life, John Bird and Matthew Brown for ten years, John Clare for fourteen years and Samuel Clare, James Suitor, John Tirrell, James Coalbeck, Joseph Loveridge, George Butler and Joseph Tomlinson for seven years.

We are not sure how they were all taken to Portsmouth although it is possible that for part of the journey at least they were taken by the new 'railroad' for we know that in 1833 this method was used. On the 8th November 1837 they were put on a prison hulk called the *Leviathan* to await transportation. The *Leviathan* had been launched in 1790 and fought in the Napoleonic Wars. At the Battle of Trafalgar, she had been near the front of the line led by Nelson in the *Victory*. When the wars finished she, like many others, was taken out of service and she would have been sailed to Portsmouth and anchored and much of her gear taken away. As always, it seems, the prison population was too large for the normal gaols and these hulks were used as floating prisons, especially for those who were to be transported.

Most people's remembrance of the hulks will be from the episode of the escaped convict Magwitch, near the beginning of Great Expectations by Charles Dickens. Luckily we also have a firsthand account of the *Leviathan* by a man who was a prisoner on the hulk, in the summer of 1833, some four years earlier than John Hardy boarded her in chains. J. F. Mortlock in *Experiences of a C*onvict writes:

At any rate I was no longer shut up in gaol, to me the most dreadful of punishments, now, I hopes, done for ever. This, however, as will be seen, turned out to be a mistaken expectation. The hulk, an old (Trafalgar) ninety-gun ship being very full, contained more than six hundred convicts (from starvation and discipline, tame as rabbits), housed on the three decks, which were divided into compartments, separated from each other by bulkheads, and from the gangway down the centre, by iron bars giving the appearance of a menagerie. Owing to the height of the wharf, alongside of which she lay, the larboard row of cells on the lower deck, was nearly in darkness and insufficiently ventilated. 'New Chums' therefore in their location down below breathed very foul air. . . A pernicious habit also existed of sluicing out all the decks every morning with salt water. . . The chilly dampness arising from this proved a fertile source of sickness.

. . . As a reward for three months of good behaviour, a light ring (called a basil) above the ankle, scarcely to be felt, succeeded the irons. Upon losing the weightier decorations my foot in walking used to fly up in an odd manner for some time afterwards, till the muscles got used to their lighter load. . . I found the carrying of timber and other hard work very irksome at first, although labour is not a severe punishment to a strong man well fed; but we suffered from a lack of sufficient food… Hence the mortality was great, it being whispered that the head doctor at the hospital ship, enjoyed a contract for supplying surgeons in towns with bodies for dissection at six guineas a piece.

The *Prison Hulk Register* for the Leviathan tells us that John Hardy was single and that he could both read and write. It also confirms that he was a labourer. Under the heading, 'Gaoler's Report', it just states, 'Unknown'. This may mean 'not known' but it may also be that this was John Hardy's first offence. When we look on the same page of the register we see the prisoners described as:

As bad as can be
Bad. In Prison before
Character and Connections bad
Before transported

If John was new to crime and prison this must have been a daunting experience, locked up with hardened criminals in a rotting hulk of a ship. J. H Capper, who was Superintendant of the convict hulks, when answering questions from members of the House of Lords on 17th March 1828, gave the official view of the strict daily routine on the hulks in Portsmouth harbour. A gun was fired at a quarter to six to summon hands, followed at six o'clock by the prisoners lashing up their hammocks and breakfast a quarter of an hour later. When the dock workers started work the convicts were sent ashore although some remained on board to clean the ship for inspection at half past nine. The convicts were:

. . . mustered out of the ship in gangs, and received on shore by the officers, quarter-masters and guards; the latter (under the inspection of the two former) strictly searching their persons to prevent the concealment of anything tending to facilitate an escape, or contrary to the rules and orders of the ship.

So the day continued with the prisoners going back on board for dinner at half-past twelve (taken, it appears, in their cells). They started work again at a quarter to twelve. Supper was at quarter past six and, in 'divisions', the men then went to evening prayers in the chapel. The last group attended prayers at quarter to eight and all the prisoners were locked up in their cells for the night.

The work they did was:

> *. . . everything that is most laborious the Navy Board give them to do and at the Ordnance, the painting of ships in the harbour, removing ballast out of and into the ships, cleaning all the ships out, taking up the mooring chains, removing the timber, clearing the mud from the docks, etc.*

To do this work each convict had a weekly allowance of 1lb 12 oz of barley, 1lb 5 oz of oatmeal, 8lb 12 oz of bread, 3lb 8oz of beef, 12 oz of cheese, 3½oz salt and 7 pints of small beer. There seems a good deal of beef and a complete lack of vegetable and fruit. In general, the food was probably served as stew or 'slop' and the beef would be the least desirable parts of the animal.

The prison hospital in Portsmouth dealt with the diseases that the conditions in the hulks worsened or caused. At times, the nineteenth century can seem very close to us but occasionally a statement, like the one given below in July 1831 by the chaplain, William Tate, in the half-yearly Parliamentary Report on Conduct of Convicts in Portsmouth Harbour, reminds us that it was a different age.

> *In the Hospital the mortality has been greater than usual; but in nearly all the individuals whose cases were considered dangerous, the marks of deep remorse and sincere penitence were very striking and consolatory*.

The Register also records that John was pardoned in 7th May 1841. Most of the others have VDL, (Van Diemen's Land now Tasmania, in this column so it seems that he was never transported but stayed on the hulk for four years before being freed. How this might be so was answered by J.H. Capper in the House of Lords. When asked whether all those sentenced to seven years transportation were sent, Capper replied:

> *Those that have been on the hulks before, or have been in gaol more than once, are usually sent abroad; but those who are not known to have been convicted are generally detained for employ in the dock-yards, and remain in the hulks for certain periods, till the Secretary of State thinks fit to recommend them to the King for pardon.*

Mr Capper goes on to say, however, that many men sentenced to seven years transportation were sent abroad because they formed a high proportion of the total convicts on the hulks. The 'Not Known' on the Hulk Register was significant in keeping John Hardy in this country. The Superintendant also states that:

> *No prisoner is discharged till he has served one moiety of his sentence; and it is very rare that this is prior to four years.*

He reveals that the officers on the hulks recommended a certain number of the convicts quarterly, on the basis of exemplary conduct throughout, vouched by the chaplain and the officers. John Hardy

had obviously kept out of trouble and worked well on the docks, for he seems to have served the minimum period possible. This policy of not transporting those sentenced for the shorter period may seem a humane one but actually the Governor of New South Wales had found the seven-year convicts less tractable and more troublesome than those sentenced to longer sentences. He stated that they believed that they would get home after some six years no matter how well they worked whereas those with longer sentences were hoping good behaviour would give them some mitigation of their sentence.

What happened to John Hardy next? He would have only been some forty-five years old although life on the hulk may have injured his health. Did he return home? He should be in the 1841 Census somewhere but so far I have been unable to trace him, in this or later Censuses. This may be due to our lack of knowledge of the origins of a stranger who, one day, may have passed through Ringstead while the men were away harvesting and decided to look for easier money than labouring provided.

In 1833, some four years before John Hardy's fall from grace another man was caught stealing in Ringstead. This was a more complicated case and our man was almost certainly a more practised thief than John. His name, among others, was George Smith and there are two George Smiths born in Ringstead about the right time: one was the son of Thomas and Dinah who was baptised on 15th September 1800 and the other was George Peter Smith the son of William and Sarah born on 21st February 1802 and baptised a few months later. We cannot be sure that either is our man.

William Coleman, a farmer in Ringstead had a mare which he kept in a fenced yard close to his house. The gate was not locked and on the 7th (or 9th) of January 1833 he found that she had gone. He had bred the mare and knew that she had a distinctive mark on her leg which he recognized when he went to Guyhirn, in the Isle of Ely, to see a mare in the constable's possession. He had once employed a certain George Smith to take this mare and three others to market in Higham Ferrers although Coleman insisted that Smith was not authorised to do anything but get them to the market. Two of the three were sold but the mare and another one were brought back. He had wanted twenty-five pounds for the mare and would not have accepted anything less than twenty-four.

Leonard Freeman, who lived at Leverington, gave evidence that on 9th January a William Foskett had come to him saying that he had a horse to sell. Freeman went to Guyhirn, where Smith and Foskett had the horse and bought the mare for fifteen pounds. The *Northampton Mercury* report of the trial is a little confused but it appears that, at this point, Robert Oldfield, the constable at Guyhirn impounded the mare and took Smith into custody. At the trial, in the Isle of Ely Lent Assizes, Smith claimed that Coleman had told him to sell the horse as he 'had not a shilling left'. Foskett, on the other hand, made no defence but called two witnesses to give him a 'good character'.

It seems that Foskett's policy was the right one for he was acquitted whereas George Smith was sentenced to transportation. It is almost certain, however that the jury thought that George Smith was the prime mover in this theft and also that this was not his first offence. A George Smith was given three months imprisonment in 1831 in Northampton for, with eight others, feloniously breaking a threshing machine. This was part of the agricultural riots which started in 1830 and often known as the 'Captain Swing Riots' in protest against the new machines and farming methods that were impoverishing many farm labourers. We do not know if this is the same George Smith and he was not the leader of the machine-breakers because other accused men received 12 months in gaol.

The reason that it seems likely that he had indulged in criminal activities before is that at his trial, he is said to have an alias, John Allen, and, later, we see that he was also known as John Hill. A law-abiding farm labourer would have been unlikely to have had two aliases. There is a story to be told here but for the present we can only infer his criminal past.

The court sentenced George to transportation for life. He was just thirty years old when, on 13th April 1833 he was received on the prison hulk, *Justitia* on the Thames at Woolwich. The *Justitia* had originally been built in Calcutta and named the *Admiral Rainier*. She was taken into the Royal Navy in 1804, re-named the *HMS Hindostan* and fought in the East Indies where she carried out escort duties. She became a store ship and then a troopship again and saw action at Charlestown before taking troops, in 1809, to restore order after the Rum Rebellion in New South Wales. In 1811 she again became a store ship and in 1819 was renamed *Dolphin*. In 1824 she was hulked as a prison ship at Woolwich and finally renamed *Justitia*. This list is a simplification of her many incarnations but this was not unusual at this time, with constant changes of name and function often happening, especially among the smaller ships. Wooden ships were much easier to fit and re-fit than their steel descendants.

Convicts being rowed out to a prison hulk, probably the *Justitia c. 1835.*
(After work by George Cook, Samuel Prout).
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Conditions on the *Justitia* for George Smith would have been similar to John Hardy on the *Leviathan* although George would have probably have been more severely treated. We know that the hulks were unhealthy places to be, as J. F. Mortlock told us in his *Experiences of a Convict* and we have further proof of this in the Surgeon's Report of one of the Convict ships taking men to New South

Wales in 1833. A. Ferguson, Surgeon on the convict ship Jupiter, kept a *Medical and Surgical Journal* from 24th December 1832 to 1st June 1833. His report includes the following:

> *There were 28 cases of herpes and 16 of itch among the convicts in February 1833. The diseases appeared to have been brought from the hulks, particularly the Justitia.*
>
> *The convicts were in [tolerably] good health and [mostly] middle aged but weakened by diarrhoea. Cholera existed in both the hulks at Woolwich and was probably the source of the bowel complaints.*

We know from the *Hulk Register* that George was transported with many of his fellow inmates on 10th June 1833. It is likely that the ship would have sailed round to Portsmouth to pick up further convicts from the hulks there and there may have been some delay before they finally embarked on the long journey to Australia.

On August 25th of that same year the convict ship *Amphitrite* ran aground at Boulogne. The female prisoners, who were battened down under the hatches broke away the half deck hatch and rushed on deck, pleading with the surgeon and captain to let them go ashore in the longboat. The captain, who had refused assistance, did not feel able to liberate prisoners entrusted to his care. The broadside of the disaster continues:

> *About seven o'clock the flood tide began. The crew, seeing that there was no hopes, clung to the rigging. The poor 108 women and 12 children remained on deck, uttering the most piteous cries. The vessel was about three quarters of a mile from shore, and no more. Owen, one of the men saved, thinks that the women remained on deck in this state about an hour and a half.*

All the women and children and many of the crew were drowned. But in all only five convict boats were wrecked, so it seems unlikely that George was lost in this way, and, unfortunately, this is where our story of George must end. Of course, there are many George Smiths who were transported during this period but none of them seem to fit the facts about our George, as we know them. Did he escape, or die, or are his records lost?

So we have two men convicted of stealing from people in Ringstead in the 1830s who were sentenced to transportation. John Hardy was pardoned but we have been unable to find him again and George Smith seems to have disappeared from the records.

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Chapter Twenty-nine

Last Words

Herbert Abington (1847 – 1872)

For most people in these biographies we only catch glimpses of them, as through cracks in a fence, from the official records. A number of the Abington family have featured because they have left more of their lives behind than their neighbours. We see mainly a family of shopkeepers, tailors and craftsmen, usually with a strong Nonconformist faith. The Abingtons, however, as the little *'Memoirs'* of Leonard Joseph and his son Leonard James are at pains to emphasise, were from an old family of landed gentry from Cambridge, dating back to the Norman Conquest. They had owned estates in Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire and suffered for their Catholic sympathies during the Tudor and early Stuart periods.

The estates eventually passed by bequest, on the death of Thomas Abington, to the Crompton family of Hartpury in Gloucestershire. The ancestors of the Abingtons of our story had become lawyers and musicians at the Georgian royal courts. Unmentioned in the *Memoirs* is Mrs Francis Abington who was briefly married to one of the Abingtons on her way from flower girl to famous actress and notorious celebrity before dying in relative poverty. It was into this line of musicians that Leonard Joseph was born but his father died when he was very young and, although he was also a musician, he had to be apprenticed to a trade [see chapter on Leonard and Herbert senior]. He later came to Ringstead as the Baptist pastor and his son Herbert Joseph became the village tea dealer, grocer and chemist.

We see the children of Leonard Joseph spread across England and beyond from London to the Potteries, Bristol and Northamptonshire. Their children, too, often looked beyond their home towns or villages for work. We have seen the sons and daughters of the village's agricultural labourers emigrating across the world but the regular visiting and links across long distances was something unusual in Ringstead at this time. Of course they were helped by the new cheap national postal and railway networks. The diary of Herbert Abington junior reveals people visiting relatives in Ringstead from London and returning home within the course of a long day.

Herbert Joseph Abington had married Kezia Bull who was from a local family also with a strong Baptist tradition. Her mother and father had kept the Ringstead Paper Mill and after her husband's death his widow had continued for a time with the work [see biography of William Mitchell]. Both Herbert and Kezia came from large families and this web of uncles and aunts and cousins provided the network that the main characters moved along in this story.

Herbert was the couple's sixth child, born in Ringstead on 28th July 1847. He followed Jedidah Louisa (1837), Leonard Joseph (1838), Ebenezer Edwin (1840) and Mary Jane (1843). A brother, Benjamin Edmund, had been born two years previously to Herbert and died when Herbert was some five years old. Another brother, Joshua James, was born two years later but died within a few months. His

namesake was born in 1851 and finally the youngest child, Samuel Edmund was born in 1856. With cousins often having similar names it is a complex family tree in which a name like Jedidah stands out as a welcome certainty.

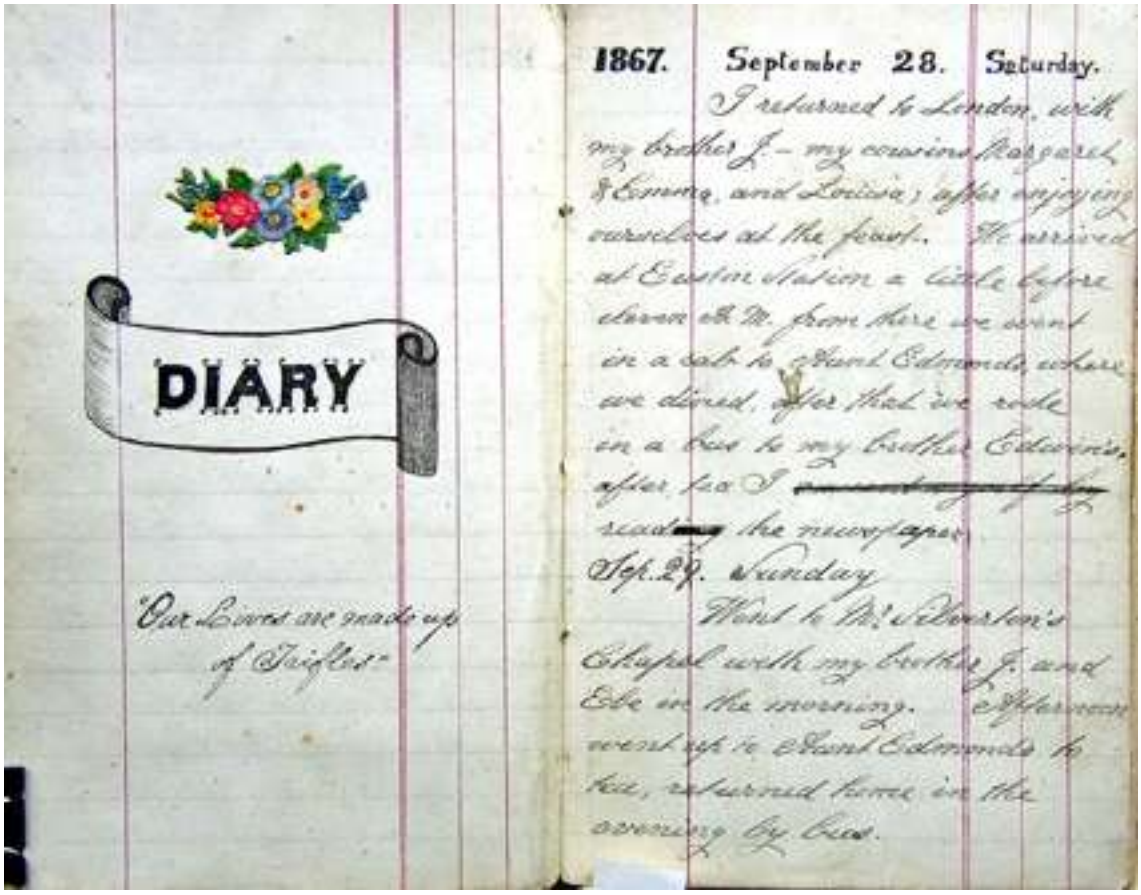
Herbert, like his brothers and sisters had to learn a trade and in 1861 he is recorded as a baker. His uncle, Andrew Bull, was the village baker so it is likely that Herbert was learning his trade with him. He is only thirteen and it is unclear how long he carried on with this work.

In September 1867 he took a small brown cashbook and on the second page he wrote his name, 'Ringstead 1867', and a short verse telling people to keep out.

Frontispiece of Diary
With the kind permission of Muriel Pack

On the first double pages he carefully wrote '**DIARY'** on another carefully drawn scroll and beneath it the quotation, 'Our Lives are made up of Trifles'. On the opposite page he wrote in bold lettering '**1867 September 28. Saturday**' and underneath the first entry:

> *I returned to London with my brother J [Joshua] – my cousins Margaret and Emma [Edmonds] and Louisa [Bull]; after enjoying ourselves at the feast. We arrived at Euston a little before eleven A.M. from there we went in a cab to Aunt Edmonds where we dined, after that we rode in a bus to my brother Edwin's. after tea I ~~amused myself by~~ read~~ing~~ the newspapers.*



First Entry in Diary.
With the kind permission of Muriel Pack.

As we have said, Herbert's mother, Kezia's, maiden name was Bull and she had at least six brothers and sisters. As Baptists they believed in adult baptism which can cause siblings to be hidden from our view but the family included Sarah, Susannah, Kezia, Eneas (Enos), Eliza, William, Andrew and Samuel. Two sisters, besides Kezia, had stayed locally. Sarah had first married Thomas Cheney and, on his death, George Smith: Susannah had married Noah Abbott. However, a younger sister, Eliza, had moved to London where she had married John Edmonds in 1849. John was a carpenter who had been born in Willoughby in Warwickshire and the couple lived in Clerkenwell in London. They seem to have been a very welcoming family and from the start, aunts, nieces and nephews are staying with them. In 1861 Herbert's brother, Leonard Joseph, a journeyman Butcher, is staying with his uncle and aunt and their daughters, Selina, Margaret and Emma.

At this time Ringstead was on the Blisworth -Thrapston (Bridge Street) - Peterborough line so villagers had many choices and could pick up trains going north or south to London at Northampton, Wellingborough or Peterborough. From Thrapston's Midland Road station, via part of what is sometimes called the *Varsity Line,* they could get to the main lines at Huntingdon and Cambridge or go north through Kettering.

Entrance to Euston Station (now demolished).
© British Library Board (074019).

When the young people arrived for the first time at Euston Station it must have been something of the shock with the large classical style Great Hall some 126 feet (38m) long, 61ft wide (19m) and an incredible 64ft (20m) high. Outside, they would have left through the great Classical archway. We know that some of his companions would already have seen it but we are not sure if Herbert had already been in London. The phrase 'I returned to London with my brother' could be read either way. He was staying with his brother Edwin (Ebenezer) who had married Elizabeth Barringer and at this time was probably living in Riley Street, Bermondsey with their small daughter Louisa. Within the next two years he had acquired a tailoring business in Kimbolton, not far from Ringstead).

There were other relations in the area on whom Herbert could call. 'Ebey' (Ebenezer) Smith, the son of his mother's eldest sister Sarah and her second husband George Smith, was living in the area. So Herbert had places to stay and people to see. It would have been an exciting if rather daunting experience for any young man with, close at hand, magnificent buildings and opulence but also the terrible poverty and dangers of Dickens's London.

Two days after he arrived we see that there is a serious reason for his move to the capital.

> *Sept. 30 Monday*
> *Went to Brompton Hospital and got a supply of medicine and oil, commenced as an outpatient August 5. I rode there and back by steamboat. Edwin brought the harmonium home.*

So Herbert had already been to London although whether he had been working or for treatment we cannot be sure.

Brompton Consumption Hospital.
From Old and New London by Edward Walford (Cassell 1880).
With the kind permission of www.lookandlearn.com.

Earlier in that same year of 1867, John Timbs, in *Curiosities of London,* tells us that Brompton Hospital:

> *. . . fronting the Fulham-road was commenced in 1844, June 11 when Prince Albert laid the first stone; the site was formerly a nursery garden and the genial moist air of Brompton has long been recommended for consumptive patients.*
>
> *The Hospital is in the Tudor style of red brick with stone finishings; Francis, architect; it was opened in 1846. In 1850 was attached an elegant memorial chapel and in 1852 was added the western wing of the Hospital . . . The Hospital is ventilated by machinery, worked by a steam engine and is warmed by water heated by two large Arnott stoves. In the kitchen steam is used for boiling caldrons of beef-tea, mutton-broth, arrow-root, coffee, chocolate etc; and the provisions are wound up a shaft to the respective wards. The patients take exercise in the well-ventilated passages: and the wards are tempered by warm fresh air which enters at the floor, and escapes by valves in the ceiling.*

That Herbert was going to Brompton Hospital tells us that he was almost certainly suffering from Tuberculosis (TB), Phthisis pulmonalis or Consumption, one of the greatest killers of the Victorian age which could strike all classes. It was the equivalent of today's Cocaine-chic with the loss of weight, pallid complexion and the slow death endowing it with a romantic, poetic aura that it did not deserve. Byron had said that it was his chosen way of death.

What we now see in the diary are visits to various chapels and churches, walks to the Elephant and Castle and Billingsgate but also visits to a show which was part of the great Victorian interest in the occult and the paranormal.

> *October 1 Tuesday*
> *Began to learn the harmonium, in the evening went to a Mesmeric entertainment, and saw a young lady in a clairvoyant state.*

Mesmerism had been particularly popular in the 1840s and was popularised by Franz Anton Mesmer who believed that an occult force, called 'animal magnetism', could be channelled to effect trance-like states and healing. It may be that Herbert was also hoping that it offered some relief for him and certainly it was used as a form of hypnotherapy to calm and ease the symptoms of patients. In this case it was probably more of a stage show but, as his cousin Samuel Abington reveals some years later the paranormal was taken very seriously even among some devout Nonconformists. The scientists were producing a magical world of dinosaurs and electricity and suddenly everything seemed possible.

Herbert also reports that London is sometimes very cold and foggy which would not have helped his breathing. On October 10th he reports:

> *Leonard called early, had breakfast with us, then I went to the Elephant and Castle Station with him. In the evening I received my notice to go into hospital.*

On Monday October 14th he went into Brompton Hospital accompanied by his brother Joshua. Unusually he writes in detail both of the hospital and its routines and it is worth quoting his first few days there in full:

> *. . . I arrived there about 3 and found myself possessed of a comfortable little bed, a little cupboard called a locker, with a pink mug, a spittoon and butter dish. I ought to have taken a knife, fork and spoon, butter and sugar, but as my notice did not express that I went without and found to my grief when tea time came, there was no sugar in the coffee, or butter to the bread, so I did without. I could easily have borrowed what I wanted but being a stranger, I did not like to ask any of the patients, and none of them noticed me. After tea four of us had a game of dominoes and I got on better at supper time. I had half a pint of beef tea with what bread I liked, after supper we went to bed, but it was just beginning morning before I could get to sleep, hearing the strange noises so many people coughing and one young man in our ward sat propped up all night, he was too ill to sleep, but at length most of the noises were hushed, and I sank into the arms of Morpheus and slept until six in the morning.*

There are four meals a day here, breakfast at half past eight, consisting of bacon or eggs and coffee or cocoa according to the doctor's orders; Dinner at 1. Meat vegetables and pudding. Tea at 5, coffee or cocoa and bread and butter or marmalade. Supper at 8 beef tea or milk and after that barley water for those that like to drink in the night. Patients (that are able) have to rise at 8 in the morning in winter and half past seven in the summer, and be in bed by nine at night. There are [no] fires allowed in any of the wards, but the temperature is kept up to 65 degrees by pipes. Patients (that are able) have to take all their meals in the gallery, and each one has to take his own mug, knife, fork and spoon with him, and keep them clean. The hours for visiting are from 2 to 3 on Tuesdays and Fridays and from two to four on Sundays.

Cod liver oil is brought into the gallery on a tray, twice a day, and all have to go there and take it together. Divine service is held in the chapel at 11 and half past six on Sundays and at 11 in the morning on Wednesday and Friday.

Oct 15 Tuesday
I got up between six and seven, had a wash and went down in the grounds, to ask the gatekeeper to get me some butter and sugar, which he did. About 10 o'clock the clinical assistant (Mr Young) came to examine and sound me, and soon after that Mr Edwards the house doctor came to sound me again, and just as we were sitting down to tea Dr Thompson came and I had to strip again for another sounding. In the evening the nurse came and put me a blister on, which I kept on till morning. Slept pretty well.

Oct 16 Wednesday
After breakfast the nurse clipped my blister, and dressed it with ointment to keep it open. I saw Richard Adams for the first time. There was a service in the chapel at eleven this morning. It is Church of England doctrine and patients who are not members of the church are not obliged to go, if they are very ~~old~~ ill, they can have their own minister to see them. In the evening the chaplain gave a lecture on the 'birth of Christ'.

October 17 Thursday
Had my blister dressed again. It was our day for setting tables and clearing away. Bought some wool and began to make a mat.

The main breakthroughs, in the nineteenth century, in cutting TB deaths were the improvement in living conditions and the recognition in the 1890s that milk from infected cows was one of the major sources of infection. Nevertheless the new hospital at Brompton did help patients. As John Timbs reported in 1867:

> *The deaths in this new Hospital have never exceeded one in every five in-patients, whereas in the former Hospital they were one in four.*

We know that statistics can be manipulated by clinical practice but Herbert was probably in the best hospital in England for treatment of tuberculosis. It had been founded by Philip Rose, a young solicitor, as many London hospitals, because of the long-lasting and frequently terminal nature of the disease, had rules specifically excluding consumption sufferers. Nevertheless, unlike Smallpox

which had virtually disappeared by the end of the century, really effective treatment did not come until the middle of the twentieth century when effective antibiotics were discovered.

Even the best Victorian doctors could only use treatments that seemed to have some effect without really understanding the nature of the disease. The use of 'blisters' like those given to Herbert was really a leftover from an earlier practice. From the early 1800s it was believed that the body could only contain one illness at a time: when a second illness entered the body, the first would be forced out. Hot plasters were put on the skin to burn it and form a blister which was then opened and drained. Any effectiveness seems to have stemmed from the pain of the blister focussing the mind away from the chest and so reducing coughing.

Herbert also 'bought some wool and began to 'make a mat'. My own brother was in hospitals and hospices much of his life and the making of plastic wicker trays and Readicut rugs were an important part of his keeping busy and passing of time. The mat is never mentioned again so perhaps Herbert quickly wearied of it.

On Monday October 21st he was weighed and was 8 stone 10½ pounds (we later discover that he was 5 feet 7½ inches which would have been an average height for a man). On the Friday of that week Jedidah, with her friend and landlady (and perhaps employer) Mrs. Elizabeth Spence had visited Herbert. Elizabeth Spence and Jedidah had been in service together with Carlos Chamberlin (or Chamberlain) in the wealthy Victoria Park area of Manchester. [see separate biography of Jedidah.] Elizabeth, a widow, opened a grocer's shop in Rusholme in the 1860s and it seems that Jedidah may have worked for her (although in the Census she is not shown with a profession). Elizabeth and her daughter Mary Eleanor, usually put as M.E. in the diary, had become great friends of Jedidah and, through her, of the Abington family.

Herbert was allowed to leave the hospital and stay with his brother Edwin and his family in Southwark for a few days. He went to Madam Tussauds with his two Manchester visitors and on the Sunday his brother Leonard, Aunt Edmonds and Margaret Edmonds all came to tea with him at Edwin's house. On the Monday he bought a muffler for 2s 6d ($12½p$)and in the afternoon he returned to hospital. Away from his friends he dwells again on his illness.

> *Oct 29 Tuesday*
> *I read that it is computed that 78,000 persons are constantly suffering from consumption in England and that the deaths among those patients are as many as 39,000 within that year. In the last report of the Registrar general it is stated that in the metropolis the deaths annually from consumption are 7,500, the average number of sufferers from the disease being 15,000.*

On most days he went to church in the Hospital (which may have been held, at the beginning of his stay, in the Committee Room during repairs to the chapel), and had occasional visits from Jedidah, Leonard, Edwin, and Selina and Aunt Edmonds and Mr Kitchen. On Tuesday 5th November he wrote on the Gunpowder Plot. Did he know that an Abington had been involved?

The next day he reveals that he now weighs 8 st. (stone) 13 lbs (pounds) a gain of 2½ pounds. His thoughts, however, naturally still dwell on death.

> *November 8th Friday*
> *Milton died on Sunday 1674 in his 66th year and so tranquil was his departure that his attendants were unable to determine the hour of his death.*

> *November 9th Saturday*
> *Patrick O'Shea the soldier that attempted to commit suicide by opening a vein in his arm about three months ago, died this morning.*

The visitors are not quite so frequent now and, when they do not come on a Sunday, he admits to feeling, 'rather dull'. We hear that the ward had a selection of books which were changed on a regular basis and that he enjoyed reading a volume of *Sunday at Home*. This was a weekly 'Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading' published by the Religious Tract Society which was often bound into annual volumes. It contained a miscellany of short stories, quizzes, coloured illustrations and short discussions of biblical texts.

He reports that he has gained 1½ pounds and is now '8 St. 0½ lbs'. Then he has a relapse

> *Dec 6 Friday*
> *Felt very poorly, had the headache very much. The assistant came to see me and gave me a draught of Mist Salic. Felt a little better in the evening. Dr Williams visited us.*

Salicylic Acid was derived from willow bark and relieved headaches, although it could affect stomachs as a side effect. It was not until 1900 that it was further refined and patented as *Aspirin* by the German company Bayer. Herbert feels better the next day and begins to take an interest in the world again.

> *Dec 13 Friday*
> *Went to church. Jedidah came to see me. This afternoon about a quarter to four o'clock an attempt was made by the Fenians to rescue Burke and Casey who were confined in the House of Detention, Clerkenwell. By blowing down the outer wall with a barrel of gunpowder.*

The late edition of the *Globe* newspaper that day, under the headline '**Twenty lives sacrificed',** reported that there had been:

> *. . . great alarm in consequence of a terrible explosion taking place. Within a radius of half a mile all the windows were shattered into pieces and the greatest confusion prevailed at the time . . . Before the catastrophe, attention had been excited by the suspicious appearance of several Irish roughs – types of the class which represents Fenianism – loitering on the outskirts of the prison.*

Soon, however the four walls around him take over:

Dec 14 Saturday
I was reading that the Hospital was founded in 1841 [on another site]; it accommodates 211 in-patients and constantly affords relief to some thousands of out-patients. There are besides 20 more patients in the experimental sanatorium at Madeira [I believe that this happened in 1864 and as the returning patients showed no improvement the experiment was discontinued] and 20 more are received at the 'Home' Manor House Chelsea.

Dec 15 Sunday
Went to church. Had no visitors. I had the hump.

Then with sure knowledge of his own condition, he writes:

December 20 Friday
Jedidah came to see me. I was reading that Brompton is a neighbourhood where formerly more than now, consumptive invalids were wont to repair. Thither many a parent has conveyed his child as a last hope. Edmond Burke had a son he loved with his whole heart. Disease laid him low and the father took him to Crowell House at Brompton. Here he sunk and died. That blow nearly broke the great man's heart. He never recovered from it.

Had Herbert's father managed to get him into the hospital through his family connections? Was this at the back of his mind when he read this?

He had lost a little weight again but gets 'leave of absence' over Christmas:

December 25 Wednesday
This morning the yellow fog lay thick and dim o'er London city far and wide. Father, Jedidah, Edmund, Joshua, Edwin and Bessie [Edwin's wife] and the children all came over to Aunts to spend a Merry Christmas.

Dec 26 Thursday

Very thick fog all day. Father, Jedidah, Joshua, Edmund, and Edwin came to Aunt's to tea.

Dec 27 Friday

Went over to Edwin's in the morning, had dinner there and started back to the hospital. Father and Edmund [brother] accompanied me to the bus at London Bridge, arrived at the hospital a four p.m. My companions who spent their Christmas in the hospital told me they had Champagne with their dinner and some again in the evening, and Plum-cake, Biscuits and tea at the evening meal. The gallery was decorated with evergreens and artificial flowers. The Chapel adjoining the Hospital was opened on Christmas Day, it had been closed for some time undergoing repairs, so that service has been held in the committee room.

Dec 29 Sunday

Went to Church twice. I entered the church (or Chapel as it is called) for the first time this morning. It is a comfortable place; the seats are all cushioned. The windows are very pretty,

all of stained glass; there are two sun-lights hanging from the roof, each one has 29 jets of gas, so that the place is very light when the gas is lit up.

Father and Edmund came to see me in the afternoon.

Chapel in Brompton Hospital (this is a special Confirmation by Bishop of London).
Illustrated London News January 3rd 1874 (author's copy).

Dec 31 Tuesday
I weighed 9 stone lost 1 lb since last weighing. Heard the Chelsea Bells ringing the old year out and the New Year in.

1868 *Wednesday Jan 1*

We had quite a tragical commencement to the New Year here. A young man named Cavill committed suicide this morning about 8 o'clock. He went into the closet and cut his throat and was almost dead when one of the patients found him. The Doctor was immediately sent for, but it was too late. The poor fellow had done his work too well. We had noticed for about a week previous, how restless and fidgety he was, he appeared to have something on his mind, but he would not tell us what it was.

Jan 2 Thursday

Dr. Quain visited us. The Committee of the Hospital commenced to give us butter, each patient is to be allowed half a pound of butter weekly, from the hospital instead of having to buy it. And four daily newspapers to each Gallery.

Jan 3 Friday

In the evening there was held in the Committee Room, the first of a series of Readings to be continued weekly throughout the season. The first gentleman read David Coombe, the Cobbler and another piece of poetry. It was very interesting and amusing.*

[*This may be a short moral tale in a booklet called *Trapping Sunbeams* by Floyd Foster Barnes].

There was also a lecture on electricity 'with experiments which made it interesting and amusing'. Certainly we can see that it was a hospital where great attempts were made to make the patient's stay as bearable as possible. On Wednesday 15th he left hospital for the last time. It is not said why he was discharged but it was the practice at Brompton to keep patients in for two months? It was presumably felt that the hospital had done all it could, whether the patient was cured or not. To keep them longer would block the beds for new sufferers.

As always, he walked to places of interest and visited friends and relations He also sampled some of the entertainments of the capital city;

Jan 23 Thursday
Had a walk in the morning. In the evening I went with Joshua and Emma to the Agricultural Hall to see the grand spectacle of 'St. George and the Dragon' and the Egyptian State Procession etc. etc.

On the 26th he sees Aunt Winter, his father's sister Letitia, who was the widow of shoemaker John Winter whose early death seems have put the family into very hard times. At about this time, his uncle, John Edmonds had become a beer retailer at the *Red Lion,* 41 Hoxton Street, Shoreditch (Herbert's brother, Leonard, later marries John's daughter, Selina, and becomes a publican at the Mermaid Tavern, Mare Street, Hackney). Not far away, at 64 High Street, Hoxton, was McDonald's Music Hall where comedians such as Arthur Lloyd, William Lingard and William Randall plied their trade. He writes:

Jan 28 Tuesday
Went to Aunt Edmonds in the evening with Leonard, Selina and Emma to MacDonald's Music hall.

In some ways this is the most surprising visit of them all. *The Tomahawk* on September of the previous year had an article entitled, 'An Opinion of Music Halls. It notes that the former operatic selections had largely disappeared and adds, acidly that they were anyway, 'badly sung and vulgarly accompanied. It continues:

Nothing is listened to now-a-days but the so-called 'comic songs' and, in sober earnestness, we must express our astonishment that human beings, endowed with the ordinary gift of reason, should be found to go night after night in order to witness such humiliating exhibitions. It is quite impossible to name anything equal to the stupidity of these comic songs unless, indeed it is their vulgarity. A man appears on the platform, dressed in outlandish clothes, and ornamented with whiskers of ferocious length and hideous hue and proceeds to sing verse after verse of pointless twaddle interspersed with a blatant 'chorus' in

which the audience is requested to join. The audience obligingly consents and each member of it contributes to the general harmony, a version of the tune which he happens to know best.

It all seems pretty harmless but it certainly would have been very raucous and probably not an entertainment that would have gone down well in Ringstead Baptist circles. He does not give his opinion of the evening and, two days later, he has returned home to Ringstead where he is met at the station by Edmund and Jedidah. Once home, it is not the Music Hall but the Temperance Hall which dominates his social round.

Feb 11 Tuesday
A meeting of the Temperance Society was held consisting of singing and speaking and a collection was made on behalf of the poor in the East of London. £1. 1. 0.was collected.

We also briefly meet, along with Herbert, some of his other aunts and uncles on his mother's side. There are Uncle and Aunt Smith on February 9th, Uncle Andrew [Bull] on the 16th, Uncle William [Bull] on the 17th and Uncle Noah [Bull] on March 8th. He also is still interested in the world outside.

March 3 Tuesday
Went to Thrapston to see a panorama of Captain Speke and Grant's travels to the source of the Nile.

We have to remember that 'darkest' Africa was a source of excitement rather like the Moon in the 1960s and an altogether more interesting place. In 1859 John Hanning Speke had gone with Richard Burton to discover the source of the Nile. Burton had become ill and Speke had carried on to identify the source as Lake Victoria. Burton questioned Speke's judgement and the two became bitter rivals. In 1862 Speke went with a new companion, Captain James Grant, where they discovered the outreach of the Nile from Victoria which they called Ripon Falls. In 1864 Speke was accidentally shot and killed. For Herbert, like many others the simple panorama in a village hall would have conjured up the mystery and danger of another world. There was little available to Ringstead villagers in 1868 to tell them of the great places and events of the world, No films or television, very few photographs and virtually nothing in colour. These travelling dioramas, panoramas and models were toured around the country and people would pay a small fee to see them. The panoramas would either be around the walls or more often on a large roll which slowly unrolled before the viewer. The dioramas tended to be semi-circular sets with a background and figures set in them.

On March 12th, his sister Jedidah returned to Manchester where she still lived, at least some of the time. On April 6th Herbert papered the parlour (a good Music Hall occupation). We hear nothing of his illness and when he weighs himself on April 18th he is 9st. 5 lbs. One wonders if his father Herbert had a set of scales in his Chemist shop as many did until late into the Twentieth Century.

On May 4th he went to 'Thrapstone' (in the nineteenth century there was usually an 'e' on the end of the name) to the Petty Sessions. Joseph Ball, (son of the butcher John Ball who Jedidah was later to marry), was tried for shooting two tame ducks in mistake for wild ones. He was discharged. [We told Joseph's story in an earlier biography.]

The Baptist Sunday School Treat had been on April 15th and, on Whit Monday, June 1st, the Annual Temperance Festival was held. Herbert describes the scene.

> *The Band played round the village at 5 o'clock in the morning. I beat the drum for them. I beat the drum for them. At 2pm the Band of Hope and Friends of the cause marched round the village in procession, stopping to sing at intervals, then the children went and had tea in Mr Ball's orchard [John Ball]; after teas they went up to Mr Dearlove's garden. A Public Tea was held in the Hall at 5o'clock. In the evening Thomas Whittaker delivered a lecture. He spoke from the direction a little girl gave him while seeking a Temperance meeting in S6t Giles. A little higher up on the right hand side through an iron gate, next door to the sweet shop. Cousin Samuel came to Miss Williamson's.*
>
> *June 3 Wednesday*
> *He [Cousin Samuel] gave a good lecture on tobacco and snuff and their effects on the human system.*

His 'Cousin Samuel' was a fascinating character who deserves a biography of his own. He was the son of Benjamin Abington and was born in about 1817 so he was a generation older than Herbert. In 1843 he worked in the Custom House in London but, perhaps as part of his duties, he went to live in Cape Town. It may be there that he met and married his wife, Catherine and certainly two of his children were born there. The family then went on to the United States in 1854 and, in 1858, they are recorded as travelling from Venezuela to Philadelphia. Presumably he was a businessman and the 1858 Passenger List records him as a 'planter'. He returned to England where his wife died and he quickly married again to Mary Ann Mills on 30th June 1859. She too died in 1865. He had become the 'Secretary of a Philanthropic Institute' according to the 1861 Census and judging from later Censuses and Herbert's diary, this was the *British Anti-Tobacco Society* which had been formed in 1853 by the Reverend Thomas Reynolds. This pressure group had originated in the United States where it had emerged from the Baptist Church and it is probable that, like the Temperance Movement, it was also closely linked to Nonconformism. The Reverend George Trask, who founded the American Society in 1848, wrote, as his last publication, a tract to the Reverend Charles Spurgeon in which he said:

> *The project of converting the world by the Gospel of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and by man's free agency is not a humbug, but a natural, scriptural, glorious project eclipsing every other. The idea of converting the world whilst rum, opium, and tobacco are its masters, is a humbug.*

At the time that Herbert writes of Samuel he was some fifty-four years of age and Jane Williamson, the middle-aged daughter of a local farmer was soon to become his third wife.

On Thursday June 4th Herbert simply records:

> *Dear little Leonard was buried, he died on Friday night May 29th.*

The death, at three years old, of the son of his brother Leonard and his wife Selina (daughter of Aunt Edmonds and also his cousin) would have hit him hard. Nevertheless he knew that he too probably had a short life to live and tried to stay active in spite of his illness.

June 16 Tuesday
In the evening a small party of us went a boating.

June 22 Monday
Went to Warmington with the band; there were only eight of us; we marched through Oundle, arrived at Warmington half past eleven. It was very wet in the morning, but it cleared up after dinner, and was fine the remainder of the day. We arrived home at half past two the next morning.

July 9 Thursday
In the evening we went boating.

July 13 Monday
Edwin and I walked to Denford and Woodford in the morning. In the evening we went to Raunds.

July 14 Tuesday
We had a fine pic-nic party; took tea at the bottom of Ham Lane.

July 21 Tuesday
Very hot. 92 deg at back of the house.

July 22 Wednesday
I and Edmond went fishing from 4 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon; had a bath in the Scour.

Then on the '8th July he notes:

My 21st birthday. Received a present of Longfellow's Poetical Works from M.E. Spence.

Did he not receive other presents, was it just that it came from post or he had a particular affection for Mary Spence, his sister's friend in Manchester? Certainly on Friday July 31st he receives a letter from Jedidah informing him of a situation in Manchester. It seems a long way to go and Manchester would not have been a first choice for someone suffering from TB but perhaps it was just that his sister would be there.

August 3 Monday
Went to Manchester. Jedidah and M.E. Spence met me at the station and I went with them to Rusholme; stayed there the night.

Aug 4 Tuesday
Entered J. Patterson's service.

Unfortunately Herbert, as so often, does not give us enough detail. What was J Patterson's first name? Where was the business? What did it do? Was Herbert still a baker? There are two possible candidates with the surname Patterson or Paterson (Herbert uses both) in 1871. One is a letterpress printer living at 73 Marshall Street with a connecting shop at 34 Rochdale Road and there is also a J Paterson who is a linen draper at 37 Rochdale Road. Could it be father and son (or daughter or wife)?

He makes no mention of his work and during August, September and October 1868 he mainly gives his Sunday activities which comprise his attendance at various chapels including the Zion Chapel, Cavendish Street Chapel and Grosvenor Street Baptist Chapel and visits to Jedidah and the Spences. His cousin, Elizabeth Smith, who was in service locally visited them at Rusholme and they, 'passed the afternoon very pleasantly singing together'. Also Cousin Samuel, who was living in Manchester at the time, came to see him.

On December 3rd Mrs Spence opened her new shop but whether this was a move or an additional one is not said. All we know is that sometime between 1861 and 1871 she moved from service with Carlos Chamberlin to her grocer's shop in 45 Wilmslow Road, Rusholme.

On the 24th his father came to Manchester and for the second year running spent Christmas away from his wife. Cousin Samuel seems to have been the life and soul of the party and on the 27th he writes:

> *Dec 27 Sunday*
> *Went to Rusholme in the morning; Cousin Samuel came in the evening, and after supper he told us some of his adventures and hair-break escapes. I stayed there all night with Father; went to the station with him in the morning, and returned home in time to open shop.*

He had to work on New Year's Day, but records:

> ***1869*** *Jan 1 Friday*
> *Closed the shop at one; went to the Royal Institution; in the evening to the Free Trade Hall to hear Butterworth's Christy's Minstrels.*

We may now wince at the idea of white people 'blacking up' to perform in a bizarre parody of black performers but in the Victorian era it was very popular entertainment (and continued in various forms until the last quarter of the Twentieth Century). The *Christy Minstrels* were formed by Edwin Pearce Christy in Buffalo in 1843 and the name became synonymous with any 'blackface' group. Rather like aging rock groups the name became a matter for dispute:

> *Soon four new companies were formed each claiming to be the original 'Christy Minstrels because each boasted one or two members of the old troupe.*

Herbert would have watched one of these travelling companies and we would be wrong to impose a retrospective morality on him. On March 3rd he went to see *Professor Pepper's Entertainment* of which he records, 'It was very good'.

John Henry Pepper was an unlikely showman. He was a Chemistry professor at London Polytechnic Institute who built the first full-size version of the illusion. The magic lantern shows had become popular in the 1860s and new gimmicks were used to bring in the crowds into the theatres (motion pictures later started in this way). The illusion was produced by a large sheet of glass place at an angle to the audience which could reflect a person or object to the audience. By clever use of lighting it produced an effect similar to that when one looks out of the window of a dimly lit room at dusk. The audience saw through the glass but also saw the refection of an object or person carefully placed out of sight. By the use of cabinets and ghostly story lines an entertaining show was put together and taken round the country.

It seems likely that Cousin Samuel was in Manchester as part of his role in the 'philanthropic institute'' because on Herbert records:

> *May 12 Wednesday*
> *Went to hear Cousin Samuel deliver a lecture on 'Tobacco and its Physiological effects' in the Hulme Working Men's Institute, City Road. Heard him state that he was the Representative of the North of England Anti-Tobacco Society.*

A week later he writes:

> *May 19 Wednesday Whit Week*
> *I had leave from business after tea, so I went to have my Portrait taken.*

Throughout the diary we see various family friends and family having their 'portrait taken' as the new photography came into the reach of ordinary people even in small towns like Raunds.

The entries in Manchester often have long gaps between them and it may be with his work he was finding it too much to keep up his diary. He does report some highlights:

> *May 21 Friday*
> *Half-day holiday. Went to the Flower Show at the Botanical Gardens. Old Trafford; met Jedidah, Mrs and Miss Spence there.*

> *July 21 Wednesday*
> *The day of the visit of their R.H. the Prince and Princess of Wales to the Royal Agricultural Show, Manchester. I had a good view of them as they passed along Stretford Road.*

On August 4th he received his 'fourth quarter salary' and then a calendar month later he states baldly:

> *Sep 4 Saturday*
> *Left J. Patterson's at 5 pm. Went to Town, called for my box as I returned and went to Rusholme.*

It is only later that we realise that he has finished his employment there but we get no clue as to the reason for his leaving.

On September 7th he and Jedidah go to Ringstead by Midland Railway. He writes with some bitterness:

> *Arrived at Thrapston at 3.10 in the afternoon. No one to meet us.*

Was it an oversight or was he in the doghouse? Edmund was at home and Joshua also returned. There is one curious entry for the 15th September:

> *Sep 15 Wednesday*
> *Leonard came home. We met him at Ringstead Station a little after ten. In the afternoon he and Uncle Andrew, Joshua and I walked to Chelveston. Met father there, came back to Ringstead and Leonard returned to London the same evening.*

This seems somewhat mysterious. Why did Leonard come from London just for the day? What was Herbert doing in Chelveston? Perhaps it is just Herbert's brevity that creates the mystery.

Herbert seems well and he walks, goes boating and gathers blackberries. On the 24th he also went to Raunds to see the schoolmaster so it may be that the Abington children attended the Wesleyan School there, although there was also a church school and various small private schools. On October 6th he visits Edwin's family and unusually his mother accompanies them:

> *Oct 6 Wednesday*
> *Mother, Jedidah and I went to Kimbolton; left Ringstead at 7 a.m. Walked to Raunds Station, from there by train, arrived at Kimbolton a little before 10. Found Edwin and Bessie there with the children. Joshua and the goods had not arrived, so we all went for a walk round by the castle and through the park, by the chestnut ridings; came back and all dined at 'The Bell'. Left Kimbolton a quarter before three; got a ride to the station and were only just in time for the train. On our way from Raunds Station we stayed and I took tea with S.A. Roberts [he or she may have been ill]. Reached home a little after six. Went to meeting and then to bid our friends 'good bye'.*

It may be that it was at this time that Edwin and his family finally moved to Kimbolton. His grandson, William Abington, later wrote that Edwin's and his wife's health were suffering from the fogs and pollution of London and his doctor advised him to seek relief in the 'pure air of the countryside'. He also says that he had already established a 'good class tailoring trade.' It may be that the suffering of Herbert also had some effect.

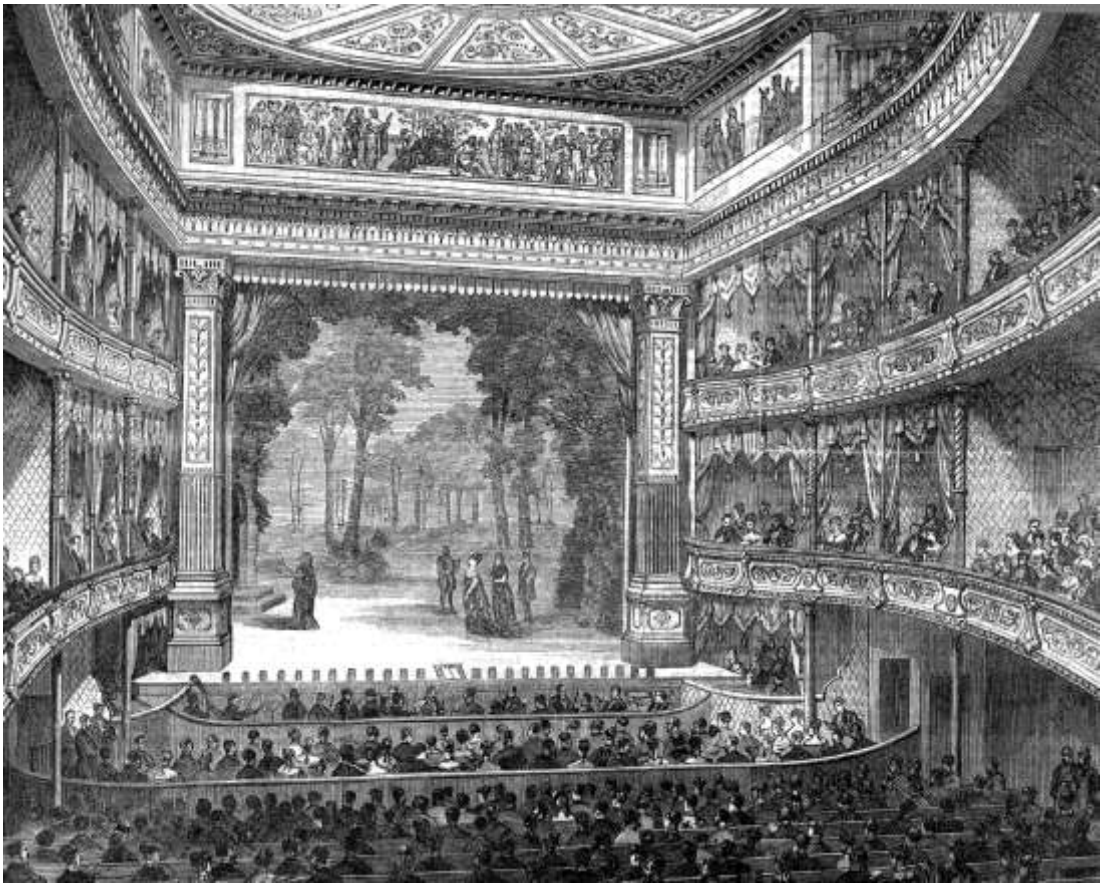
The following day he was back in Manchester:

> *Oct 7 Thursday*

Came back to Manchester. Father and W.K. [William Kitchen] accompanied us to Thrapston Station; left there at 9 a.m. had a pleasant journey; I arrived at London Road 2.45. M.E. Spence and J. Fisher met us there; had a cab to Rusholme.

He was obviously looking for work but he was still taking advantage of the chances to learn that the large cities offered. He went to a lecture on Sirius at the Birch [Chapel] schoolroom, to the free library and to Readings in Rusholme Public Hall. On October 12th he reports:

Went to Binyons and Co. (received a little encouragement) to Red Bank and Deansgate. In the evening we went to see 'A Winter's Tale' a play of Shakespeare's. It was excellent.



This is a scene from The Winter's Tale in the actual production that Herbert went to see in 1869 at The Prince's Theatre (Illustrated London News).

With the kind permission of the Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

Binyons and Co may refer to Binyons, Robinson and Co. who were tea and coffee merchants. Herbert's father had been a tea dealer originally on a village scale and Jedidah's former employer probably had some connections with the tea trade. He was not offered a job and went to Oldfield Road after an unnamed post. In brackets he puts 'not good enough'. Was it Herbert or the post? Suddenly his old employer offers him his old job back:

Oct 22 Friday
Received a note from Mr. Patterson asking me to go back again.

Oct 23 Saturday

Entered his service again.

Still we hear nothing of his employment and it seems to have been a means of earning a living and something which he did not find, for whatever reason, congenial. Just a few weeks after starting work he is again taken very ill.

Nov 21 Sunday
Felt unwell in the night; very restless, pain in sides and difficulty of breathing.

Nov 22 Monday
Very ill; No appetite; dullness in head. Had Must. Plast. On right side and feet in hot water for 30 minutes at bed time.

Nov 24 Wednesday

Worse; breathing very difficult; pain in left side; kept on work until evening; obliged to give up, and go to Mrs. Spence; had Must. Plast. On left side and feet in hot water again.

Nov 25 Thursday
Worse. Sent for Dr. Gregory; he pronounced it a slight attack of Inflammation and Bronchitis; ordered hot bran in flannel to my back continually until better, and to keep in bed.

Nov 28 Sunday
Better, but much reduced; came downstairs to tea.

He stays inside and seems to improve slowly. On Sunday December 12th he enjoys reading *Adam Graeme* a novel by Mrs. Oliphant. She was one of the most popular writers of her time, churning out books in order to maintain her family after the early death of her husband.

He begins to go out for short walks and on Monday 20th December he notes, 'Resumed my occupation. On Christmas Eve he is awakened:

. . . by hearing a band of musicians strike up the old tune of 'Christians awake'.

It was very sweet in the stillness of the night as
'The midnight moon serenely smiles
O'er natures soft repose
No low'ring cloud obscures the sky
No ruffling tempest blows' and t'was such a night as this
'That while they watched the shepherd swains
Heard angels strike to angel strains
The song of heavenly love
Blest harmony that far excels
All music else on earth that dwells

As e'er was tuned above
T'was while they watched the sages traced
The star that every star effaced
With new and nobler shine
They followed and it led the way
To where the infant Saviour lay
And gave them light divine.'

After the brass band had passed out of hearing another vocal and instrumental came and sang Christians Awake to another tune, that was very nice; when that had gone I went again to sleep and did not awaken again until 10 o'clock. When the bells were pealing out merrily as a reminder that it was Xmas Day morning.

Dec 25
It was a nice morning, quite an unusual treat for us such an one as the poet described 'Sweet day, so calm, so bright'. As soon as I had dressed and breakfasted I bent my steps toward Rusholme. Had a very nice dinner, turkey etc. Spent the day very quietly, like a Sunday, no company there except Mr. Thornhill. I stayed there all night it being Sunday the day following.

Dec 31 Friday
Stayed up until New Year, listening to Holy Trinity Bells.

On New Year's Day, however, he was back at work and on the 2nd Mrs Spence presented him with 'a respirator' On the Monday he writes:

Jan 3 Monday
Kept open all day. Walked to St. Peter's in the evening; met J. and M.E. coming from Royal Institute.

We see that, especially in progressive cities like Manchester, women were involved in, (and being admitted to!), many educational opportunities which before had been largely denied to them. On February 20th he went to hear about something that was a trouble to all believers in the Bible as literal truth and one that his Uncle Leonard James had struggled with.

Feb 20 Sunday
Went to chapel in morning. In the afternoon to hear a lecture on 'The antiquity of the human race' by Dr. G. Sexton M.A. He stated in the course of his lecture, that there were records of the Chinese showing that they as a nation existed in a state of civilisation 300 years before the time of Abraham, and he also said there were Geological facts which led to the supposition that there were men living upon this earth 100,000 years ago. Went to Rusholme; arrived just in time for tea.

The scientific discoveries in geology and archaeology were undermining the traditional view that all things were created at once. It is a debate that still divides the Christian community, especially in the United States.

On March 9th he went to a diorama of the Holy Land. Such travelling exhibitions would often be visited by local schools. In *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy tells of schoolchildren being taken to see a model of the ancient city of Jerusalem and the showman pointing out the various places described in the Bible. Like this model of Jerusalem in the novel, we can guess that many owed a great deal to the imagination of the maker.

> *The model of the ancient city stood in the middle of the apartment, and the proprietor, with a fine religious philanthropy written on his features, walked round it with a pointer in his hand, showing the young people the various quarters and places known to them by name from reading their Bibles; Mount Moriah, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the City of Zion, the walls and the gates outside one of which was a large mound like a tumulus, and on the mound a little white cross. The spot, he said, was Calvary.*
>
> *'I think,' said Sue…..'that this model, elaborate as it is, is a very imaginary production.'*

On Sunday March 3rd Cousin Samuel came to tea and had been unwell with inflammation of the lungs for five or six weeks. The air of Manchester, thick with factory and house chimney smoke and often laced with other chemicals and the fine fibres from the cotton industry was not good for anyone with respiratory problems. On Sunday May 8th he wrote:

> *Went to Rusholme in the morning (through the fields) as I was impatient to hear all the 'good' news from home. Cousin S. came in the evening after chapel.*

We do not learn what the 'good news' was but Herbert seems once more in good health and he writes one of his longest entries:

> *June 9 Whit-Thursday*
>
> *Rose at 6 o'clock, opened shop, swept out and dusted, had my breakfast and went off for a day's holiday. Strolled about town until 11. Met M.E. and Jed. (Jedidah) at London Road Station and went to Alderley Edge. We enjoyed it very much, scrambling up the hill, then pausing to view the delightful scenery on the grassy slopes at the bottom of the hill groups of children were at play, as happy as could be, and to make it still more enjoyable, a brass band was playing in the distance. We took tea in the cottage at the bottom of the hill, and returned to Manchester by the 7 train, when to finish the day, we went to see the Diorama of Ireland*.

His employer's wife died on June 11th and on July 18 Monday he writes:

> *We removed to the shop in Medlock Street.*

Presumably this refers to Patterson's shop. There are no entries for August and on September 13th he writes:

> *Jedidah and I came home by the L and M.W. Railway. Arrived at Ringstead Station at 12.40. Father was there to meet us with Austins van. Edwin and Jos. E, Smith and Benjamin took dinner with us. Ebe Smith returned to London the same evening.*

Early September seems to have been the time when the family got together for:

> *Sep 14 Wednesday*
> *Went to Kimbolton, I and Josh, Jedidah and Margaret Edmonds. Leonard and uncle Edmonds came from London in the evening.*
>
> *Sep 15 Thursday*
> *We all returned to Ringstead by the first train in the morning; before we came home we went for an hour's ride on the water at Denford. Leonard and uncle went back to London in the evening.*

On the 19th he returned to Manchester. From there he reports that his sister Mary Jane was married to Benjamin Lovell, a local shoemaker. Perhaps this was the good news he referred to on May 8th. On October 21st he left Pattersons for the second and final time and he had time to enjoy himself. On October 24 he went with Jedidah and Mrs Spence to see, 'the tragedy of Richard III'. On the morning of October 25th he went to the Assize Courts, as a spectator, one presumes, and saw the Aurora Borealis in the evening.

On November 8th:

> *I returned home again. Mrs. Spence accompanied me in a cab to London Road Station. Father met me at Ringstead Station.*

Soon after, William Kitchen was taken ill with haemolysis and six days later he died. His uncle George Smith, the second husband of his mother's sister Sarah preached at the funeral.

Nothing is said of Christmas and it appears that the New Year is spent at his brother's house in Kimbolton:

> *Dec 31 Saturday*
> *Mr. G. Barritt called in at Edwin's. At half past ten pm Jos and I went to the Moravian Chapel to the watch meeting. Had tea and bun. Commenced the New Year with singing. Stayed until half past twelve. Reverend C.H.Spurgeon farewell to the old year:*

He adds the rather sad and resigned verse:

> *'Departed year what records dwell within thine hallowed scroll,*
> *Of joyous hopes and golden dreams yet blighted at their goal*
> *Of visions bright as morning dawn as vesper fragrance sweet*
> *Fair idols shivered, shattered, all in fragments at thy feet.*
> *So be it changeful year, farewell thy sunshine and thy shade,*
> *Thy rainbow hues of loveliness, thy joys not doomed to fade*
> *Thine anguish and thy weariness bid all their deep woe fell*
> *In saddened shrines of human heart departing year, farewell'.*

On Tuesday February 28th:

> *The Members of the Temperance Society gave an entertainment in the Hall consisting of singing a 'piece' entitled the 'Trials and Troubles of an aspiring publican' which was well represented and with respect to the singing, men of Harlech and The Red Cross Knight were heartily applauded. The Hall was crowded to excess and the amount taken for admission was £1 10s 1d After paying expenses, we had £1 left to give towards flooring for the hall with boards.*

He also reports on the happiness and tragedy of village life:

> *March 2* Thursday*
> *Bradley Weekly and Bessie Phillips were married*
> **Samuel Saddington attempted suicide about 1 pm by cutting his throat in four places; he is expected to recover.*

On March 28th there is another entertainment in the Temperance Hall and Herbert pasted a newspaper cutting into his diary:

> *Ringstead – On Tuesday evening another entertainment was given in the Ringstead Hall, by members of the temperance Society. The programme was a follows: - Glee 'Awake Æolian Lyre,' the company; song, 'The Slave Ship,' Mr. J. Warren; song, 'I'm lonely since my mother died', Mr. W. Abbott; song, 'You've been a friend to me', Miss Knight; dialogue, 'Troubles of a Publican', duet, 'The Minute Gun at Sea,' Messrs. Warren and Dyson; song, 'Wrap the Flag around me, Boys,' Mr. T. Phillips: dialogue, 'Buy your own Cherries;' song 'The Death of Nelson,' Mr. J. Warren; reading, 'Darby Doyle's Voyage to Quebec,' Mr. Dyson; song, 'Ring the Bell Watchman,' Miss E. Abbott; dialogue, 'Breach of Promise;' song 'One Faith, One Love,', Miss Knight; song 'Babylon is Falling,' Mr. Lockie; dialogue, 'Next Morning,' song, 'I am a Prussian,' Mr. W. Abbott; 'God Save the Queen.' The attendance was very good, and the whole passed off very agreeably.*

One gathers that it was a mixture of the patriotic, sentimental and the moralistic: our stereotype of the Victorian era. On Monday April 3rd 1871 he reports:

> *April 3 Monday*
> *Census taken. Father, Mother and I at home. Will any of us three be living when it is taken next time?*

We know that his father suffered from bad health and that his mother had dementia for the last years of her life but it was perhaps himself of whom he was most thinking. It is at this time that he starts using initials as a sort of code although the meanings of some are obvious.

> *March 20*
> *Received P.K.'s P.OAT. X.L.N.T.*

> *April 20*
> *P.W.T.L.B.I.B: C.B.*

June 9
J.K. B.D. 18.

On April 26th he went to another temperance lecture which, 'abounded with humorous anecdotes and illustrations some of which were heartily cheered'. For the first time for a long time he writes that he has weighed himself. He is 8 st. 7 lbs. (On April 18th 1868 he was 9 st. 5 lbs.). No more is said and he seems to have struck up a greater friendship with J Knight and they visit his brothers in Kimbolton. The days and weeks pass with walks and visits to and from friends and relations:

May 16 Tuesday
Mrs. Spence came to Ringstead; arrived 12.30. Met her at Station with W. Bull's horse and trap.

May 17 Wednesday
Had a walk down to the Mill in the morning; to Denford in the evening.

May 19 Friday
Edwin came early; went home after dinner. Mrs Spence and I walked down Ham to the railway bridge in the evening.

May 20 Saturday
Went as far as Raunds turn in the morning. Joshua came in the evening.

May 21 Sunday
Mr. Pates of Aldwinckle preached here all day. We all went to tea with Mary Jane. Joshua went home in the evening. J. Phillips and I accompanied him a little way.

May 22 Monday
I went to Aldwinckle with Mr. Kitchen in the afternoon with pony and trap; enjoyed the ride very much; arrived in time for the sermon (by Mr. Islip of Brigstock). Public tea at half past four which was excellent. Address in the evening by Messrs Ackhurst, Kitchen, Islip, Smith and Bristow. Mr Pates in the chair. We went into Mr. Batson's after meeting; they pressed us very much to take some refreshment so after a nice slice of leg of mutton and a cup of Iceland Moss cocoa, we went on our way rejoicing; got home soon after ten.

On June 15th, while out at J. Knight's house he seems to have had a fainting fit (Syncope) but otherwise we hear nothing of his illness. A few days later he notes:

June 18 Sunday
Ebey's wife, Uncle and Aunt Smith, Mary J and Benjamin came to tea with us. Our first acquaintance with Mrs. E. Smith. First impression very favourable.

His cousin Ebenezer Smith who he had seen often in London had recently married Sarah and I think the E in Mrs E Smith refers to 'Ebey' in a jokingly formal way. His mother had gone to Raunds with

Mrs Spence to have her 'portrait taken' and on the 21st Herbert in true texting style pronounced it XLNT. We see sometimes the normal Ringstead life with glimpses off the outside world and sudden tragedy.

> *June 27 Tuesday*
> *Went down Ham for a stroll in the morning; met J. Knight down there with his gun and J. Groom the mole catcher; had a long chat with them. Patti came home. Baptist Missionary Service in the evening. Mr. Kitchen presided; after singing a hymn, Mr. Childs of Raunds offered up a short prayer. Mr. Bradfield (of Rushden) gave a short address, and Mr. Fuller a coloured man of the Cameroons, Western Africa gave some interesting facts in relation to his work in Africa, and to give us an idea of the native tongue, he repeated a text of scripture and sang several verses of well known hymns in their tongue with pleasing effect. Mr. Silverton concluded with prayer.*
>
> *Inquest held over the son of Alfred Mayes, aged one month, who died from the effects of an overdose of Syr. Poppies*. Verdict accidental death from overdosing.*

[*Syrup of Poppies would have been a medicine containing opium and laudanum and similar opiates were used in many medicines including those for children. It is very likely that Herbert would have had such medicines to control his pain.]

On Saturday July 1st he gives the statistics from the 1871 Census. Even in such dry figures one can sense his own mortality is in his mind. It is obvious that the family are worried about him. On the Sunday he tells of a simple enjoyable day:

> *July 9 Sunday*
> *He [Joshua] went class with me in the morning and chapel. In the afternoon we went to tea with Patty Knight: S.A. Bull, J.Butt and Emma Edmonds were there. And with a few anecdotes we enjoyed our tea very much. Afterwards singing until chapel time.*

The following Saturday, however, he goes to seek treatment:

> *July 15 Saturday*
> *Father and I went to Peterborough by the 10.15 train from Ringstead Station, to see Dr. Pailey. He examined my chest with stethoscope. Pronounced right lung sound, but left diseased. Ordered cod-liver oil to be continued, Tinct. Quinine Co. to be taken twice a day and half glass of porter with dinner, plenty of milk and nourishing food, and to be in the air as much as possible without exertion. Fee for advice two shillings.*
>
> *We went round and through the Cathedral, sitting to rest a few minutes, while we admired the beautiful stained windows. Returned home by the 5 train. It was a very hot day and I was very much fatigued with the journey.*

Immediately, the illness comes to the fore in the Diary:

July 16 Sunday
Felt weak and low – did not go out until evening – (as it was very hot) and then sat in the vestry to hear the sermon. [Was this because of the heat or his coughing?] Uncle Smith preached. Text – 'It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death the judgement'. After meeting went up with Uncle Andrew; stayed supper with them.

He again has to stay mainly in the house with little sorties for tea with people in the village. We hear that he takes a magazine which may be the source of the texts and poems that he starts to use.

July 18
Little better. Josh came unexpectedly with Mr. How; went Thrapston Market. Father with them and paid the half years magazine bill for me. Uncle Smith came home from market with them – stayed to tea with us. Father bought some shrimps which we enjoyed very much. Josh went home with Mr. How in the evening.

July 21 Friday
S.A. Bull's birthday. I took tea with them.

July 27 Thursday
Received a small hamper from Mrs. Spence containing Bot. Carbon, Lobster, Bloaters etc.etc. Commenced antiseptic treatment.

On July 28th he celebrated his 24th birthday and on August 2nd, his sister, Mary Jane Lovell was safely delivered of a son named Herbert William. Was he named after Herbert or his father? Also Aunt Fairey (Emma Jane Abington had married a shoemaker, Samuel Fairey who had died in 1869), who was now a housekeeper in Irthlingborough, came to see him.

Suddenly Herbert became very ill again.

Aug 8 Tuesday
Much worse. Pain in right side, difficulty of breathing – cough painful; very weak and low. Had two Must. Plasters on right side and feet in warm water at bedtime; breathing little easier; restless night.

Aug 9 Wednesday
About the same; two Must. Plasters on back; rose about nine; felt little better. Received a letter from Mr. Feaver. Said he had no doubt if I continued Carbon treatment for six months, I should be alright. Time will show, if I live to prove it.

We see Herbert's correct scepticism about his treatment. M E Spence came to visit and slowly through August he improved, although with some relapses. His father, who had been in Yarmouth on holiday, came home on September 2nd.

He knows, as he suspected would ber the case, that the treatment is not working but still tries, weak as he is, to enjoy life.

Sep 8 Friday
I wrote to Mr. Feaver. No better than when I commenced taking Carbon, if so well. Josh came in the evening; also Uncle Sam and Freddy and Louisa Knight.

Sep 10 Sunday
Feast come. Went to meeting in the morning. Evening all gone to meeting but me. Feel a little better than I did last Sunday. Great many strangers parading the street.

Sep 11 Monday
I walked down to the Feast with Benjamin in the evening. Called in at Mrs. Knight's.

Sep 12 Tuesday
Aunt Fairey came for the day. Leonard, Selina and Jedidah came by the 12.30 train. Had quite a large dinner party – eleven of us. All here but Edwin; he arrived in time for tea. Went up to Uncle Andrew's in the evening; Mr. Abbott from Raunds, J. Patrick and uncle Sam there, besides several others. Had some singing, but made more noise than harmony.

On October 1st:

Cough and breathing very bad; could not get out to chapel at all. Jedidah stayed with me afternoon and evening.

He is now mainly telling what others are doing while he stays at home.

Oct 17 Tuesday
This evening, Mr. Kitchen gave a lecture in the Hall, on coal, coal mines, illustrated by a panorama of twenty coloured views of objects in nature and art. I was very sorry I could not be there; those who were, said it was exceedingly interesting.

He still sometimes manages to get to the chapel but rarely moves from the house. When he tells us on October 31st that 'Margaret and Selina took tea with us, and bade us goodbye' there seems a greater emphasis on the 'bade us goodbye'. It is not a phrase that he uses before this time. He still has retained his sense of humour, as he tells of his friends' and brother's attempts to help him.

Nov 2
Received a letter from Manchester saying they had sent me a rocking chair. And one from Leonard in the afternoon to say he had sent me and easy chair.

Nov 3
Received the one from London.

Nov 4
Received the one from Manchester.

On November 15th Joshua went to Thrapston and became, 'a member of the Odd Fellows Society' in which his father was locally a leading light. We also hear that Mr Meckley and a man started building

a new room adjoining the back of the shop. On November 16th he simply puts J.K. Syn. Which seems to imply that it was J Knight who had the fainting fit although it may be code for something else. A few days later he receives the sad news that so many Victorian households had to endure as urbanisation and increased mobility produced annual epidemics which ran ahead of the scientists and doctors' advances

Nov 20 Monday
Edwin's babe named Leonard James died. Aged nearly six months
'Sweet babe, why should we weep for thee?
From sin and suffering, thou art free'.

On November 22nd he states. 'Went to a situation in Bradford, Yorkshire.' This seems very unlikely that we must wonder if he referring to somebody else in the family; or should it read 'Sent' or 'Went for'?

On November 25th Herbert's father went to *Philadelphus Jeyes* [who invented Jeyes Fluid] in Northampton perhaps to get pharmaceutical supplies for his shop. Mr Spurgin called on Herbert and we discover what medicines he is taking:

Nov 25 Saturday
Father went to Northampton to Philadelphus Jeyes and Co. Mr. Spurgin called; sat down and took a glass of wine; asked me several questions respecting myself and what I was taking. Told him Oil., Tinct. Quinine, and Chloric ether. Said he did not know that I could take anything better.

Nevertheless Herbert knows that the drugs are not working. He sometimes has a better day but he knows that worse ones are to follow:

Dec 3 Sunday
Evening. I have had a comfortable day – not much cough. Joshua, Benjamin, George Bull and Robert Knight stayed with me this afternoon. I am quite alone this evening excepting Charlie, who is sleeping before the fire, which is blazing brightly, and as I sit writing, I can hear the bells chiming sweetly.

Dec 12 Tuesday
Finished Feaver's Carbon. I have been taking it for nearly 20 weeks, and as I am not any better, I shall now discontinue the use of that, and take Bragg's for a time.

He also puts in a piece to show that all were susceptible to the great killers of the age, Typhoid Fever, Cholera and TB.

Dec 14 Thursday
It is ten years today since Prince Albert died of typhoid fever. And at this time the Prince of Wales is lying in a precarious state suffering from the same disease.

On Christmas day we see the mix of Christianity and spiritualism that gripped many Victorian minds and once again Cousin Samuel held centre stage:

> *About 3 o'clock this morning the band played a tune called 'Prince of Light' very harmoniously underneath my window; and another ('Sovereignty') a short distance off.*
>
> *At 10 o'clock am Jabez Abbott and Anne Maria Bull were married; after the ceremony the Band preceded the bridal pair up the street.*
>
> *Benjamin and Mary Jane came to spend the day with us, and Elizabeth and Eliza Abbott, Herbert Dodson and Eliza Smith to tea with us; whilst taking tea Cousin Samuel came in and entertained us for about an hour by talking of spiritualism, what he had seen, heard and felt at séances. His opinion of spiritualism is that it is the work of evil spirits. In answer to a question of mine as to whether these spirits could influence anyone who did not wish to be influenced by them, he said he would relate a fact of his own experience, which I will give as near as I can in his own words. 'At a certain place where I used to attend the meetings regularly for the purposes of investigation, there was usually a spirit present known to us by the name of Estelle, who made communications through a medium named Miss Hart. So one evening I said to her, 'Why do you always play upon Miss Hart? Why not influence someone else? Influence me'. She replied –'I will next time'. The next week I went to the meeting as usual, having forgotten the circumstance just mentioned. At the time and seating myself in an easy chair, waited patiently for the commencement. I had not been sitting many minutes before I felt a very strange sensation creeping over me, as though sensibility were being withdrawn. I endeavoured to rouse myself by opening and shutting my eyes, clenching my fists and sticking my nails into the palms of my hands. A person sitting near noticed me and asked if I felt ill. I replied that I felt very queer, at the same time rising from my chair and walking a few steps to and fro in the room. I then began to feel better and directly after Miss Hart began to communicate, then the thought of Estelle flashed into my mind, so drawing near, I said, 'I thought you were going to influence me tonight'. She said, 'Well, I did try. But you resisted me, and one cannot make a clock go with a watch spring'.*

On December 31st this year there are no parties or celebrations. His brother, Edwin stayed with him in the afternoon and his sister, Mary Jane in the evening. He then writes 'End of 1871'.
He starts the New Year with a text as motto for the year:

> *'Fear not' for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

On January he has obviously been looking through his diary and sees his failings:

> *Jan 20 Saturday*
> *I have often thought I should like to be able to write something in my diary every day, but I appear to be so deficient of the faculty of language, that I cannot write of every day*

occurrences in an interesting manner: nevertheless from this time I will try to write something, though it be but a sentence, a thought or a text of scripture.

This he tries to do, so 1872 has many entries, but most are texts rather than personal observations or thoughts. On January 23rd, however he does reveal himself and the thoughts that he has kept away from the diary for so long.

Dum spiro, spero. This is my Motto – 'While I breathe, I hope'. I have been asked once or twice by friends whether I think I shall recover my health and strength. Now this is a question I scarcely like to ask myself, much less being asked by others, for if I reply, 'I hope so' – I fancy they think to themselves, if they do not speak out, just these words – Ah poor fellow that is one of the symptoms of his disease, to flatter the poor victim to the last: although I am aware of all this, still I would wish to hope against hope, for 'tis this that buoys the spirits up. 'Though hope for me had smiled but to deceive; and disappointment still pursues her blandishments'.

Evening. Mr Eady has just been in to see me and asked me the question I have been alluding to.

In his heart he knows that it is just a matter of time and, with good reason, he allows himself a little self-pity:

Jan 26
Restless through the night, face much swollen this morning [he was suffering with a gumboil]. Joshua came to bid us goodbye. Going to Bristol in the morning: How I envy him, and then it makes me feel wretched. Oh that I were blessed with health and strength as my brothers are.

'Why am I so weak and weary?
Why to me is life so dreary?
While to others, all is fair'

Jan 27
Face a little better. Received Edmund's indenture to be signed, binding him for 4½ years from this time, dated Jan 26/72.

Of course, he was not to know that his brother (Samuel Edmund) would not live to complete his apprenticeship and would die on 8th April 1875, also of TB, aged just eighteen.

Herbert is true to his word and most days puts in some texts which look to the next world and his own salvation as a sinner.

Jan 31
'Sinning and suffering'.
Feb 3
'Hope on, tired heart, hope on.

On the same day he received 'Dr. Niblett's treatise' which was obviously about a cure for TB for he wrote back to him and, on February 7th,, he received, with faint hope a case of medicine. The good doctor sent a note with the medicine:

> *. . . 'I have given your case my earnest consideration, and am satisfied that this balsam will be of great benefit to you, and if persevered with will I hope soon restore you to health and strength'. I hope so too. May the Divine blessing accompany it.*

We know something of what the treatise that was first sent to Herbert by Dr. Niblett because of an editorial in the *British Medical Journal* on April 6 1878, following a spate of letters about the 'cure'. It quotes from the pamphlet:

> *Treatment of Consumption. – In recommending the following treatment, I trust that I am actuated by an earnest desire to benefit those who cases it may serve to illustrate. My aim is to lessen human suffering and to prolong human life.*
>
> *'Blessed art of healing, once again divine.'*
>
> *The specific medicine which I have so successfully prepared for every form and variety of consumption, and all diseases of the lungs and air-passages, is called* ***The Restorative Balsam.*** *There is not a single symptom this balsam will not take hold of and eradicate. Its action is immediate; it will also remove chronic bronchitis, asthma, sharp pains in the chest, difficult expectoration, sore throats, coughs and colds, also general debility. It will nourish and strengthen the vital organs by purifying the blood and removing all nervousness; it will greatly assist the digestive organs and increase the appetite; it will itself nourish patients for weeks at a time.*

The article finishes:

> *The profession will be interested to know whether the licensing bodies in question are disposed to allow this to pass unnoticed much longer.*

We tend to laugh at the Victorian quack and patent medicines but the sellers were often preying on the weak and vulnerable and slowly the medical profession was beginning to demand the prosecution of the charlatans.

Before this he wrote on Tuesday February 6th:

> Eliza Abbott's A of B.D. [Anniversary of Birth Day] 21. Mother went to her party. Mary Jane could not go as her little boy was poorly. I remember going 19 years ago to her birthday party, the day after Uncle Andrew's wedding

On many days there is just a short text but he still sometimes tells of his problems amid the trivia of everyday life:

> *Feb 13*
> *'Bright days are often followed by dark ones'. Not quite so well; cough very bad. Headache and weariness. Father paid the Magazine bill.*

He does manage to write a long piece on a relative's death:

> *Feb 18 Sunday*
> *Uncle Eneas died suddenly. We learned from letters we received afterwards that Uncle S. Bull and his wife were with Uncle E. at his house, on Sunday evening from seven to quarter to nine. They then left him apparently well in health and cheerful in mind. He wished them to stay until his boys got home, but they wanted to get home to their family. When Uncle E's two boys went home between nine to then, they found their father lying against the door unconscious. They immediately ran off to Uncle Edmund's and he and Leonard went back with them. They at once procured a doctor and he pronounced life quite extinct.*

Uncle Eneas (Enos in Census) Bull was Kezia's brother and the only one in the family who seems to have followed the parent's trade of paper-making. He is at Ringstead Mill in 1841; a porter in 1851, lodging with his brother Samuel Bull in Southwark (who is a Police Constable like Herbert's brother, Edwin, a little later): he married Sarah Ann Petty in 1854 and is a packer in a paper works in 1861 and living at 5 North Street, Spitalfields with his wife and three children.

Herbert struggles through March and even ventures out briefly:

> *Mar 4*
> *A beautiful day, mild and bright; I ventured out, after being a prisoner in the house for over three months; walked to the top of the garden; the sun was shining, trees budding, birds singing and violets coming into bloom, but I felt too weak to enjoy the pleasant prospect.*
>
> *March 5*
> *'The darkest hour precedes the dawn*
> *And the longest night must end in morn'.*
>
> *March 6 Wednesday*
> *Wrote to Dr. Niblett for another case of medicine although I cannot say that it does me any good.*
>
> *Mar 7*
> *Went up the garden again, but did not feel any better for it; very weary after it; cough troublesome and head ached. Edwin came in evening.*

His cousin Samuel, who is about to depart for Nebraska and Vancouver, comes to see them and attend the wedding of' J Phillips and E Roberts'. And as usual, 'we enjoyed his company very much'. His father is also ill and on Sunday he 'stayed with me all day, suffering together'. On the previous day when Mr Spurgeon came to see his father he had asked to go 'on the club' which seems to show that Herbert Joseph's finances were not good.

His friends and relations still came to see him. First Jedidah and then Elizabeth Spence come down from Manchester to visit. Herbert is in increasing pain and his cough, throws him, 'into an

indescribable agony of suffocation. On April 11 Mrs Spence took, in a telling phrase, 'a last farewell' of him. He does tell of the death of Mr Williamson, father of Jane who becomes Cousin Samuel's third wife, at the great age of 93. On Sunday April 21st he writes:

> *I got down into the parlour after tea, after staying upstairs for ten days. Mr. J. Green and Uncle Noah came in to see me and at my request they with Father and Edward sang two or three hymns; whilst they were singing I thought 'if with our own discordant voices we are able to make such harmony here on earth',*
> *'What must it be like to be there*
> *Where angels strike to angel strains*
> *The song of heavenly love'.*
>
> *Edwin carried me upstairs in his arms.*

Through May he receives visitors and writes texts into his diary.

> *May 10*
> *'The path of sorrow and that path alone*
> *leads to the land where sorrow is unknown'.*
>
> *May 11*
> *'A home in heaven, as the sufferer lies*
> *On his bed of pain and uplifts his eyes*
> *To that bright world, what a joy is given*
> *By the blessed thought of a home in heaven'.*

On May 15th he records:

> *Services were held at Staughton for the ordination of Mr. C. Warren. Several friends went from Ringstead.*

By a strange twist, on the death of Charles Warren, his second wife, Ada, became Herbert's brother, Joshua's second wife.

On May 27th he writes one of his last longer pieces:

> *May 27 Monday*
> *Father brought Mr. Farrer home with him to see me, and I enjoyed his company for nearly two hours. We sang with Father's assistance.*
>
> > *'When I can read my title clear*
> > *To mansions in the skies*
> > *I'll bid farewell to every fear*
> > *And wipe my weeping eyes'.*

And I think we all felt what we sang; then Mr. F. read and prayed, and they sang again. Mr. F. saying he could continue 'till midnight his soul was so full of the love of God and joy unspeakable, that he could say with the psalmist 'Bless the Lord, Oh my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name'.

On June 6th he writes his last daily entry:

Anniversary services held. Mr. Anderson of Deptford preached two sermons. Very wet day. Edwin came and went home same evening. I felt very sad and dejected; breathing difficult all day.

'My flesh and my heart faileth' but O God, do thou be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. In Thee, O Lord do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Forsake me not O Lord, O my God be not far from me.

There is just one last entry which may have been written earlier and then, later, signed:

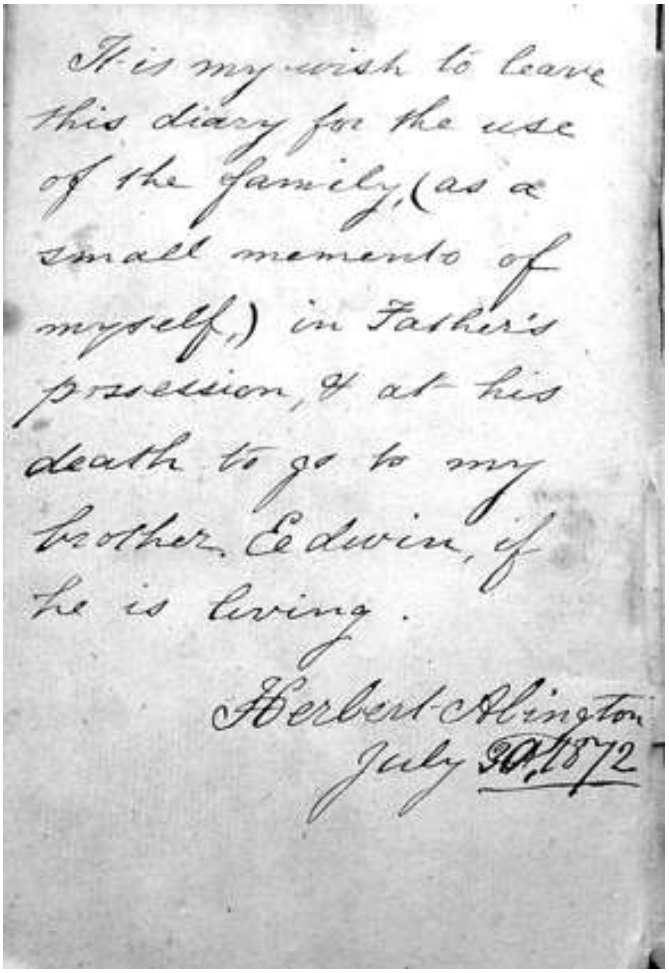
Here endeth this miscellaneous collection of facts and scraps, and although it may not interest anyone else to read it, yet it hath well repaid me for the trouble of writing, by the pleasure it hath afforded at many times in looking over

It is my wish to leave this diary for the use of the family (as a small memento of myself) in Father's possession, and at his death to pass to my brother Edwin if he is living.

Herbert Abington
July 30th 1872

Herbert died, less than one week later, on 3rd August 1872. He was buried in the small Particular Baptist churchyard where the stone, now moved to the edge of the garden, also records the deaths of his parents and his brother Samuel Edmund, who was soon to follow him. We see a family which was close-knit, with many friends. I have omitted much of the coming and going of family and friends but, even so, we can see that there is a constant interaction between brothers and sisters, cousins, uncle and aunts and we see relatives being taken into family businesses. It was also a family bound and sustained by the Baptist faith. We soon realise that this faith is not a narrow one for Herbert and he attends churches and chapels of various denominations and faces up to the challenges to his faith that the new scientific discoveries were producing. It is very sad to see a young man interested in the great issues of the day and in the future, a future which he knows he will not share.

He rarely gives the details of life and people in his diary that we would now want, partly because he was writing it for his family. There is much that is left undescribed, unmentioned and unsaid but for that reason the times when we do get a glimpse of Herbert, the young man, are the more affecting.



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I would like to give my grateful thanks to John and Ian Abington and Muriel Pack for allowing me to use the transcription of Herbert's Diary and the three illustrations from it. My special thanks to John (who did the transcription), for sending me the copies of the pages from the diary and for carefully correcting my text: also for the detailed booklet of the Abington family history researched and written by Ian and John. Any errors remaining are, of course, my responsibility.

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RINGSTEAD PEOPLE 2

More Lives of Nineteenth Century People

From a Northamptonshire Village

David Ball

Ringstead

People 2

By

David Ball

Published by David Ball,

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ISBN 978-1-903981-26-9

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Appendix **Amendments and Additions to *Ringstead People.***

Front cover shows a view from near the path to Mallows Cotton across to the station and Great Addington Church. George Clarke (c1847). With the kind permission of the Northamptonshire Record Office. Back cover shows a similar view in 2013 taken by the author.

Acknowledgements

Once again I am indebted to many people for their help and support in writing these short biographies. Janice and Philip Morris, Vivienne Marshall and Agnes Burton have continued with their online support. The staff of Northamptonshire Record Office have always been helpful and understanding. I also must record my indebtedness to the excellent Rushden Heritage website and especially to Kay Collins.

A number of websites have kindly allowed me to use photographs and I have thanked them in the references at the end of each chapter. Almost without exception I have been met with kindness and a willingness to help.

I would like to thank my wife, Betty for her patience and for her obsession with patchwork which has enabled her to understand my own obsession with this project.

David Ball

References

I have given my main references at the end of each chapter for people who wish to follow up anything with their own research. I have omitted certain references which underpin all the chapters. These are the Parish Registers of Ringstead and the neighbouring parishes. These have been viewed mainly at the Northampton Record Office, (NRO), but I have also used the transcriptions on the Rushden Heritage website. I have also used the Censuses from 1841 – 1911 on Ancestry.co.uk and the 1911 Census on FindMyPast.co.uk, as well as at NRO and more recently on the Rushden site. Every month more is becoming available on line but Record Offices are still the most valuable repositories of our past. Without them many ordinary lives would disappear forever.

Website

This is likely to be my last book on Ringstead and at some stage I will close down my website. It has proved a wonderful way of posting my draft stories and sometimes to my delight people write to me to amend or add to the biographies. I would like to thank my son Tom for setting up the website **www.ringsteadpeople.com** on which these stories originally appeared and without which I probably would never have got started.

Introduction

My hope from the start was that I could help to bring to life the lives of the ordinary people of the village of Ringstead. Of course the sources are few and we rarely can see the personal lives in the way that the upper classes are recorded. If there seems more than an average amount of criminality it is because the newspapers usually only seemed aware of ordinary people when the law became involved. The other surprise that the two books have given me is the large number of villagers who disappear only to appear in distant corners of England or the Empire. We see in these stories that the villagers had an independence of spirit and an unwillingness to kowtow to anyone. Those who came from outside, the schoolmasters, constables and vicars, to bring order and respectfulness to the inhabitants were often exasperated and bewildered by them.

David Ball

October 2013

[Note a 'c' before a date in the text is short for circa meaning 'about' or 'approximately'.

For younger readers who did not grow up with red exercise book covers full of archaic distances, weights and measures, here are a few that are mentioned in the text. It is important to remember that before the various Acts of Parliament in the Nineteenth Century not only time but many measurements differed across the country.

12d. (old pence) =1s. (shilling: now 5 pence): 20 shillings = £1 (or sometimes 1L).

16 oz. (ounces) = 1 lb. (pound - 0.454 kg): 14 lbs. = 1 st. (stone); 8 stone = 1 cwt (hundredweight): 20 cwt = 1 ton. (1.016 tonne)

12" or in. (inches) = 1 ft. (foot: 30.48 cm): 3 ft = 1 yd (yard): 1760 yards = 1 mile. Also 1 rod, pole or perch = 5½ yards and 220 yards = 1 furlong.

4 roods = 1 acre (4840 square yards). It is easy to confuse rods and roods and the latter often varied from county to county.

Chapter One

The Drink Curse

John Thomas Collett

I have tried, in these biographies, to tell the stories of ordinary men and women: the labourers, the shoemakers, the teachers and the shopkeepers. Occasionally, however, the story of someone whose stay in the village was brief is difficult to ignore. It may be a teacher like Albert Crew or a thief like John Hardy. Sometimes also it is the lure of the chase that leads us on: the pleasure of reconstructing an extraordinary life hidden by time and perhaps by deliberate red herrings.

I first came across J. T. Collett PhD when I read in the *Wellingborough News* of a talk he had given on his, 'Reminiscences of the Drink Curse', at the Ringstead Temperance Hall on Monday 4th February 1882. The article was written for those who would have known of the facts of his time in Ringstead so, annoyingly, much was left unsaid.

> *The announcement of Mr. Collett's visit to Ringstead, as might be expected, drew a large number of people to the Temperance Hall. Some were attracted thither by curiosity, others perhaps expected to hear something novel, and may came to hear a man who about seven years ago made no small commotion in the village, and championed the people's cause in parish matters*

Why, 'expected'? Exactly what the commotion was is never stated but those present certainly gave him a very enthusiastic welcome. He tells of his problems which would have been known to his audience, but not to us.

> *He expressed the great pleasure it gave him to be once more in Ringstead. It was six and a half years since he left the village. During that time life had passed roughly with him, and some of the angles in life had been rudely rubbed off, but notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of life he dared to come to Ringstead, where (dare he say it) he was once the Baptist Minister. He should ever cherish that thought. Well, he still had the same love for freedom and free thought as then. Though this might bring crosses and rebuffs, he and they should have a purpose true and dare to defend it. He advocated freedom of thought and freedom of speech* to *his opponents as well as to himself.*

We see a 'Radical' who would have been much appreciated by a large section of the villagers. He went on to talk of the dangers of drink: how it shortened lives, destroyed careers, blunted the affections and impaired the memory. He admits that he had once drunk intoxicating drinks and could say, 'from personal experience that the drink was an evil'. He finished by describing:

> *. . . in graphic terms his experience of prison life while incarcerated in Leicester gaol, a victim of an unjust, vindictive and scandalous prosecution.*

The *Ringstead Particular Baptist Church Book* confirms part of the story but it gives few other details. It tells us:

The church was without a minister from August 1874 to the first Sabbath of 1875. When the church engaged the Reverend J T Collett for 12 months, who commenced his engagement on the first Sunday of November

He was proposed for membership of Ringstead Baptist Church and accepted on December 26th 1875 on a 'profession of faith'. This seems to imply that they were concerned about his Particular Baptist Minister credentials.

Where did this J. T. Collett come from? A John Thomas Collet, son of William and Elizabeth, was born on the 6th November 1846 and baptised on December 26th 1847 at St Mary's Church in Guyhirn. Unfortunately this child was buried the following April aged just 17 months. The cause of death was diarrhoea, perhaps due to the lack of clean drinking water in the fens. Another son was born on 30th December 1848 and also baptised John Thomas on March 9th 1849. The first child had been baptised at the parish church but our John Thomas Collett received a Primitive Methodist baptism and we know that a Primitive Methodist chapel had opened in the adjacent hamlet of Tholomas Drove in 1845.

The parents of John were William and Elizabeth Collett. William is something of a mystery, giving a number of different birth places in the Census returns. We do know, from his marriage certificate, that he was the son of James Collett and was probably born somewhere south of Oxford on the Berkshire, Oxfordshire border. His wife had been born Elizabeth Pywell in Warmington Northamptonshire.

William was a cordwainer or shoemaker and we can only surmise as to what brought him to Guyhirn. In 1841 he was still single and living with shoemaker Charles Kemp and his family in Parsons Drove, very near to Guyhirn. He married Elizabeth at Warmington on May 7th 1844 in his wife's home village. She was a servant at the time of their marriage so perhaps she had been working In the Guyhirn area.

Guyhirn is a village near Wisbech, which is strung along what was once the main road from Peterborough to the port of Wisbech. It had followed the course of the north bank of the Nene which had been canalised and the high banks erected to protect the lands from the salt water of the tide overflowing as it met the river water. All around were the flat silt fens on which the agricultural wealth of the area was built.

The 1851 Census for Guyhirn shows this dependence of the village on farming for its wealth. There were some on parish relief and agricultural labourers but there were many farmers. We see, among them, millwrights and wheelwrights, brickmakers and bricklayers, carpenters and blacksmiths. There are also two shoemakers, both employing men, and there is William Collet, cordwainer. It seems likely that they were all making boots and shoes for the farmers and the stout boots which they and the farmworkers would have needed in the damp fields of the fens.

The Fens had a history of religious dissent and education. In 1879, William had returned to Guyhirn and was living in Tholomas Drove, a hamlet on the road to Wisbech St Mary. There had been a free school there since 1726, provided by the will of a local Quaker and we also know of other schools, day and Sunday, provided by the various churches. It would seem to have been an unusually good place for a young boy to get at least some schooling.

There had been for centuries little Church of England presence in the parish and this continued until 1871. The Reverend William Carpenter writing of this time before he came states:

> *Nothing but dame schools existed in the village and the education of the young has been so neglected that many of the inhabitants cannot even read. . .*

The latter statement would have been true of many English parishes and there may be some sectarian bias here. In Guyhirn there was, and still is, an austere little church built as a puritan chapel but finished in 1660 just when Cromwell's Commonwealth gave way to the Anglican kingdom of Charles II. It became the parish chapel of ease for the Guyhirn graveyard and it was in this mixed middle ground that John tried to set his religious life.

By 1854, when their daughter Phoebe was born, William and Elizabeth had moved to the different, although essentially still rural, world of Aston near in Birmingham. He continued with his trade of bootmaker, so perhaps the demand for boots and shoes in Wisbech was being affected by the general depression in farming, together with competition from the new factories. The couple suffered a series of tragedies as child after child was born and died in early infancy. It was not until 1860, when James George Collett was born, that John had a sibling who survived the first few years of life. These two brothers both became pastors in non-conformist churches but their careers could not have been more different.

Perhaps surprisingly, Wisbech once had a Baptist College, the Theological Academy of the General Baptists of the New Connexion, which had transferred in 1813 from the Mile End Road in London. John Collett did not go there but perhaps it helped shape his career thoughts for, by 1871, we find him at the English Baptist College in Bristol.

Its Principal was Frederick William Gotch, who was descended from a well-known family from Kettering in Northamptonshire. Gotch was a progressive man who had a great interest in the new science. It would seem the sort of forward-thinking, broad, broad college that would have suited John but we know from the Bristol Baptist College alumni files that:

> *J. T. Collett entered College in 1870 from Ely. Charges had been laid against this student at the start of the 1871 session. He had to leave.*

In those years after he was thrown out of the Baptist College, much seems to have happened to John. It must have been during this time, if at all, that he gained an M.A., a Ph.D. and the right to be called 'Reverend'. It appears that, in 1872, he married Hannah and moved to London, where his first child, John, was born. Then, on 25th October 1873, at the Free Church, Princes Risborough, in Buckinghamshire, a 'Rev. J. T. Collett' officiated at the wedding of Mr. Thomas Gilks and Miss Elizabeth Aldridge. By 4th July 1874 he was a minister at Christ Church, a Unitarian church in Devonport when his second son, George, was born. Within the next eighteen months James, his youngest child was also born there.

The first mention of him that I have found is in *the Northampton Mercury* of 25th December 1875 which reported that he had spoken at a meeting held at the Raunds Wesleyan Chapel

Why he left his post in Devonport we do not know but the move to Ringstead was not an obvious one. The Unitarians and Particular Baptists had a number of important theological differences. Nor do we do know how much of his background John revealed to those interviewing him at Ringstead. All we can say is that there could have been a number of reasons why the church members had concerns when appointing him. His father being a bootmaker might have been an advantage at his interview and a number of the schoolmasters appointed to the National School also came from shoemaking backgrounds.

We do get a hint of how John had 'championed the people's cause in Parish matters', that he referred to when he returned to the village in 1882, In the Vestry Minutes for 1876, signed by Edward Sandford, the Vicar, it states:

> *At the Easter Meeting held in the School on April 21 1876 Mr. Thomas Peach was nominated churchwarden by the Vicar and Dr. Collet for the parish by the parishioners.*

The Vestry Committee was the precursor of the Parish Council and was naturally dominated by the local church and its supporters. John seems to have been something of a rabble-rouser but he did try to give the ordinary villagers (and the Nonconformists) a voice on this committee. It is not commented on but we can imagine that there was a great deal of 'commotion' and anger at his deliberate intrusion into this important local meeting. It seems to have marked the start of a campaign by the more radical parts of the community to have a say in local politics.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the more conservative of the Ringstead Particular Church members did not take to John and, a few months later, in September 1876 it was decided not to renew his engagement. One surprising reason given was that he was joining the Catholic Church and indeed, in October 1876 it was proposed that Dr Collett's name be erased from the Church Book as he had joined the Catholic Church. An 1885 book 'listing about four thousand Protestants who have recently become Roman Catholics' does include:

> Rev. *D. J. T. Collett, formerly a Baptist minister.*

If this is our J. T. Collett then the Catholic Church is just one of a number of churches that he seems to have belonged to concurrently, as we shall see.

After Collett left Ringstead, the first that we hear of him is in a letter sent to the Birmingham Daily Post on 14th February 1880. (His name is variously spelt with and without an 'e'.)

> ***A 'FEVER FONT'***
>
> *Sir, - Will you permit me, through the medium of your columns to draw the attention of the sanitary authorities of this district to the existence of a pool, having a circumference of about fifty yards and situated within six yards of the back gate of my residence, and two yards from a street along which about 150 workpeople pass daily to their employ? The pool is filled with stagnant water and is the receptacle for dead dogs, cats &c.; also the refuse of middens in the locality. I saw two cartloads emptied into it on Wednesday morning last, being the third lot within the last month.*
>
> *As a result of the rising of the poisonous gases from this font of disease I have my children ill with scarlet fever. Now, I am told to remove from my house, and thus shun the evil; but, sir there are other houses in the locality, ten being in the row in which I live. If this pool is allowed to remain and I go, someone else may enter my house and immediately have their children taken with fever, to say nothing of the children of other residents, some of whom have been and are suffering.*
>
> *I am yours &c*.
>
> *J. T. COLLETTE, Ph. D.*
>
> *Watt Street, Warwick Road, Greet, Feb. 14.*

We see that he was still a campaigner and had a journalist's eye for giving the details. We also see that he had a family and was living in poor conditions.

Greet was on the southern outskirts of Birmingham. It was a small rural community, which, like many others suddenly urbanised in the 1870s with rows of terraces being built to house the workers, mainly for the local BSA Small Arms Factory. The sort of problem that 'J. T. Collette' complains of was the almost inevitable result.

By October of that year John had moved some twenty-five miles eastward to Nuneaton. 'J.T.' successfully sued an Oxfordshire clergyman for 10s 6d for a sermon he had written for him. He describes himself as Master of Arts and author. A letter from him to the *Birmingham Daily News* explains the situation more clearly and also reveals a little of his gathering problems and aspirations.

> *. . . I am a Nonconformist minister (Congregationalist) without charge and the sermons I supply to Church clergymen are those preached by myself, containing Nonconformist theology. You would have known this, only I happen to be an advanced Liberal and that is the greatest sin a man can commit in Nuneaton and, therefore, all people in this place look upon me as a 'dangerous' man, who would corrupt the minds of the youth of the town with 'Radical' principles.*

J.T. appears to be a Congregationalist Minister without a congregation. In light of this letter it is no surprise that, when we next encounter him, he had moved again, to 48 Southampton Street in Leicester. The 1881 Census, taken on the 3rd April, lists him as John Collett, aged 31 and a journalist. With him are his wife Hannah, aged 32 and their children John, aged nine born in London, George aged six and James aged five both born in Plymouth in Devon. The birth places of John and Hannah are 'Not Known'. Now this could be an honest response by the head of the household, in their absence, or it could be John trying to leave his history behind. In this he follows his father's example who gave his place of birth as Auram in Oxfordshire in 1851, Appleford in Berkshire in 1861 and, finally, Sutton (Courtenay) in Berkshire ten years later. The latter two places at least exist but is difficult to guess what village 'Auram' might be. It was only John's mother's consistency of birthplace, Warmington in Northamptonshire, which confirms that we have the right family each time.

John and his family are lodging with Hannah Forehead, a widow, and her children. He had probably come to Leicester to obtain work. We know that he managed to get a temporary position with the *Leicester Newspaper Company* as a 'Newspaper Canvasser', selling advertising to local businesses. Unfortunately, our knowledge comes from the newspaper reports of his trial for embezzlement from the company, in the months following his employment in March or early April of 1881. One newspaper report also confirms that he was formerly a Unitarian Minister at Devonport, which is part of Plymouth, where, in the 1881 Census, the youngest two children were said to have been born.

On Thursday 1st September 1881 a John Thomas Collett of 48 Southampton Street came before the Leicester Borough Police Court. The charge was that, although he did not have authority to collect accounts he had done so, getting two cheques made out in his name. These cheques had not been paid into the company account. One was for £9 10s and the other for £6 6s. One witness told the court that he had asked for this under the pretext that he received 5% commission on all orders that he personally took in. In spite of his previous 'excellent character' and 'testimonials from persons of the highest standing', he was only given bail 'of £80 and two sureties of £40 each. It is unlikely that he would have been able to find this money so probably remained in gaol. He was committed to trial

at the next Quarter Sessions and at the Leicester Borough Sessions on Wednesday 19th October 1881 he was sentenced to 12months hard labour.

We know a great deal about his time in Leicester Gaol because he wrote a book entitled *Prison Reminiscences of the Drink Curse* which was published in 1883 by Marshall Brothers of London, although it was printed in Leicester. It ran to 112 pages and was obviously the basis of the Temperance speech that he gave in Ringstead in the February of that year.

John Thomas Collett (The frontispiece: from Prison Reminiscences of the Drink Curse)

Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library 1883.8.227

For once we have absolute proof that he did indeed write a book for a few copies still exist. There is one in the 'Rare Books' department of Cambridge University Library. It is a small fragile paperback about 8 inches by 5 inches with a pale grey cover. John might derive some satisfaction at the care with which it is now handled, and the company that it keeps. We learn that the author, J. T. Collett, Ph.D. F.R.A.S. has also written, '*The Shades of Hades, Why I am a Liberal* and *Is Vaccination a*

Preventative against Disease, etc. etc'. It is the second edition so we must assume that it has had some success although John comments wryly on this at later court case. The book's main purpose is to show that alcohol is the major reason for crime. Today, we would, perhaps, give drugs a similar prominence. He gives figures to prove his case:

> *In the particular prison in which I was engaged* ***twenty-five hundred prisoners*** *entered during the year, and all with the exception of* ***seventeen*** *were victims of 'the drink', and its curse was manifest upon them.*

John worked as a librarian while in the prison and in this way saw many of the prisoners and he recounts some of their lives. He tells us that the real rogues easily coped with prison life and even quite enjoyed it. For other men, however, who had made one mistake it could be a bitter experience. He did not have to step outside his cell to find a prisoner to illustrate this kind of man. He reveals his own sad case when he writes:

> *I shall never forget a prisoner of the latter kind who had held the position of a Christian Minister and had fallen through drink, having a wife and three children whom he dearly loved. One night he had a dream that troubled him greatly, which was to the following effect. He dreamed that he saw his wife and three boys in the corner of the cell, all looking lean and hungry and weeping bitterly. For a moment neither spoke, but they looked at him and he at them. At last he thought his wife cried, 'Dear Tom, what shall I do with these three boys? And then each boy addressed him, saying 'Papa, I am so hungry, do give me something to eat. The effect of the dream upon the prisoner was manifest; all that he would say for days after, when spoken to upon any subject, was 'oh! my dear, dear family. God help them; what a devil I have been'. But the most remarkable thing in connection with the circumstance was on the very day he dreamed the above, his wife and family were compelled to enter the parish union and he in ignorance of the fact.*

John talks about the chaplains, the officers, the punishments, the food and the prisoners. He shows up some of the failings of the system and offers ideas on how it could be improved. With regard to the chaplains, many of whom he criticises for their lack of commitment and compassion, he writes, in his Introduction, the following two sentences which might explain some of his own problems with the churches that he was involved with:

> *Those having the moral training of the prisoners in hand, especially ought to be beyond denominational bias and sectarian cant. Remembering it is not creed but Christ, not ritual but righteousness, not priesthood but piety, that are essential to the uplifting of men.*

John does find the Catholic priest one of the best of the chaplains being, 'a gentleman and a Christian' but does add, 'whatever may be the defects of his system and the errors of his theological code'. This does not sound like a man who had joined the Roman Catholic Church but with John we can never be certain of the truth.

He also criticised the 'hard labour' which he says was not cost effective and did not help to fit the prisoners for their lives in the world of work outside. In Leicester Prison, he tells us most of the labour consisted in 'wood-chopping'. The wood was first sawn by large gangs and Collett feels that the rogues tend to corrupt the first-timers when they are thrown together in this type of work. In his chapter entitled 'On The Saw' Collett describes how the system worked. The saw was a development of the 'crank' which in some prisons was used merely for useless mechanical 'hard labour', in the same way as the treadmill. He tells us that:

> *There were about eighty men employed in the work. It was given as first class "hard labour". They were divided into two portions, first the sawyers, and second choppers and tyers. The "saw" was worked by thirty men changing every quarter of an hour, thus twenty were constantly turning the "crank handles" and ten resting. The "saw" crank was fixed in a long building so that twenty men could stand in one long row, each in a small "stall". Some portion of each day all thirty men would turn, thus bringing two men together in each of ten "stalls".*

It was in this situation that Collett thought that the first offenders could be corrupted by the old hands as the operation was only supervised by one warder. In general prisoners could not talk to each other. In his book, *Victorian Prison Lives*, Philip Priestley points out that in 1853 a Royal Commission found at Leicester Prison:

> *. . . untried prisoners "suffered stoppages for offences such as the following:- 'Coughing to each other in the airing yard'; 'attempting to communicate', attempting to look over the stall in the chapel', and 'repeatedly turning round in chapel.'*

Perhaps the most revealing part of Collett's book for us is when he manages to link the evils of this work to a prisoner who, once again, we quickly recognize.

> *To show you the evil of this 'saw' association I will here state what occurred to an educated prisoner who had been committed for twelve months upon a very questionable charge of embezzlement. We all felt that his sentence was most excessive. The facts of the case were as follows. He was engaged upon the newspaper press as manager of the contract advertisement department of a daily paper. One day he was apprehended by a county court bailiff for a debt of fifteen pounds sixteen shillings. His employers were indebted to him to the extent of eighteen pounds eighteen shillings as commission. When taken, he desired the bailiff to accompany him to the office, where he would seek payment of the money due and discharge the debt for which he was apprehended. He was denied payment by the manager upon the ground that 'the proprietors must settle with him.' He then went to two customers and drew their accounts and paid the bailiff off. He afterward informed the manager what he had done, and gave him an account setting forth the fact of having drawn the accounts to the total of fifteen pounds sixteen shillings, and showing the balance due to him to be three pounds two shillings to make a just settlement. After a few weeks, the manager, upon his own authority, and without consulting the editor – who was the managing director – charged him with the crime of embezzling the amounts he had drawn from the customers to pay off the bailiff. He pleaded not guilty and was committed for trial. At his trial the jury found him guilty of a breach of the **letter** of the law, and the merciful (?) judge passed the above sentence, notwithstanding he had been previously a clergyman, and that such gentlemen as Gladstone, Bright and others gave him good testimonial. Now, some officers have an idea, fully borne out in their actions, that if an educated and gentlemanly prisoner come under their charge, he shall do all the roughest work and be made to associate with the most vulgar and villainous in the prison.*

On 'the saw' a pickpocket tells John of an address in Manchester which needed 'educated men with a gentlemanly appearance' to act as 'hooks' for the 'hands'. These men, with links to good society, acted as 'detectives' to provide information for the 'hands' or pickpockets.

We see a very different view of the case here than in the newspaper report and one that seems to have some credibility. Was John too clever for his immediate bosses who resented him and were pleased to orchestrate his downfall, or did he manipulate the true facts? Again, with the

recommendations from Gladstone and Bright, if these are true they link him to the most powerful men in the country. Gladstone became Liberal Prime Minister for the second time in 1880. John Bright was a leading radical Liberal who was for many years an M.P for Birmingham and served in Gladstone's cabinet. These are weighty references indeed and we can at the moment only wonder at how close John's connection was to these important men, whose politics he shared. John's record, however, leads us to be dubious of their authenticity

There is a picture of John as the frontispiece to the book. It shows him with a fashionable droopy moustache and thin long sideboards and wearing oval metal rimmed spectacles. As we are to discover later, it was not a book that would change his fortunes.

So we see John, a chastened man giving his lecture on the devil drink to the Ringstead villagers. Well, not exactly, for his speech told of his trial and imprisonment as a result of an 'unjust prosecution' and his book spells out clearly how he felt that he had been unfairly treated. Neither would we expect him to be swayed from his radical ideals. On Monday 3rd December 1883 he gave a lecture at Raunds Temperance Hall on 'Reforms needed by the working classes'.

A few months later, in February 1884, in the Leicester County Court, John was being sued for a debt of £1 that he owed. The debt was for a pair of boots from some five years earlier when Collett had been employed as a traveller for a boot and shoe manufacturer. The case is covered at some length, in the *Leicester Chronicle,* perhaps because he was beginning to gain some notoriety. In answer to questioning he reveals that he is a newspaper agent and author but only, 'by commission'. He states that his average earnings are 33s 6d a week but adds that he had been in distress some fifteen months ago and his wife and family had been in the Workhouse for some time. This would have been around the period when he was in gaol, although this is not mentioned.

There is a second case brought against him by a Mr. C, W. Stokes, a traveller to recover:

> *. . . the sum of £8 odd due for commission on advertisements procured by the defendant for a book which he had written on 'Prison Life' – Collett pleaded inability to pay more than 5s a month. (To defendant): On December 28 did you not publish a book entitled 'Horrible London'? Defendant: - Unfortunately I did. His Honour: He might do so, and probably it was a dead loss. – Defendant: It is sir; out of 5,000 copies published I have 4,800 on my hands (Laughter.) I have to keep my books; my books don't keep me (Laughter).*

In both cases he was ordered to pay five shillings a month. Mr. J. J. Harper, the judge, appeared to have had some sympathy with John Collett and we see that he seems to have been a likeable witty character who could please the crowds.

On the 5th August of the same year John was once again in court, this time for not paying a debt owed to L. E. Gee, a solicitor for the sum of £18 under a recent judgement. John admitted that he was the editor of the *Birmingham and Midlands Trades Journal* and was entitled to 20% of the profits – 'but up to the present time no profits had been made'. He continued:

> *Amongst other things, he was the author of a publication entitled 'Why should London wait?' and received some £40 for advertisements for the book while the work cost him £84. Of the number printed he had only sold 200 copies. He contributed to nine papers but did not get paid for everything he wrote, as literature was not a very paying game. (Laughter.) . . . He was also the author of a pamphlet entitled 'Experiences of Prison Life;' but the sales never reached 6000 copies, They sold at the rate of 500 per week for the first few weeks but as soon as the public read them they did not go off as quickly (Laughter.) He was not aware that*

the plaintiff had received a letter from his publishers saying that they would not have the remainder of the pamphlets for waste paper. He had written pamphlets on various subjects, and had lectured on temperance in connection with the blue ribbon movement; but altogether his earnings did not average £2 per week.

He was ordered to pay the debt, according to the original judgment. The judge, although called J. J. Hooper could be the same man as at his previous appearance. John is mistakenly reported as James and the titles of his publications differ in both newspaper reports. There are. As usual a few facts which make one wonder about the truth of John's claims. He declined to answer when asked if he had written the pieces in the *Daily Telegraph* on 'Why Should London Wait?'[For better housing etc] and certainly there was a series appearing there in late 1883. Secondly George Robert Sims, born in 1847, and most famous today for the poem beginning, *'It is Christmas Day in the Workhouse'*, was a successful radical journalist, campaigner and writer. He wrote pieces in the newspapers on 'Horrible London' which were later reprinted in book form. He also finished his education in Germany, [where John said in a later case that he had obtained his PhD]. Are these coincidences, or was John beginning to lose his hold on reality or was it deliberate fraud?

On 22nd August 1885 the *Tamworth Herald* printed a short article on the Trent Valley Brewery Company (Limited) of Litchfield. This was taken from *The Brewers' Review, '*a new publication devoted to the interests of the brewing trade, edited by Mr. J. T. Collette, M.A., Ph.D.'. John had written the article and it seems unlikely that he had remained teetotal in his appraisal of the company and its products. Was his new venture a success? We suspect not. The first prospectus of the *Brewing Trade Review* has the following statement:

The Country Brewers' Society contracts with its members to supply them with a Trade Newspaper. For this purpose two Trade Papers have been called into existence in the past which are still being issued. Circumstances in both cases have rendered the severing of the connexion with the County Brewers' Society necessary. From the large sum of money which the proprietor of the last of these two papers has recently demanded for his property it is clear that the value of the Society's name and assistance to these papers has been very great.

Somewhere in an archive there may be more to be found but it seems that John's paper did not last long. Perhaps it was he who tried to sell it for a' large sum of money'. If so, it seems very likely that he did not succeed.

By May 1887, John had moved to 2 Garfield Place, Bordesley Green, Small Heath, Birmingham. We know this because he was, once again, in court. This time he was in Birmingham Police Court. He hear that John Thomas Collett is described as, 'a doctor of philosophy, a curate, a scripture reader, editor &c'. He was charged with obtaining money from people by false pretences. The police asked for him to be remanded but John wanted the case heard immediately as he was sure he could prove his innocence.

Mary Ann Pullar explained how John had come to her house on the 9th May and handed her his card on which was written:

J.T. Collett, M.A., F.R.A.S., Editor of the Birmingham Midland Counties Trades Journal and Commercial Register, Commercial Buildings, Deritend. [Now part of Birmingham.]

Answering questions John told the court that he was a Doctor of Philosophy which he had obtained in Germany. The witness stated that he had told her that he was a curate at Ward End Church and

that he was collecting on behalf of a family called Inson who were in very distressing circumstances. Mary Pullar gave him:

> *. . . a bottle containing spirits, a few biscuits and 1s.*

A sickly looking man called Inson was then called and he told the court that Collett had never passed on any of these gifts.

When asked what he had to say to the charge, John spoke at length, as one would expect. He claimed that, finding that Inson was sick and could not work or pay his rent, he had volunteered to collect money for him and had done so for some weeks past.

> *He gave a long list of names and wished to go into the minutest details with regard to the conversations and transactions he had had with the people names; but the Magistrate's Clerk, (Mr. Barradale), frequently interrupted with the remark, 'Confine yourself to the shilling'.*

John told them finally that in all he had collected about 14s 6d but when asked he said that he did not have it with him but had the 'equivalent at home'.

The case then moved on to a charge that he had sent a letter to a Mr. F. Henshaw of Green Lane asking him for money. The heading of the letter was the Birmingham Midland Counties Trade Journal and Commercial Register.

> *The circular explained that the paper circulated in India, Ceylon, Japan, Borneo, Java, Manila, Mauritius, Hawaiian Islands and other foreign parts*

The next witness said that Collett had asked for money for the Insons and he had said he had been the Scripture Reader at St Martin's, Bull Ring some nine years previously. John admitted that this was untrue. He was remanded to appear on the Wednesday but it appears that he did not turn up for, on the Thursday, he was arrested and now admitted that he had collected money for the Insons but that he had spent it.

When he was sentenced, on Wednesday 25th May, 1887, it was stated that he had a previous conviction for embezzlement at Chester [I have not found any proof of this. Could it be a misheard Leicester?], and he was sentenced to three months hard labour as a 'rogue and vagabond'.

It is obvious that John was on a steep downward spiral into debt and petty crime. He was described at his trial for fraud as a, 'shabbily dressed, well built man of about forty years of age'. His hopes of a career as preacher, journalist or author seem dashed and debt was driving him to crime. It also seems likely that drink was still the major part of his problem.

In August 1887, at Aston Police Court, he was charged again, this time with 'obtaining alms at Ward End on 5th May by false and fraudulent pretences' It is reported in the Leicester Chronicle under the headline:

> ***"DR." T. COLLETT AGAIN***

It is clear that the newspaper is querying the title, "Dr". 'It also becomes obvious that these are offences that occurred as part of his previous charges, of collecting money for the Insons, which were not dealt with at the time. Again the amounts are small: one is for 1s another 6d and included

are items such as a pair of boots or an old dress. The defence lawyer asked for leniency for John who he said was:

> *. . . a well educated man who up to about 1880 was in good circumstances but, in consequence of intemperate habits and other causes he had got into trouble in Leicester and was sentenced to 12 months hard labour.*

Despite the pleas and his promise to reform he was sentenced to another two months hard labour. Was this just justice taking its course or was John Thomas Collett right in thinking he was being deliberately persecuted because of his political views? Was he just a Micawber who in desperation began to slip ever more into crime and deception?

We know that, like Micawber before him, he decided to try for his fortune in the New World. Exactly when he went is not certain but we do know that his wife Hannah and his three children, John, George and James stated in a later Census that they had emigrated to America in 1887. I have not found the family on board ship with certainty but there is one possibility. On 24th May 1888 the American Line steamer, *Lord Clive,* left Queenstown in Ireland on its way from Liverpool and docked in Philadelphia harbour on 5th June. She had on board a John T. Collett with his family. Unlike all the other people on that page of the *Passenger List* there are no ages and, possibly, no other Christian names for the family. We have:

Collett	*Jno*	*a*	*M*	*Lab*
"	*Mrs*	*a*	*F*	*Wife*
"	*Boy (or Roy?)*	*a*	*M*	*Lab*
"	*Child*	*c*	*"*	*Child*
"	*Child*	*c*	*F*	*"*

They are all heading for Philadelphia as settlers. Now, some of this is wrong. The oldest son would have been at least 16 and so an adult. The youngest son, however, is shown as female although this may be a mistake made in writing across a page without ruled lines. For the rest, if we take into account the Colletts' entry in the 1881 Leicester Census, where information is wrong or not given, it does seem to follow a pattern. All we can say is that it could be our family and their later assertion that they arrived in 1887 was an understandable mistake.

Almost all the 1890 USA Federal Census was lost in a fire so we do not see them together in a Census in their new country. The 1889 Philadelphia City Directory does record John T Collett as a 'Laborer', and a year later as a Civil Engineer living in the Bullitt Building there. It is almost certainly the same home where we find Hannah and the couple's children in later Directories.

What we also discover is that John died in Philadelphia on 17th December 1894 and was buried four days later in a Philadelphia Cemetery. His occupation was given as journalist and his address as 116 Spruce Street. Was this a current occupation or was it harking back to earlier times in England. He was recorded as married and was just 45 years old. The left hand edge of the certificate is missing but the cause of death is probably, 'Mania with Cellulitis and Periostitis of face and jaw.' John seems to have had a wound to his jaw, perhaps from a tooth extraction, which became infected, destroying the tissue and bone and poisoning his system. In the days before antibiotics infections could lead to death with frightening rapidity. It would have been a difficult and painful death. How "mania"

contributed to his death is another matter. His drinking and erratic behaviour were perhaps part of an undiagnosed illness. We cannot be sure.

In the Philadelphia City Directory for 1894 Hannah and her sons, John, who is a clerk and George, a 'laborer', are shown living together. There is no sign of the youngest son, James or of John so, probably, either the names were collected after his death or when he was still in hospital. Certainly, by the 1998 Directory Hannah is shown as. 'wid Jno T.', and her sons John and Thomas J (James?) are shown with her at a new address in Naudain, Philadelphia.

When we find John's family again they have moved to 148 Cox Street in Camden City, New Jersey. In the 1900 United States Federal Census his son John, aged 29, is now the 'Head of House'. He is married to Catharine aged 28, who was born in Wisconsin but whose father came from Scotland. John is a proof reader, as is his unmarried brother George who is 26 years old. The youngest brother, James, aged 25, is also living in the house and is a tinsmith. John Thomas's widow, Hannah, aged 52 is also living with her son. We see that the two eldest sons have followed in their father's footsteps into the business of print. The family had still not become naturalised American citizens.

Back in England, John's brother, James George Collett, was also making a name for himself. He had moved back to Birmingham with the family and first worked as a draper's assistant. He was a Baptist and attended Preachers' Classes run by Henry Platten the Minister at the Graham Street Baptist Church. From there he progressed to *Rawdon Baptist College* and became a joint Pastor of the Kings Heath and Moseley Baptist Churches from 1888 until 1913. Was he relieved that his wayward older brother had emigrated to America before he took up his appointment? He lived to be over one hundred years old, dying in 1962. In 2009 the *New Life Baptist Church* in Kings Heath was being renovated and found, built into the walls, were two time capsules, one from 1872 and the other from 1897. Included, among newspapers and documents of the church was a handwritten note from James George Collett dated 1897.

Although, at times, a painful story to tell, these pages will have to serve as a time capsule for his brother John Thomas Collett, who, for a few months, caused, 'no small commotion', in a small Northamptonshire village.

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My thanks to Agnes Burton for the details from the Ringstead Baptist Church Book: to Helen Ford (archives@warwick.ac.uk) for the details from the Brewing Trade Review: to Mrs. Shirley Shire, Librarian at Bristol Baptist College for details of John Collett's dismissal from the college: to Rudolf Schmidt (www.antiquusmorbus.com)and Nicola Cook, Library Assistant at the Welcome Library for helping with the meaning of the cause of death on the death certificate
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Chapter Two

Sins of the Father?

William Cobley (c1826 – 1868) and his son William (1856 - ?)

One Sunday in early summer in 1842 a young woman was making her way to chapel in Ringstead. She was, according to the newspaper report a pretty girl and we can imagine her in her Sunday best, perhaps aware of how well she looked. Then, to her annoyance, a young man who had been drinking heavily, or, as the newspaper reporter puts it, in a heavy, sub Dickensian humorous style, 'had been spending his time in the service of Bacchus instead of Cupid' comes up to her. He then 'coils his arm three times round her waist'. Even allowing for the tiny waists of the time this seems unlikely so we must assume it means on three occasions.

Hannah then continues with her evidence at the Wellingborough Petty Sessions:

> *"I says," continued Hannah, "Bill just uncoil your arm will you? When he gives it another coil. Then I gives him a push, to make him uncoil his arm, when unbeknown to me, he flops into a ditch and begins a singing 'Here I lies alone to die all hunder the willor tree.' Then I says get hup, and don't lay a roaren there you drinking brute, when up he gets, an kicks me and calls me names."*

The young woman was Hannah Houghton and the young man was William Cobley. Apparently, 'he had kept Hannah company for some time." William admitted the charge but thought:

> *. . . it very cruel on the part of Hannah to make the charge, and said "it warrant natural."*

We can see the law's reluctance, until very recently, to get involved in, 'domestics'. 'The Magistrates advised them to make it up and settle the matter out of Court. They did so, and left the Hall as loving as turtle doves.'

I had intended following these star-crossed lovers to see what happened to them. The spoilt walk to chapel happened on the 4th September 1842, some fifteen months after the Census. Surely it would be simple to identify the parties and carry their lives forward. In the case of Hannah she has proved elusive. Is she the Hannah Houghton who was born in Lowick in 1822, married Thomas Nutt of Wollaston and lived to be ninety-five? There is no sign of her in Ringstead and she seems some five years too old for our Romeo. Perhaps she is the Hannah Houghton born in Holcot in about 1822 who married Thomas Parker of Sywell in 1844, the same year as our Lowick girl?

There are also other possibilities. But the most likely Hannah is actually Anne Houghton, born in about 1827 in Lowick, who was the sister of Hannah Nutt. In 1841, she is living with her parents in Lowick and by 1851 is a servant in Thrapston. She marries Joseph Allen of Woodford in 1856 and lives there afterwards, bringing up a large family. It seems more likely that she would be walking to church in Ringstead. We also notice that, in the 1871 Census, she is living at 13 Pig Lane Woodford and her eldest son is George Houghton, who is 18 years old, and is recorded as 'son of wife'. He had been baptised in Lowick, the son of Anne, on 23rd April 1854. This is long after William Cobley had left the area.

Unfortunately we cannot be certain which of these Hannah Houghtons was that girl, walking to chapel one September day in 1842. What we do know is that she did not marry the drunken young man who assaulted her. William Cobley was one of a wide family. The Ringstead Parish Registers are full of Cobley births in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but, by 1851 there is only Elizabeth, widow of William Cobley (possibly a great uncle of our William) and her four children. She is now married to twenty-six year old coal; dealer, Lovell Warren, some seventeen years her junior.

We see the evidence of this flight from Ringstead in the 1881 Censuses for Northampton. Samuel Cobley (27) and his family; Samuel Cobley (51) and his wife and family (all born in Ringstead); George Cobley (25) and his wife, Joseph Cobley (38) and his wife and family are all there and all working in the boot and shoe trade. The new factories were drawing men and women from the outwork villages.

Our William Cobley was probably born in late 1826 and was baptised in Ringstead on 26th February 1827. He was, like many growing boys, to cause his parents problems. In all his run-ins with the law there does seem, however, a perversely likeable, sense of misplaced fun.

We know that William's drunken foolishness was not a one-off episode. In February 1844, he was again before the courts because of his drinking. One of the new police force had had problems with him. The Mercury reports that:

> *Police constable Tuckey brought a charge against Thos. Whittering and Wm. Cobley for being drunk and disorderly.*

The behaviour of one of the drunken men seems to echo the dramatic gestures of William towards Hannah. We are told that:

> *One of the worthies, by the force of liquor, imagined himself so strong that he was calling on his companion to come and hold him up till he placed his feet on the globe and shoved it out of its place. His companion was preparing to lend him the necessary aid when Tuckey came up and prevented the accomplishment of his dire intention, which threatened the position of our little globe. The conduct of the defendant on the whole was proved to be of so harmless a nature that the bench dismissed the case.*

When we look at the cases of the men and women from Ringstead that came up before the courts we see that drunkenness was the greatest cause. The others are mainly poaching, petty theft and assault. We know that the Temperance movement was extremely strong during the Victorian era and it had some cause. We see today the 'binge drinking' problems in our villages and small market towns. Then it was even worse, made more shocking by the poverty of the families of the drinkers. Originally, in the eighteenth century cheap gin had been the main ruin of mothers and fathers and the 1830 Beer Act had been brought in to allow beer and cider only public houses, aimed specifically at the working classes. These were often started in a front parlour of a house and sometimes could allow the landlord or landlady to buy their house and even move next door.

There was some regulation, as we have seen in Ringstead in earlier stories, with the prosecution of landlords for serving beer after time but in other ways, even by today's standards it was very lax. It was not until 1886 that it became illegal to serve alcoholic drinks to children under thirteen. In 1854 an Act banned Sunday drinking between the times of 2.30 pm and after 10 pm. The following year another Bill proposed the almost complete cessation of Sunday trading in London. These led to two great demonstrations in Hyde Park with riots and many arrests.

It was not long after his second arrest that William's parents, John and Mary took the family south to Canterbury. It is there, in 1851, that we find them. John had been an agricultural worker and after the1841 Enclosure of Ringstead it would have been more difficult for him to make a living. Perhaps there was a family member involved. Sarah, the wife of a William Cobley living in Lowick, had been born in Kent. This William had been born in Bromham in Huntingdonshire and of course Hannah Houghton had probably come from Lowick. It is all very tenuous but, for whatever reason, the family moved to Canterbury and John became a 'Railway Engine Cleaner'. Perhaps the coming of the railway to Ringstead had opened his eyes to new opportunities to get out of poverty. His five-year-old son, Henry, had been born in Kent so it seems that the family probably moved there sometime around 1845 or 1846.

By the 1851 Census, William had already married and had a family of his own. His wife was a Whitstable woman called Mary Ann Nelson. Her maiden name was Perkins and she had married Edward Nelson in 1843. He had died in 1848 and, it seems, within months, she had married William. They are living at Goulding Court, Staplegate, Canterbury and William is working as a 'cordwainer' or shoemaker. There are four children, Edward N. (8), and three girls, Anne E. N. (7), Ellen (2) and Esther (8 months). They all have the surname Cobley but it seems certain that the oldest two children are from Mary Ann's first marriage and the 'N' is for Nelson.

It is now possible that William now settled down to domestic life and forgot his old ways. It seems that the couple moved to Whitstable, Mary Ann's birthplace and their youngest child, Esther was born there in about 1858 but in the following year Mary Ann died. Did this send William back off the rails again? In January 1860 William came before the St. Augustine Petty Sessions in Canterbury charged with an assault at Whitstable. Unfortunately William had failed to turn up for his trial and the constable who had served him with the summons stated that he had told him that he did not intend attending.

The landlord of the *Hoy Endeavour* public house had spotted a woman trying to pickpocket, 'a countryman who was the worse for liquor'. He started to put her out of the pub by force. At this point William decided to get involved and threw landlord and woman out together. The following disturbance meant that the landlord was unable to clear his house until one o'clock the following morning. In his absence William was fined £2, or one month's imprisonment.

Belatedly William arrived, claiming that the train from Whitstable had been late and saying that he had never interfered with the landlord and had just thrown water in the woman's face to 'aid in her recovery' from the hysterics. He pleaded for mitigation of the sentence but this was not allowed except to give him one week to pay the fine.

A year later he was living with his parents in 2 St. Radegund Street, Canterbury. He is still a shoemaker and the younger children of the marriage, Ellen (11), William (4) and Esther (3) are with him. Next door, with his wife and family, is his younger brother, George (26) who has followed his father onto the railways and is an 'Engine fireman'. George too was having his problems On Tuesday 21st of that same year he brought an action against Canterbury Friendly Society of which he was a member. When he asked for sickness benefit, because of illness the Society said that he had not been a 'sound man' when he became a member, even though he claimed that he was, and so he was not entitled to benefit. In fact he was, 'ruptured'. In these days before the Welfare State the Friendly Societies, run by their members, were a lifeline for many poor families. They relied on most people remaining healthy and so did not allow certain groups to join. These men, often the neediest, were left to get through as best they could. The clause of the Canterbury Society which was used against George makes this very clear.

That no person shall be admitted a member of this society under the age of seventeen nor over the age of thirty years, nor shall at the same time, nor at any time after his admission into the society belong to, or be a member of any other friendly society, nor shall be afflicted with the gout, rheumatism, kings evil, consumption, asthma or any other disease which may tend to shorten human life or that may occasion him to claim any of the benefits of this society. But if at any future time it can be proved that any person was subject to one or more of the aforesaid disorders or complaints, or being a member of any other friendly society, he shall be immediately excluded this society without any return of money etc.

I am reminded of a Friendship Club in another village I know which removed the fuse each week from the plug of their cooker in the village hall so that no other group should use it. Friendly, up to a point! It seems however, that George won his case.

William's son, also William began to cause problems for his widowed father. He appeared before the Canterbury Police Court on August 5th 1867. The Kentish Chronicle for the 10th August records that:

A young boy, named Cobley, was charged with being found lying in a coal shed for an unlawful purpose. On being found, the policeman asked him what he was doing there, and he said he had been turned out of doors by his father.

The father of the boy appeared and denied the truth of the boy's assertion. He said that he had never turned him out, but he had got into the companionship of thieves and bad boys, and had left home, absolutely refusing to work. He was quite willing to take the boy home, and do the best he could for him.

The chairman severely reprimanded the boy for his bad behaviour and sent him home in company with his father.

The young William could only have been about eleven years old but his father was struggling, as his own father John, had struggled with him. It may be also that William, the father was not well, for in the spring of the following year he died. The grandfather, John, died a year later. [At the General Quarter Sessions at Canterbury on 2nd January 1866 a John Cobley had been sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for house breaking. We can only hope that it was no relation.]

William's family was scattered by this double blow. Ellen had married Charles Kirby in 1864 who in 1871 is a City of Canterbury Corporation worker. Esther is staying with their father's sister, Sophia who had married to James Henshaw. The whole family, including Esther, are working at a paper mill in Chartham in Kent.

Orphaned, and probably living with one of his aunts in Ruttington Lane in Canterbury, William, seems to be out of control. In a report of the Canterbury Police Court on Thursday 7th January 1869, we are told by the *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald* that:

William Cobley, a youth under 14 years of age was charged with stealing a pair of female boots worth 5s 6d from the shop of Wm. Moore in Burgate-street.

Samuel Warren, who had a clothes shop saw William steal the boots from outside the shop and gave chase. He caught him and handed William over to the police. Showing some of the naivety of his father, when young, William blurted out, 'I stole the boots, but I did not steal your trousers yesterday'. William was then also charged with stealing the trousers which Mr. Warren had missed but had not known until then what had happened to them. The trousers were said to be worth 16s

9d, [some £40 today], although Green, a pawnbroker, only gave him five shillings for them. Green was warned by the court about accepting new articles into pawn and, probably unfairly, one thinks of Fagin and Oliver Twist Another boy, called Rogers also gives evidence that he did not see who took the trousers but that he, like all the boys in the gang, took a share of the profits.

William was sent to the Quarter Sessions which seem to have been very soon after his first appearance. He pleaded guilty on both counts although he still maintained that he had not been the one who had stolen the trousers. He was ordered to be 'imprisoned and kept to hard labour for a period of three weeks in the gaol, on the expiration of that term to be sent to Red Hill reformatory for five years'.

Did the Recorder, J. Deedes feel that he was doing the right thing by a young orphan who was going wrong or was he moved by the figures that he had read out at the start of the session and his regret at the number of crimes and prisoners during the past year? Did he feel that removing William for five years would improve the statistics? Does some of this strike a chord today?

William served his time in Canterbury City Gaol and was taken into Redhill Reformatory on 26th January 1869.

In 1788 a small group of men had met in St. Paul's Coffee House in London and decided to try to do something for the children who lived, and often died, on the streets of London. This became the *Royal Philanthropic Society*. They started an institute for these homeless boys and girls in Southwark and gradually widened their activities. In 1845 it was decided only to take boys and to move into the country. Of course, as would be the case today, residents around possible sites were not happy at the prospect of having delinquent boys on their doorstep and one offered a thousand pounds for it be located elsewhere. This money was accepted.

In 1848 the institution moved to Redhill, near Reigate, in Surrey and a Farm School was established. At first it was a voluntary scheme and some parents even paid for their wayward children to go there. The Reformatory School Act of 1854 changed this and Redhill became Redhill Reformatory School and only received boys sent there by the courts. In many ways this was a progressive measure, and was supported by Charles Dickens, because it was in place of prison for young offenders. By 1857 there were five houses at Redhill with some 250 boys, each house having a master and a matron, rather on the pattern of the public schools.

As well as the farming, crafts such as basket making, tailoring and shoemaking were taught. There were sports teams and a choir and a 'Harvest Home' Open Day when the great and the good came to see the work of the school.

In September 1869 the *Illustrated London News* reported:

> Home of the Philanthropic Society took place at their farm, Redhill, on Wednesday week. The attendance of visitors was unusually large. The various buildings were gaily decorated for the occasion, and the whole establishment appeared to the best advantage. Nothing could exceed the cleanliness and good order displayed through the buildings and the grounds of the farm and the appearance of all the rescued "waifs and strays" of humanity under the society's charge was highly creditable. A muster of boys first took place. Then a certain number of them were told off to carry the "last load" to the farmyard, one of the most pleasing features in the days' proceedings. A thanksgiving service in the chapel with a sermon by the Rev. W.F.C.S. Fraser followed. After the service in the chapel came races and

games, a supper for the boys, the address of the chairman of the day (Mr. J. Gladstone, Treasurer of the society) and distribution of the prizes.

One can imagine William and the other boys fidgeting as further speeches followed.

For many boys it may have been a happy, organised time away and their lives were turned around, but others would have resented the uniform of brown corduroy with a forage cap and all that went with it.

There is a record of what William looked like when he entered Redhill. He was 4ft 10½ inches tall, had a ruddy complexion with dark brown hair, and large brown eyes. He also had large ears and eyebrows and a very hairy upper lip with a deep dimple in his chin. He was 'very red around the bridge of the nose from blows in fighting'. We have a description of a young boy who was a stereotype of a street urchin. To complete the picture we are told in his Redhill file that he could only read in easy (underlined) monosyllables and could write very little.

His age was given as thirteen years and he had attended the National School in Canterbury, although one suspects he had not been a regular attender. He had also worked with horses on a farm at Shalford near Canterbury, where he earned four shillings a week. Both his parents and his grandfather, John Cobley were dead. His grandmother, Mary Ann Cobley (nee Whiteman) seems to have cared for him most for she visited him on August 8th of his admission year. As one would expect, perhaps, misdemeanours and punishments are entered on his record over the next three years. But only at the rate of three or four a year. He was impertinent, noisy at work, caused 'disorder' and was idle and shirked school. On one occasion he was fined three pence for, 'damage to school wall'. Perhaps he was trying out newfound writing skills. We get a picture of a boisterous lad used to the rough-and-ready give-and-take of the street.

On May 6th 1872 it is noted that his grandmother wanted to see him but she 'was too infirm to travel'. He was given leave until 18th May. Perhaps it was to visit his grandmother and family in Canterbury before he left because, on May 29th it is simply written in his file, 'Emigrated to Canada'.

Perhaps, with the best of intentions, as many as thirty-five young men were sent each year to various parts of the British Empire. William was one of these and was sent to Canada. This practice of sending children abroad had started as early as 1619 when the Virginia Company took 100 street children to work on their plantations. This migration of child labour continued to the colonies on a small scale but it was from about 1870 that the large movement of children and young people to Canada began in earnest. In part it was a response to the overcrowded cities with their unemployment, poverty and epidemics of cholera and typhoid.

The children came from local government workhouses as well as 'philanthropic' charities. Two women, Maria Rye and Annie Macpherson, set up schemes in the 1860s to send children abroad, especially to Canada. By 1880 it was the Dr. Barnado's Homes who became the largest 'exporter'. Some 80,000 children went to Canada between 1870 and 1914 and the Barnado schemes sent over 35,000 of these.

There was a critical report of the practice by Andrew Doyle in 1875. He told of children going to a distribution house, at a place called Marchemont in Canada, and the farmers coming to pick which children they wanted. Doyle believed that the farmers were mainly after free child labour to replace paid help and he alleged that many of the houses had no washing facilities, there was rarely any training and in some cases there was evidence of cruelty. After a few years, however, it was considered that the problems had been sorted out and the schemes started again and did not

decline until the 1920s. This traffic was resurrected during the Second World War, as part of the evacuation policy, to take children away from the dangers of bombing and invasion. It was originally intended to take some 20,000 children to Canada but on 17th September 1940 the *City of Benares*, was torpedoed and seventy of the children on board were lost. This halted the evacuation of the children to Canada but the sending, by charities, of vulnerable children to Australia continued on a small scale, until 1967.

William left aboard the *S.S. Scandinavian* from Liverpool on 30th May 1872 when he was sixteen years old. It may have been discovered that he had not been christened in Canterbury as had been thought, and on 22nd February 1872 he was baptized in the school chapel. One the same double spread of the *Baptism Register* and for the same date are another eleven boys whose "abodes" vary from Norfolk to Derbyshire. It seems likely that John, along with the other boys and young men, was being prepared for his journey. He went as part of Reverend Herring's party of 32 children, mainly boys and young men between the ages of ten and eighteen. The Reverend A. Styleman Herring was a leading light in the *Clerkenwell and Central Emigration Club and Society for London and the Provinces* which aimed to assist the poor to find a new life. *The Scandinavian* arrived at Quebec on 11th June 1872.

We cannot find what happened to William next. Did he make a better life for himself? His Redhill file records that he wrote to his sister in 1873 and to his grandmother in 1874. There was one final letter recorded in the year prior to February 1876 in which he said that he was doing well in Canada. His grandmother died in 1876 and the letters seem to have stopped.

Did William really 'do well' in his new land? Some of the 'Home Children' would have found happiness and new hope but we know that this was not always the case. As the online history of the Royal Philanthropic Society briefly notes:

> *Some may have bettered themselves and lived long lives, others may not have fared so well in foreign lands.*

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Chapter Three

Greater Love Hath No Man

John William Sawford (1879 – 1900)

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of organisations in all spheres of English life. The County Councils were formed in 1888 followed in 1894 by the Local Government Act which instituted the Rural District and Parish Councils. It was also a time when many of the sports centralised and codified their rules and centralised. We see the formation of the Football Association in 1863, Rugby Football Union in 1871 and Amateur Athletic Association in 1880.

This was also the era when many uniformed voluntary groups were founded. It began with the Salvation Army in 1865 followed by the Church Boy's Brigade in 1883 and the St John Ambulance Brigade in June 1887. These groups provided training and discipline, with a religious and moral element. Government and communities, then and now, saw them, in part, as a channel for adolescent boys and young men to use their energies in useful ways rather than causing trouble and disruption. Times were changing rapidly, however, and women and girls were very soon involved.

The St John Ambulance Brigade had emerged out of the St John Ambulance Association which had been formed some ten years earlier. The Association taught first aid and awarded certificates to those who passed an examination. At first this ran alongside the Brigade which was formed of volunteers who had received their Association certificate in first aid and health care. It was a uniformed organisation, run on military lines, which used these skills especially at events and in the workplace.

Dr Mackenzie of Raunds ran St John Ambulance Association classes in Ringstead in the autumn of 1892. On the 12th December twenty women and seventeen men sat the examination and only two women failed. We see in the successful candidates many of the familiar names of the village. There are Bulls and Cottinghams, Mayes and Weekleys and Childs and Sawfords.

Walter and Elizabeth Sawford, probably husband and wife, both passed. The Sawford name was unknown in the village until the end of the eighteenth century when Thomas Sawford married Mary Musket on October 14th 1790 in the Parish Church. Thomas died just three years later and Mary re-married. It was probably his brother, Henry, who married Susannah Wilson on the 29th October 1792. The family seem to have come from just over the county border, in Bedfordshire, probably from the Knotting area, some nine miles due south of Ringstead. William and Susannah had three sons, John, George and William who married and a daughter, Elizabeth who died a spinster aged just 28 years old.

It is George, an agricultural labourer, whose line we are following here. He married Ann Cobley (nee Saddenton or Saddington), the widow of Robert Cobley who had also died after just three years of marriage, aged twenty-three. They had had a daughter Sarah. George and Ann had two sons Thomas and William. It was William who married Esther Hornsby on 14th October 1847. She too was from Knotting in Bedfordshire, and perhaps William had met her when he had visited relatives. On the other hand she was a 'servant' at their marriage so perhaps she had followed the family trail to Ringstead. Their happiness was, once again short lived. They had a son George who had received a

Wesleyan baptism and was buried on July 6th 1849 and five days later, aged twenty-four, Esther followed him.

William was a young widower but, as was the usual practice, he quickly re-married, to Mary Ann Barker, on November 3rd 1851. She came from Old in Northamptonshire and was once again a 'servant' so perhaps she had come to Ringstead. William was a shoemaker and like many of them he was a non-conformist and the children were baptised in the Ringstead Wesleyan Chapel, as part of the Higham Ferrers Wesleyan Circuit.

The history of the Wesleyan Methodists in Ringstead is less documented that the Particular Baptists and probably goes back further than is recorded. Whellan's Gazetteer and Directory of Northamptonshire for 1849 does tell us that:

> *A blacksmith's shop has lately been converted into a Methodist Chapel.*

According to the Religious Census of 1851, however, a Wesleyan Chapel had been erected in 1814 and we know that such a chapel was sold in 1817 for £12 9s 0d. The building in Chapel Street, now a private house, was registered for worship on October 1st 1857 and the present frontage and extra schoolrooms were added in 1878. It was not until July 30th 1896, however, that it was registered for marriages.

The children of William and Mary Ann were John, Walter, George, Mary Ann and Louisa. We can see from the Registers that, from Henry and Susannah, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Sawfords had now become part of the Ringstead family of names.

Walter, the second oldest child, was born in July 1854 and baptised on the 8th of November of the same year. He, like his father, became a shoemaker and married, across the river, to Elizabeth Perkins, on December 25th 1872, when they were both eighteen years old. She was from Little Addington and a lacemaker which was becoming an increasingly unusual profession in the area. The couple had eight children and it is John William, the third child who was born in 1879 whose story this is.

If we can now return to those successful St John Ambulance Certificate candidates we see that the Sawfords were a family who took an active part in the community. Walter became a member, and one of the earliest chairmen, of the Ringstead Parish Council. In 1881 they were living in Carlow but by 1891 had moved to Shop [High] Street where Walter describes himself as a "hand-sewn shoemaker", living next door to his cousin Alfred, a carrier, and his family.

The successful candidates were presented with their certificates on the evening of Wednesday 8th February 1893 at a 'well-attended public tea at the Temperance Hall, This was followed by public meeting, a distribution of certificates, and a variety entertainment. There was a 'glee', entitled 'Hail Smiling Morn' which was sung by a mixed quartet. After the presentation the variety entertainment included:

> *Comic song in character, "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent-road," Mr. Head (cheered and "Frolics of Parliament" given); recitation, "The Doctor's Fright," Mr. G. Baker; song; "On the Banks of Allan Water, Miss Bailey; song, "Off to Philadelphia", Mr Walter Hall.*

There was then an interval while the St John classes went through a series of bandaging exercises as well as stretcher drill, 'which were inspected by Dr. Mackenzie and pronounced to be 'well done'. Then the programme of songs and recitations started again.

It may seem a little odd in comparison to the modern ceremonies for the giving of First Aid certificates but it was a new adventure for many there and they certainly knew how to make an occasion of it. Songs were to village meetings what raffles are today. Is that a metaphor for the changing times?

At first the Association and Brigade ran alongside each other but the Association morphed into a Brigade as a branch of the Wellingborough District. By 1897 the Brigade was well in its stride and on 11th September 1897:

> *What was probably the largest parade of any provincial corps took place on Saturday at Wellingborough . . . when nearly 200 officers, men, and nursing sisters were present . . . All but few of the men were in full uniform, whilst the nursing sisters also wore their neat and useful dress, and everyone on parade presented a smart appearance. Hen, likewise, the stretchers, the wheeled litters, the cycle transports, the ambulance wagon, and all the necessary appliances for a properly fitted-up Ambulance Corps, all being in evidence.*

The Ringstead Corps were at this Parade as they were at the annual 'smoking concert', held in October by the Brigade at the Wellingborough Drill Hall. Whether Walter's son, John William, was present we do not know but we do know that he had become a member at around this time for we next meet him being sent off to the Boer War.

Although not much remembered today, the British were engaged in small wars and battles across the world throughout the nineteenth century. The nature of warfare was changing and the set piece battles such as Waterloo to a mutually recognized set of rules was disappearing as the machinery of war increased in accuracy and power. The unwillingness of many British commanders to recognize and adjust to this change was seen at the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in the Crimean War, in 1854, where cavalry uselessly charged at cannons with terrible results.

What had been shown by Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole in the Crimea was the way that good nursing care and hygiene could dramatically reduce the number of soldiers killed through disease and infection. Unfortunately these military and medical lessons were known but were not sufficiently acted upon.

The Boers had risen in 1881 and, led by Paul Kruger, had defeated the British. The discovery of gold in the Transvaal and diamonds in the Kimberley area, on the borders of Cape Colony, had increased the conflict between the Boer farmers and the Uitlanders, the new immigrants, who were mainly British. The Uitlanders had few political rights but they were backed by the multi-millionaires, Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit. Rhodes, in particular, acted in Africa as the East India Company had earlier done in Asia, as an unofficial arm of the British Empire. The British army became involved and tried to take the Transvaal and Orange Free State. On October 11th 1899 the Boer President, Kruger, sent an ultimatum, insisting that the army withdrew from these states. The British Government refused and the second Anglo-Boer War began.

It was a confusing war of sieges and skirmishes where small numbers of Boer farmers inflicted defeats on a numerically superior army led by men bewildered by this new type of guerrilla warfare. It was also a war where letters home from literate soldiers, and newspaper articles from the front by war correspondents, quickly alerted the British public to the nature and conditions of the conflict. Published in the Rushden Echo on 15th February 1901, by a private in the Coldstream Guards, was a soldier's diary which the writer "hopes will enlighten the inhabitants of Rushden and Higham Ferrers district as to the way the British Soldier has been treated". He writes:

> *We arrived at Klip Drift and that was one of the worst times we have had. We were on short rations – very short indeed – for all we could get were two biscuits a day, and even then we were sometimes robbed. Whose fault it was I cannot say, but I know we were nearly starved. To make it worse it was very wet at the time and often we were in two feet of water. After Cronje was caught, we advanced to Bloemfontein, and were about killed to make a name for a certain person.*

During the Nineteenth Century the Royal Army Medical Corps had slowly developed but it was realised by the government that there was not enough medical support to fight the war in South Africa. Within three weeks of the declaration of war, on October 11th 1899, the St John Ambulance Brigade was asked to provide a volunteer force to back up the Medical Corps. By 13th November 1899 the first twenty-three of these volunteers had arrived at the St John Headquarters in Clerkenwell.

The Wellingborough Division prided itself as being one of the best of the provincial groups and the *Northampton Mercury* reported that, on Wednesday 20th* December 1899, the Ringstead Corps had sent: [*the memorial tablet states 20th November; there may be a difference between the volunteering date and the call-up]:

> *. . . one of their number, John W. Sawford (son of Mr. Walter Sawford, chairman of the Parish Council) for ambulance work in South Africa. The division all turned out and marched to the station. Dr. Mackenzie and the men of the corps presented young Sawford with part of his outfit. Not being able to be present at the "[s]end off", Dr. Mackenzie wrote bidding him "Goodbye", good luck, and a safe return to the old country". Young Sawford left by the 6.12 train for London, the men all heartily wishing him God speed and a safe return.*

He was expected to sail for South Africa just one week later. In that week he would have reported to St. John's Gate in London and perhaps had a very brief period of training with the army at Aldershot or Netley.

The *London Standard* tells us of the first St John volunteers, who sailed in November, that:

> *Each man provides his own outfit and underclothing and Brigade uniform, the khaki suits and field or sea kit being paid for by the St. John Ambulance Association.*

The article goes on to add:

> *Considerable numbers of nursing sisters of the Brigade have volunteered for service in South Africa, but owing to the Army Nursing Reserve being more than equal to meet the requirements of public service, the War Office has not found it necessary to call for volunteers from the Nursing Divisions of the Brigade.*

Throughout the war, the generals remained unwilling to call up sufficient female nurses of any kind and this probably cost many lives.

In an article in the *Proceedings of the St John Historical Society*, Professor Peter Beighton quotes from an account by James Crook ,of the Blackpool Division of the Brigade, who went up to London a few weeks after John Sawford. It is likely that John's experiences would have followed a similar pattern:

During the time we were in London we had to have two hours drill in the morning and two in the afternoon. Our nights were spent in the Strand or some other place. On Sunday January 7, we had a church parade in full khaki uniform. At the conclusion of the service we were formed in front of the church and addressed by a couple of gentlemen after which they wished us "God speed". On Monday we paraded at 9 am and were conducted to the Tower of London, where we spent a very enjoyable morning, being permitted to visit places which were closed to civilians. The night following we went to Collin's Music Hall, where 120 seats (stalls) had been reserved for us. The programme was one of the finest I have ever had the pleasure of listening to, an several times during the performance the audience rose and gave three ringing cheers for the men in khaki. At the conclusion Miss Kate Carney, the Coster Queen, presented each man with a good fat cigar, while the manager provided free drinks. The manager wished us to remain all night and spend a social evening, but our officers thought a good night's rest would be better for us. All the way from the theatre we were cheered until we arrived at St John's Gate, where we were dismissed at 12 pm.

It is easy to imagine the excitement for these young men, suddenly thrust, literally, into the limelight before they embarked on their great adventure. This pattern of free food and drink continued to Southampton where they boarded their ship. The ship would have had its own hospital and John Sawford's duties would have started as soon a she was on board. Going south they would have left the cold of England in January and encountered the heat of the tropics. The journey to Cape Town would have taken about three weeks.

By June 1900 more than 1,300 "Johnnies" had sailed for South Africa and in all some 1,800 served in the war. The initial tour of duty was for six months although some volunteered for longer. Generally, the Johnnies would have been posted to base hospitals to allow the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) to deal with the casualties near the battlefront. It seems that John Sawford was sent to No. 1 Field Hospital near the Orange River. It may be that he had been posted there from Bloemfontein for, on 13th March 1900, Lord Roberts had led an army into the capital of the Orange Free State. Kimberley and Ladysmith had been relieved in February and, the most famous relief of a siege, at Mafeking, was to come on 17th May.

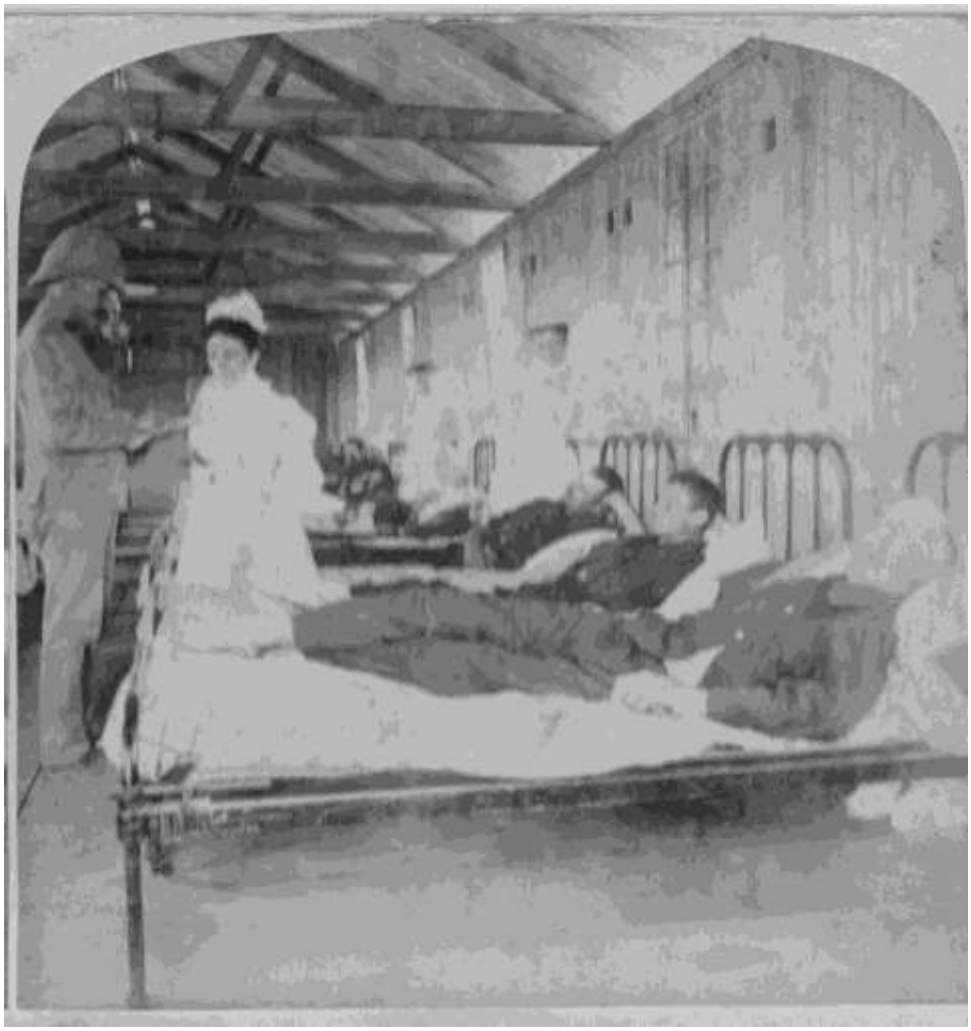
At Bloemfontein, however, the triumph quickly turned into tragedy. The British had entered unopposed but the Boers had seized the waterworks which supplied the town. As a result the British and colonial soldiers were supplied from wayside pools or any other source that could be found. The weather was hot and the water was not always boiled. As a result 'Yellow Jack' laid much of the army low. Some 6000 soldiers came down with Enteric or Typhoid fever and 1000 soldiers were buried at Bloemfontein.

A wounded soldier from the Coldstream Guards wrote home from another No 1 Station Hospital, at Wynburgh, and his letter was printed in the Cheshire Observer on Saturday January 27th 1900. In this he wrote:

Africa is a very nice country, you travel for a week and only see a mud house, and all the people have deserted from that. Tell Barney there are plenty of hares and ostriches here. We have to go two or three days sometimes before we get any water, and then we have to drink the same as we wash in.

This simple misunderstanding, or disregard, of the need for regular food and a healthy water supply by the army chiefs killed more of their own soldiers than any alleged incompetence in battle.

The hospitals could not cope, with many more suffering than there were beds available, made worse because sixty orderlies contracted the disease from the patients. At some point John moved to No 1 Field Station, which was near a railway station on the De-Aar to Kimberley line, some 14 kilometres east of Hopetown. The Orange River Bridge was three kilometres north of the station. At the outbreak of the war a garrison was established at the station under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C.G.C. Money and all mobile troops were concentrated there.



'Telling the Surgeon how the light cases are getting on. Orange River Hospital, S. Africa'.

From a Stereoview by Underwood & Underwood. (Author's own copy.)
These Stereoviews (like many war photographs) were posed and conditions may have been far more crowded and chaotic than is shown here, with some men having to lie on the floor.

Whether the Enteric Fever was brought from Bloemfontein or whether it was a separate outbreak we cannot be sure. We do know that John contracted the fever, possibly from one of his patients. The poor rations and lack of adequate safe water weakened the British troops so that they often succumbed to this virulent disease. Lying on a hospital bed, (if he had one), all the gaiety of the send-off must have seemed to John a long time ago although it was only a matter of a few months. On 30th April John died of the effects of the fever and was buried at the Field Station near the Orange River. Like William Frost Cottingham, another young man who had left Ringstead for Africa some fifteen years earlier, Africa had claimed him almost as soon as he had arrived in the "Dark Continent".

The Mercury reported on 11th May 1900 that:

> *Information reached Chief Supt. T. H. Hilton of Wellingborough on Friday [4th May] of the death at Orange River of Private Sawford who was a member of the Ringstead Division of the Wellingborough Ambulance Corps. The deceased who was about 22 years of age [sic] went out early in the campaign as a hospital orderly in company with the late Private Woodhams of Wollaston and, like him has become a victim of enteric fever. The sad news has caused a painful sensation in Ringstead where the deceased was well-known and deservedly popular.*

The article continues with a 'humorous' piece which may partly explain the reason for the spread of the disease:

> *The rank and file with Lord Methuen among whom are the Northampton [Regiment} were a short time ago temporarily forbidden to bathers and sentinels were posted to look for surreptitious swimmers. One of the sentinels caught sight of a swimmer, who persistently ignored his summons to surrender to arrest. At last the bather emerged from the river; the furious sentinel advanced upon the dripping figure and claimed a prisoner. "Confound you!" was the reply, "can't you see I'm an officer!"*

On Sunday 13th May a special service in memory of John Sawford was held in the Ringstead Wesleyan Church. The Evening Telegraph reported the next day that:

> *There was a splendid muster of the men in the Wellingborough Corps, every division being represented, and in addition to the 93 males on parade there were 15 nursing sisters present. . . The corps assembled at the Temperance Hall and proceeded direct to the chapel where an impressive service was conducted by the Rev. J. Bates. The preacher took "Duty" as his subject and in a touching reference to the late Private Sawford referred to him as one who had given his life for others. In all his letters home there was never a complaint and he always spoke highly of his comrades.*

By the end of the war, although figures vary slightly, 7,582 British soldiers had been killed in action or had died of their wounds but over 13,000 had died of disease. Interestingly officers were some 9% of those who died as a result of wounds, but they were only 3% of those who died of disease. These figures may be explained in several ways but certainly some of the Canadians who were fighting felt that treatment at a hospital was based on rank and, perhaps foolishly, tried to nurse men, who came down with the fever, in their own beds. Of the 1800 St John Ambulance volunteers some 60 died, the majority from enteric fever, which they had contracted from their patients.

The war seemed to be won by June 1900 but the Boers continued to resist, using guerrilla tactics. Kitchener, now in sole command, begins a scorched earth policy destroying the Boers' crops, livestock and farms. This led to thousands of homeless and starving women and children. Kitchener used 'concentration camps', pioneered by the Spanish in Cuba, to hold these refugees. Again figures vary but according to Professor Fransjohan Pretorius, writing in 2011 on the BBC website, by the end of the war, some 28,000 Boer women and children as well as 20,000 black people died in these camps. They did not die as a matter of policy but because of incompetence and a callous lack of care only relieved when, first the Fawcett Commission Report and then Emily Hobhouse, a campaigning Liberal, revealed the terrible conditions to the British public, and the Government finally took action. The black refugees were often forgotten (even by Emily Hobhouse) and they continued to endure terrible conditions after the camps for Boers had been improved.

The Orange River Station where John Sawford had died became the location of both white and black concentration refugee camps. The bigotry of the Boers was almost matched by the lack of care of the British.

Others did return safely from the war to Ringstead, On Saturday 19th October 1900:

> *P.C. Sullivan, who was formerly stationed in the parish previous to the calling up of the Reserve forces for South Africa, arrived by the 6.47 train at Ringstead and in addition to his wife, over 200 parishioners assembled at the station to give their highly respected officer a hearty welcome. A conveyance had been provided. The horse was taken from the shafts of the vehicle and, amidst cheers, Mr Sullivan was drawn by the villagers, accompanied by Mrs Sullivan and their two children, into the village up to his front door, where every good wish and congratulation was given him on his safe return.*

The following year, on Saturday 19th January 1900 a member of the Ringstead St John Ambulance Brigade also arrived home safely from the war. Private Chester was from Raunds but was greeted by the local Ringstead Division who, headed by a Drum and Fife band, met him at Ringstead Station and took him to a packed Temperance Hall, where he was officially greeted and thanked for his 'great and good work'. He spoke of his time in South Africa but said the he 'had never flinched'. He also expressed his regret for the loss of John Sawford. Were John Sawford's parents and siblings present or did it stir too many recent painful memories?

At the end of the *Northampton Mercury* article on the memorial service for John it states:

> *A movement is on foot and is being heartily taken up by all classes to erect some permanent memorial to Private Sawford in the parish.*

There had been a number of articles in 1893, in the Mercury, with headlines such as, "*A Village Without a Burial-Place",* for in April of that year the churchyard had been deemed full and unfit for further burials. Burials continued at Denford but there was a local outcry and a cemetery was decided upon and the land purchased and fenced. Writing in the *Northampton Mercury* on 15th June 1894, "Eye-On" in *About Town and County* wrote:

> *In passing through Ringstead the other day, I could not help noticing the pretty chapel which has been erected on the new cemetery that has just been provided on the Station-road. It is such a handsome structure and much more commodious than such buildings usually are. I understand that the graveyard is to be dedicated shortly – not consecrated – and that ministers of all denominations are to be asked to take part in the ceremony.*

John William Sawford has been remembered in a number of places across the globe. His body was moved from the Orange River Station to the West End Cemetery in Kimberley and his name put on a memorial there which is, "In Proud Remembrance of British Soldiers who were killed in action or who died as a result of service during the South African War at places commemorated on this monument". He is in a Book of Remembrance at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town and his name is recorded in Peterborough Cathedral below a stained glass window installed in 1903 in honour of those who died in the Boer War.

Memorial stone to John William Sawford on Ringstead Cemetery Chapel wall.

Author's own photograph. May 2012

In Ringstead there is a white memorial stone to John on one corner of that Cemetery Chapel, with the inscription:

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS. THAT A
MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS

Thomas Pakenham, in his book on *The Boer War*, wrote:

> *The central tactical lesson of the Boer War eluded them. The reason for those humiliating reverses was not the marksmanship of the Boers, nor their better guns or rifles, nor the crass stupidity of the British generals – all myths which British people found it convenient to believe. It was that the smokeless, long-range, high velocity, small-bore magazine bullet from rifle or machine-gun – plus the trench – had decisively tilted the balance against attack and in favour of defence*.
>
> *The world learnt this lesson the hard way*: *in the bloody stalemates of the Dardanelles and Flanders.*

Walk around the corner of the Cemetery Chapel and you will find, backing onto John's stone, is another, similar, white memorial plaque to:

> *Members of the Young People's Class*, whose companions have erected this tablet in affectionate regard.*
>
> **Wesleyan Bible Class*

On the stone are the names of five young men, the oldest twenty-three, who died in 1917 and 1918. Among them is William Sawford, son of George and Minnie who were living in Gladstone Street in Ringstead. George was Walter's brother and William was the nephew of John. William had been a soldier in the East Kent Regiment ('The Buffs'). He was killed in action and buried in the Philosophe British Cemetery at Mazingarbe, near Lens, on 24th May 1917. He was nineteen years old.

On the 17th September 1999 John W. Sawford's St John Medal for South Africa, in 'nearly extremely fine' condition, was sold at auction for £250.

> *NOTE: On Feast Sunday, September 1900 the St John Ambulance Corps from the area held a parade in Ringstead, followed by a service in the Wesleyan Chapel. A memorial tablet to Private J Sawford was unveiled inside the chapel, on the right hand side. It seems likely that this is the tablet that now is on the outside wall of the Cemetery Chapel. The same may be true of the First World War tablet which also has a Wesleyan reference. Was it moved when the chapel ceased to be used for worship?*

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Chapter Four

Sheep Lost and Found

Aaron Abbott (c1782 – 1868) and James Abbott (c1779 – 1850)

The *Northampton Mercury* for the 3rd March 1804 has an advertisement by the *Harleston Association* which is a mixture of self-congratulation and warning. It tells of a reward of £25 that it had recently paid to a shepherd for detecting who had stolen one of the lambs from his flock. This information had brought a man to justice and he had been found guilty and sentenced to be hung.

These private prosecution associations began in the eighteenth century as the old village constable system became increasingly unable to cope with the changing world. Also, for most crimes the law was still based on victims pursuing their own claims through the courts. The association members, however, paid an annual subscription and this fund was used to offer rewards and also to pay the cost of prosecution. Of course, it was only the reasonably well off who could afford to pay for this protection.

The main aim of these associations was the protection of property, especially of farm buildings, machinery, crops and livestock. As Richard Cowley, in his book *Guilty M'lud*, points out, the reward for information leading to a conviction for rick burning was £50 and for sheep stealing was £25 but for highway robbery was only £5 5s. These *Harleston Association* figures reflect the severity of the law on these offences. In Northamptonshire, in the period between 1780 and 1839, nine people were hung for murder but twelve were hung for horse or sheep theft. For the rest of the nineteenth century the only executions were for murder, with a maximum of three in any one decade.

During the eighteenth century the new wealthy classes had brought in a wide range of, often petty, offences for which the death penalty was mandatory. Known as the 'Bloody Code', some 220 offences were made punishable by death, including: 'being in the company for Gypsies for one month', 'strong evidence of malice in a child aged 7-14 years', and 'blacking the face or using a disguise whilst committing a crime'. In the countryside, 'Enclosures' and the protecting of this privatised Common land was a key driving force in the introduction of this harsh new code. Sheep replaced the medieval 'royal game' and the poacher became the new Robin Hood. The French Revolution and the sometimes violent unrest caused by agricultural depression and rapid mechanisation further increased the fears of those in power.

The *Harleston Association* was quite a newcomer, being formed in 1798 but it enjoyed the patronage of Earl Spencer who lived near the village of Harleston, at Althorp, and it quickly became one of the richest groups. The manors of Great Addington and Harleston had been tied together since the sixteenth century with the same family holding both. The advertisement in the *Northampton Mercury* had referred to a case in the previous year:

> *At the Annual Meeting of the Association, held the 23rd February instant, at the sign of the Fox and Hounds, in Harleston, in the County of Northampton, the Treasurer paid the sum of £.25 pound to John Goodman, Shepherd to Thomas Checkley, of Great Addington, in the said County, Farmer (a Member of this Association), as a Reward allowed by this Society for detecting Aaron Abbott, Shepherd to Mr Fascutt of Ringstead, in the same County, in stealing*

a Lamb from the Flock of the same Thomas Checkley, in Great-Addington Field, in the Month of March last; of which the said Aaron Abbott was convicted at the last Summer Assize held for the said County, and then condemned to be hanged.

That would appear to be that, but, like many advertisements, it does not tell the whole story. If we look back at the *Northampton Mercury* for Saturday March19th 1803 we see that Aaron Abbott was committed to the County Gaol by Thomas Carter, for stealing a lamb. In the July 16th issue we see that he was charged with the offence and was sent to the next Assizes. The following week we see that Aaron and four other prisoners 'were capitally convicted and received sentences of death'. It continues, however,' . . . **but were all reprieved before the Judges left Northampton'**.

The possibility of a 'French Revolution' in England increased fears but also persuaded the authorities to temper these terrible laws. The 'Royal Pardon' was routinely used and the judges themselves had the power to reprieve, those on whom they had so recently passed the mandatory death sentence. Nevertheless, one can imagine Aaron's time in the condemned cell, perhaps being weighed for the 'drop', and his relief at the reprieve. The *Harleston Association* wished to emphasise the worst that could happen to a sheep-stealer and did not mention Aaron's almost immediate reprieve.

The year of Aaron's crime was a significant one for, after being blocked in 1780, the parish of Great Addington was 'enclosed' in 1803 just a few months after he was sentenced. Like poaching, sheep stealing from the farmers and landowners on enclosed land or land to be enclosed, was sometimes seen as a form of protest both against enclosure and the rise of sheep farming. Aaron was a shepherd himself, however, although probably working on the Open fields. Ringstead had also successfully opposed an attempt to enclose the parish and it would not finally happen until 1841. Unfortunately the details of Aaron's case, like many others, have been lost so we cannot tell whether it was protest, poverty or greed that led Aaron to take a lamb from a neighbouring shepherd's flock. Nor do we know if it was Mr Checkley's action of summoning Aaron that led to a reprisal raid against him. Certainly, in the 2nd of June 1804 edition of the *Northampton Mercury,* the *Harleston Association* had once again to offer a reward for the apprehension of the people who entered into:

. . . the Garden belonging to, and in the Occupation of, Mr. Thomas Checkley, of Great Addington, in Northamptonshire, Farmer, (Member of the Association), and STEAL and TAKE AWAY THEREOUT a large Quantity of very fine CABBAGES; and did also STEAL and TAKE AWAY out of his Chaff-House and Stable, about THREE PECKS OF BEANS and a new RYING-SIEVE, which is branded with the letters T. C. on the Rim.

It may also have been an uncomfortable life for John Goodman, Mr Checkley's shepherd, who had reported Aaron for the theft. Look through the Parish Registers of Great Addington and the neighbouring parishes and the surname Abbott (or Abbot or Abbut) litters the pages.

Aaron had been baptised in the village church on 29th December 1782, the son of Daniel and Hannah Abbott. Daniel was from the village but he had married Hannah Percival in her home parish of Twywell on 22nd May 1775. He was described as a 'sandman' which probably meant that he worked in one of the small quarries or pits which were dotted along the Nene Valley. All their children were baptised in the Great Addington parish church. Before Aaron, had come the oldest, William (baptised 4th April 1776) and James (baptised 25th July 1779) who seems to have been the sibling to whom he was closest. After Aaron there was Sophia (baptised 31st March 1793 and buried some two weeks later on the 15th April) and then the twins Moses and Sophia (baptised 2nd August 1795). Moses too died soon after his birth (11th August).

We do not know what sentence, if any, Aaron served after his reprieve but it may be that the time that he had already served was deemed sufficient. It is possible that he then had to move to Grafton Underwood, perhaps caused by the death of his employer. Certainly a Robert Foscutt, aged 83 years who was a dealer and farmer was buried in Ringstead, on 4th August 4th 1806. We do know that at Grafton Underwood, on 1st August 1809, that Aaron married Martha Draper. Both bride and groom signed with an 'X' and Aaron's older brother, James who was one of the witnesses, also signed with an X. The other witness, who signed with his full name, was the Parish Clerk, Thomas Carley. He was a remarkable man who was born without hands but had taught himself how to write a beautiful copperplate hand by holding the pen in his teeth and had become the village schoolmaster.

Martha Draper had been baptised in Grafton Underwood on 1st August 1779, the daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Draper. Charles is variously described in the Baptismal Register as a 'weaver' and a 'pauper'. It is perhaps surprising to realise that this part of Northamptonshire once had a large cottage industry in weaving. The *Victoria History of the County of Northamptonshire* tells us that weaving was extensively carried out:

> *. . . in the district embraced by the parishes of Kettering, Rothwell, Desborough, Braybrooke, Little Bowden, and the neighbouring villages. The principle articles woven were tammies and shalloons. The former was a thin woollen material of open texture used for straining purposes; it was also made into flags, often in bright colours. The latter was made of a coarse woollen stuff.*

The textile industry was one of the first to be industrialised with Leicestershire and the West Riding of Yorkshire becoming the main areas for woollen worsted spinning and weaving factories. The weaving industry in Northamptonshire collapsed from being 11% of male employment in 1777 to just 1% in 1851. The hundreds of Rothwell, Corby, Guilsborough, Spelhoe and Huxloe (which included Great Addington) were the five main weaving areas and their populations tended to decline while those around were increasing. These out-of-work weavers flooded the agricultural employment market. Unfortunately that too declined after the Napoleonic Wars and it was only the rise of shoemaking, and, to some extent, lacemaking for the women which helped parishes such as Ringstead.

It may be that the couple moved back to Ringstead, if indeed Aaron had ever left, for all their children were baptised there. These were William Abbott who was born on 3rd March 1810 and baptised on 7th October of the same year; Thomas Draper Abbott, born 6th November 1811, baptised 1st December 1811; Esther, baptised 4th December 1817 and Elizabeth, Hannah, Esther and James baptised together on 31st December 1820. This batch baptising of families was not unusual and it seems that Esther was baptised twice but this was not a rare occurrence.

Can we picture Aaron and the cottage of his family? Of course, we cannot be sure how the families of individual shepherds and farm workers dressed and lived in Ringstead. We have no itineries of furniture in wills or at house sales. We can look at the works of writers who travelled around the country and tell of what they found, although rarely did their travels pause in Northamptonshire. William Howitt wrote *The Rural Life of England* which was published in 1838. In his chapter on "Cottage Life" he wrote:

> *When we go into the cottage of the working man, how forcibly are we struck with the difference between his mode of life and our own. There is his tenement of, at most, one or two rooms. His naked walls; bare brick, stone or mud floor, as it may be; a few wooden or rush-bottomed chairs: a deal or old oak table; a simple fireplace, with its oven beside it, or, in*

many parts of the kingdom, no other fireplace than the hearth; a few pots and pans – and you have his whole abode, goods and chattels. He comes home weary from his out-door work, having eaten his dinner under hedge or tree, and seats himself for a few hours with his wife and children, then turns into a rude bed, standing perhaps on the farther side of his only room, and out again before daylight, if it be winter. . . . he flings on his patched garments, washes his face in a wooden or earthen dish at the door; blows up the fire, gets ready his own breakfast, and is gone.

Such is the routine of his life, from week to week and year to year; Sundays and a few holidays, are white days in his calendar. On them he shaves, and puts on a clean shirt and better coat, drawn from that old chest which contains the whole wardrobe of himself and his children; his wife has generally some separate drawer or bandbox in which to stow her lighter and more fragile gear. Then he walks round his little garden, if he have it; goes with his wife and children to church or meeting; to sit with neighbour, or have a neighbour look in upon him. There he sits, his children upon his knee, and he tells them how his father used to talk to ***him.***

This is a cottage in its best estate.

Howitt acknowledged that this description was of a good father in steady employment. Many families fared worse. It is also a generalized description probably taken from a few examples but the picture in Ringstead in the first half of the century is unlikely to be very different. Howitt also touches here on what the shepherd or farm worker would have worn and here there would have been a gradual change throughout the Nineteenth Century.

When we look at images of labourers from the time we usually see long boots with knee breeches and a smock, later changing to trousers and a collarless shirt with a waistcoat, a neckerchief and wide brimmed hat. There would also usually be a coarse serge jacket. All of these items would have been much mended and patched. Apart from the boots they not would give much protection in wet weather and would have been slow to dry, although the smocks were often oiled so they would have been reasonably light in summer but, perhaps more importantly, gave some protection against the rain

It is the smock frock which usually featured in idealized pictures of rural England and indeed they were probably worn across the country although, as with many things to do with the lives of ordinary people our knowledge is still sketchy.

The working smocks were usually made of drabbet (coarse linen) and were usually beige or it seems, in some counties, including Northamptonshire, green. Most man would have a second smock in finer linen or cotton which was kept for Sunday best. The design of the smock was very economical of material with much of the pattern square cut with just the collar rounded. There would often be other layers over the shoulders and a sort of cape to give extra protection to the working smocks. Also the smocking would have given it a little shape and warmth. In the north and other industrial rural areas they disappeared more rapidly than in places such as Suffolk, Herefordshire and Wiltshire. In *North and South*, written in 1854, Elizabeth Gaskell described a small coastal town near Manchester and compared it with similar places in the south:

The colours look greyer – more enduring, not so gay and pretty. There were no smock frocks, even among the country-folk, they retarded motion and were apt to catch on machinery, and so the habit of wearing them had died out.

It is likely that in a rural industrial area like the villages and small towns strung along the Nene valley the smock also was outdated by the middle of the century. Nevertheless we do know that they were still being worn in the Ringstead area as late as 1868. In that year "James Ward was charged with stealing a smock frock, value one shilling, the property of William Knighton, in the parish of Raunds". Knighton had hung up his smock frock in his employer's hay loft from where it had disappeared. Alfred Burton, who worked in the local brickyard, bought the smock for four pence from Ward who was found guilty of the theft. This also poses the question, was Burton also intending to wear it? Certainly in a report in the *Northampton Mercury* on 21st June 1879 there was an Inquest on the body of an unknown man at Blisworth. He was said to have been wearing:

. . . old moleskin trousers, a navvy's smock and thick nailed boots.

The Mercury has many reports with references to smocks, which seemed desirable or easy items to steal, but far fewer after the middle of the century when they increasingly became just clothes for young boys. John Askham, Wellingborough's shoemaker poet, wrote in 1865 a *Sonnet – Blackberrying* which finishes:

And the stout urchin in his brown smock frock
Heedless of rents and wounds and scoldings dire,
They climb the hedge, and pluck the topmost briar

Of all farm workers, the smock was most associated with the shepherd and, on balance, it does seem very likely that, in the early years of the century, Aaron Abbott would have worn one in his daily rounds and also one for Sunday best.

Within a few years of the last baptisms of Aaron and Martha's children the couple took a decision which would change their lives forever but, first, we will look very briefly at the life of his older brother, James.

As we have seen, James was baptised on 25th July 1779 but the first we have any record of him as an adult is from a curious entry in the Great Addington Register. On the 31st January 1817 Lucy and Rebecca Abbott are christened in the parish church. The parents are set down as James and Ann. Ann is recorded as living in the village but against James is the puzzling entry, 'America' and for his occupation it has, 'Late Shoemaker'**.** What Ann's maiden name was, and if and where the couple married, has still not been found.

When we next encounter the two brothers and their families it is some six years later and they are stepping off a ship in New York harbour before going on to Upper Canada. We can only assume that James had gone ahead and checked out the new lands before his brother's family and his own followed him to the New World. Certainly there are two Land Petitions for a James Abbott in Wentworth County in Upper Canada [Ontario], in 1817 and 1819. The first petition was for a smaller town lot but these 'free lots' were often for 100 or 200 acres in the new areas which had been carved out of the virgin lands of the local peoples for the settlers by the British Government. Wherever there are straight lines on a map it usually means the boundaries have been drawn by a colonial power. In 1820 and 1821 the Government had given a 'bounty' of £10 to each emigrant to

Canada but this had been stopped although, as the *Northampton Mercury* reported on 22nd December 1821:

> *Grants of land will be given to settlers as before and they will be gratuitously furnished with husbandry implements, but nothing farther.*

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars times were very hard for most working people. The *Mercury* reported on 31st May 1817, on an area some 40 miles to the east of Ringstead, that:

> *The rage for emigration from the Isle of Ely to America has not yet subsided. Farmers, tradesmen and mechanics are continually quitting their native Isle to seek a livelihood in a distant land. A vessel went round to Wisbech for passengers and in a few days upward of 90 applications were made.*

It seems that James returned to England and collected the rest of the party before re-crossing the Atlantic with them on the *Comet.* There are a number of boats and ships named *Comet* at this time but it is likely that this *Comet* was a 250 ton single deck ship. According to the *Lloyds Register of Shipping* for 1823 it was American owned and built in about 1816. A steam-driven paddle steamer built in 1812, also named *Comet,* was working along the Clyde but steam was still in its infancy partly because of the amount of coal needed for any long voyage. Even in 1903, Scott's ship, *Discovery,* had sails as well as engines because of this problem of coal storage on a comparatively small ship.

We know that the *Comet,* under George Moore's captaincy*,* sailed from London, leaving Cowes on the Isle of Wight on December 31st and arrived in New York on 6th March 1823. Another immigrant to Canada in 1823 took seven weeks and two days to get to Quebec so this seems a long voyage but times were very dependent on the weather. It was still a perilous journey. The *Connaught Journal* on 3rd March 1823 tells of a ship, called the *Phoebe* of 370 tons being totally wrecked at Glanbeigh in County Kerry in Ireland. It was carrying timber from the New World and was the other side of the ocean but it shows the dangers of such a voyage. The advertisement in *The Times* of November 18th 1822 may give some idea of why it took so long.

> *For New York (to succeed the Acasta) and first ship, having her heavy goods on board, the fine fast sailing, American SHIP Comet, A1, coppered and copper fastened, George Moore, Commander, burden 300 tons; lying in London Dock. Here accommodations for passengers are elegant and spacious and cabin passengers are found with bedding upon the principle of the Liverpool packet ships. For freight and passage apply to Capt. Moore at the New England coffee house; to Richard Pettit, College-hill; or to Hopkins and Glover, brokers, 'Change Alley.*

This was essentially a cargo ship, also taking passengers. It may be that there were further stops along the English and perhaps the Irish and American Coasts. Also the advertisement does not mention the conditions for steerage passengers which, on a single deck ship may have been very basic. It would have been difficult and probably unpleasant voyage during the worst of the winter months, especially for Aaron and Martha with two very young children.

George Moore, the captain of the *Comet*, had been born in Littlehampton in 1792 and began his maritime career as a cabin boy. He emigrated to America in 1817 and became a captain and one of the founders of the London Line. He was a friend of the writer Washington Irving and named one of his sons after him. Unfortunately we also find that in 1825 the *Comet*, with George as the captain carried slaves along the east coast of America into the port of Savannah. The slave trade had been abolished in 1807 in much of the British Empire although not in territories run by the East India Company or in Ceylon and it was not until 1833 that slavery was finally abolished in all the Empire. In

the United States, although it was banned and attempts were made to stop the slave ships, the trade continued, and the American Civil War was fought partly over the south's unwillingness to give up slavery. In all this time the 'internal' movement of slaves along the east coast of America and the Gulf of Mexico continued. A ship called the *Comet* was taking slaves from the District of Columbia to New Orleans when it was wrecked on January 3rd 1831 on the Bahamas Bank and 164 slaves were taken to Nassau in New Providence where they were freed. Great Britain eventually paid an indemnity for these slaves. We know from the Lloyd's Register that George Moore was commander of a Comet in 1831 but it may not have been the one that was wrecked which was a 'brig'. Nevertheless it is worth seeing just what was happening in the United States at this time.

In opposing the passage of a Bill through the American House of Representatives in 1843, to pass on this 'recompense' to the slave owners who 'lost' slaves in 1831, Joshua Reed Giddings spoke movingly of what had happened:

> *We are called on to interpose the supreme power of the nation to aid the pecuniary views of certain individuals, resident in this District and vicinity, who, in 1831, entered into a commercial speculation for the purchase, exportation and sale, of a certain other portion of the population resident here and in the surrounding country. For this purpose they chartered the ship "Comet", to sail from Alexandria to New Orleans; they then made their purchases of men women and children. Here, sir, in sight of the Hall in which we are now sitting, and in full view of the "star spangled banner" which floats over this edifice, consecrated to the maintenance of our national honor and human freedom, they examined the bodies, viewed the proportions, determined upon the age, and fixed the value of fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and children. Then came the separation. All the ties of domestic life were severed; the child torn from its parents; brothers were taken, while parents and sisters were left; the fond mother chained to the cofle and forced from her home and hearth amid the heart-rending cries of her child; while deep agony and unutterable anguish sat upon every countenance except those of the slave-dealers, who, without a pulsation of human sympathy, with whip in hand, forced their drove of "human chattels' on board the slave ship lying at yonder wharf, in plain view of the windows in front of our Hall*.

So it was on a ship which would be used for slaves two years later that the Abbotts arrived in New York. The passenger list records that James Abbot was 40 years old and his wife, Ann, was 50. James is recorded as a shoemaker. With them are their children Rebecca (17) and William (12). There is no sign of Lucy who was baptised in 1817 and William has not previously appeared in the records. The entry in the original log is very difficult to decipher and he is the same age as the William who is the son of Aaron. This is, of course, possible but it seems a little odd. It may be that this double entry is a mistake for I have found no sign of him in Canada. The full list of Aaron's family who travelled are Aaron (38), Martha (39), William (12), Thomas (10), Anna, who was christened Hannah, (9), Elizabeth (7), Esther (5) and James (3). The ages do not quite match up but this is not unusual.

The route via New York was considered the more expensive way of travelling so we can only wonder as to why the family used it. As we have seen, it may have been a cheap passage, travelling on what was essentially a cargo ship. From New York there were a number of possible routes that they could have taken. Perhaps the most likely would have been by boat up the Hudson River to Albany, then westward along the Mohawk River and Erie Canal, which, although partly built at this time, did have some sections open to traffic. Once at the shores of Lake Ontario they could have taken a sailing ship to Hamilton and Cootes Paradise. A less likely route would have been by steamer from New York around the coast and up the Hudson River, transferring to an open 'Durham' boat for the upper reaches. This boat would use a sail where possible and be 'poled' through the shallows to Lake

Ontario. Travel by boat was generally easier and safer than going overland at this time, before the coming of the railways.

James had received, on 12th November 1817, a 'town lot' at Lot 5, on the north side of Ancaster Street in Cootes Paradise, a beautiful wetland now part of the city of Hamilton on the western end of Lake Ontario. One of his descendants has told me that the family believes that he made use of his old skills and set up a boot and shoe repair business there. He did not sell this lot until 1830 so it seems probable that, on their arrival, the two families first lived in Cootes Paradise while they tried to secure land.

All these lands, of what became south Ontario, were purchased by the British from the Mississauga, originally part of the Ojibwa nation in the 1780s to give grants of land to American loyalists, (loyal to Britain), who had lost their land as a result of the American War of Independence. Recently the Canadian government has awarded some $145 million to the Mississauga as a settlement of a land claim because of the original gross underpayment in the 1790s.

Aaron, like his brother, had applied for land in Wentworth in 1824. In these petitions the applicant had to give good reasons why they should be given a free land grant. It would seem, therefore, that the two families first tried to settle in Wentworth County but then, for some reason then tried their luck in Eramosa in Wellington County. Eramosa was, at that time, mainly occupied by military officers and British loyalists from the United States although a new wave of immigrants was beginning. The name, 'Eramosa', as the Reverend William Barrie pointed out, when opening the new Presbyterian Church in 1861, *has a 'sonorous ring'* but:

> *It is said to be the name given to it by the Indians and in their language it means a dead dog.*

What would the two Abbott families have found, in this part of Upper Canada, different to their home in Ringstead? Eramosa would have had a similar population but instead of the closely packed 'ring village' there would have been straight tracks with log houses strung along them. The land would have been largely forested with rocky outcrops and swamps. After the beautiful, but homely Nene Valley it would have seemed a vast, awe-inspiring country with the limestone outcrops shimmering in the River Eramosa.

The weather would have not been so different to England but with drier winters and snow rather than rain, with little springtime, and hot summers, dry but with a sapping humidity, which parched the land until the arrival of the Autumn rains in October and November. In 1846, Wm. H, Smith produced, as he states, the first Canadian Gazetteer. He notes:

> *Much has been written against, and strange notions are prevalent in Britain respecting the climate of Canada. Most persons on the other side of the Atlantic imagine that the winter is so severe, and the snow so deep, that it is impossible for any one to stir out of doors without being wrapped up to their eyebrows in furs or woollens; nor even without the risk of being frozen to death, or lost in the snow. This is a very erroneous idea. . .*

Of course Smith was trying to 'sell' Canada and perhaps underplays both the humid summer heat which Elysia DeLaurentis, at the Wellington Museum and Archives, assures me can often get into the high 80s Fahrenheit. He also downplays the 'ague; which apparently the British were concerned about, comparing it to judging the healthiness of the climate of England by the Fens. Nevertheless at this time the area of Upper Canada would have had swamp and forest and mosquitoes and black fly would have been a constant irritation and danger to the Abbotts during May especially. Even today the insects can make it almost impossible to work outside without proper protection, (and we have

not mentioned the horseflies and deerflies). In northern Ontario they still wear hats with netting draped down over their heads to protect as much tender skin as possible. In the 1950s, Canadian singer Wade Hemsworth recorded a song called, *The Blackfly Song,* which has the chorus:

> *And the black flies, the little black flies,*
>
> *Always the black fly no matter where you go;*
>
> *I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones,*
>
> *In North Ontar-i-o-i-o, In North Ontar-i-o-i-o.*

There are land petitions for both James and Aaron in Eramosa in 1829. James was granted 100 acres by the Crown on 17th August 1829 but on 9th October of the same year he sold it again, to Thomas Brown. We will look, later, at the possible reason for this sudden sale. For Aaron, however, this was the end of his journey.

In *Here and There in Eramosa* Frank Day tells us that:

> *. . . the story is told locally that the couple reached Lot seventeen about dusk. Tired with their travel, it is said that they spent their first night on the new farm sleeping on the ground beside a fallen maple tree.*

Aaron was granted 200 acres, a huge area by Ringstead standards. This did not mean, however, that the land was his. In order for this to happen he first had to build a house at least 20 ft. by 16ft in size and live there for two years. He also had to level half a road in front of his property and clear, cultivate and fence ten acres of the land. *Emigration Handbooks* were produced each year for the emigrants, although many would not have been able to read them. The one for 1820 makes it clear that these first years would be very hard but for those who persevered it could lead to real prosperity.

> *If the emigrant farmer should be poor, he will have difficulties to encounter in establishing himself. Arrived at his land, he will have no shelter till he erects his house; he then cuts down trees and clears his ground of brushwood &c. by fire. By degrees he ameliorates his land, obtains shelter for his cattle &c. Enterprising men who have courage to surmount difficulties, will in the end do very well, as thousands have done.*

John Harris, an Irishman from Cork wrote a diary of his life between 1811 and 1830. In 1820 he arrived in Eramosa just a few years before the Abbotts. The brief entries there give some indication of the day-to-day chores that would have made up much of the settlers' lives. In May 1822 he records:

16 *Ephraim Conroy with me chopping*
17 *Wm Smith Snr with me chopping*
18 *Wm Smith Snr with me burning brush*
20 *Chopping*
23 *with J. Ramsey chopping*
24 *Wm Smith with me chopping. J Ramsey went out.*
25 *Rolling*
27,28 *Burning*
29 *Made L. Ramsey a pair of shoes*

30 Cutting potatoes. Adolphus Armstrong arrived and stopped all night
31 Made garden
1 June Planting corn

He was also walking 15 to 20 miles on many occasions for provisions, friendship or business. The shoe-making which punctuates his diary was obviously a sideline that helped supplement his income until he sold his crops – or ate them.

Aaron did have the help of his two older sons, and perhaps his other children as they grew up. His neighbours, too, would have helped him build his first 'shanty', a small log dwelling without windows, as he and his family would be expected to help others. Later a more permanent 'house', with windows, would be built. The first of these house 'raisings' in Eramosa was recalled many years later in the *Guelph Evening Mercury,* by the son of John Ramsey:

> *The first log house put up in the Township is still standing on Mr. John Ramsey's farm. It was raised in 1823 and took the united strength of every man in the township – twelve in all – to put it up, assisted by three gallons of whiskey, which Mr Ramsey carried on his back from Dundas Street, for the occasion.*

Even so, it was not until 1836 that Aaron was able to prove to the Land Agent that he had done all that was necessary and the 'grant' was signed over to him. It is possible that some of the family worked in the neighbourhood, to provide money or goods, until the farm was a going concern.

Writing of the nearby township of Puslinch, Charles Callfas tells of the winter of 1842 when the snow was on the ground from November until May so that not a, ' fence nor stump could be seen'. He goes on to tell of his father who:

> *. . . built a shanty about sixteen feet square which housed eighteen persons for several months when a second one was erected. Trees were hewn down, burned or sold for almost nothing. They used the hoe for a plough, covered the grain by scratching it with brush and cut it with a sickle. He stated that bears were numerous and bold. Even in daylight they could come looking in the windows and often steal little pigs out of the pen. The cattle defended the sheep against the wolves. At night oxen would lie down a distance apart and the sheep would get between them for safety.*

Young people usually adapt quickly to new surroundings but for the Abbott children, although it must have been a wonderful playground when freed from work, it would also have been, at times, a frightening place. Another early Eramosa settler, Lazarus Parkinson, later told of the wolves from a young boy's perspective:

> *Our cattle running in the woods were chased home by the wolves two or three times during the winter. The wolves would pursue the cattle as the shades of evening were gathering thick and gloomily in the deep recesses of the forest, close up to the clearing, and then the whole pack would set up a dreadful howl. Night coming on with its darkness rendered more gloomy by the thick woods that surrounded our dwelling at no great distance, the winds sighed mournfully in the tree-tops, and the thrilling, piercing, doleful howl of the wolves, caused a strange feeling to pass through the minds of us boys and made us creep close to our big fire, and sit quietly watching its red-glowing coals, its bright blaze ever varying in form and color, wondering to ourselves why wolves should howl so hideously.*

The two Abbott couples were older than the usual pioneers and James was older than his brother. Also while Aaron had been a shepherd, James had worked as a shoemaker. It seems that Aaron was able to build a good life in Eramosa but that James, for whatever reason, was not able to take advantage of the free agricultural land.

At some stage James and Ann moved to Trafalgar Township, Halton County, west of Toronto, which has now been amalgamated into the town of Oakville. There is a gravestone in the Palermo United Cemetery in Oakville, which records the deaths of the couple. At the bottom it states that Ann died on 19th October 1829, aged 66 years. This is just ten days after the sale of his land in Eramosa and it is possible that with Ann sick he realised that he would not be able to manage the land. I think that Ann's age may be a mistake for Ann was fifty when they were on the Comet in 1823 and, looking at her husband's and children's ages, fifty-six would seem more likely.

Perhaps, because of her death, James also sold his town lot in Cootes Paradise. There is an Indenture of Bargain and Sale, dated 1830:

> *. . . from James Abbott to Allan Napier MacNabb for 3/5 of an acre, lot 8, south side of Ancaster St. In the town of Cootes Paradise.*
>
> *[Allan Napier MacNabb made his fortune in property speculation and later became the Canadian Prime Minister.]*

The same gravestone records that James died on 24th December 1850 aged 71 years and 6 months. Next to this grave is another small stone which records the burial of Jane Abbott, 'Relict [widow] of James Abbott, in her sixtieth year, on September 28th [8 not clear] 1857 [could be 1851], Native of Brixton'. It seems that James re-married after the death of Ann. I have not managed to find James or Jane's marriage or them in residence together. There is no Brixton in Canada so presumably it is the area of London that this refers to but does this mean that she had not lived long in Canada? James's apparently hidden life is probably just a result of him moving from place to place.

In contrast to James, Aaron had settled for life in Eramosa and the 1833 Census of the Township records his household as:

> *Abbott, Aaron, 3 males (16+): 1 male (0-16): 3 females (16+)*

Aaron is shown again on the same 'project' in 1837-8. By then, of course, he had made the land his own. By 1851 he is seventy years old and recorded as a 'Gentleman' which means that he was not having to work for a living. With him and Martha is their son James (30) with his wife Mary Ann and their four children. His oldest son, William had married Martha Black who was born in Ireland and may have been a relative of James Black (although he was from Scotland) who had founded the Everton *Church Disciples of Christ*. Most of the younger Abbotts seem to have become members of this local church but Aaron and Martha, as well as their youngest son, James, retained their old allegiance to the Church of England.

The Agricultural Census of 1851 confirms that Aaron is still on the farm with his son James and it also fills in some of the details of what they were growing on their joint holding of 200acres. They had 80 acres under cultivation with 50 of these under crops, (Aaron had 6 ¾ and James 8 acres of this under wheat), and 30 under pasture. There were still 120 acres 'under wood or wild'. It seems likely that father and son ran the lots as one farm.

On the 26th December 1852 Martha died. The couple had decided that they would be buried on the spot where they had spent that first night on their lot, beside the fallen maple tree, and accordingly she was laid to rest there and a headstone erected.

In the 1861 Census Aaron is still living on the lot with his son James and his wife and family. The land records show that the farm was sold in 1863, perhaps so that he could leave something to all his children, although in 1867 he is still listed as living on Concession 6 Lot 17 as a freeholder, with his son William farming beside him on Lot 15. It may be, therefore, that it was on Aaron's death that the house was sold

Aaron lived long enough to have become recognized as one of the fathers of the township and in May 1866 he would have read, or had read to him, the reminiscences of other early settlers in the Guelph Evening Mercury. He was mentioned several times but, for whatever reason, never offered his own memories for publication. Through these articles, from which we have already quoted, we get some idea of their tough self-reliant lifestyle. We read of privation, hazardous journeys, crossing dangerous swollen rivers, and people surviving against the odds. The Reverend William Barrie summed it up when he spoke at the opening of the new Presbyterian Church in 1861:

> *It was no easy matter for the first settlers to get along. They had for years hard toiling and many privations. There was no grist mill nearer to this quarter than Esquesing or Waterloo, which was 23 miles off; and it generally took three or four days to go with a grist of eight bushels to there and come home again. Dundas was the nearest market, and it often took about a week to there and come home again; and the teamster had sometimes to lodge with his oxen in the forest all night. There were cases in which men carried the wheat (about a bushel) on their backs to the grist mill in Waterloo. In some families the wheat was boiled and made food of in that way; but the consequence was dysentery, this led to the use of coffee mills for grinding the wheat. For years no settler had anything to sell, and a York shilling was scarcely ever seen in any person's possession.*

Aaron died on 13th June 1868, aged 86 years. It is said that he was buried alongside Martha. We know that their farmland burial plot had a monument surrounded by a four-foot high stone fence enclosing an area six feet by eight feet. It is told by Frank Day, however, that Aaron's name was never put on the headstone. In the 1940s the Ontario government ordered the closure of these farm burial plots and the removal of the remains to recognised cemeteries. So it was that the grave marker was moved to the local Everton Cemetery and it is there today. It records:

In Memory of
MARTHA ABBOTT
Who Departed This
Life December 26 1852
Aged 73 years

Below this, now partly worn away, are four lines of text from Psalm 106:

Happy are they, and only they
Who from thy judgement never stray.
Who know what's right, not only so,
But always practice what they know.

Was Aaron's name missed off by some oversight or did he remember a 'strayed' lamb some 65 years earlier and decide to not have his own name set there?

Abbott family tradition has it that Aaron had either given to, or helped his eldest son, William, to buy, the farm next to his own while another son, James managed and lived on the home farm. It is also believed in the family that Aaron left the farm to William's eldest son also called Aaron with the stipulation that he should pay each of his grandchildren $100 when they reached 21 years of age.

Aaron's will is given in the petition papers entered into the Surrogate Court of Wellington on 20th June 1868. It first gives a list of Aaron's assets:

Bedding an Furniture of about the value of	*$ 21*	*00*
Notes of hand amounting to	*1034*	*00*
Also cash in hand	*27*	*22*
43 lbs of wool value at	*10*	*74*
	1102	*96*

It also goes on to give power to his executors to sell off his goods, pay off his debts and funeral expenses and then to distribute the residue as follows:

> *To my son William the sum of One Dollar – To my son James the sum of One Dollar. To my daughter Elizabeth the sum of One Hundred Dollars and to my granddaughter Martha Talbot Forrester the sum of One Hundred Dollars and the remainder to be divided as equally as they can between my Daughter Hannah and the aforesaid Elizabeth and my Daughter-in-law Mary Abbot wife of my son James share and share alike – and the same to be divided within four years after my decease.*

His grandson, also Aaron, was one of the executors, and it seems likely that the land and house had been given to some of his male heirs before his death. Otherwise this will would seem to have been a blow to them. Nevertheless, his son, James, ceased to be a freeholder and the 1871 Census shows him still living with his wife and 8 children in Eramosa but now recorded as a 'labourer'. His older children are 'farm servants' or 'servants'. At the wedding of his son William on 2nd April 1874, it states that it took place at 'the residence of James Abbot Lot 7, 5th (or 3rd) line Eramosa', which was just across the railway line from the small town of Rockwood. It may be that by this time James was renting a house with just an acre or two of land, with access onto the 5th line (or driveway). At first, the regimented, straight lines of the New World driveways and roads would have seemed alien to the Abbotts after the Ringstead lanes which had followed the history of the land.

The couple stayed in Rockwood where James worked as a labourer on the railroad. James and Mary Ann both died in 1894 and are buried in the town of Durham.

Here and There in Eramosa records of the Abbotts:

> *. . . the family was influential and widely known in Eramosa as shown by the municipal records and they were particularly noted for vocal and instrumental musical ability*, which they applied generously for the welfare of the local churches and organizations. They were connected with most of the older families of the township by descent or marriage.*

*[*Note: At the baptism of his daughter Mary on 20th October 1822, at Great Addington, a Charles Abbott was described as 'Labourer, Carpenter and Musician.' Music seems to have been in the Abbott genes.]*

For Aaron and his family their lives as pioneers in the Eramosa area must have meant hard, unremitting work but they built a new life there and became some of the leading citizens of the new community.

Afterword.

Surprisingly, perhaps, an earlier Addington Abbott's life followed a similar pattern to Aaron's. Giles Abbott of Little Addington was committed to gaol, on 17th November 1800, charged with stealing a 'stirk heifer' from Elizabeth Fortescue of Thurning. In February of the following year he was found guilty at the Assizes and sentenced to death but was reprieved before the judges left Northampton. His son, also Giles, emigrated to Australia in 1836 and Giles senior with his wife, Hannah followed him a year later. They too seem to have become pillars of their new community and one member of the family, Jacob, became a prominent local pastor.

References

My thanks to Bob Abbott in Canada who has given me the benefit of all his research into Aaron and his family and to Jane Watt for kindly checking the Palermo graves' inscriptions. I would also wish to thank Elysia DeLaurentis at the Wellington County Museum and Archives who did some brilliant research there on my behalf and answered all my questions about the Abbotts' journey and Eramosa and also summarised and copied relevant pages from the following: Ontario Archives and Land Record Index: Land Abstract Index for Eramosa: Guelph Evening Mercury Wednesday 17th June 1868: Ontario Genealogical Society tombstone transcriptions for Eramosa: Wellington County Surrogate Court probate records 1868: History of Guelph and Townships/Township of Eramosa by James Innes (First pub. Guelph Evening Mercury 2nd – 10th May 1866): Transcription of the Diary of John Harris 1811- 1830: Smith's Canadian Gazetteer 1846 by Wm. H Smith.

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Chapter Five

Village Constables

John Pengilly, Henry Packer, Joseph Balderson, Edward Stones,
Elias Brown, John Skelly, John Puttnam, Frederick Sullivan

The post of village constable has a long history. From the time of Edward I each parish had had to appoint two constables each year. These appointments became the nomination of the 'Vestry Committee', (they met in the vestry of the church), which was made up of the local gentry. The post of constable was not one that many men wanted as there was no formal wage and it could be a time-consuming job. Some men, who could afford it, paid others to take on the role. It was also a job unlikely to make a man popular among his fellow villagers. He would have to place accused people in the stocks, or in the lock up, or, if there was nowhere else suitable locally, in his own house.

The familiar truncheon became a weapon and symbol of office. By the early nineteenth century most parishes would have five or more constables and, in the rural areas the post lasted well into the nineteenth century.

Times were changing, however, and the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 and the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819 made the authorities, somewhat unwillingly, accept that the army was not the best force to keep public order. The Gordon Riots accelerated the formation of the Metropolitan Police. The Peterloo Massacre, where the military broke up an illegal gathering so violently that eleven people were killed and several hundred injured, began the movement for a national civilian police force.

Already, in 1828, a Select Committee on Criminal Committals and Convictions noted:

> *. . . in the Agricultural counties, the business of detection is often left to a village constable who is perfectly unfit to deal with any but village crimes.*

The parish constable, was also responsible for short measures (in shops etc), bastardy orders and, it seems, practically anything that went wrong. Earlier than this Select Committee, an article, taken from 'an agricultural publication' was printed in the Northampton Mercury on 30th August 1822. It reveals the bigotry of the times but also the low opinion some people had of the constable.

> *I believe the generality of Gipsies to be ignorant, and hardened, and wicked enough for any crime. . . And although Mr. Constable swears that there are no gipsies in his parish to his knowledge, and nobody sells by false weights and measures to his knowledge, yet he knows that he has sworn to a lie: he knows that the publican sells by a little white mug about three quarters of a pint; but as long as it passes with the magistrate all is right, and he 'only does as the other constables do'. - (I have been one myself, Sir, so I know what they do.)*

The fear engendered by the 'Swing Riots' in the 1830s in the rural areas also helped lead finally, in 1839, to the *County Police Act* which allowed county magistrates at Quarter Sessions to adopt powers to create local forces, but with no central government funding. Some counties resented both the interference with the old system and the costs involved but Northamptonshire was one of the earliest to take up this option. The Northampton Borough Police had already been formed in 1835

and in 1840 the County Constabulary followed. The first Chief Constable was Henry Goddard, an ex Bow Street Runner.

The new system used much of the terminology of the old, and as the two ran side-by-side for a number of years it can be a little confusing. The Northampton Mercury for the 7th July 1832 had reported that:

> *Mr. Richard Freeman of Ringstead was sworn into office as Chief Constable for the Hundred of Higham Ferrers: in the room of Mr. Joseph Walker, deceased.*

Richard Freeman was a wealthy local farmer who declares in the 1851 Census for Ringstead that he is a farmer of 270 acres, employing seven labourers. He is obviously part of the old system but even in 1872 at the Petty Sessions on April 15th we see that William Bull, a shoemaker and grocer, and, Charles Robinson, shoemaker and shoe agent, are sworn in as constables for Ringstead. The constables made an application for an increase in the fee allowed for expenses for attendance but were told this was a matter for the Justices at the Quarter Sessions. This is obviously still part of the old system still continuing. The 1839 Act did specifically allow the Justices of the Peace to appoint 'special constables' to supplement the professional police force, if needed, and it these that continued the old Parish Constable system. Many saw this change to a centralised professional police force as an attack on the liberties of England. A 'Rugbaean' wrote a one act play, published in 1840, called *John Bull and the Rural Police* which ended with the cast singing a song to *The Old English Constable:*

> *Yet all at length must bend to fate, so borne along the tide,*
> *A victim to Reform at last a sudden death he died.*
> *And while o'er England's liberties new laws and fashions ride,*
> *Alas! I fear our country's peace lies buried by the side*
> *Of a fine Old English Constable, one of the olden time.*
>
> *For times and seasons now are changed, old customs pass away,*
> *No longer English hands and hearts will prove old England's stay;*
> *Gendarmerie will henceforth be the order of the day,*
> *And we shall think on with regret the former happy sway*
> *Of the fine Old English Constables, all of the olden time.*

What qualifications did these new police constables have to possess? The Act specified that they must be:

> *. . . under forty years of age; to stand five feet seven inches without shoes; to read and write and keep accounts; to be free from any bodily complaints, of strong constitution and generally intelligent.*

He also could not have certain jobs such as servant, gamekeeper or innkeeper and must have 'a certificate of character to be signed by one or more respectable persons'.

We are told that the constable was to receive not less than 15s and not more than £1 1s a week. For clothing he was to be supplied with:

> *First year, one great coat, cape to ditto, badge to ditto, coat, badge to ditto, two pair of trowsers [sic?], one pair of boots, one pair of shoes, hat, stock. Second year, one coat, badge to ditto, one pair of trowsers, one pair of boots, one pair of shoes, hat. The supply for the*

third year will be the same as for the first year, and for the fourth the same as the second, and so on for successive periods.

In the Northamptonshire Constabulary the original uniform would have been a ten-buttoned single-breasted, blue coat, grey trousers with a leather belt containing cases for handcuffs and staff and a plain black top hat. It was not the most practical uniform for chasing felons down country lanes.

The constable was also to be supplied with a staff, (I have not seen it in any reports called a truncheon) and, perhaps more surprisingly, in some circumstances, with a small cutlass. Again I have never seen a cutlass referred to in any reports for Northamptonshire.

The Constables had a long day, for the Chief Constable, on 13th June 1840, extending the hours that had been laid down in an order made less than three weeks earlier, stated that the constables would go on duty at 5 am until 10 am and then patrol from 7 pm until the beer houses are closed or longer if necessary. They were also to watch out particularly for vagrants pitching their tents and remove them.

The first newspaper article that I have found which refers to the new police in Ringstead is to a Police Constable Tuckey who brought a charge against Thomas Whittering and William Cobley for being drunk and disorderly. The case was heard at Wellingborough Petty Sessions on Wednesday 7th February 1844. It is a case, that we have dealt with in an earlier biography, relating to young William Cobley who was so drunk that he believed that he could move the earth off its axis.

It seems clear at this point that the constable was not based in Ringstead for in another case, where William Wagstaffe was charged of stealing two rabbits belonging to Thomas Bayfield's son, Police Constable Tuckey *went* to Ringstead. When charged with the offence, William said that he had found the rabbits and that:

. . . they were in a pie and the skins were in the cupboard.

At first Ringstead was in the Wellingborough Division under Superintendant Luke Knight and the nearest constable was in Raunds. In 1849 the Superintendant took charge of a District and under him there would be two or three Divisions run by the new rank of Inspector.

We do not know exactly when Police Constable Tuckey left but it was before 1849 when the original Personnel Register was re-written and only officers then serving were included. John Pengilly joined the force on 1st November 1849 and we find him, on the 27th January 1851, according to the *Northampton Mercury,* as 'the police officer stationed at Ringstead' Later events lead us to doubt that this is strictly correct in that the 1851 Census has him living at Higham End, Raunds. The case is about William Knighton of Raunds keeping his licensed house open, 'after the hour of ten o'clock' and John 'proved' the offence.

Living with John in Higham End was his wife Sarah and son William John. Perhaps, surprisingly, John and his family are from Ashburton in Devon and we may wonder what brought them to Northamptonshire. Of course, we should not be too surprised because the life stories that we have followed throughout the century have shown us that village life was not the stable, settled affair that we sometimes imagine. This was particularly true of those who followed the new 'professions' of National School teacher, station master or police constable. The old constable system relied on the village looking after itself. Under the new service the rule was to appoint from without and to move men before they got too comfortable.

John was the son of John and Susanna Pengilly (the spelling varies) and was baptised in Ashburton on 12th March 1819. Ashburton is an inland parish of Devon which had grown to prosperity through agriculture, tin mining and the wool industry. Throughout the nineteenth century, however there was emigration from Devon and Cornwall. In the 'Hungry Forties', agriculture was depressed and this was worsened by the impact of potato blight in the 1845–7 period. In Ashburton, the serge and blanket manufacturing industry was an important employer and this was also in rapid decline. The town had 3,080 inhabitants in 1801 and 4,165 in 1831 but by 1841 it had decreased to 3,841 and this decline continued throughout the nineteenth century so that by 1901 the population was only 2,628. These were hard times in the area. Pam Ferris, the actor, in a series for BBC Wales found out that her great-great-grandfather, Richard Perkins, in desperation, had walked with his eight children from north Devon to Aberkenfig, near Bridgend in Wales.

Many young men and women, would have been forced to leave the area in order to seek work. It was also at this time that John's mother died and his father remarried so, perhaps, events at home may have also provided a reason for John to seek a new career as a police constable in Northamptonshire. There was, however, a more compelling reason why John came to Northamptonshire. He had been a member of the South Devonshire Railway Company Police which had been disbanded in 1849. The new Chief Constable of Northamptonshire, Henry Bayly, looking for more constables for his force went to Devon to actively recruit these experienced men and ten former railway policemen came to the county as a result. In the event, the idea was not a great success, for four men left in the first year and within six years all had left the force.

In 1841 John, like his father was an agricultural labourer in Ashburton. By 1851 his father had remarried and was a land drainer in Ashburton but Police Constable John Pengilly and his family were living in Raunds.

How did John fare in rural Northamptonshire? Ringstead had quite a strong dialect and John would have had a broad Devon accent. One can imagine that the wags outside the pubs at closing time would have found his accent irresistible. I have only found the one case where John is named but it is probable that he did come across a Ringstead resident whose activities pepper the pages of the *Northampton Mercury* court reports. The Saturday May 31st 1851 issue list those, 'Committed to the County Gaol and House of Correction' and includes:

> *Korah Dicks for one month for using a gun for killing game at Ringstead and for one month for assaulting a police-constable at Ringstead.*

It is likely that John was not long in Ringstead for his daughter was born, in 1854, in Long Buckby, another shoemaking village with some reputation for disorder. It is logged in the *Personnel Register* that John received five punishments, was injured once on duty and had just one favourable report. It also records that he was dismissed on 15th April 1855. Unfortunately no reasons are given and this lack of detail is typical of the *Register.*

By 1861 John Pengilly and his family are living in Salisbury Terrace in Islington and he is an Inspector at a Railway Coal Depot. It seems that John tried to start up his own business as a corn dealer but the London Gazette for 29th December 1868 lists him as a 'Bankrupt to surrender at Basinghall Street'. It states that he is late of Copenhagen Street but, in the 1871 Census he is still there, in Islington, and has been reduced to, 'coal heaver'. He is fifty years old and he is dead before he is sixty. It seems that the years had not been kind to John.

We saw, in an earlier biography of Korah Dicks, that it was parish constable Samuel Figgis who landed in trouble for allowing Korah to get drunk before delivering him to the Northampton Gaol in

1855. Also, Joseph Dearlove and William Beeby are sworn in as parish constables at the Wellingborough Petty Sessions of April 11th 1856. The remnant of the old system still had a role to play in Ringstead in supporting the new police force. It was also in 1856 that the County and Borough Police Act was introduced which stated that the acceptance of a fully manned, centrally inspected, efficient police force would be rewarded with government funding of one quarter of the cost. There was again opposition on grounds of cost and also of local democracy, as the county police forces were still under the administration of the Quarter Sessions whereas the borough forces were governed by elected (by the few) representatives.

Many of the local constables must have been involved in investigations following the disappearance of Lydia Attley in 1850 and the discovery of a body and the aborted trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864. The investigation was taken over by their superiors. The Chief Constable, Captain Bayley, Superintendant Noble and Inspector Williamson were present at the Inquest on the supposed body of Lydia.

Unknown Constable in Northamptonshire County Constabulary. Pre 1870

© Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police (Northamptonshire Police Archives)

In 1860, the new Division of Thrapston had been formed which took pieces from Oundle, Kettering and Wellingborough. This was part of the enlargement of the force following a report by the new Police Inspectorate, formed in 1856, which had found the county greatly undermanned. A new Thrapston Police Station was built with living accommodation for the Divisional Inspector and the town Constable as well as the police offices and Magistrates Court Room.

By 1860 the uniform had changed to a blue, knee length eight-button frock coat with no pockets and blue trousers. The hat had now been reduced from a top hat to a more serviceable bowler type with a metal badge.

It is not clear who looked after Ringstead in the period after John Pengilly left but on 1st June 1863 Henry Packer joined the Wellingborough Division. He was 27 years old and 5 ft 8¾ inches tall. John Pengilly had been 5 ft 9½ inches tall and all the Ringstead constables were above the average height for the time.

P.C. Henry Packer became responsible for Ringstead although it does not appear that he was actually living there. It was he, who, on the 22nd August 1865, found Odd Dicks, one of Korah's sons, sitting on a stolen mangold wurtzel, under a hedge, at the side of a farmer's turnip field.

Henry was the son of a tailor, born in about 1836 in Long Buckby, but living with his family in Helmdon. He seems to have been something of a trouble-shooter, going into villages to sort out 'hot spots'. In 1863 and 1864 he appears in a number of cases in Finedon, in 1865, as we have seen at Ringstead, and in 1867 and 1868 he gives evidence in cases at Easton, Collyweston, Raunds and Thrapston, where it is said that he is stationed. He appears to have been something of a high flyer because in 1861 he was a police constable in Chalfont St. Peter in Buckinghamshire and by 1871 a Police Inspector in Towcester.

There was a hierarchy of police constables, although rarely referred to in the newspaper reports. In the early years, when a constable first joined the police force he would be referred to as a 'third class constable'. He would receive some simple training and would be sent out into the streets and lanes. In the beginning it was considered that it would take some four years to become a second-class constable and then, if his conduct was appropriate, he would be upgraded to a first class constable after another five years. In fact these periods were soon condensed and Henry was promoted to a Second Class Constable on 1st January 1864, to First Class on 1st January 1866, to Merit Class on 1st April 1867, to Sergeant, Second Class on 1st February 1869 and Inspector on 1st February 1870. A meteoric rise! Surprisingly he had two punishments and no favourable reports. On 30th September 1874 he resigned, probably to become Master of the Towcester Union Workhouse

Certainly, the 1881 Census shows Henry in that capacity and he continued there until his retirement. He died on October 6th 1905 aged 70 years and was buried in Towcester Cemetery.

We see other police constable's names in connection with Ringstead. In September1865 Police Constable, George Arnold, who was almost certainly based in a neighbouring parish, brings a case against W. Dicks for drunkenness, abusive language and disturbing the peace. It was, as usual at this time, near the *Swan Inn*.

It seems that there was no single officer responsible for Ringstead and that the first police constable to be actually stationed there was Joseph Balderson. Our introduction to him is when one of the locals accuses his Inspector of assault. In his evidence at the trial, Joseph states that he had been at Ringstead, 'during the last fortnight', so we must assume that he had started his duties there on or around the 27th July 1868. He says that he was only temporarily placed at Ringstead which, he adds:

Was memorialised for in consequence of the riotous conduct of some of the inhabitants.

Some of the villagers did not welcome a police constable into their midst. On the other hand, as Joseph said, many villagers had actively sought to have a constable stationed in the village. At the Northamptonshire Quarter Sessions in July 1868:

> *A memorial from the inhabitants of Ringstead, praying for a police-constable to be stationed at the parish has been heard before the committee. . . The Chief Constable states that with his present force he cannot permanently place any police constable at Ringstead.*

One wonders if this was a punishment posting for Joseph for he had been promoted to Constable First Class but on 20th April 1868 he had been reduced back to Constable Second Class. He had been born in Spratton in Northamptonshire in1844, the son of a farm labourer. In the 1861 Census he was twenty-one years old and still living at home with his parents. Like his father he too was a farm labourer. Most of the early police constables appointed came from agricultural labouring backgrounds and this was true even of the Metropolitan areas.

On August 4th 1868 at around 11 pm Joseph, pounding his new beat, was outside the *Black Horse* when he heard a loud noise coming from the other end of the High Street, near the *Swan Inn*. He found twenty or thirty young men collected there and he asked them to go home as the noise had, 'aroused the neighbours'.

At this same time, by coincidence it seems, Superintendant Noble and Inspector Williamson had been driving in a gig on the road from Addington to Ringstead. As they were coming up the road from Ringstead Station to the village they heard the noise of a 'drunken party'.

Alfred Wilson was one of those men outside the Swan Inn. According to his testimony he had been score keeping at a local cricket match and it was about ten o'clock at night. His cottage was at the bottom of the Swan Yard and he was talking to several men who were on their way to night harvest work. He said that Inspector Williamson came up and demanded why he had not gone home. Alfred alleged that:

> *The defendant [Inspector Williamson] attacked me with a stick inflicting several bruises. He followed me all the way to my home, beating me as he went.*

Thomas Smith, Joseph Cobley and Lemuel Lockie all supported Alfred's version of events, except the time which they said was near to 11 o'clock. Thomas Smith, (possibly another man) who lived at the Swan Inn saw from his window:

> *The defendant was striking complainant with a stick and Superintendant Noble was hitting him with a whip.*

Lemuel Lockie who also saw the incident from his window which overlooked the Swan Yard testified that there were:

> *Two or three men in the yard, but there was no disturbance.*

Alfred told the court that on the following day the doctor had called on him. Unfortunately the doctor could not be present at the trial because he was attending a patient. Was this the truth or did the good doctor not wish to appear on the 'wrong' side? In evidence, the three police officers stated that they had not seen or carried out any assault. Inspector Williamson had concluded that the men

were displeased by the temporary appointment of a policeman in the parish and that Wilson had said:

> *We will have no ------ bobbies here.*

The Bench considered that there was no evidence of the defendant having used 'more violence than was necessary in supporting the law' and the case was dismissed.

The local drinkers must especially have resented this temporary policeman among them. On 11th October 1868 P.C. Balderson discovered Joseph Baker on Sunday afternoon:

> *. . . lying on a public footpath in the village in a state of intoxication and fast asleep. His dress was discomposed.*

Baker flatly denied the charge but was fined just 1s. with costs as it was his first offence.

The Northampton Mercury of 9th January 1869 report of the Quarter Sessions that the Police Committee had proposed an increase in the force by four constables. One of these was because:

> *Great complaints there were at Ringstead and the chief constable placed a man there temporarily, but from his reserved force at Northampton. The committee had been informed that a great improvement had taken place since the constable was stationed there.*

The permanent increase in the force was agreed and Joseph continued in his post at Ringstead.

On 18th February 1869 Joseph was on duty at 12 o'clock at night at the 'top end of the village'. He heard a loud noise and found James Cope and Joseph Cobley (a witness in the first case), 'kicking up a disturbance'. He asked them to go home but they refused, sneering:

> *. . . they didn't care a - - - - - for old Balderson.*

Mr. Henry, defending protested that:

> *. . . the defendants had been at work all day and were simply going home quietly after a glass of ale.*

Again the loyal shoemakers came out as witnesses. George Cole and Thomas Roberts gave evidence that they had been at the *Swan Inn* with the defendants and that they had drunk little. Joseph Balderson had abused them without provocation. Needless to say, they were found guilty and fined.

You get an impression that some in the community saw the police as interfering busybodies, spoiling people's fun from such reports as this from the *Northampton Mercury* on the Thrapston Feast in August 1870:

> *There was a large number of persons present, and in the evening the company danced to the music of the Ringstead brass band. The proceedings were extinguished by the police at about ten p.m.*

Can we reasonably infer from the word, 'extinguished', that the report writer considers that an enjoyable evening had been snuffed out?

Joseph had met Mary Elizabeth Bayfield (or Boyfield). She had been born at Upwell in Cambridgeshire where her father, John, had been a corn miller. However, John originally came from Bythorn and his wife, also called Mary, had been born in Raunds. It appears from the birthplace of one of their children that the family had been in Leeds in Yorkshire but when we find them, in 1861, Mary, the mother, is a young widow living back in Raunds with her children. She is a schoolmistress. Mary Elizabeth and Joseph Balderson married on 31st August 1869 and by the 1871 Census they are together, with their one-month year old son, Edgar, in Seivers Row, off Chapel Road, in Ringstead.

And so the cases continued for Ringstead's first resident constable. In February 1870 Lemuel Lockie, (another witness in the first case), was charged with stealing a hive of bees, the property of George Essex, baker of Denford. In this case we see the police constable's smart detection work. He gave evidence that he:

> *. . . searched prisoner's house and in the cellar found a piece of sack (now produced) and a pair of shoes (also produced). Upstairs witness [P.C. Balderson] found a pair of trousers with honey adhering to the inside of the leg. The trousers were concealed within blankets. The honey appeared to have been recently smeared on the trousers. Witness then went to the prisoner's garden and observing the soil near his door disturbed, unearthed a large iron pot containing several pounds of honey in the comb. The quantity was about a hivefull.*

Joseph also examined the defendant's closet and dust heap and found honeycomb from which honey had been extracted. He also compared the boots with the footmarks made in George Essex's garden and found that they matched. Lemuel was sentenced to three months imprisonment in the House of Correction.

Joseph also charged Frederick Bishop of Saffron Walden with begging on the 25th June 1870 and he was committed for one-month hard labour and, in the same year, William Dearlove, a local farmer's son, with two separate charges of shooting pigeons. The case was gone into in some detail and witnesses, employees of William's father, gave evidence on his behalf. The case against William Dearlove was finally dismissed but Joseph had shown that he was willing to charge those who lived in the big houses as well as the cottages.

In February 1871 he encountered the rascally Korah Dicks, now an 'aged man, although not quite sixty years old. He charged him with hitting a little girl with his stick who, he said, had spat at him. A year later Joseph is giving evidence against Elizabeth Jeffs for stealing turnips from Mr Peach's field. She was fined, including costs, 12s. 9d.; in default she was committed to gaol; for 14 days. The report tells us that Elizabeth:

> *. . . appeared to be about 16 years old, appeared to be an orphan and until recently was, with her brother, an inmate of the Thrapston Union Workhouse, whence they were taken by an old man with whom she has since lived.*

In fact Elizabeth, who was from Titchmarsh originally, was nearer thirteen than sixteen and had been in the Workhouse with her mother and two brothers. She and her brother, John may have escaped from poverty and crime but her youngest brother Henry is likely to be the twenty-one-year-old convict, born in Titchmarsh, who is in Pentonville Prison in 1881.

Joseph had five 'punishments' in his career but during this time he had been promoted back to Constable First Class on 1st January 1871 and then on 1st September 1873 to Merit Class

In February 1874 Joseph gave evidence in the case of George Wilson, a lad of about thirteen years of age, who was charged with stealing a silver watch. George admitted the theft and, as he had already been incarcerated for eight or nine days was only sentenced to receive ‘twelve strokes with a birch rod’. [George became ‘Manager of a Boot Manufactory’ in Northampton, married late in life to a woman, Ellen Elizabeth Slinn, fifteen years his junior and had three children.]

Unknown Constable in Northamptonshire County Constabulary. After 1879

© Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police. (Northamptonshire Police Archives)

I have not found further cases where Joseph Balderson is named and the diary of the new Constable, Elias Brown, shows that he took over in Ringstead from early 1877. It is a little confusing as in the 1881 Census we find Joseph with his wife, Mary, and their family which includes Alfred who is just one year old and born in Ringstead. They are now in Crick and Joseph is still a police constable although, on the 1st May 1882 Joseph was once again 'reduced', this time to Constable First Class. . He was then posted to Badby in west Northamptonshire where he is recorded in the 1891 Census. Soon after, on 30th November 1891 Joseph was 'discharged to pension' and his certificate of character is 'Fair'. Ten years later he is 61 and. in a, not unusual, ‘poacher turned gamekeeper’ move, Joseph has become a publican in the *Plume of Feathers* in Everdon.

Joseph was one of the few police constables who stayed long enough in Ringstead to become part of the community. On April 30th 1871 a son, Edgar William and on August 17th 1872 a daughter, Anna Maria were christened at the Parish Church and on February 22nd 1977 another daughter, called Mary after her mother, was buried in the churchyard). In all, it seems that the couple had at least six children who were born in Ringstead.

Bureaucracy in the police, often complained about today, was also a problem in the nineteenth century. The *Northampton Mercury* for 7th January 1871 had quoted the Chairman of the Police Committee who explained to the Court that:

> *. . . the number of returns the Chief Constable has to make, in addition to his other work, had increased so much of late, that the work over-taxed the energies and time of his clerk. The committee had the clerk up to examine him, and he said that for about four weeks in the quarter, he had to sit up till eleven o'clock at night, and some of the books were now in arrear for three years.*

The committee, at the Chief Constable's request, appointed a constable who could act in that capacity when he was not occupied with the clerical work. At that same Quarter Sessions the committee also allowed the promotion of constables from the 1st to the 2nd class without making any limit on the numbers but emphasised that a constable should not be moved from the 3rd class until he has served at least 6 months. I think the report should say from 2nd to 1st class (rather than the reverse) but it does show that the original five years service before promotion from third class had been relaxed. It seems that retaining constables had become a problem. As we have seen from some of the cases reported, it could be a difficult and sometimes dangerous job and was far from well paid.

We have said that it was confusing that Joseph Balderson had left his post in Ringstead in 1877 but seems to have still been living there in 1880. Part of the confusion is that there was a short term replacement called Edward Stones. He had been born in the Liberty of Normacot which is in the parish of Stone in Staffordshire. In 1854, when he was nineteen years old, he had joined the Royal Marines and left, after serving his time, in 1867. It seems that he worked as a labourer for a couple of years before joining the Northamptonshire Constabulary. At thirty-four he was older than most recruits but the military was a rich source of constables. He moved around, as was usual, from Little Bowden and Daventry to Northampton and then on to Thrapston. He moved again to the Oundle District before returning to Thrapston.

We do not know if Edward Stones was in Ringstead for the harvest accident on September 11th that the *Mercury*, in its report for the year 1879 recorded. A man called Overhill had been loading corn in the hayfield at Ringstead when he fell and broke his neck.

Many in Ringstead had wanted a constable to be available in the village so there was a need for a police house and station. At the Northampton Epiphany Quarter sessions on 7th January 1880:

> *The committee recommended that the Chief Constable should take a house at Ringstead at £7. 10s and a house at Crick at £6. 10s. for police constables.*

We find Edward in the 1881 Census living in the Seivers Buildings in the Carlow end of the village with his wife Sarah and their young children, Thomas, Joseph, George, and Richard. Richard, the youngest, is only one years old and he had been born in Brigstock in the Oundle District, so the family had not been in Ringstead long. We also know from the *Northamptonshire Constabulary*

Personnel Register that he was dismissed on 30th April, just a few weeks after the Census so his time in Ringstead was short.

No reason is given for his dismissal but in 1891 the family are at Ravensthorpe and it appears that he is a "navvy". In 1901, however, he is still at Ravensthorpe and it looks as if it is the same Census Collector's writing and Edward's occupation seems to read "navvel [sic] pensioner" so perhaps this was always the case. By 1901, his wife had died and his three unmarried sons are agricultural labourers and still at home. Only Richard is still at home by 1911 and Edward is 75 years old. He died two years later.

As we have said, the Diary of Police Constable Elias Brown shows that he became the constable in Ringstead in 1877 but how does this square with Edward Stones being there? It may be that he was a high flyer and was seconded to other duties around the District, while others temporarily took his place.

In 1881 he had been a constable, living with his wife Emily and their 10-month-old son George, at 58 Gold Street, Wellingborough. When exactly the Ringstead police house and station was purchased and if and when Elias and his family moved in I have been unable to find.

He had been born in Mears Ashby in about 1857 and he, like many constables, had been an agricultural labourer as a young man although his record in the *Personnel Register* records that he has been an, 'Attendant and Soldier'. He joined the Northamptonshire police force on 5th October 1876.

We first come across P.C. Brown named in the *Mercury* report of the Thrapston Petty Sessions on October 4th 1881, some five months after the dismissal of Edward Stones. Under a case about a 'battle royal between the rival clans of the Yorks and Grooms, old inhabitants of Denford' we find George Mundin and Owen Oxley were charged with a breach of the peace and John Abbott was charged with being drunk and disorderly In both instances, P.C. Brown 'proved the case'. In November of that year he was also concerned with a case where a lad named Petit. He was a shoemaker's son who had been sent to Higham Ferrers with some work. He returned home, saying he had been robbed of the money and described in some detail the man who had robbed him:

> *He wore a soft hat, black velvet coat, and cloth trousers and had black whiskers.*

Eventually he confessed that he had lost the money and had concocted the story to avoid being flogged by his father. The money was afterwards found by a lad named Flawn. The boy, Petit, had put down the money while playing and had forgotten what he had done. In December Elias apprehended Charles Andrews, an indolent 'Crispinite' [shoemaker] who had absconded, leaving his wife and family to be chargeable to the Thrapston Union. In February of the following year he gave evidence against James Barker and Charles Cope for being drunk and disorderly on the 7th January and Ralph Pearson and Joseph Attley for fighting outside the Temperance Hall between 10 and 11 o'clock at night on the 11th January. Other cases of drunkenness followed and in May 1883 there was a case which may illustrate changing attitudes to 'necessary force':

> *Thomas Jones, no fixed address, was charged with assaulting P.C. Elias Brown whilst in the execution of his duty on the 24th ult. The prisoner, about four o'clock in the afternoon, in company with two men and three women of a similar class, entered the beerhouse at Ringstead kept by Mr. Figgis [New Inn]. P.C. Brown perceived that some of them were intoxicated and he therefore followed them to caution the landlord against supplying them with more drink. The prisoner followed him outside and commenced attacking him in a*

manner which showed that he was an expert pugilist. The constable after receiving one or two blows on the chest, drew his staff and struck at the prisoner's arm. The latter accidentally received the blow on his head from which he lost a quantity of blood. – The bench inflicted a fine of 20s., and 13s. 10d costs.

Elias was promoted rapidly so that he was made a Sergeant Second Class on 15th January 1883 by which time he had already left Ringstead. On 1st December 1885 he was again promoted, to Sergeant First Class. He did have one favourable report but also six punishments which is perhaps surprising. Then, as now, it was a difficult profession in which to avoid censure. Elias "retired to his pension" on 5th January 1902 by which time he was in the Northampton Division.

In September 1883, John Skelly, a 2nd Class Constable, born in Middlesex, was posted to Ringstead. There seems to be greater cooperation with other constables and we see him patrolling in Denford, Great and Little Addington and sometimes in Raunds. As a result, P.C. Daniels and P.C. Andrews are also sometimes involved in Ringstead matters. Earlier in 1883 he had given evidence in cases which showed that he had previously been in Thrapston, perhaps serving his probationary time. He had joined the Northamptonshire Constabulary on 1st April 1882, aged thirty-two years old, and had been allocated to the Thrapston Division. His only reference was from the Marquis of Exeter although he had been an ordinary labourer. We see from the diary the long distances that rural Constables had to walk seven days a week. It was not unusual for them to walk twenty miles in a day. There was truth in the stereotype of a policeman needing solid, well-shod feet.

In 1878, the Contagious Diseases Act brought in new laws and controls to control epidemics in livestock. Farmers had to notify the police of any cases and isolate their stock. In September 1883 the *Mercury* has columns of announcements under this legislation notifying the public of the cases of Foot and Mouth Disease and Swine Fever and the isolated areas. Ringstead had seven 'infected places' with Foot and Mouth in a county total of 819. This disease had first been identified in England in 1839 but, initially, had not been thought of as serious, alongside the other diseases that livestock suffered.

John's early months were dominated by him dealing with this outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease among the local cattle herds although there was time for another, more unusual, case. His first entry in his diary reads:

Saturday 8th September 1883. On duty in Ringstead and neighbourhood and thence to Denford and neighbourhood. Mr. Robert Crawley of Thrapston reported that he had 30 Beast with the Foot and Mouth Disease in a Field called Grose Holme Meadow Ringstead. I have examined the fence and found them in good repair, thence to Thrapston making inquiry about 7 men belonging to a German band for stealing 2 sheets from a house in Bedford on the 7th instant. Met Inspector Tarry and P.C. Capps.

These meetings with the Inspector and other local constables were a regular part of the Constable's patrols with certain 'points' designated on his route for 'Conferences'. In these days before easy access to a telephone system, communication was a problem and this Conference system was a way in which the constables of adjoining parishes or 'beats 'could meet up and exchange information. It was also, of course, part of a monitoring system but these conferences would have provided some companionship and support, in what was often a lonely job. We see an earlier example of the checking aspect of the system in the diaries of Inspector Williamson which he kept from 1866 to 1888. On 28th January 1866 he came upon the unfortunate P.C. Ball who was at his 'point' at the Obelisk. [This probably refers to The Obelisk in Finedon at the junction of the Thrapston and

Irthlingborough Roads. It was erected in about 1789 as direction pillar and to record the return to sanity of George lll.]

> *Met Constable Ball, found him fast asleep at the point and snoring, his lamp stood by his side and after standing by him some few minutes I picked up his lamp and brought it home with me, he knowing nothing about it.*

We do not know what happened to P.C. Ball but he continued in the force. On the second day of John's stay in Ringstead, a Sunday, another 30 beast belonging to Mrs L. Gale were reported with the disease. He also visited Mr Thomas Nicholl's field called 'The Smalley' and found that a fence, erected to keep the cattle away from the gate, had been dismantled, apparently on the owner's orders.

There was still concern about the drinking culture in the village among some of the residents. At the Thrapston Petty Sessions on September 6th 1884 Superintendant Noble reported:

> *During the past year these houses [licensed] have been well conducted with two exceptions. One beer house keeper was convicted for a breach of his license and I had complaints of a publican at Ringstead not conducting his house properly but there was not sufficient evidence to summons him. . . A memorial, signed by about 80 inhabitants of Ringstead was presented to the Bench praying them to exercise the discriminating powers granted to them under a recent statute and refuse to grant any licences in the parish.*

Like all the other Constables, John Skelly had to deal with drunkenness and this meant much of his work was checking on the public houses at closing time. It would have been a long day. The Diary was not like the more modern policeman's notebook. It was a hardback book kept in the station and made up, usually at the end of the day. Inspector Tarry, on one of his visits has written in the margin, in a space provided:

> *Visited this station tonight at 11.40 pm. Constable Skelly in Bed. Found Diary made up and Sub-Division [Ringstead] quiet.*

Is this just a statement of fact or is there the implication that he thought the Constable should still have been on duty?

We see that John, every week or so, walked round the neighbourhood in plain clothes, 'looking for vagrants'. This was a specified part of his duties but it must have been some relief to be out of uniform.

The *Northampton Mercury* for 14th March 1885 reported on a socks crime when a homeless framework-knitter called William Hallam was accused of stealing 2½ pairs of socks valued at 3d. from William Wingell, tailor, of Raunds. John Skelly found him walking along the road to Kettering and, on searching him, found the socks. It transpired that he had also stolen a shirt and he was sentenced to one month's hard labour on both counts. In August of 1885, on that same road to Kettering, John apprehended a man who had stolen a pair of shoes from Great Addington. There is no mention of a wardrobe.

Beside John's cases for drunkenness or petty theft we also see the machinery of government increasingly making its impact locally. Parents, some with 'conscientious scruples' are prosecuted for not getting their children vaccinated or for not sending them to school. Charles Smith was summoned for 'neglecting to contribute towards the maintenance of his father, a pauper in receipt

of relief from the Thrapston Union but the case was dismissed when it was shown that Charles had only a pension of 7s a week to live on himself. Thomas Sewell, a miller, was prosecuted for not notifying the police that he had swine fever on his premises. He pleaded ignorance of the law and was fined just '1s. with £1 expenses'.

The last entry in the diary is for Sunday 25th January 1885. John moved to Paulerspury near Towcester and, in the *Mercury* of May 21st 1887 a J. Skelly from Towcester sent in one of the best solutions to a problem set in the newspaper's 'Draughts Column'. John died on 11th April 1888, still a young man. Is it a coincidence that there is a William Skelly, Baptist Minister, living in Rotton Row, Raunds at this time who had been born in County Down in Ireland?

John Thomas Puttnam (or Puttenham) was the next constable that we know to have been based in Ringstead. We see once again a flurry of court cases as he tried to impose his will on the local 'bad boys'. Like his predecessors he was the son of an agricultural labourer. He was born in Hartwell, in Northamptonshire, in about 1866 and as Thomas Puttnam we find him as a labourer too in the 1881 Census, aged just 15 years. Some five years later, on 1st September 1885, he joined the County Constabulary. He was first stationed in the Kettering Division before moving to Daventry. On 1st January 1889 he was promoted to Constable First Class but in April of the following year he was punished for some unnamed offence and this often seemed to lead to a posting to Ringstead. Certainly in 1891, now aged 25, he is lodging with Albert Orpin, an ironstone labourer, and his family in Carlow Street in Ringstead.

He seems to have got quite quickly into his stride and at the Thrapston Divisional Petty Sessions on 14th July 1891 he charged Samuel William Bull for 'furious driving' at Ringstead. In a case in which his Inspector prosecuted, he also gave evidence against William Robinson, beerhouse keeper at the Black Horse Inn for permitting drunkenness on his licensed premises. William protested that he had refused to serve the man, Thomas Hillson, as he was drunk, and he had tried to get him out of his house several times. In his defence shoemaker John Dix told the court that, as the landlord had refused to serve Hillson, he and his companions:

> *. . . gave him two pints on condition that he drank them in five minutes – Inspector Tarry: Did he manage it? – Witness: Yes; he done it in about three minutes. (Laughter.)*

It transpired that Hillson had been sold beer by the landlord's mother but in the circumstances the bench only ordered Robinson to pay costs but cautioned him about his future control of the house.

In March of the same year he gave evidence against William Davis from Thrapston for leaving his horse and cart right across the highway while he went into a public house.

More dramatic was his involvement with Constable Tebby and Inspector Tarry at a brawl at Denford Feast on June 5th 1893. At about ten-thirty at night the men in uniform heard of trouble and went to the feast. They met two Raunds men who were, 'the worse for drink and using bad language'. They told them to be quiet whereupon the men went up to John Puttnam and began abusing him. According to the Inspector one of the men, Clark then trod on his foot and he pushed him away:

> *. . . whereupon Clark immediately drew back and gave the witness a violent blow in the left eye, at the same time saying. 'Tak that, you -------'. Witness reeled from the effects of the blow and the two constables caught hold of Clark and when he had recovered a little he (witness) told Clark he should be arrested. Nunley then shouted out, 'Come on, chaps. The ---- - can't give us more than six months. A crowd began to collect and Robins and Nunley made a rush at the witness who was struck and kicked by Nunley whilst Robins caught hold of*

witness's leg with the object of throwing him down. Witness then forced Nunley into a doorway, and whilst doing so was struck on the back of the head by someone, and at the same time Robins succeeded in throwing witness down. Whilst on the ground witness was kicked on the head and about his body, and when he was getting up was again struck on the head from behind. Afterwards he saw Clark with the handcuff on his wrist strike Tebby, who was on the ground, with the other handcuff. Witness then drew his staff and when Clark was in the act of kicking Tebby struck him on the head. At the same time he saw both Nunley and Robins kick both constables and run back into the crowd. The two constables were then lying on the ground insensible but were afterwards picked up and taken into an adjoining house.

The men had a different version of events claiming that Clark had accidentally trod on the Inspector's foot and had been struck first and this had caused the fracas. Whatever the exact truth, it would have been a frightening experience for John Puttnam. He was examined by Mr. D Ramsay, surgeon of Raunds who found that:

. . . both eyes were blacked, the skin on the nose was broken, and there was a wound on the head, whilst he was bruised about the body and legs. In consequence of the injuries witness ordered the constable to go home to bed and he has been incapacitated from duty ever since.

John, who still bore 'unmistakeable evidence of the injuries he received', was allowed to sit down while he gave evidence. The five men involved, all from Raunds, were found guilty and the sentences ranged from a 20s. fine to six months in gaol.

Our last sighting of P.C. John 'Puttenham' is in November 1894 when he recognized that a prisoner being tried at the Assizes answered the description of a man wanted for the theft of jewellery and Jubilee coins from a Miss Robinson at Islip.

It was at this time that a Lighting Act was passed and in March 1895 a poll was taken at the Temperance Hall to decide whether it should be adopted in Ringstead. At a previous Parish Meeting 40 had voted for its adoption and only five against. A poll was from noon until 8 pm and at 8.15 pm the result was declared with 98 for the adoption and 33 against, thus giving the necessary two thirds required. Another part of the move to prevent crime was put in place.

John Puttnam married Mary Ann Donson in 1895, and we find him Police Constable, 1st Class with Mary Ann and a six year-old nephew in Barnwell. In fact. the *Personnel Register* has him moving to the Oundle Division on 10th August 1897 and we also see that he received another punishment on May 1897 which, as we have seen, often led to a posting away from the parish where the offence occurred. He did receive a favourable report in February 1896 but in June 1901 he was fined 10/- and extra pay was disallowed and he was also warned as to his future conduct. He died just three years later, on 22nd May 1904.

The police constable who brought the century to a close had probably travelled the furthest to keep the peace in Ringstead. We saw earlier that John Pengilly had left Ashburton in Devon, a place suffering a severe recession in the agricultural and woollen industries. Now, at the end of the nineteenth century another constable came to Ringstead from a place almost synonymous with the misery of farm workers and their families.

According to the *Personnel Register,* Frederick Sullivan was born in Kilmardon in Queens County (now County Laois) in southern Ireland in about 1865. The Great Famine of 1845-49 had devastated the area. The workhouses had not been able to cope with all those made destitute and many

emigrated or died. As in Devon and Cornwall, potato blight was at the heart of it, although the government's callous indifference played its part. We do not know what happened to Frederick Sullivan's family but we do know that on 4th November 1887 he joined the Coldstream Guards. His birthplace was given as Clonaslee in Queens County and he was 22 years and 9 months old.

In 1870 the Liberal Secretary of State for War, Edward Cardwell had introduced the Army Enlistment Act which had reduced the normal period of service of soldiers from 21 years to 12 years. Further, only about half of this period was to be served with the regulars. Frederick, like many who enlisted, served up to six years in the regiment before leaving the regular army but remained on the army reserve. He was liable for recall for a further six years if, at anytime, there was a national emergency.

His time in the Coldstream Guards could not have been long for he joined the Northamptonshire force on 4th December 1890 but his references are from Colonel Stirling and Major Codrington so it seems certain that he left the army with a good name. We find Frederick, in 1891, aged twenty-five, a police constable in the Police Station, London Road, Kettering living with the Inspector of Police, Levi Andrews and his family. Altogether there are ten police constables lodging there as well as two prisoners in the cells. One of those in the cells is an able seaman, born in Australia. Less than half a mile away a fourteen-year-old servant girl, Charlotte Payne, was working for Charles H. Robinson, Auctioneer and Valuer, at Linden Villa, Broadway.

We must assume that Frederick and Charlotte's paths crossed at this time for in late 1893 they were married. Charlotte, or Lottie, would have been only sixteen and Frederick ten years her senior. In 1895 the couple had a son whom they named Edwin. Frederick was then stationed at Naseby in Northamptonshire. The first case in which I have found him carrying out his duties is in the sad one of the finding of the body of a woman in Naseby Reservoir on 16th August 1892. He was 'severely reprimanded' in this month but, once again, we do not know the cause of his punishment.

Over the next years Frederick would have become experienced in dealing with the petty thefts, rick fires, suicides, assaults and drunkenness that would have been the main caseload of a rural policeman. This may have been another punishment posting for in May 1896 he had been severely reprimanded and in June he was posted to the Thrapston Division and became the Ringstead constable.

We do not find reported any cases in which he is involved but suddenly the Anglo-Boer war interrupts the lives of him and his family. The Northampton Mercury 13th October 1899 reports that the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire had sent out a letter to all the constables in the Army Reserve who have been ordered to rejoin their regiments:

> *The Constables who belong to the Army Reserve and who are about to rejoin their Regiments for active service in the Transvaal will be informed that should they return to the force at the end of their army service they will be entitled to reckon all the approved service which they were entitled to reckon at the date of their transfer to the Army. In wishing these men God-speed, the Chief Constable feels sure that they will do all that in them lies worthily to maintain the prestige of our Army and the glorious record of their different regiments.*

Frederick, stationed at Ringstead, was one of those called up to the Coldstream *Guards* and, on 17th October 1899, followed many other policemen back to war. Luckily for Frederick, his time at war was not too long and he returned to a hero's welcome on the 6.47 train on Saturday 19th October 1900. His wife and over 200 parishioners assembled at the station to:

. . . give their highly respected officer a hearty welcome. A conveyance had been provided. The horse was taken from the shafts of the vehicle and amidst cheers, Mr. Sullivan was drawn by the villagers, accompanied by Mrs. Sullivan and their two children, into the village up to his front door where every good wish and congratulation was given him on his safe return.

A little girl had been born in Frederick's absence and he and his family were living at 10 Gladstone Street. After his furlough, which lasted until 30th October, he settled back down in the new century to the usual round of thefts, cows on the highway, riding a bicycle without lights, domestic violence and drunkenness. The couple had four more children and, on 19th September 1906, he was posted to Wansford in the Oundle Division. He was awarded £2 for 'meritorious conduct for stopping a runaway horse and cart in Nassington on 13th May 1907'. On 1st December 1919 he retired to enjoy his pension.

The police constables had become part of the life of Ringstead village life. Most seem to have stayed about five years and gained the respect of the majority of the inhabitants. Alongside the constables came organised sport, the lighting of village streets and the temperance movement to help bring order. We see, by the welcome given to Frederick Sullivan that most Ringstead people had accepted and now welcomed the men in blue who had helped make their village a safer, quieter, place to live in. We, now, look back nostalgically to the time when the friendly local copper pounded the streets rather as some of the old men drinking in the *Swan* or the *Black Horse* would have reminisced about the good times they had, before the ------ bobbies came to spoil their fun.

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Chapter Six

The Staff of Life

Mary Betts, Thomas Lee, Thomas Chapman Coleman, Thomas Haines,
John Childs, Andrew Bull, Thomas Austin, Joseph Scholes, Robert Woodruff

A little after the First World War, The Millers' Mutual Association published a colourful pamphlet on the history of bread. This opened with the words:

> *From time immemorial bread has been the most important food of man. Throughout history its distribution has been the chief concern of Kings and Governments. A shortage of bread has led to revolutions and the downfall of empires. A great deal of the legislation of the world has been devoted to ensuring an adequate supply of bread to the people.*

There may be some local pleading here but bread has had a significant place in the social history of the western world. It has been an important Christian symbol and a constant focus for political unrest.

The eighteenth century ended with England at war with Napoleon's France and a string of poor harvests. The price of a quartern loaf (weighing 4 pounds) in London rose to 1s 5d at a time when many were earning less than 10 shillings a week. The corn dealers and bakers' shops were looted and the king's carriage attacked. *The Times* in 1795 printed a list of rules that it said was the way to 'Peace and Plenty'. - These included:

1 *Abolish all gravy soups and second courses.*
2 *Buy no starch when wheat is dear.*
3 *Destroy all useless dogs.*
4 *Give no dog or other animal the* ***smallest*** *piece of bread or flour.*
5 *Save all your skim-milk carefully and give it all to the poor or sell it at a cheap rate.*
6 *Make broth, rice puddings etc., for the poor and teach them to make such things.*
7 *Go to church*

It is perhaps surprising to see rice as a cheap substitute for bread but this was a bonus of empire often helped by slave labour. Even in 1850 poor Lydia Attley, on the last day that she was seen alive, was going to buy some rice for her dinner. It is likely that she ate it as a rice pudding which would have been considered a good, digestible dish for an invalid or pregnant woman. Another staple crop was becoming popular with working families, much to the disgust of William Cobbett. In his very popular *Cottage Economy*, published in 1822, he railed against the potato with his usual prejudice:

> *. . . in the evidence given before the Agricultural Committee . . .many labourers, especially in the West of England, use potatoes instead of bread to a very great extent. And I find from the same evidence that it is the custom to allot the labourers "a potato ground" in part payment of their wages! This has the tendency to bring English labourers down to the state of the Irish whose mode of living, as to food, is but one remove from that of the pig, and of the ill-fed pig too.*

Cobbett was also strongly against the 'shop' replacing the market stall, believing it an unnecessary, cost intrusion between producer and consumer. Further, in his book, he encouraged labourers to be as self-sufficient as possible which is why his star rose again in the 1970s. He 'proves' that bread, financially and in all other respects, was better than potatoes and that baking it at home was similarly better than buying the bakers' loaves.

> *How wasteful then, and indeed how shameful for a labourer's wife to go to the baker's shop; and how negligent, how criminally careless of the welfare of his family, must the labourer be, who permits so scandalous a use of the proceeds of his labour!*

Nevertheless, Ringstead had at least two bakers' shops for most if not all of the nineteenth century. The making of bread was a time-consuming business, even if, as Cobbett suggested, the week's supply was baked in one go. Further, many of the cottages would have only had an open fire with their cooking done in front of it or in a pot over it. The baking of bread would have been difficult or impossible for many in the poorer homes. Of course the bakers would also have catered for the demand of the emerging middle class for the white bread as well as cakes and pastries.

Ringstead and the parishes around seem to have maintained, at least in some form, local flour which would have been brought by horse and cart from the water and wind mills and it seems likely that the bakers continued to use this, throughout the century, even though there would have been increasing competition from the New World flour and the larger mills and bakeries in the towns and cities. Even as early as 1786 the Albion Mills, the first great steam-powered factory in London, had been established and ground 10 bushels of wheat an hour. The local millers faced ruin until it burnt down in mysterious circumstances.

The Bett or Betts family had been bakers in Ringstead for much of the eighteenth century. They were part of a large family of farmers, the first son usually being christened, 'White'. Samuel Bett, born in about 1703 was the first baker that we know of and his son John, born in about 1734 followed his father's trade. I have not found an older brother called White, and we only know of a brother Samuel, born in 1737 and buried a year later. John married Mary and they had at least four children: Joseph, John, Samuel and Hannah. John died when he was only about forty-five years old in 1779 but Mary carried on with the family business until her death a quarter of a century later. She was buried in Ringstead churchyard on June 15th 1804 aged seventy-four.

The bakery and house were advertised for sale in the *Northampton Mercury* on 14th July 1804, with immediate possession. There is some confusion here for the 'deceased widow' is referred to as Hannah, not Mary, Betts and we must assume that this is a mix-up with her daughter Hannah. The list of the household furniture and effects shows that she had lived in some comfort, perhaps helped by the Betts' yeoman background. The items auctioned by Richard Smith at the *Swan*, included:

> *Bedsteads and Furniture; Feather and Flock Beds; Blankets and Quilts; Bed and Table Linen; Dining, Tea and Dressing Tables; Chests of Drawers; Pier and Swing Glasses; neat Chairs; Clock; Pewter Dishes and Plates; Glass, China and Earthenware; Brass Pots and Kettles; Kitchen Requisites; Brewing Copper, sweet Casks, Tubs and a Variety of other Effects.*

Also included in the sale was the house and bakery which are described as:

> *A Freehold MESSUAGE or TENEMENT, with an old-accustomed Bakehouse in Full Trade, suitable Barns, Stables, and other Out-offices belonging; also a neat GARDEN and ORCHARD, situate in RINGSTEAD aforesaid, and late in the Occupation of the said Hannah Betts.*

N.B. The Fixtures, Baking Implements, and Wood, may be taken by the Purchaser at a fair Valuation;

The sale of the wood shows us that coal fired ovens had not yet reached Ringstead. The ovens would probably still have been heated in the centuries-old way by burning bundles of sticks, or faggots, in the brick oven until it reached the correct temperature, then raking out all the ashes and putting in the dough onto the hot stones and closing the door. It was a long process and the baker would be one of the first risers in the village.

At the end of the advertisement for the sale it adds:

May be viewed in the mean Time; and further Particulars had of Mr FRANCIS TIDBURY, at Woodford Mills, Administrator of the Goods and Chattels of the said Hannah Betts.

We know that the children of Mary Betts signed over their "Right, Title and Interest of in and to the Burthen of Administration of the said chattels and credits of the said deceased". It is clear that Mary had built up large debts to Francis Tidbury, presumably for flour, and, perhaps, as she grew older and less able to run the bakery. As we have said, for most of the nineteenth century Ringstead supported two bakeries but it was not a way to make one's fortune and some went bankrupt along the way.

We do not know exactly what the bakery would have looked like inside but it seems likely that it was little different from when it was built. In 1805, one year after Mary's death, *A Treatise on the Art of Bread-Making* was published. It describes what a good bakehouse should look like:

A bakehouse is a manufactory where bread is made for the purpose of sale. In order to render it convenient, it should be attached to the dwelling house, and have an inner door opening into the kitchen, and likewise an outer door to open into a small yard. In this yard there ought to be a well or pump, as also a shed for the piling of faggots. The room should be large and commodious, and the floor laid with stone or tiles. On one side should be erected a dresser or counter , with suitable shelves above it; on the other side a kneading trough about seven feet long, three feet high, two feet and a half broad at top and sixteen inches at bottom with a sluice board to pen the dough up at one end, and a lid to shut down like that of a box. On a third side a copper will contain from three to four pails of water should be erected, which is far preferable to the filthy custom of heating the water in the oven; and on the fourth side the oven should be placed.

The production of bread was hard work, as anyone who has made bread at home by hand, can testify. Imagine it with the following quantities given by H.G. Muller in *Baking and Bakeries:*

About 5 imperial gallons (22.7 litres) of yeast were mixed with enough hot water to bring the whole to blood heat. 3½ pounds (1.59kg.) of salt were then dissolved in it and the whole was added to about 1 hundredweight (50.8 kg) of flour in a wooden trough. The mixture was then well worked up by hand until quite free from lumps. This was called the sponge. Its surface was then made level and a little flour sprinkled on it. The whole was then covered up and allowed to ferment for twelve hours. After that warm water containing again 3 pounds (1.59 kg) of salt as well as 3 hundredweight (152.4 kg) of flour was added and the whole worked up into a uniform dough. That was again covered and allowed to ferment for an hour and a half. It now swelled and when sufficiently spongy it was called 'proof' and was fit for dividing, weighing and shaping into loaves. These were then introduced into the oven by means of an oven peel.

Of course, the actual quantities used by Mary Betts and her successors would have varied but bread was a large part of most Ringstead families' expenditure, and the number of loaves needed would have been great.

The next time that we meet the Ringstead bakers is in the 1841 Census. There are two separate bakeries now in business: Thomas Lee, who was next to Vicarage House (or Farm), and Thomas Coleman. There must have been bakers between the death of Mary Betts in 1804 and 1841 but so far we have not found them. Thomas Lee did appear in the *List of Licensed Victuallers* for Ringstead in 1822 but without a public house named for him. The trades of brewer and baker had long been associated as originally the froth from the beer was used to produce the yeast for the baking. At about twenty years of age, Thomas was probably too young to have bought Mary Betts's bakery in 1804 but it may be by 1822 he was already the village baker.

The Ringstead parish registers do show the christening, on March 30th 1835, of Elizabeth, the daughter of William (not the later blacksmith, parish clerk and postmaster) and Rebecca Bradshaw. William is shown as a baker but by 1841 the family had moved to Leicester with William now a journeyman baker. By 1851 he is a hawker but by 1861 he had become a baker again. The children are shown as being born in Denford (even Elizabeth) or Leicester so it is likely that William was a journeyman working for one of the other bakers either in Ringstead or Denford.

Thomas Lee was born in East Farndon, south-west of Market Harborough in about 1786. His brother William remained in the area to become a farmer or grazier, with, in 1851 146 acres and employing two labourers. Thomas, however, moved south some twenty-five miles to Ringstead. Neither brother married and both had housekeepers. In 1841 Thomas was 55 and described as a baker. Living with him were Susannah Archer 50, female servant; Samuel Eastham [?], 15, a male servant and Elizabeth Teat, 53, whose role is indecipherable. By 1851 Thomas is a master baker employing one man who is John Hames Dainty, aged 38 a journeyman baker born in Geddington. The women, both born in Stanwick, have aged alarmingly because Susannah Archer is now seventy-five and Elizabeth Teat, a widow is a pauper and eighty years old.

Thomas calls himself a master baker and this could just be a 'puff', as I have seen an advertisement for a 'master window cleaner', but it may indicate that he considered himself superior to the other baker in the village and besides bread baked a range of cakes and biscuits. The George family kept a baker's shop in Folkingham, in Lincolnshire, some 45 miles to the north. Between 1833 an 1838 they wrote 'receipts' in a small notebook. This was published by Teresa Crompton in 1997 under the title *A Pound of Fine Flower (this alternative spelling was just going out of fashion).* By looking at the recipes we can see the sort of fare that a village bakery at the time might offer for sale.

The main ingredients used are flour, sugar, butter and milk with a flavouring such as ginger, bitter almonds, lemon juice, caraway seeds and nutmeg. Other common ingredients included eggs, currants and ground rice. The main rising agent used was ''Viletta' or Volatile salts' which was a form of Ammonium Carbonate. As it was also used in smelling salts it can be imagined that the smell of ammonia would have hung around the bakery. Many of the names of the recipes have a familiar ring; almond cakes, gingerbread, Shrewsbury cakes, Abernethy biscuits, Madeira buns and so on. After the heavy kneading of the bread it may seem that it was a relief to make the biscuits and cakes until one sees a recipe for a, well-named, Pound Cake which, after the ingredients, includes the instruction to, 'beat them all together for one hour'.

In these days before compressed yeast the preparation of yeast was a laborious process for each baker made his or her own from his 'stock yeast' The starter was made from hops, flour and malt beaten into a stiff batter, covered, and allowed to sit for twenty-four hours. This was used as the key

ingredient to make the stock yeast which also had to sit for twenty-four hours. Some of this was used each day to start the next batch. Once a month the baker ought to have cleaned everything up and started again but many carried on for a year.

It was hard, time-consuming work to turn the flour into bread, cakes and biscuits but the baker was always being accused of overcharging and short measures. This was partly because of the vital part played by bread in many people's diet and the rising price of 'corn' caused by the Corn Laws, passed in 1815 to protect the farmers from cheap imports from the New World and elsewhere. In many large cities there was rioting and corn factors and bakers were attacked and pillaged. On a local scale, in 1843, Thomas Lee was fined 12 shillings for deficient weights at Wellingborough Petty Sessions. Many small traders were similarly caught as the local Police Inspector began to implement the new laws which standardised and checked weights and measures throughout the country. Bread was a precious commodity and had to be sold by weight.

This suspicion of bakers can be seen from this article in the Stamford Mercury for 16th September 1842:

> *"How is it," observes a correspondent, that the bread is so dear, notwithstanding the reduced price of wheat? The answer is plain. The public allow the baker to fix the price and never stay to question it. When the assize of bread was abolished, it was imagined that people would say to a baker 'What is the price of a 4lb loaf?' as they do to a butcher, 'What is the price of a leg of mutton?' – and would, if discontented with the price, walk out of the shop and make the purchase elsewhere; but habit is stronger than reason. The people had for so long a period been accustomed to think of bread as something settled at a price over which they had no means of control that the most frugal housewife among them never dreams of making a loaf a matter of bargain. Of course the baker will not lower the price, if not compelled; but they have carried the high-price matter too far; and not individual remonstrances but public attention is now directed to the matter. As bread is an article of daily manufacture, it might be as well to consider whether it would not be a good speculation to establish ovens, where for a small charge (smaller than now demanded for baking a joint) loaves might be baked, and thus people enabled, if they pleased to bake their own bread, as they bake their own dinners.*

We see that the practice of roasting the Sunday joint in the baker's ovens for a charge was a long established one and also that many, perhaps most, working-class families had stopped baking their own bread, in spite of Cobbett's campaign.

Thomas Lee died on the 12th April 1855 and in his will left to his brother William, a grazier in Great Oxenden:

> *. . . all that my messuages and tenement in Ringstead aforesaid wherein I now reside with the Bakehouse, Yards, Gardens, Premises and appurtenances thereunto belonging.*

He also left nineteen guineas to his servant Susan Archer and five guineas to John Griffuth Leete, his surgeon [Doctor].

As we have seen Thomas Lee was not the only baker in Ringstead but before we consider his rival it is worth just noting a certain James Wilkinson who was the alleged father of Lydia Attley's first child before she disappeared heavy with her second, allegedly murdered by William Weekley Ball. James was a journeyman baker from Leicestershire who married Lydia Hill, the daughter of James Hill, publican of the *Black Horse*. They moved to Welford and he was a baker there for over thirty years.

The other baker in the 1841 Ringstead Census was Thomas Chapman Coleman. He too came from outside the village being born in Holcot and baptised in Ringstead on 30th September 1813, some seventeen miles to the west. All his younger brothers and sisters are christened in Ringstead so it seems the family moved there soon after his birth. . He married Deborah Lawrence from Denford on 3rd May 1831 in Ringstead Parish Church. His mother, Mary, died less than a fortnight later and was buried in Ringstead churchyard. His sons, Charles Chapman Coleman, who was born on 5th November 1826, and John Joseph, born on 18th June 1835 were baptised in the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church

By 1841, as we have seen, he was a baker in Ringstead, with his wife, and sons Charles and John. By 1851 Charles has moved away and John is a butcher's apprentice. Louise Saddington from Denford is a house servant. The *Northampton Mercury* for 12th July 1851 may give a possible reason for there being no further children and the need of a servant. Among the death announcements is the following notice:

> *At Ringstead, July 4th, after eight years' spinal affliction, borne with Christian fortitude, Deborah, the beloved wife of Thomas Chapman Coleman, baker, Ringstead, aged 45 years.*

We do not see any of the family again in an English Census and it seems certain that soon after Deborah's death they left England and took their chances on the other side of the world. We have chased many a Ringstead resident across the seas but this time we will only record these entries in the Birth Married and Death columns of the newspapers:

> *On the 1st instant, [May 1852] by special licence at St. James' Church by the Rev. J. Grylls, Mr. Charles Chapman Coleman of George-street to Miss Mary Ann Esther Chormdery, eldest daughter of Mr. J.J. Chormdery of Windmill-street, Sydney*
>
> *COLEMAN – April 24 1886 at his residence, Botany-road, Waterloo [Sydney], Thomas Chapman Coleman aged 74.*

John Joseph probably died in 1876 in Victoria so the following item in the *Barrier Miner* [Broken Hill, NSW] may or not be relevant. It does sum up a way of life for those mining pioneers:

> *John Joseph Casey was found guilty at the Criminal Court of the manslaughter of John Joseph Coleman. Casey hit Coleman on the head with a stick on Good Friday. The judge fined Casey £15 and allowed him time to pay it.*

Thomas Haines was the next baker to help provide the daily bread from one of Ringstead's bakeries. He had been born in Great Catworth in Huntingdonshire and in 1841 it is probably him working for a farmer in Easton. In 1849 he married Elizabeth Vickers Wilby, whose father was a baker from Market Harborough. Perhaps as a result of this, aged just twenty-five, he is also a baker at 49 Newlands Street in Higham Ferrers. They have an eight-week-old daughter also called Elizabeth, an apprentice baker and a young servant girl. Thomas's younger brother, William, is also staying with them. He, too, is a baker and although shown as a visitor he is perhaps also helping his brother.

He moved to Ringstead in the middle of the 1850s. We know that from the 1861 Census which shows him, aged 35, in the Ringstead High Street. He has two more daughters. Honoria is six and born in Higham Ferrers and Anne is five and born in Ringstead so it seems that he moved to Ringstead in 1855 or 1856. He is now described as a master baker, employing two journeyman bakers. His bakery business seems to be growing fast: perhaps too fast for his finances.

In April 1862 we learn a little about what has been happening from a newspaper report in the *Northampton Mercury.* Unfortunately it is from a report of a case in the Crown Court where Thomas has been indicted for obtaining the sum of £171 by false pretences from the Thrapston branch of the Northamptonshire Union Bank. The article records that Mr. Merewether, for the prosecution told the jury that:

> *The prisoner was a local preacher and might well have paused before he entered upon an act upon which nobody who heard of it could come to a favourable conclusion.*

Thomas banked in Wellingborough and was struggling financially. He had been granted an overdraft, upon certain sureties, up to a limit of £600. He had used £535 of that permitted overdraft when he received cheques to the value of £386 [in effect, unpaid bills] from London. He tried to borrow £100 from his father without success and presented a cheque for £170 at the Thrapston branch of the Northamptonshire Union Bank and was given this amount in cash. He then paid this into the Wellingborough account so that he could pay off some of the outstanding bills. He had hoped that the cheque would go via London and take several days to clear, giving him time to borrow the money from somewhere. The Thrapston manager, however, sent the cheque directly to Wellingborough and it was immediately dishonoured.

The jury found Thomas not guilty of trying to defraud the bank but he was obviously in financial difficulties. On April 9th 1862, Thomas Haines, corn factor and baker of Ringstead, by his own petition was registered bankrupt. On 3rd June of the same year at five o'clock in the afternoon, at the White Hart Hotel Thrapston, his possessions were sold by his 'Mortgagee'.

These were sold in four lots. These included:

> *Lot 1. All that roomy and convenient MESSUAGE or Farm House situate in Ringstead in the County of Northampton, with the Barns, Yards, Gardens, Homestead, Orchard and piece of Land thereto adjoining. And also all those THREE COTTAGES or Tenements thereto adjoining, with the Barns and Out-buildings.*
>
> *These Premises extend from the East end of the Street of Ringstead [High Street] to the Back Lane and contain with the site of the buildings 1A. 1R. 9P. (little more or less.)*

Lot 2 contained a close of pasture land containing 6 acres and 36 perch; Lot 3 arable land of 8 acres and 29 perch; and Lot 4 arable land of 8 acres 1 rood and 9 perch. This land appears to have been in one piece with Back Lane on the south and Denford Road on the east. Surprisingly there is no mention of the bakery. Of course he may have been renting it or owned both and it was the purchase of the farmhouse, cottages and land that caused his downfall. He overreached himself.

Whatever the details, his career as a baker was over and the 1871 Census finds the family living in Green Lane Terrace in Kettering. Thomas is now a 'Traveller' and one daughter is a haberdasher and the other a governess. His wife, Elizabeth has no paid work and they still employ a young girl as a servant. Things are similar in 1881 but by 1891, a Traveller in the Corn Trade, Thomas and Elizabeth are living at 20 Castle Road, Bedford. Their married daughter Honoria and her daughter, Maria are staying with them and they still have another young girl working as a general servant for them.

It seems likely that Thomas and Elizabeth overstretched themselves in Ringstead but he found new work in the corn trade and they managed to maintain a servant and their middle-class status.

In the 1862 edition of Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory there are three bakers in Ringstead. Alongside Thomas Haines there are John Childs and Andrew Bull. Andrew does not appear in the Melville and Co. Directory of the previous year. We see the Andrew Bull is a new village baker but does the fact that the three bakers are all recorded in 1862 mean that there were three bakeries?

Whatever the answer it does seem that probably John Childs started his bakery in 1861 and Andrew Bull in 1862. They were both to remain village bakers for many years. It is their stories that we are now going to try to discover.

John 'Chiles' had been baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on December 25th 1816, the son of James and Susannah. James was originally from Southoe in Huntingdonshire but had married a Ringstead girl, Elizabeth Whiteman, and settled in the village. John married Elizabeth, (also 'Chiles'), on June 12th 1837 also in the parish church and by the 1841 Census the young couple already had three children; Joseph 3, Sarah 2 and Martha 6 months old and had moved to Swineshead, some ten miles away, in Bedfordshire. John's mother Susannah and his younger brother George are also staying with them. Judging by the birthplace of their eldest son, Joseph they moved to Swineshead immediately or soon after their marriage. John is a shoemaker.

By 1852 the couple have seven children living at home and two young shoemakers from Catworth are working for him. It is not clear but it appears that John is also a grocer. His wife, Elizabeth is a shoe binder and the two older girls are lacemakers.

It must have been a busy household but by 1861 they have moved back to Ringstead and John has a new career. We see him in the High Street, one of the village bakers. He is 45 years old, two years younger than his wife, and is helped in his new business by his fifteen-year-old son, Samuel. Robert, the eldest son, and still at home, is a shoemaker. His house and bakery is one house from the Chapel Road turning in the Census so we can be sure that it is what are now two houses, 47 and 49 High Street. It seems that the bakehouse was in number 47 and the house and, possibly, the shop in number 49. This position is confirmed by comparing the black and white postcard below with the earlier picture of the Post Office in the biography of the postmasters. We can see that the two shops were neighbours, although unfortunately the Post Office building has now disappeared.

1871 finds the family still at the bakery but only daughters, Elizabeth, a dressmaker and Martha a 'baker's daughter' are now at home. Does a 'baker's daughter' help in the shop or the bakery?

At about the time of the Census collection in 1871, John is involved in a court case to recover 12s. from a porter called Cadman, employed by the London and North-Western Railway Company at Thrapston. The debt had actually been to his son who we learn had since emigrated. In fact Cadman's wife, who was a witness, was too ill to attend so the case was adjourned.

The years roll by and 1881 has John (65) and Elizabeth (67) with the only family living with them being John's widowed sister, Mary Ann (68). John does have some help, however, because lodging with them there is a sixteen-year-old assistant baker from Raunds.

The Old Bakehouse (47/49 High Street)
Author's Photograph 2012

A 1920s view of the Old Bakehouse from the opposite direction showing the Swan in the distance

[The Bakery is the white building on the left. You can just see the shop sign over the door. The first building on the left had been the Post Office at the end of the Nineteenth Century]

Reproduced with permission of the Northamptonshire Telegraph.

Olde Bakery Cottage (17 High Street)

Author's Photograph 2012

Two bakers might seem enough for a small village but it appears that there were sometimes three or more competing for trade. Perhaps as the village bakers got older others saw a chance to increase their own trade. Henry Peach was a baker in Denford and we know that at this time that he too was delivering bread in the village. On 15th May 1882 he and his 'boy' were on their round, in the village, unaware that Inspector Alexander was watching them. There had been 'complaints'. Perhaps one of the village bakers was annoyed by Henry Peach coming into his patch. The Inspector:

> *Went to Mr. Bradshaw's, publican [I am not sure which public house this was] and found he had left two loaves there, a "cottage" and a loaf baked in a tin. Witness weighed the bread, and found 4 ozs. Short in the two loaves, - Mr. Peach acknowledged the offence, and said he was very sorry it had occurred but he was under the impression that the loaves came within the denomination of "fancy bread" and did not require weighing. – The same defendant was also charged with selling five other loaves other than by weight on the same date and in the same parish. – Inspector Alexander deposed that these were delivered at the house of Joseph Fox. There was a deficiency of 6 ozs. In the five loaves. – Mr. Peach was then charged with delivering bread from his cart and not being provided with scales to weigh the same, at Ringstead, on the same day. – Defendant acknowledged the offence and pleaded in extenuation that the lad had accidentally left the scales at home. He was very sorry for what had occurred, and would take care it did not happen again.*

Henry Peach was fined for not selling 'by weight'. The fact that Henry Peach might consider the loaves 'fancy' may indicate that the standard loaf was a 'batch loaf' which was not baked in a tin.

Unfortunately for John, at the same court session, he was charged with having an 'unjust flour scale' just two days after Henry Peach was caught. The report states:

> *It appeared that the scale was about one ounce against the purchaser. There was dough on it, and after cleaning the scale the deficiency was reduced. – Inspector [sic?] Noble said the defendant was a most respectable man, and had never before been summoned on a similar charge. – The Bench considered that it to be rather the result of carelessness than with a fraudulent intent; they therefore imposed the mitigated fine of 5s. and 14s 6d. expenses. - On Superintendant Noble's application the scales were (after adjustment) ordered to be given up to the defendant.*

We do see that John Childs was a well-regarded man but perhaps age was catching up on him. We do not have a description of John. Was he like Grandfather Iden, who Richard Jefferies describes in *Amaryllis at the Fair,* which was published in 1887?

> *He wore a grey suit, as a true miller and baker should, and had worn the same cut and colour for years and years. In the shop too, he always had a grey suit on, perhaps its original hue was white, but it got to appear grey upon him; a large grey chimney-pot, many sizes too big for his head apparently, for it looked as if forever about to descend and put out his face like an extinguisher. Though his boots were so carefully polished, they quickly took a grey tint from the flour dust as he pottered about the bins in the morning.*

John died, aged seventy-two, and was buried in the churchyard on October 20th 1888. It seems likely that the house and business was sold and by 1891 his widow, Elizabeth, aged 74 and his sister, Mary Ann, are living together in Carlow Street.

At first I had thought that his only competitor was Andrew Bull but there was one other, besides Henry Peach, who does not appear in any of the trade directories. On 29th April 1876 the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* printed a nationwide list of 'Petitions for Liquidation by Arrangement'. Among them was:

> *T. Austin, Ringstead, Northamptonshire, baker.*

He must have managed to carry on with his business for, on 22nd November 1879, the *Northampton Mercury* records that at the Thrapston Petty Sessions on November 16th:

> *Thomas Austin of Ringstead was charged by Inspector Alexander of Oundle with unlawfully selling to one, Rebecca Morris, two loaves of bread otherwise than by weight. – Defendant was fined 5s. and also ordered to pay expenses amounting to £1 3s. 8d.*

It may be now that baking ovens were more easily installed. Coal-fired ovens, heated externally, sometimes by pipes, were taking over from ovens needing wood fires lit in the oven space itself. In the *Northampton Mercury* of 5th June 1880 Hughes and Co. of the Railway Waggon [sic] Works and Coal Yard, Gas Works Wharf, Northampton advertised its list of coals for sale. These included:

> *BADDESLEY Best known kind for Bakers*
>
> *[Baddesley was a pit in Warwickshire. Just two years after this advertisement, on 2nd May 1882, 32 men lost their lives when a pumping boiler set light to coal dust causing an explosion. 23 of the dead were from the rescue party.]*

When we look through the Ringstead Censuses we find that Thomas Austin was a carrier in 1861. He was 33 years old and born in Podington in Bedfordshire. He and his wife, Sarah, have four young children, all born in Ringstead. By 1871 he had become a baker and a grocer in Shop [High] Street. Sarah died in 1879 and by 1881 he is shown as a widower and a 'baker and outdoor beer house' only two doors from the *Black Horse.* He died in 1890 and was buried on March 14th aged sixty-two.

We can only guess at Thomas Austin's place in the local baking hierarchy but it seems likely that he was at the corner shop end of the market providing bread for London End rather than the emerging middle classes. We see no description of 'Master Baker', and no journeyman assistants. It seems that he never made more than a poor living from his shop.

A Baker's Oven

This picture is from 1920s but would have changed little from nineteenth century

[From Work and Workers, Shown to the Children by Arthur O. Cook]

If we now return to Andrew Bull, we have already briefly met him in another biography. He was the younger brother of Kezia Bull who married the Chemist, Herbert Joseph Abington. He is recorded in the diary of Herbert's son, also Herbert, as Uncle Andrew. He was born on 18th April 1826 to John and Sarah Bull who were paper makers at Ringstead Mill. They were member of the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church and there is some temptation to wonder if the bakeries were divided on sectarian lines, one for the established church and one for the nonconformists.

There is no sign of Andrew in the 1841 Census but there are two Samuel Bulls, both rounded to the age of fifteen and both tailors. One is living with one sister, Susannah and the other is with Sarah Cheney, another, widowed, sister. It may be that one of these boys was Andrew and probably he is the second 'Samuel' as in 1851 he is shown as living with Sarah and her second husband, George Smith. By now he is working as a shoemaker. On 6th July 1854 he married local girl, Mary Ann Partrick and had three children, Elizabeth, Ralph and Eliza before the 1861 Census where he was shown as a shoemaker and baker. The eldest child, Elizabeth is given as being born in Brigstock so presumably the couple had lived there for a time.

His wife, Mary Ann Partrick, had been born in Ringstead but in 1851, at the age of twenty-three she was a cook at Islip for Ralph Wilson (76) a wine merchant and his wife Susannah (70) who is described as a 'gentlewoman'. When we return to the 1861 Ringstead census we see that Mary Ann is shown as the 'Manager of the Bakehouse' and it seems likely that she was the one with the expertise, who was in charge of the baking. There is a young apprentice shoemaker living with them and the only help is probably from Herbert Abington, their nephew, who is described as a baker. It seems that the couple had to do almost all the baking themselves with much of the work falling on Mary Ann. It would have been hard work with long hours but she would have been used to this as a cook.

It seems unlikely that the sickly Herbert worked long for his uncle and by 1871 Andrew is shown in Shop Street (High Street) as the baker and Mary Ann as the baker's wife. Perhaps Andrew had learned his trade from his wife and had given up the shoemaking. Mary-Ann may have run the shop still but she had four children to look after, ranging in ages from three to sixteen years old, for their youngest son, George has been born.

We learn from a court case in July 1875 that Andrew had a sideline as a pig dealer. He had bought a dozen, twelve-week-old pigs from Mr Brawn of Ringstead. The next day he tried to make a quick profit by selling them at auction but they did not make the price he wanted so he had to buy them in. He had a chat at the *Swan Inn* with Mr Holmes a coal dealer from Denford and agreed to take them there for him to examine:

> *Plaintiff [Andrew Bull] emptied the pigs out of his cart into the defendant's stye. Defendant [Mr. Holmes] then examined the pigs and found a good deal of fault with them. I said, "Look here, Mr. Holmes, if the pigs are no good to you, you don't have to have them." He said, "I will give you 16s. each" and I let him have them.*

So, after some haggling, the sale was agreed. This was on the Tuesday and on the Friday Holmes asked Andrew to look at the pigs for two of them were dead. It transpired that they had tuberculosis. The judge decided that there was no evidence to show that Andrew had known of their diseased state and ordered Holmes to pay for the pigs, with the usual costs because he 'must consider that the defendant did make this purchase with his eyes open'.

By 1881, at 54, Andrew is still a baker and only George, the youngest child, is still at home. He is shown as a baker like his father. Ten years later and George, has moved out to become a baker elsewhere and the couple's oldest son, Ralph, a butcher, has returned home. There is also an eleven-year-old granddaughter called Elsie Marsh who is staying with them. Mary Ann died a year after the 1891 Census and Andrew, in spring 1893, re-married. His new bride was Sarah Horn, Ringstead born, but the widow of an Irthlingborough beer seller.

In spring 1895 there were high winds in the area and many houses were damaged. The Ringstead correspondent wrote in the *Northampton Mercury* on the 29th March:

> *In several cases the houses are practically unroofed. The thatched houses and other buildings, as might be expected, suffered considerably. A bakehouse chimney, belonging to Mr. Andrew Bull was blown down, smashing through the roof into the bedroom. Fortunately, no one happened to be in the room at the time, or the consequences might have been more serious*

Andrew's time was nearly up, however, and he died in 1896 and was buried on 26th June. In his will he left to his second wife:

> *. . . my plate, linen china glass books pictures furniture and other household effects with the exception of a chest containing two drawers at the bottom. The said chest I bequeath to my grandson Raymond Bull of Irthlingboro' Norths.*

He appointed John Knight as his sole executor with instructions to sell everything off and divide the money equally between his son George, now a baker in Irthlingborough and his daughter Eliza Mary Marsh of London. Of his two oldest children, Ralph had died in 1892 and Elizabeth who had been a drapers assistant in Newmarket, possibly died a year later.

By this time the industrialisation of food provided competition to the producers and in the High Street. In 1880 there were some 10,000 water and wind corn mills in Britain but by 1899 there were only around 2,000 left. The hard wheats from the New World together with the steam-driven roller mills drove most local mills out of business although the Ringstead windmill and water mills hung on longer than many.

In politics, in the middle of the century, the Corn Laws repeal had split the old Tory Party with the Peelite faction joining the Whigs to form the new Liberal Party, the right wing becoming the new Conservative Party. The 1867 Reform Act had given many working men in urban areas the vote and the 1884 Reform Act extended the vote to all men paying an annual rental of £10 or those holding land valued at £10. This meant that many men in Ringstead now had the vote and the Liberal Party had a Labour wing. Women were still excluded but we can see the influence of these changes in the local politics in the backgrounds of the people who later sat on the new Parish Councils, the attitude of some parents to the National School and the rise of industrial action culminating in the Raunds March.

Part of this working class movement was the growth of the Co-operative movement through the latter part of the century and as it came to a conclusion the Co-op made its appearance on the Ringstead High Street.

First we will look at the last of the individual Ringstead bakers before the new century. It seems likely that Joseph Scholes took over the bakery of John Childs. We see him in Kelly's Directory of 1890 alongside Andrew Bull. We can also note that George Wadsworth is listed as a miller at Ringstead Water Mill showing that local flour was probably still available.

Joseph was born in Stamford in about 1835 and had become a baker at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire. He had married, aged 30, to Mary Ann Whyman on February 1866 in Oundle and we see that his first wife had died for he is a widower. His father was Richard Scholes who was also a baker. He is there in the 1871 Census with his second wife. As with most bakers there is a young apprentice living with them. Presumably he was baking for Belvoir Castle and would have been able to produce fine white bread as well as the wholemeal bread for the servants.

By 1881 Joseph has set up as a baker in his own right on the Higham Ferrers High Street. There is just one son, John Joseph, born in about 1873 at Belvoir. It seems that Joseph and family moved to Ringstead to take on John Child's bakery after his death. We know this because of a case in which Joseph was involved with, although it is a little confusing. It seems that after Higham he moved to Irthlingborough for a short period for he was there when he took on a workhouse apprentice from Bedford Union, called William Askew.

As part of the democratic political movement, which we have briefly mentioned, acts were passed by Parliament to improve the legal position of working men. In 1875 the *Employers and Workmen Act* put employers on an equal footing with their staff in a legal contract. Previous to this act only the workman, if he broke a contract, was subject to the criminal law and could be imprisoned or fined. This act laid down that both employer and workman were only subject to the penalties of the civil law in such a case.

In *The Register of Visits to Boys and Girls sent out as apprentices or servants from the Bedford Union Workhouse* it reports that:

> ASKEW, William, 13. *10 Dec 1884, Joseph SCHOLES, baker of Irthlingboro' bound 31 Jan 1885, term 5 years – in consequence of a complaint having been made by a gent. at Irthlingboro' that the boy was ill treated I went to see the lad who said he had no complaint but the case is a suspicious one. On 5th July 1886 Mr SCHOLES applied to have the Indrs. [Indentures] cancelled. On 28th August SCHOLES brought the boy before the Bd [Board] and said that he had no use for him in consequence of the impediment in his speech. The Bd told SCHOLES that he must keep him but they would endeavour to find him another situation. In consequence of information received I visited the lad and made enquiries at several places and found that without doubt the lad had been constantly ill treated. Steps were taken before the Magistrates at Thrapston and the Indrs [Indentures], were cancelled and his master fined heavily. Askew returned to the House 29 Oct 1886.*

Neither here nor in the court case report do we learn what this constant ill treatment amounted to but presumably it included beatings and physical force. It certainly does not shed a good light on Joseph Scholes, even accepting that William Askew was probably a difficult youngster, and his next employer, a blacksmith in Yelden, also had problems with him.

The report on the case at the Thrapston Petty Sessions on Tuesday November 23rd 1886 states that Joseph is a baker at Ringstead so it is probably in 1885 or 1886 that Joseph moved to Ringstead. He is still there in 1891 and 1901 at 2 High Street, next to the Post Office.

At 6 High Street is his son John Joseph, at 28 a journeyman baker, almost certainly working for his father, with his wife Martha and their two young daughters, Kathleen (4) and Rita (2). In spite of the numbering it seems most likely that this is 47/49 High Street and he took over the bakery from John Childs. Joseph died in early 1905 and John Joseph took over the family business. The 1911 Census shows us that of the three children that the couple had, only Kathleen aged 14, is still alive and she and her mother are shown as assistant bakers.

John Joseph Scholes with his baker's cart (1930s ?)

From the Ringstead picture archive held by Peter Davies

In the Ringstead cemetery is a large marble grave with the inscription:

> *In loving memory of our dear father John Joseph Scholes who passed away July 23rd 1945, aged 72 years. And Martha Jane Scholes who passed away March 9th 1946*.

It would appear that, by the end of the Nineteenth Century, there were two bakers for the village but perhaps it was not as simple as that. In September 1895 the Board of Guardians of Thrapston Union Workhouse accepted a series of food tenders. Among them was one for:

> *Mr. Betts, Ringstead, bread 3¼d., flour 10d. per stone;*

So there was a Betts in the bread trade at the end of the century as well as at the beginning but, as yet, I have not found how he fitted in. It is possible that he was a wholesaler rather than a baker himself.

The 1901 Census alerts us to another baker for at number 25 lived Robert Woodruff aged 57 from Riseley in Bedfordshire and his wife Sarah, also 57 and born in Raunds. He is shown as, 'baker Co-op

manager' Round the corner at 2 Chapel Road lived 19-year-old Lillian Mary Abbott whose occupation is given as a shop assistant in the Co-op stores.

The Co-operative movement probably started in Scotland in the eighteenth century but it was the Rochdale Pioneers who were the first successful example of working people getting together to set up a jointly owned shop . From the start it was also a political movement but its main aim was to provide unadulterated food at reasonable prices. We see this at a meeting of the Kettering District Cooperative Association at Desborough in October 1884:

> *Mr. Scotton, who was enthusiastically received, gave an instructive speech on how working men, by taking affairs into their own hands, might provide for themselves, and the good co-operation has done for the whole of the working classes throughout the whole country.*

The Desborough Co-operative Stores had started in 1864 so it is perhaps surprising that Ringstead did not form its own Co-operative Stores, which included a bakery, until 1894.

Ringstead High Street in 1920s. Girl is leaning against Co-op window (Londis 2013)

1920s postcard. Author's own copy

The first manager, as we have seen, was Robert Woodruff, who had been born in about 1842 in Riseley in Bedfordshire. By 1871 he was a baker, living with his widowed mother in High Street, Raunds. He married Elizabeth Ann Green in 1877 but she died just two years later and in 1881 he is still a baker, staying with his mother-in-law, Ann Green who was a sixty-eight year old widow living in Rotton Row , Raunds.

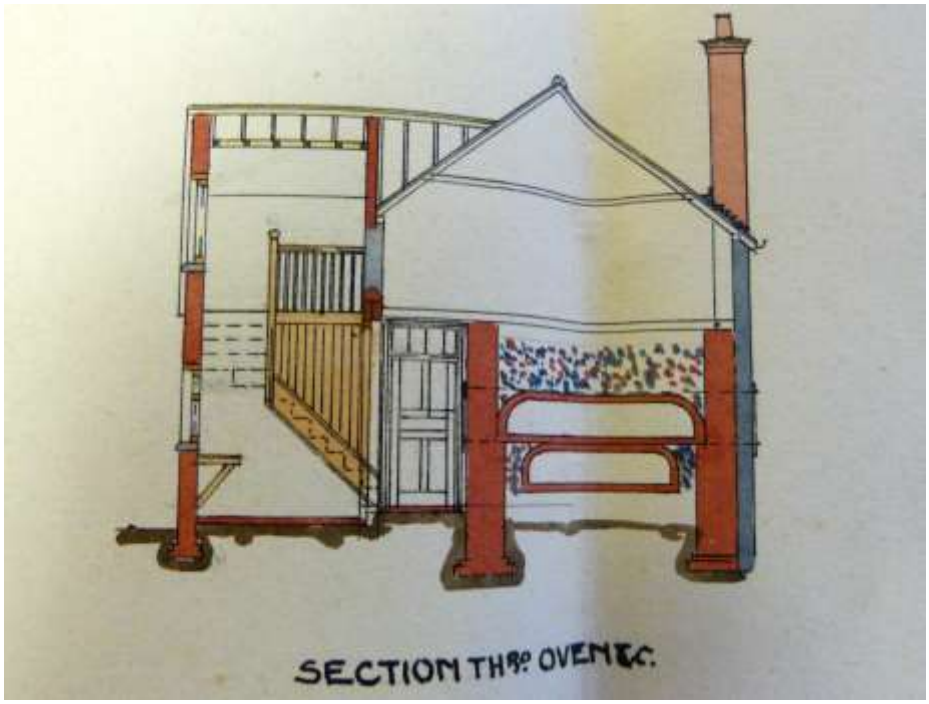
He married again to Sarah Pentelow (nee Brown), the widow of a wealthy Raunds farmer, John Pentelow, who had had 300 acres and employed ten men and two boys. 1891 finds the couple in High Street, Raunds. Robert is 49 and Sarah is 48 years old and, living with them are Sarah's four children, aged 9 to 15 from her first marriage.

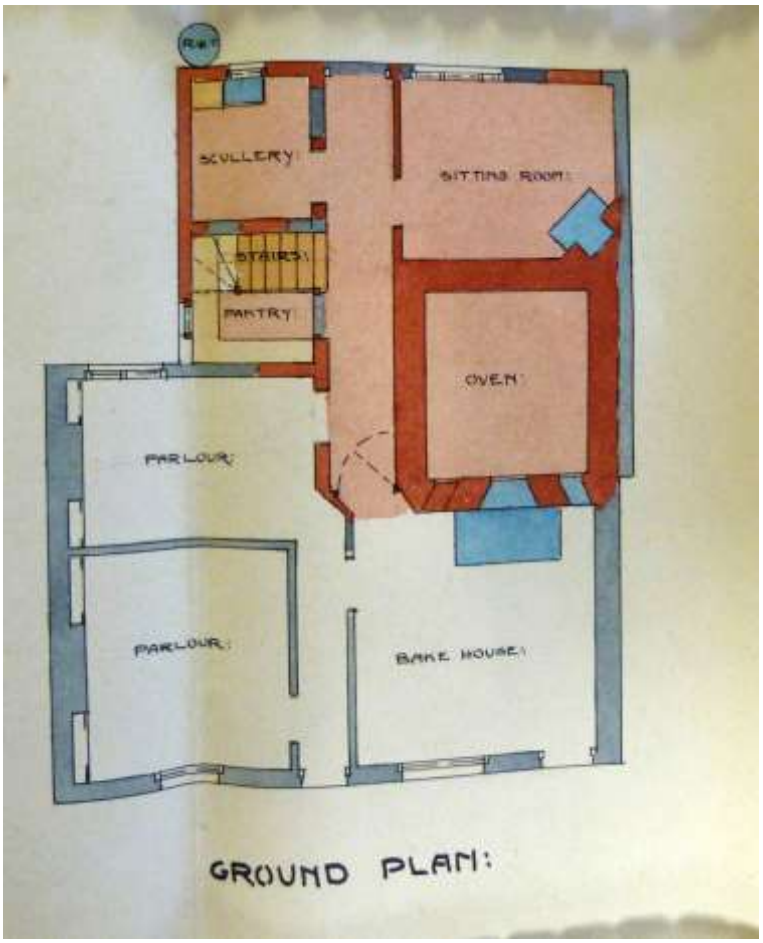
One would have thought that Robert was well set up with a bakehouse and presumably married to a rich widow. If this was the case, something changed for by 1901 the couple, with Helen, their eldest daughter, 25 and unmarried, are living at 25 High Street, Ringstead and he is the Co-op manager. Just over a year later Robert died and by 1911 Sarah is living with her 59 year old unmarried brother, a farmer in Walgrave. Also living there are her unmarried sister and widowed brother, all in their sixties.

As an aside, Robert was probably the 'Mr. Woodroffe' that Mr David Ramsay, M.B. M.R.C.S., the doctor from Raunds was attending on December 7th 1901. After visiting Robert the doctor called on another patient and while there was consulted by someone with an abscess in his foot. The doctor operated but in the process the knife slipped and the point went in the, 'principal joint of the forefinger, causing a slight but deep wound'. At the time he did little about it but when he returned home he bled and disinfected the wound, but it was too late. He was almost immediately in pain and despite the attentions of various local doctors and constant nursing he died on Monday 6th January 1902. We tend to forget how the discovery of antibiotics has changed our attitude to many infections.

In 1901 a John Kingsmith had ordered some plans from Wellingborough architects, Talbot, Brown and Fisher, to improve a bakehouse in Ringstead. John Kingsmith (originally King Smith) was from Raunds where he had grown up with his widowed mother Keziah Smith and his siblings. In 1861, aged 19 he was a rough stuff cutter and his older brother Owen was a clicker. His mother had been an Infant School Teacher but by this time was only a 'Housekeeper'. Lodging with them is Cornelius Steven aged 52, a shoe manufacturer born in Louth. Was he part of the reason for their rise to be manufacturers also? It seems unlikely for he married on the Isle of Wight in 1865 and the next two Censuses show him as a Schoolmaster living with his wife in Peterborough. Whatever the reason, by 1901 John Kingsmith, as he was now, was a Government Contractor, living with his second wife Mary Ellen. He had given generously to Raunds Parish Church and had also been a trustee of the Raunds Methodist Church. He had also been one of the employers who had agreed to pay the statement prices for piece work and as a result his workers continued to work during the Raunds Strike in 1905. He also gave £5 for the relief fund and promised to pay in ten shillings a week for the duration of the strike.

Why was he getting plans drawn up for a bakehouse in Ringstead? Was he the landlord or was he possibly doing it as part of his good works for the Ringstead Co-operative Society. We must remember that this was still a self funded group: Part of a big movement but not part of a large organisation. We may discover the real truth later but the house rooms may indicate that it was not the Co-operative Bakery. The plans show the building as it is and suggests two possible ways of increasing the size of the bakehouse. It does therefore give us some idea of what a bakehouse would have looked like for the latter part of the nineteenth century.





Drawings of Bakehouse before alterations

Talbot, Brown and Fisher October 29th 1901 (NRO. TBF 221)
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

Ringstead High Street in 1920s

Post Office now moved to its present (2013) site and Co-op with bread cart outside. The milk cart is moving away. Is the woman with the buckets delivering milk or carrying water from the pump?
With the kind permission of Vivienne Marshall

The same Co-op Bread Delivery Cart in 2013? (I think the roof is up on the postcard).
With the kind permission of Mr. Gaunt
Authors own photograph 3rd August 2013

The century had seen bread move from being the main sustainer of life for many working, and pauper families, to being a part of their diet, if still an important part.

We are now into living memory and there are still a few people who recall the two bakers' shops and the Sunday ritual of taking the Sunday joint to one or other of them to have it roasted in the bread oven. Stan Attley, who was born in 1918 was recorded by the Anchors Away Youth Group in 1998, telling of his childhood:

> *All food was cooked over an open fire – fried or boiled. The Sunday dinner was taken round to the bake house to be cooked, also cakes and pies etc.: and it cost 2d. There were two bake houses in the village.*

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Chapter Seven

Passing Strangers

Tabitha Boswell (c1704 – 1784) and others

In the high-ceilinged space in the Ringstead church tower where the bellringers stand, a cluster of plaques line the walls. The church nave is almost empty of memorials but here they are, behind a curtain, among the dust and the cobwebs. Most of the plaques are to local churchmen and notables. High in one corner, partly hidden by the vertical ladder to the belfry is a rough-edged rectangle of blue-veined marble. It is impossible to read completely without chancing the climb up the ladder but by enlarging a digital photograph and comparing it with the original hymn lyric by Isaac Watts and the Northamptonshire Family History Society transcription we can see what is written there:

In Memory of
TABITHA BOSWELL
who died
Jan^{ry} 5th 1784.
Aged 80 Years.
"Death like an overflowing stream,
Sweeps us away. Our life's a dream,
An empty tale: a Morning flow'r
Cut down and withered in an hour."

Tabitha Boswell's memorial plaque is in the corner partly hidden by the ladder

Author's photograph 15th October 2012

The words of Isaac Watts were more commonly seen and heard in the Nonconformist chapels than an Anglican church but there is a more unusual fact about this memorial that we discover when we look in the Parish Burial Register. There we see:

> *Tabitha Boswell an old gypsie January 10th 1784*

The previous entry, for December 28th 1783 is for' Esther Boswell, a young Gypsie'. A little later the Registers also record the burial of "Sara Nichols, gypsey, reputed wife of J. a Chelsea Pensioner". There is also, on the 26th March 1801, the burial of Mary Bosworth, alias Bozeat, widow who is almost certainly a gypsy.

The gypsies were a regular part of the English roads and byways until after the middle of the Twentieth Century. Their caravans or 'vardos', still mainly horse-drawn would be seen along the lanes of Northamptonshire or parked in a lay-by, the washing hung out to dry on the bushes nearby. Hidden away in the quiet corners of the countryside.

The origins of this mysterious race were widely discussed in the early nineteenth century. It had been once thought that these travelling people were from Egypt and this resulted in their name which is a corruption of 'Egyptians'. By the nineteenth century, the modern view was emerging that the race had started out from north-west India, now Pakistan, possibly driven further west by Tamburlaine in about 1400 although it may be that these tribes had had a semi-nomadic existence for thousands of years.

They spread westward through Europe and the original Hindi dialect gained words from the countries in which they settled and passed through so that a distinct Romani language emerged. They also intermarried with the local peoples and coined new words. Writing in 1838, William Howitt states:

> *The names by which they have been, or are, known in different countries are various. They call themselves Romi, Manusch and Gadzi, each of these appellatives being connected to a different language – the Copt, the Sanscrit and the Celtic. . . .But the most ancient and generic name is that of the Sinte, or inhabitants of the Sinde or Indus.*

As they moved into Western Europe they were treated as exotic celebrities at first but then were often persecuted and driven out. Howitt tells us of this experience in Britain:

> *At first they were received as princes and kings and excited commiseration by the tale of their injuries. They had royal and parliamentary passes granted them, to go through the country seeking relief, as many of the parish records yet bear testimony. So late as 1647 there appears an entry in the constable's accounts at Uttoxeter in Staffordshire, of four shillings being given to forty-six Egyptians travelling with a pass from parliament to seek relief by the space of four months. But when this delusion was past, and it was seen that they had no intention of quitting the country they became persecuted by justices of the peace and parish constables as thieves and vagrants; and the rapid enclosure of waste lands during the war tended greatly to break up their haunts and put them in great straits.*

We have seen in other life stories that during the nineteenth century England changed with new roads, railways, police forces and communications. Perhaps most important was the move from the commons and open places which were enclosed and fenced. They had developed circuits to find produce, work and trade throughout the year but now many of the places where they camped or gathered food were denied them and they came into conflict with farmers and the new

constabulary. It must be remembered that in 1530 Parliament had passed a law which declared that being a gypsy or associating with a Gypsy was punishable by death and many were hanged and others deported. Although it largely fell into disuse, that law was only repealed in 1783, less than a year before the death of Tabitha Boswell.

In the story of the police constables we saw that some wandered the parish in plain clothes in order to discover and move on 'vagrants'. Certainly there was strong opposition from many people to the gypsies. One writer, writing in the *Stamford Mercury* on 30th August 1822 stated bitterly:

> *I believe the generality of Gipsies to be ignorant and hardened and wicked enough for any crime. Having been brought up on a spot much frequented by them, I know something of their character and manner of living. In the first place, they neither fear God, nor regard man; therefore it is no wonder that they should, as I verily believe they do, snare more hares, rabbits and pheasants; steal more sheep and lambs; rob more hen roosts and orchards; and finally steal more hay than all the villagers in the country besides; to say nothing about burglaries and highway robberies.*

John Hoyland however, writing in 1816, asserts that true gypsies preferred meat which had not been killed by the hand of man, perhaps a relic of their Hindu past, so would eat carrion and animals which had been killed by natural causes. This may be why John Clare is his poem, 'The Gypsy Camp' describes that:

> *There stinking mutton roasts upon the coals,*

Hoyland was told that farmers in Northamptonshire found gypsies did not commit any 'depredations on their property, unless it was in pilfering wood from the fences'.

With their knowledge of herbs it is possibly true that they did hurry some animals to their deaths but their reputation for being thieves and vagabonds was probably exaggerated. It was an easy option to lay the blame on them but, like most stereotypes, it had a grain of truth in it. They had to use their wits to survive and the patter and ruses needed to part people from their money sometimes led to deceit and theft.

The gypsy women had long made money by telling fortunes on doorsteps and in fairground booths. They were making use of their differentness. Writing in the middle of the Twentieth Century, Brian Vesey Fitzgerald tells of one such trick:

> ***Hokano baro** is practised all over the world, with modifications to suit the country, and has been described by almost every writer on Gypsies. In its standardized form it consists of three parts. Firstly getting into the house of the dupe, or, if that is not essential into his or her confidence (this is generally achieved by fortune-telling, but it may be done by means of offering cheap goods for sale or even by plain begging.) Second the removal of the property. Thirdly, the binding of the victim by oath, not to say anything about it, for three or four weeks.*

The Gypsy Palmist

Late Nineteenth or early Twentieth Century. Place unknown.
With the kind permission of The Skeptiseum (www.skeptiseum.org)

I have not found an example of this in Ringstead but in researching the early life of John Thomas Collett, the wayward Baptist pastor, who was born in Guyhirn, near Wisbech, I found the following article from the *Cambridge Chronicle* quoted in the *Northampton Mercury* of 20th January 1849:

> *GUYHIRN, - EXTRAORDINARY CREDULITY. – Soon after Michaelmas last a gipsy woman called upon the wife of a labouring man, residing near Guyhirn, and offered upon receiving certain considerations, to impart a grand secret, and to disclose a certain spot near her house where numerous bags of gold were deposited. The poor woman's curiosity was excited; and anxious to get possession of the hidden wealth, she complied with the required conditions, and accordingly placed in the hands of the gipsy first a shilling, then a sovereign, and some article of wearing apparel, and even her wedding ring; but these were not considered sufficient, and a pawnbroker's ticket for a watch, which had been pledged nearly twelve months since, was offered; but she was informed that the spell could not be accomplished until the dupe had borrowed 27s. upon the ticket. She obtained the money of a neighbouring shopkeeper, promising at the same time that he would receive, in a few days, double the amount of the loan; this money was also handed over to the gipsy, who after many signs and gibberish expressions called for two forks, one of which was stuck in the floor in the corner of the house and the other on the outside of the house; and after carefully covering them with a shawl, departed leaving strict injunctions that no one should touch them until her return, otherwise*

the charm would be broken. In this state matters remained for nearly three months, the credulous woman having been in daily expectation of again meeting the gipsy, but alas! In vain; and this week her husband sent her to the sergeant of police at Elm, to whom she told the above tale, and requested that he would adopt some means by which they might be enabled to recover the property so foolishly parted with.

Most families or groups of gypsies would have had regular circuits which they travelled following the work, the sources of food and the seasons. The winter would have been a bad time for gipsies and it may be no coincidence that Tabitha and Esther died in late December and early January. An abnormally hot summer in 1784 was followed by a severe winter with heavy snow and almost continual frost from late December to late February 1784. Any burial would also have been very difficult in the open fields. Many Gypsies would overwinter in urban areas, gathering together in larger groups. It must be remembered that for much of the nineteenth century the gypsies did not travel in the richly painted vardos but in tents and often with little protection from the elements.

These 'rod' or 'bender' tents made of wooden rods pushed into holes in the ground were held together at the top and covered with some sort of material. Stones were placed around the bottom to stop the wind getting under the covering and sometimes a hole made at the top to let out the smoke from the cooking fire. In really bad weather it could be a miserable, life-threatening existence. In 1816 John Hoyland published *A historical survey of the customs, habits, & present state of the Gypsies: designed to develope the origin of this singular people, and to promote the amelioration of their condition.* Some of his research was in Northamptonshire and he tells of one visit to a Gypsy camp:

. . . the author visited an encampment of Gypsies. It consisted of five tents, situated near Rushden, within two miles of the pleasant town of Higham Ferrers. He did not reconnoitre the camp till about mid-day, having been informed that by this time it was probable, the able-bodied persons of both sexes would be drawn off to a feast and a fair in different situations, not very distant. It proved so; there were only two women, three children, and an infant remaining in the tents which were the residences of several branches of the numerous families of Smith and Loversedge, names well known in the county of Northampton.

The head of the former, has been for many years a dealer in asses or donkies; and is reputed to be possessed of some property. His wife, more than eighty years of age was seated at the entrance of one of the tents, weaving a cabbage net. The other woman, who was middle-aged, was nursing an infant; and the eldest of the children, about twelve years of age, was making preparation for washing; a pan was suspended from three poles, under which she had kindled a fire to boil water. The very tattered and squalid appearance of this poor girl was truly affecting.

On conversing with the old woman, she said she had forty grand-children; some gone to the feast, others to the fair; and she signified that both men and women were musical performers.

. . . she said they endured great hardship in winter having no shelter but their tents in the worst of the weather.

Hoyland then recounts:

The last winter but one, a company of these houseless wanderers were dug out of the snow in Ditchford Lane near Irchester, Northamptonshire, when it appeared one woman had been lying-in and that one old man was dying.

There was a tradition of music making among the gypsies both as a way of enjoying themselves but also as a way of making money on their travels. John Clare, in his younger 'tramping' days, was a keen song collector and fiddle player. He had learnt to play the fiddle from John Grey who was a member of the "Boswell crew" and, when he had become a "decent scraper", played, danced and drank with the "Smiths gang". Mr John Hales, who for 55 years was the sexton of Castor, some twenty miles to the north-east of Ringstead, told of the Castor Feast in the 1840s.

Gipsies used to come with their fiddles and tambourines and provide the music for all the villages of the district. If the feasts were not on they would occasionally play in the streets like a German band. As many as sixty would appear at Castor Feast. They encamped on the heath.

This tradition has continued into the present day with singers like Wiggy Smith, in the Gloucester area, recording a repertoire of traditional songs mixed with Country and Western and pop songs from the past. It seems likely that this would have been the pattern in the nineteenth century with a mixture of ballads and sentimental songs.

Howitt, writing in 1838, describes meeting up with a gang of gypsies. He tells how the men kept to themselves but that the women greeted you, hoping to 'lay hold of your money under pretence of telling your fortune'. He then goes on to describe the look and dress of these young women:

The women, many of them, in their youth, are fine strapping figures, with handsome brown faces and most brilliant and speaking eyes – they have a peculiar poco-curante air and jaunty gait, and are extremely fond of finery. Their costume is unique, and pretty uniform, - scarlet cloaks, black velvet bonnets with large white pukes trimmed with lace; a handkerchief thrown over the head under the bonnet, and tied beneath the chin; long pendant earrings, black stockings, and ankle boots. So far from shunning any intercourse or inquiries, they approach you with a ready smile and a style of flattery peculiar to them. "A good-day to you, sir; your honour is born to fortune. I see that by the cast of your countenance. It was a right lucky planet that shone on your honour's birth!" If you know anything of their language, and they are only too glad to talk to you in it. Accost a gipsy with "Shaushan Palla?" "how do you, brother?" – and you will see the effect.*

**nonchalant.*

Gypsy bender tent and camp

From Beauties of the English Landscape. By Birket Foster (1874)

Author's own copy

As we have said, the gypsies had their usual annual circuits and there are a few pieces of evidence to show that Ringstead was part of at least one of these rounds. In *Ringstead People* we told of the trial of William Weekley Ball for the alleged murder of Lydia Attley in 1850. When, in March 1864 further bodies were unearthed at the same spot where Lydia's supposed body had earlier been found, the *Northampton Mercury* reported:

> *The truth, in fact, has oozed out that Ringstead open-field was greatly frequented by gypsies, who ordinarily buried their dead there. The practice was carried on to such an extent that fifty years ago legal steps were taken to check it. . .*

I have not found these 'legal steps' but could it be that these attempts to stop the burying in the open fields had led to the burial of Tabitha and Esher in the churchyard? The *Mercury* goes on to tell of another traveller who passed that way in 1864.

. . . There was always a track way across the field from Denford to Keystone – though almost impassable in bad weather up to a very recent period. At the point where Lydia Atley was supposed to have been buried it takes the form of a letter S reversed. Nearly opposite the spot is a large tree, beneath which a gipsy family are not unlikely to have pitched their tent and which may have served them as a land-mark to their last resting place. About a fortnight ago a somewhat strange accident occurred there. A wandering tinker travelling homeward to Oundle having made himself over comfortable with Thrapstone ale, missed his way and found himself in the Denford and Keystone lane. The night was intensely dark, and all things considered it is scarcely surprising that he should not have been able to follow the sinuousities of the lane. In point of fact he tumbled into the grave from which the skeleton had been recently taken, and there he slept the night through.

We see that the area had been a routeway for travelling peoples of all types and it is important to stress that the English Gypsies were just one group who travelled the countryside. The Irish Tinkers, for example, although possibly connected to the Gypsies, and often intermarried with them, were a distinct race with their own language called Shelta. Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald makes clear:

They follow the same way of life; are smiths, horse-dealers, fortune tellers; have many of their [Gypsy] customs. They are not just Irishmen who have taken to the road. They are a race.

An editorial on gypsies in the *Western Gazette* on 16th January 1891 gives a partial list of some of the itinerants:

The people who roam over the country during the summer as proprietors of travelling shows, horse dealers, tinkers, Cheap Jacks, pottery dealers, sellers of skewers and hawkers of baskets, fortune sellers, and keepers of cock-shies at fairs and races.

The one trade not mentioned here is the selling of clothes pegs, which, although a gypsy stereotype, continued into the second half of the Twentieth Century. Originally the pegs would have been made from split peeled willow bound with hazel bark. By the end of the century, instead of the hazel they used old biscuit tins, the paper labels burnt off, flattened and polished with moss and earth and then cut into thin strips and wrapped round the top of the peg and secured with a single small nail. They were most commonly made by the men, or sometimes the whole family, and it was the women who did the selling, some door-to-door, but mainly to the shops. Some Gypsies also made and sold willow baskets. Did they get the willow and hazel from along the Nene? Was that why Tabitha and Esther were in Ringstead that winter in 1783/4?

Other wanderers would have included young labourers and others ‘on the tramp’ looking for work, higglers and other travelling sellers, vagabonds and tramps. There was a tendency to lump them all together as Gypsies which is why, for a time the term ‘Gypsy’ was seen as a term of abuse.

I have not found a Romani name for Ringstead but Northampton was called *Choko-mengreskey gav* (Shoemakers’ Town). Hidden in the censuses we do see evidence of Ringstead as being in these circuits. One travelling family, the Hernes (or Hurns or Hearns) appear in the Censuses in Gloucestershire and Staffordshire but we see from the birth places of the children that they had been in Northamptonshire. We find the family together with the Smiths and sometimes Boswells on Rodborough Common, near Stroud in Gloucestershire in 1861, at Newent in the same county ten years later and at Bloxwich, Walsall in 1881. The names and the places of birth do vary and there are some mistakes, perhaps due to the Census collector but we do see a sort of pattern emerging. The 1871 Census gives the greatest details and it shows:

Edmund Herne	*50*	*H*	*Easton Northants (possibly Easton-on-the-Hill near Stamford*
Jemima Herne	*55*	*W*	*Staughton, Leics.(Little Storton [Staughton], Beds 1881)*
Alice Smith	*35*	*stepd*	*Thurning, Northants*
Zippereta Herne	*21*	*son*	***Ringstead,** Northants*
Treinte Herne	*18*	*dau*	*Peterborough, Lincs.*
Urania Herne	*16*	*dau*	*Market Deeping, Lincs.*
Manfield Herne	*12*	*son*	*Welford, Northants*
Madonna Smith	*16*	*?*	*Lutton, Northants*
Caleb Herne	*23*	*son*	*Leighton, Hunts (probably Leighton Bromswold)*

There is some confusion here for when we look in the Ringstead Parish Registers we find that Edward and Jemima Hearne had a daughter baptised Zepporah Hearne on 15th September 1850 (and a Matilda baptised a week later). When we look in the 1861 Census we find the family on Rodborough Common near Stroud and Zepreta, aged ten years is a daughter. By 1881 the 30 year old daughter born in Ringstead is called Cudnet (or similar). Whether these differences are due to the Census Collector's trouble with the Hearne's accent or their deliberate misleading of him is impossible to tell, although much of the information given seems to be correct. She (or he) disappears from the 1891 and 1901 Censuses although it is possible that she is the May Ann Hearn at Carmarthen Lunatic Asylum in 1901. It is certainly a possibility that she is the Sippert Hearn a single woman aged 61 and born in Kingsthorpe, Northamptonshire who is in Glamorgan County Asylum in Bridgend in the 1911 Census. We know that some of her siblings moved west into the Glamorgan area and there is enough phonetic similarity in the names and birthplace to make it a possibility.

In the 1881 Census, when they are in Bloxwich, John Hurn (who is probably Edmund Herne), Jemima and family are in a tent as are four of the five families on the site but Samuel Hurn and his wife are in a 'Gipsy Waggon'. It is only at about this time that the vardo or wagon began to take over from the bender tent and this change would have put certain areas out of easy reach and made them more visible on the fenced roadsides. We see that the Herne family had wandered the lanes of Northamptonshire and the adjoining counties but had then moved west for some reason. Was it that the more pastoral counties provided better conditions with the increasing move to arable fields in the east?

Certainly we see evidence of them being harried in the Ringstead area. The *Northampton Mercury* for 11th February 1860 reports:

> *Vagrancy. – Tito Smith and Cornelius Smith, gypsies, were charged by William Hebber, sergeant of police, with camping on the public highway, in the parish of Raunds. It appeared that the defendants, with 14 or 15 females and children, were encamped in the road leading from Higham Station to Ringstead, but it being shown that they did so under the impression that they could with the permission of the owner of the adjoining lane (Mr. Harrison), who admitted that he had given it, the magistrates discharged them on payment of 5s.6d. costs, at the same time warning them that no proprietor had a right to give such permission, and that if they offended again they would be severely punished.*

Towards the end of the century 'George Smith of Coalville' and others began to propose ways to ameliorate the gypsies' lot, concentrating particularly on the children. In May 1887 he wrote to the *Northampton Mercury*, proclaiming:

> *It is time the hand of civilisation opened a crevice into the – with some noble exceptions – many thousands of dark abodes that are being moved to and fro before our eyes to let a ray of light upon the tent and van dwellers and their children to guide them Heavenward.*

Some five years later, on November 12th 1892, he wrote to the *Northampton Mercury* telling of his Movable Dwellings Bill. He deplored the attitude of the van dwellers who had met at Rotherham and opposed his Bill:

> *They are to be pitied in their attempts to prevent the nineteenth century civilisation and heavenly light from entering the gipsy and van children's hearts, heads and homes. I say again for the thousandth time that the sole object of the Movable Dwellings Bill are (1) to open the school doors to all gypsy and van children of every class, kith, kin and colour by a free pass-book on simple, easy workable lines; (2) to give the sanitary and educational officers similar power over van and tent-dwellers, and their abodes to that they now have over house-dwellers, and their homes and no more – less I cannot accept; and (3) by the registration of their vans in a manner analogous to the Canal Boats Act I promoted of 1874 and 1884 – at a cost of 5s. every three years.*

This paternalistic interference was strongly objected to by many gypsies who believed that his description of gypsies might apply to other travelling folk with whom he was confusing them. Shooba Eskroe Rye wrote to the *Morning Post* in October 1882:

> *The general impression given by his speeches is that he does not know a gipsy when he sees one. Any travelling tinker, or seller of brushes or wandering tramp seems to pass with him as a gipsy and to form a subject for a screed of abuse.*

In the *Western Gazette* on 16th January 1891 another, George Smith, who was 'King of the Gypsies', answered the 'George Smith of Coalville' and 'his attack on our liberties'. He states:

> *I personally know all the gypsies and showmen of England and I am bold to assert that, in health and morality, their lives will bear favourable comparison with either that of 'GEORGE SMITH of Coalville' himself or those of his slum-dwellers. Many members of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons have been in my tent and those of other Gypsies and can speak to their cleanliness.*

The editorial comment on this letter goes on to comment favourably on the improved behaviour of many of the travellers. It still asserts, however, that the children should be allowed the advantages of an elementary education.

Photograph of Gypsy 'Vardo' or Wagon in Ditchford Lane. By Vic Childs (mid 20th Century).

With the kind permission of the Eric Fowells Collection

A case at Wellingborough Divisional Petty Sessions in November 1903 gives some idea of the attitude of the authorities and charities to the Gypsies:

> *Luke Parker, Margaret Parker, and Lemio Parker, gipsies, were charged with exposing and neglecting their children at Great Harrowden. – Mr. James Jackson prosecuted on behalf of the N.S.P.C.C.C... – The case against the last-named defendant was first taken. It was stated and supported in evidence by Inspector Rushton of Northampton, that the defendant, with his wife and two children, who were travelling about the country, were in the neighbourhood of Hardwick on Friday last, when a babe was born and the family pitched a camp in Green-lane Harrowden. Their only shelter was some rough sacking over some hedge stakes, the whole enclosure being about four feet square. There on some loose hay, the mother and newly-born child had to lie, and the whole surroundings were as damp and miserable as could be imagined. The other two children were in a shockingly dirty and neglected state, and the whole family appeared numbed with cold, the weather being very bad. There was only a little bread and condensed milk in the way of food to be found. The family remained in that place till Sunday when Inspector Rushton had the mother and child removed to the Workhouse. – The Bench in sentencing the accused to six months' hard labour, said that on a previous occasion his wife had a child born on a common, the child being found dead. At that time he was told that if such a thing occurred again he would be severely dealt with. The Bench regarded the case as very serious. – The evidence against the other defendants was much similar. In this case the defendants had a nine months old child and another four years old. They were all in a separate enclosure but the conditions were the same. – The male*

> *defendant was sent to gaol for two months with hard labour, and the female was discharged.*

It seems evident that something needed to be done but one can only wonder, if it had happened some six weeks later, if the bitter irony of the situation would have been recognized by the court.

The history of the gypsies and other travelling people is complex. What we see in the nineteenth century is the same ambivalent attitude that we have today. Alongside the persecution we see in the village halls and churches and fields the children singing a 'Gypsy Roundel'(Ringstead), or a brass band playing the 'Gipsy Bride', of the Wesleyan Chapel having a meat teas 'served on the grass, 'gipsy fashion' (Higham Ferrers). William Howitt writing in 1838 had been accosted by young upper-class women pretending to be gypsies as a 'frolic'.

Ringstead would have likewise been split between those who were glad to see the back of the gypsies' begging, and petty thieving and others would have seen them as a romantic reminder of the times when men and women were free to roam the countryside. I have often wondered if the Book of Genesis recalls a folk memory of the change from hunter gatherers to settled farmers and Eden was that lost world before Eve discovered the knowledge of seed-sowing and people were tied to the drudgery of survival. Writing in 1838, William Howitt summed up this dual standard:

> *The picture of the Rural Life of England must be woefully defective which should omit those singular and most picturesque squatters on heaths and in lanes, the Gipsies. They make part and parcel of the landscape scenery of England. They are an essential portion of our poetry and literature. They are moulded into our memories and all our associations of the country but the surprise of our first seeing them, by the stories of their cunning, their petty larcenies, their fortune telling and by the writings of almost all our best poets and essayists.*

John Clare called them, 'A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race'.

Many of the old ways have now disappeared but the difficult moral problems we *gorgios* still have to confront in our dealings with the travelling folk still remain.

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My thanks also to Kay Collins and the Rushdenheritage website for help with the Gypsy wagon photograph.

"A Gypsy Encampment" in Ringstead Group Fancy Dress Competition (Twentieth Century)
With the kind permission of Peter Davies custodian of the Ringstead photograph archive

Chapter Eight

Gypsies? A Postscript

Martha Jane Beeby (nee Gunn) (1867 - 1913)

Browsing the shelves of a Cambridgeshire Library I came across a book by John Bell called *More Crimes of Cambridgeshire*. On the cover was a picture of some gypsy caravans. As I was at that time researching the gypsies who passed through the Ringstead area I looked for the chapter which the cover photograph illustrated. The story was about a Martha Jane Beeby and as Beeby was a common name in the parishes around Ringstead I decided to research a little further.

Martha Jane Gunn had been born in 1867 in Denford, the daughter of Thomas Gunn, horsekeeper, and his wife Emma. In 1885 she married a local man Charles Leonard Robinson Beeby. Leonard, as he was usually called, became a brickmaker living with Martha at 17 High Street, Desborough. By 1891 the couple had three children, Charles, who was an invalid, George and Florence.

At some time in the next ten years something blew the family apart. I can find neither Leonard nor Martha, nor their eldest son, Charles in the 1901 Census. The second son, George, now aged 13 is living with his grandparents in Kettering and Florence is the adopted daughter of Fred Asbrey, a shoemaker and his wife Lavinia and living in Broughton near Kettering.

What had happened to the couple? According to John Bell, in his book, Martha had gone off with the gypsies and had then been abandoned. I have not found out the source which justified the fine photograph on his front cover. What we do know is that by 1911 Leonard, now 52, is back living with his widowed mother, Emma Beeby. Was it possible that the couple both decided to leave their home and children but that they fell out and Leonard returned home?

Whatever the circumstances, Martha Jane appears in the 1911 Census for The Green, Brampton near Huntingdon. It is later events which tell us that she is our woman although in the Census she is Martha Ann Seekings, aged 44, living with her 'husband' Fredrick [sic] Seekings. He is a farm worker and some five years her junior. John Bell states that he was of 'limited intellect'. Also staying with them is John Beeby a nephew, (or who believes that he is a nephew). He is fourteen years old and also a farm worker.

Some two years later, on Monday 28th July 1913, Brampton Feast was held. Fred had been at work until 8pm. He then went to the Bell Inn and was there with Martha until closing time. We learn, from the press coverage of the events that followed, that the couple had been living in Brampton for a number of years as man and wife. At closing time, the couple, who had been quarrelling, made their way home accompanied by a Mr Stocker, whose main concern seems to have been the good name of the Bell Inn. On the way back to their house, at about 10.30 pm, Martha was pushed and fell into a ditch. Stocker pulled her out (Abrahams also stated that he had pulled her out) and stayed with them a further quarter of a mile along the road and left them walking side-by-side towards their home. A Mrs Favell, whose cottage was nearby, heard the couple quarrelling and, when her husband returned home from the feast with Mr Abrahams and his wife, the two men, with Abraham's bicycle lamp went to investigate. They found the couple lying together by the roadside. Seekings had his arm under Martha. Looking closer Favell saw that Martha was very white and he saw in the lamplight that she was covered in blood. He got Abrahams to go for the police and he remained.

Fred Seekings who had been muttering now became aggressive but the constable arrived. He examined Martha and found that her throat had been cut, almost from ear to ear, and she was indeed dead.

After the inquest Fred Seekings was charged with Martha's murder. He had said at first that she had taken his knife and done it herself and her nephew certainly gave evidence that she had twice threatened suicide when drunk. Dr. MacRitchie, who examined the body which had been laid out upon a table in Seekings' house, stated that there were two cuts and he was of the opinion that it could not have been self-inflicted. Fred Seekings' other defence that he was too drunk to know what he was doing , or to remember anything, was also not accepted and he was found guilty and sentenced to death.

On Tuesday 4th November 1913 at 8 o'clock in the morning, Frederick was hung at Cambridge Gaol in a small 'execution shed'. He had slept well and put on a stone in weight during his time in prison. At his death he was 161 pounds and was given a drop of 6ft 3ins. He always maintained he had been too drunk to know what he had done but he paid great attention to the chaplain's ministrations and went to the scaffold with a quiet dignity.

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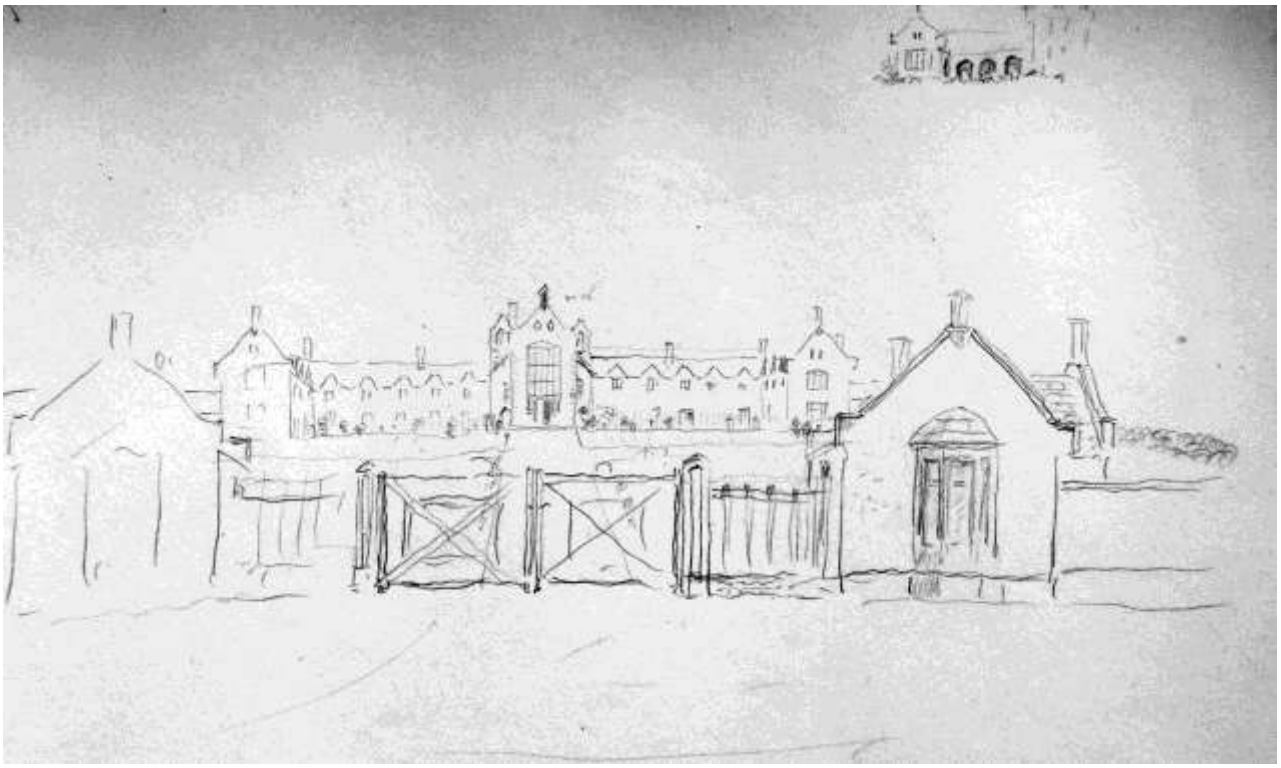
Chapter Nine

Workhouse Lives

Henry Atley. Louisa Tomlin (Cobley), Jane Weekley etc

Fear of the Workhouse loomed over the lives of working class families throughout much of the Nineteenth Century. Some Ringstead people found themselves in Thrapston Union Workhouse and I told a few of their stories. First there is a brief introduction to the Thrapston Union Workhouse and the Ringstead Gift Charity as I do not think that there has been a history of them yet written.



Thrapston Union Workhouse.

Sketch by George Clarke June 23rd 1847
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

The Thrapston Union Workhouse

At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century many villages and towns had their own parish workhouse, sometimes just an ordinary cottage set aside for the purpose. The Parliamentary Report of 1777 recorded workhouses in Denford, Raunds and Thrapston so that it seems that that there was not a workhouse in the village of Ringstead itself.

From 1601 a Parish Overseer had been appointed annually who could levy a poor rate to look after the sick and old, often in their own homes, and provide work for the able-bodied. Increasingly this

latter group were touted around the parish for work on the local farms, their wages subsidised from the poor rate.

This system became a subsidy for the farmers and tended to depress wages for ordinary labourers or make it more difficult for them to find work. It also became increasingly expensive, especially in the agricultural depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. A Government Commission was set up and all the parishes in the country were consulted, perhaps for the first time. Unfortunately the Commission's recommendations came out before much of this evidence had been received back.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was the result. Poor Law Commissioners were appointed to combine the more than 13,000 parishes into 573 'Unions' and new workhouses were built to serve them.

The Thrapston Poor Law Union came into being on 30th November 1835 with 26 constituent parishes. By 1836 the Union Workhouse site was agreed on the Denford Road. The architect, William J. Donthorn designed many workhouses in the area based on the model cruciform plan published by the Commissioners. Ringstead's contribution to the cost was £227 from the 'liquidation of a debt incurred before the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act'.

On 14th June 1836 there was an advertisement in *The Times* inviting builders to tender by 9 o'clock on the 28th June and be 'prepared to enter upon the work forthwith'.

Less than a year later, on May 6th 1837 there was an advertisement for a married couple as MASTER and MATRON of the workhouse. It was not a job to suit everyone.

> *They must be without children resident with them, from 35 to 45 years of age, of good health and unquestionable character. They will be required to reside constantly in the workhouse where they will be provided with rations and lodgings and have a salary of £60 per annum. The master must write a good hand and be conversant with accounts.*

By 1871, when another advertisement for Master and Matron was placed the age range had widened to 30 to 50 years but the salary was still £60 a year, £40 for the Master and £20 for the Matron. The Master also had to provide:

> *. . . security, with two sureties in the sum of £300, for the due performance of the duties of both offices.*

In general the Matron had responsibility for the female inmates, as well as children under seven of both sexes. Simon Fowler in his book, *Workhouse*, also records the speech of John Wyld, Master of Bishop Auckland Workhouse, which detailed the couple's duties and stated that the Matron should also:

> *. . . 'pay particular attention to the moral conduct and orderly behaviour of the female paupers and children; to see that they are clean and decent in their dress and persons and to train them up in such employments as will best fit them for service.'*

Fowler also adds that:

> *Practical housekeeping issues, such as ensuring that bed linen was changed monthly also fell into her domain.*

The Master always had overall charge but it was an extremely demanding, poorly paid, post for both Master and Matron and it is little wonder that Unions often had difficulty in appointing and then retaining them and that many fell beneath the standard expected.

On June 15th 1837 there was a further advertisement inviting tenders for clothes:

> *Viz: black felt hats at per doz; boys leather caps at per doz; men's coats, waistcoats and trousers of dark gray woollen cloth at per suit; mans and boys linen shirts at per doz; strong gray worsted stockings at per doz; cotton handkerchiefs at per doz; men's house shoes at per pair; men's strong shoes at per pair; coarse straw bonnets at per doz; brown stuff gowns and frocks at per garment; stays at per doz; flannel at per yard; coloured twilled cotton at per yard; linen shifts at per doz; blue checked linen for aprons at per yard; black worsted hose at per doz; coloured cotton handkerchiefs and shawls at per doz; women's and girls' shoes at per doz..*

On the 6th July, one month after Mr. And Mrs. Thompson had been voted as the best candidates for the new positions of Master and Matron, the Board of Guardians met to approve the clothes tender from Mr. Edward Hodson. Much was the same as in the advertisement but the males' suits (Men's £1. 3s. 0d; Youths' 15s. 0d; Boys' 14s. 0d) were of beavertreen rather than 'dark gray woollen cloth'. Beavertreen is to beavers what moleskin is to moles and is a fustian made of coarse twilled cotton and garments are still made from it in England today.

We can get some picture of what those first workhouse inmates would have looked like. The men dressed in, to the modern eye, rather lumpy heavy brown suits with heavy boots. The women in long gowns of coarse brown 'stuff' over flannel petticoats with checked aprons and sometimes straw bonnets.

It would have been a recognizable, humiliating uniform, coarse, often ill-fitting, and hot in summer. Nevertheless for those who had lived in poverty for some time, and who had no other access to clothing charities, it would often have been better than the clothes that they had had to take off when they had entered the institution. If and when they left the institution (which they could do at any time with short notice) they would have had to don once more their own washed clothes. Of course for those who suddenly had to enter the workhouse because of the death or ruin of a breadwinner, the change in clothing would have been harder to bear.

The regime of the workhouse was designed to be harsh and unpleasant. It was set up as a deterrent to reduce the cost to the ratepayers so that each person who entered the Union Workhouse was deemed to be a failure of the system. Edwin Chadwick, the architect of the new Union Workhouse system, had advocated that the inmates, on entering should be divided into seven groups based on sex and age, who should, at all times be kept separate. Often there were only four groups but the insane and the mentally ill would usually have shared the same dormitories as the rest of their age and sex.

The workhouse day would also have been strictly ordered with early rising (5 a.m. in the original rules) and bed times (8 p.m.). Those able to would also have put in ten hours work each day within the timetable of meals and prayers. Again this would not have been such a shock to the system as to people today in those times when daylight governed the working day for many. What they would have found hard would have been the compulsion. Many Ringstead men and women, who were used to running their own lives by home work, whether shoemaking or lacemaking would have found this lack of freedom intolerable.

In some workhouses the paupers never saw the outside world. Even the work, which would often have been similar to that in the prisons, but without the treadmill, would have been within the walls of the union. At Thrapston, however, there were, at times, work parties to local quarries where the men broke stones. It was miserable, rough work but many used to the open fields would have been glad to leave the claustrophobic conditions of the workhouse. As we shall see, the inmates also worked at producing firewood during some of the century. The women were expected to work in the kitchens and laundry as well as keeping the Workhouse clean.

At Andover in 1845 a scandal was uncovered when it was found that the inmates were so starved that they tried to eat the marrow from the rotting bones that they were breaking up. This caused a national scandal and many, such as Charles Dickens, were against the whole workhouse system. What it also showed is that as with many institutions, and as we are finding even now, it is the humanity and integrity of those running and managing a residential institution which largely determine how good or bad such places are.

There were never such horrific conditions as at Andover or the harsh dehumanised norm of the large urban Workhouses but there was at least one scandal at Thrapston. It was linked to a Master and Matron who had been in post for some sixteen years. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 16th July 1887 had an article headed, "Shocking Revelations". Underneath was a report of the Board of Guardians meeting on the previous Tuesday. The Workhouse Inspector, W. A. Peel, had reported that on his last visit he had found the House in a "discreditable condition". He had discovered:

> *On the male side of the House the beds were either unmade, or had been used since being made. Some of the bolsters in the dormitories were without straw. On the Master's attention being called to this he had stated that he had asked the guardians for straw but they had not let him have any. On being further questioned, however, he could not say which guardians he had asked. The earth closets were in an offensive state. The Inspector found also that the inmates and casuals were employed together in cutting wood, contrary to the regulations. The male and female reception areas were in a filthy state and littered with feathers. The infections ward was foul and in a disgraceful state. The washerwomen complained that their beer had been withheld. The mortuary was in a disgraceful state and in it was a dead body, not properly attended to. In the hospital a lad was lying on a bed without sheets. The nurse said that she had asked for these sheets but could not get any. The inmates said the soup and beef-tea that they were supplied with were not fit to drink but (and the Chairman said he wished to call especial attention to this) and told the Inspector they would suffer for it. [By withdrawing food.]*

The Guardians seemed even more concerned by the fact that the Master had sometimes been absent from the House without leave. They had also found over some four years that the maintenance costs were 2s. to 2. 6d. per head above the cost of other unions. There had been several inconclusive investigations to discover why this was the case but all they could say was that it could only be down to "bad management".

The Master and Matron were asked to resign which they did with a letter ending:

> *Trusting we may leave the House as clean and in good order as we found it 16 years ago.*

This, however, was not the end of the matter and "bad management" was perhaps a euphemism for fraud. On the 30th August 1887 Richard P. Wakefield was charged with embezzling ten sums of money of 19s 6d. amounting in all to £9 15s. We discover that Thrapston Workhouse like many others provided employment for the able-bodied male paupers by wood sawing and billet making.

These billets were used in the Workhouse as firewood but were also sold to local customers as far as Higham Ferrers. Some of the inmates took this wood out on a donkey cart and were paid by the customers. They gave this money to the Master.

Richard Wakefield was charged with keeping some of this money himself. The Magistrates made it clear that the Guardians had been very slip-shod in managing the accounts and, as a result, although "there was a cause of very grave suspicion against the defendant" nevertheless they did not feel there was clear proof of his wrongdoing. The case was dismissed and, perhaps surprisingly, Richard Wakefield stayed in Thrapston with his family and by 1891 had become the local Registrar of Marriages.

As you can imagine, food was a constant source of complaint among the inmates and none would have grown strong on the diet. It would have been very dull with a minimum of meat and a maximum of "filling" carbohydrate. On 5th April 1856 the Guardians' Minute Book records the "Dietaries for Children, which gives some indication of the uniform dullness of the fare and the exact way in which it was calculated,

Table A. Children from 2 to 5

	BREAKFAST		**DINNER**				**SUPPER**		
	Bread *oz*	**Milk** *Pints*	**Meat** *oz*	**Potatoes** *oz*	**Suet Pudding** *oz*	**Rice Pudding** oz	**Bread** *oz*	**Butter** *oz*	**Tea** *Pints*
Sunday	4	½	3	8	-	-	4	¼	1
Monday	4	½	-	-	8	-	4	¼	1
Tuesday	4	½	3	8	-	-	4	¼	1
Wednesday	4	½	-	-	-	8	4	¼	1
Thursday	4	½	3	8	-	-	4	¼	1
Friday	4	½	-	-	8	-	4	¼	1
Saturday	4	½	3	8	-	-	4	¼	1

Suet Pudding = 9½oz flour and 1½oz suet to pound. Rice Pudding = 5½oz Rice to a pound

In Table B for the children from 5 to 9 the fare was identical except they received an extra 2oz of suet and rice puddings and ¾ oz of cheese instead of the ¼oz of butter.

(Thrapston Board of Guardians Minute Books NRO PL10)

The numbers of paupers from Ringstead living in Thrapston Union Workhouse were never large and were mainly the old and infirm and unmarried women entering the workhouse to have a baby, as the table below shows.

Thrapston Union Workhouse Births 1839 – 1910 and Deaths 1837 – 1910
Registers of Births: Ringstead People only

Date of Birth	Sex	Name of Parent(s)	Legitimate or Illegitimate	When Baptized and Name (or death)
01 Mar 1839	F	Jane Weekley	Illegit	-
28 Apr 1843	M	Jane Weekley	Illegit	Died 29 Apr -
10 Mar 1846	M	Lydia Atly	Illegit	-
04 Feb 1848	F	Elizabeth Ann Smith	Illegit	-
02 Mar 1849	F	Mary Ann Warren	Illegit	-
14 Apr 1851	M	Elizabeth Major	Illegit	-
09 Sep 1852	M	Jane Weekley	Illegit	-
04 Mar 1861	F	Louisa Tomlin	Legit.	
02 Feb 1873	M	Hepzibah Major	Illegit	02 Mar 1873 Joseph
09 Jan 1887	M	Mary Ann Brown	Illegit	-
14 Aug 1896	M	Maud Emma Burgiss	Illegit	-
24 Mar 1899	F	Mundin(g)	-	Winifred
29 June 1905	F	Jane Elizabeth Nash	-	-
25 Aug 1906	F	Maud Carter	Illegit	-
07 Apr 1907	M	Jane Smith	Illegit	-

Register of Deaths: Ringstead People only

Date of Death	Name	Age	Where Buried
21 May 1839	Mary Saddington	77	-
29 Apr 1843	Thomas Weekly	Infant 1 day	-
23 Dec 1843	William Rawson	83	-
19 May 1851	Thomas Major	5 weeks	-
13 June 1857	Lot Magor (Major)	33	-
17 Sep 1859	Jane Fairy	41	-
02 Mar 1862	John Roberts	74	-
01 Apr 1863	Alice Roberts	55	-
03 Feb 1866	Morris Knowles	73	-
12 Dec 1868	William Roughton	22	-
14 Dec 1871	Anna Hardwick	83	-
10 Feb 1874	James Whiteman	71	-
05 Jun 1875	William Walker	76	-
30 Nov 1875	Sarah Andrews	67	-
24 Dec 1878	Hill Greene	65	-
19 Apr 1881	Timothy Chandler	69	-
16 Apr 1882	George Mundin	62	-
08 Feb 1884	Samuel Rowlett	75	-
19 Dec 1885	Rebecca Manning	73	-
19 Sep 1888	Sarah Abbott	63	Ringstead
18 Jun 1889	Rebecca Warren	81	Ringstead

14 Jun 1890	George Warren	77	Ringstead (fr)
14 May 1891	George Smith	46	Ringstead
04 Jun 1893	Elizabeth Wadsworth	70	Woodford (fr)
25 Jun 1896	Richard Wadsworth	60	Ringstead (fr)
09 Dec 1896	James Figgis	38	Ringstead
02 Apr 1899	William Munding	52	Ringstead (fr)
28 Dec 1899	Thomas Hilson	48	Ringstead
11 Feb 1901	William Allen	69	Ringstead
19 Nov 1902	Elizabeth Warren	86	Ringstead (?)
05 May 1903	William Phillips	73	Ringstead
24 Sep 1904	Henry Phillips	57	-
09 Apr 1907	William Smith	29	Ringstead
15 May 1908	Samuel York	66	Ringstead
11 Sep 1908	William Dick	74	Ringstead
06 Dec 1908	Eliza Fox	88	-
11 Jan 1909	William Manning	70	Ringstead
18 Mar 1910	Sarah Colbert	90	-

(fr) Friends or family have taken body to bury

Few of the people in these lists would have stayed long in the workhouse. Some would have gone in to give birth to a child and others to die. George Mundin, for example is shown as dying there on 14th May 1882 but we know from a report in the *Wellingborough News* that this was an even sadder case than most workhouse deaths.

> *SUICIDE OF AN ELDERLY MAN – Mr. J. T. Parker held an inquest at Thrapston Workhouse on Monday on the body of George Mundin, labourer, of Ringstead, aged 64 years. Deceased had of late suffered from bronchitis, and this had prevented him from going to work. On the 8th inst. He went to bed at 9.30 in his usual spirits and the next morning his daughter found him with his throat cut and a knife beside him. He was removed to Thrapston Workhouse, but he succumbed to his injuries on the 16th inst. The jury returned a verdict that the deceased committed suicide while temporarily insane.*

A report of the suicide in the *Northampton Mercury* included significant extra information:

> *The deceased had for some time been in a depressed state of mind, owing to family troubles and he had dreaded having to go into the Union.*

We see that many workhouses gradually became local hospitals, often with separate infirmaries being built to replace the old sick wards but most elderly people still dreaded going into them, because of their past associations, for much of the Twentieth Century.

If we look at the Censuses for Thrapston Workhouse from 1841 to 1891 we see a similar picture with comparatively few people from Ringstead and those almost entirely mothers and their children, or expectant single mothers or the infirm elderly.

Censuses for Thrapston Union Workhouse: Ringstead Born and Families

CENSUS	Name	Sex	Occupation	Age
1841				
	TOTAL INMATES 0		***Resident Staff 3***	***0***
1851	Harry Atly	M	-	4
	Elizabeth Major	F	Servant	19
	TOTAL INMATES 64		***Resident Staff 3***	
1861	Louisa Tomlin	F	Ag Lab's Wife	21
	Rebecca Tilley	F	-	5
	Isaac Tilley	M	-	5
Family	Mary Tilley	F	Ag Lab's Wife b. Stanwick	40
	Eliza Tilley	F	b. Stanwick	7
	Sarah E Tomlin	F	b. Thrapston	I mth
	TOTAL INMATES 65		***Resident Staff 3***	
1871	Clara Sutton	F	-	5
	Fanny Coggins	F	Wife of Shoemaker	24
	Louisa Tomlin	F	Wife of Ag Lab	33
	James Whiteman	M	Shoemaker	71
Family	Sarah Tomlin	F	Scholar b. Raunds	10
	Martha Tomlin	F	b. Sheffield, Yorks.	1
	Elizabeth Sutton	F	Dom. Servant b. Little Addington	41
	Elizabeth Coggins	F	b. Raunds	6
	Alice Coggins	F	b. Raunds	3
	Margaret Coggins		b. Raunds	2
	John Coggins		b. Raunds	2 mths
	TOTAL INMATES 67		***Resident Staff 4***	
1881	Timothy Chandler	M	Gardener	70
	Elizabeth Figgis	F	Pauper	18
	TOTAL INMATES 87		***Resident Staff 4***	
1891	NONE			
	TOTAL INMATES 75		***Resident Staff 4***	
1901	Mary Mundin	F	widow	40
	Harry Mundin	M		12
	Percy Mundin	M		10
	Alexander Mundin	M		5
	William Phillips	M	Ordinary agricultural labourer	71
	Henry Phillips	M	Horsekeeper on farm	52
	William Manning	M	Ordinary agricultural labourer	61
Family	Sarah Phillips	F	(wife of Henry : born Raunds)	55
	Bertram Burgin	M	Illegit. son of Maud b. Thrapston	5
	Maud Burgin	F	Illegit. daughter of Maud b. Raunds	3
			[Maud (mother) born in Ringstead]	
	TOTAL INMATES 102		***Resident Staff 4***	

In the 1841 Census there were no Ringstead born children in the Thrapston Workhouse; in 1851 there were just two; in 1861 three (although there were five other linked family members); four in 1871 (with five other family members); two in 1881, none in 1891 and 7 in 1901. Of course this is only a snapshot on one day every ten years and is based only on those born in Ringstead but it does indicate that numbers of people from Ringstead in the workhouse were low and it tended to be used by people in times of crisis rather than poverty, although all would have been poor. The resident staffing moves away from education to nursing, as the Workhouse increasingly becomes the local hospital for the poor, especially for childbirth, mental illness and 'senile decay'.

Workhouse buildings on a frosty morning 13th December 2012

(Now East Northamptonshire District Council Offices.)

The perimeter wall and gates have gone but otherwise looks very similar to George Clarke's 1847 sketch. Now, however, surrounded by a housing estate.

As I am writing this in the last week before Christmas 2012 I thought I ought to finish on a more positive note and show the other side of the Dickensian world. On 27th December 1900, in the last few weeks of Victorian England, there was an article in the *Northants Evening Telegraph, headed, CHRISTMAS DAY AT THE WORKHOUSE:*

> *As in former years, the Guardians of the Thrapston Union have this year done everything possible for those under their care. The large dining hall, thanks to the efforts of the master and matron (Mr. And Mrs. Cook) had been tastefully adorned with the orthodox Christmas decorations of holly and ivy, these forming a frame for the many pictures which adorned the walls. The chapel was also nicely decorated with evergreens, the service which was held being conducted by the Rev. A.C. Neely of Islip. The dinner was naturally the great event of the day and a capital fare was provided, consisting of roast beef, fowls and plum pudding, to*

which, needless to add, full justice was done. The company numbered about 170. In the evening an entertainment arranged by the officers of the House was given, several of the musical inmates contributed to the programme. With kindly forethought Mrs. Buckley of Thrapston had sent a number of toys for the children, whilst Dr. Masters (the former medical officer) gave each man an ounce of tobacco, and two ounces of tea and half-a-pound of sugar to the women, besides oranges and sweets for the children. The master also received a parcel of books and pictures from the office of the "Review of Books", for which he desires to express his thanks as well as to the other donors.

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Ringstead Gift Charity

The poor of Ringstead, as in many other parishes could look to a local charity for help before they were forced into looking to the Poor Law and the Workhouse. At the time of the Ringstead Enclosure (1839 – 41) Thomas Wilkins, considered the principal resident at the time, tried to discover the history of the Ringstead Charity Estate for George Capron who had bought up much of the land of the old Ringstead Open Fields.

He found that, in 1824, Thomas Burton, the non-resident Lord of the Manor, and Oliver Cox who was a resident land owner, had been the only remaining trustees and it was the latter who effectively managed the operation of the fund. At that time, John Porter, then an old man of 78, who had been the Parish Clerk for many years, confirmed that the origin of the charity was lost but at some point a bequest of strips of land among the Ringstead Open Fields had been made, the rent from which were to be given to the deserving poor, mainly in the form of clothing and bedding. Other aged inhabitants confirmed his account. A charity had begun in 1617 when John Wells left a bequest of sixteen shillings to be paid yearly and administered by the minister and churchwardens. They were to use it to help the sixteen poorest households in Ringstead. How and when it changed into the Ringstead Charity which was based on the rental money from land that the Charity owned is unclear.

The entries in the Charity's small cash book are difficult to decipher but include in November 1835:

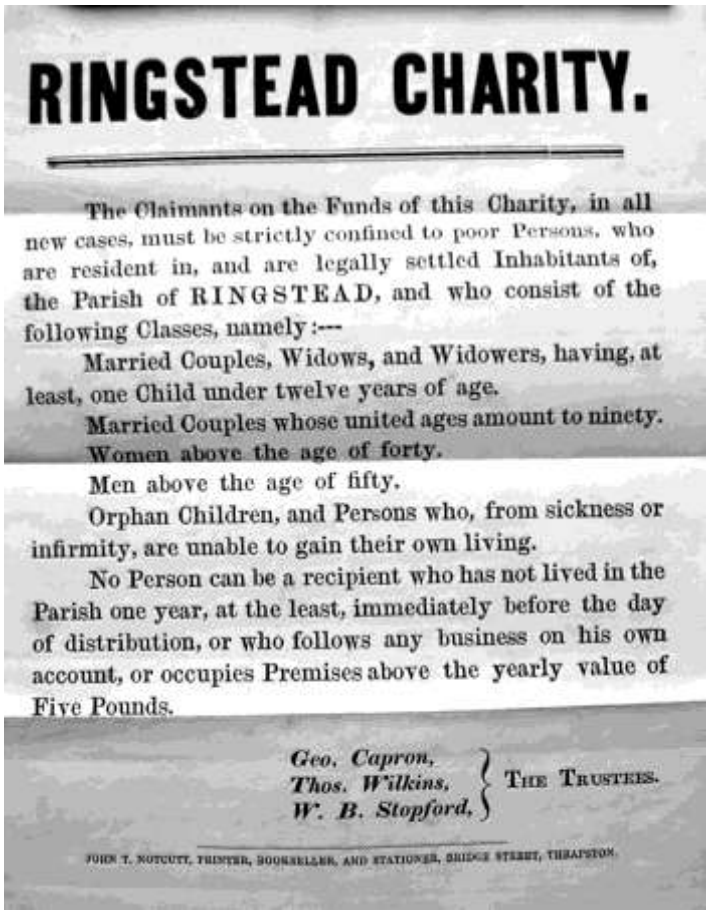
Widow Whiteman	*5 yds Flannel 1/=. 3 yds blanket 9/=*
Widow Major	*Ditto*
John Fairey & wife	*2 sheets @ 2/11 & 4 yds D[?] 11/=*
Daniel Ball	*1 Blanket 5/= & 2 sheets 5/10*

In 1836 Oliver Cox died and Thomas Wilkins took over as the other trustee. Then, with the enclosure of the Open Fields George Capron became the major landowner and he, with Thomas Wilkins, took over the running of the charity. It was probably also be at this time that the strips were consolidated into twenty-seven acres of land on the Denford Road. The granting of aid seems to have been run previously according to the judgement of the trustees but Capron wanted the charity to have clear rules. In 1847 these rules were agreed and a handbill was produced and distributed throughout the parish.

This listed the 'legally settled inhabitants' who were entitled to claim. These included:

> *Married Couples, Widows, and Widowers, having at least, one Child under twelve years of age.*
> *Married Couples whose united ages amount to ninety.*
> *Women above the age of forty.*
> *Men above the age of fifty.*
> *Orphan Children and Persons who, from sickness or infirmity, are unable to gain their own living*

They also had to have lived in Ringstead for at least a year, not follow any business on their own account or occupy premises above the yearly value of £5. Of course, they also had to be judged to be in need.



RINGSTEAD CHARITY.

The Claimants on the Funds of this Charity, in all new cases, must be strictly confined to poor Persons, who are resident in, and are legally settled Inhabitants of, the Parish of RINGSTEAD, and who consist of the following Classes, namely:—

Married Couples, Widows, and Widowers, having, at least, one Child under twelve years of age.

Married Couples whose united ages amount to ninety.

Women above the age of forty.

Men above the age of fifty.

Orphan Children, and Persons who, from sickness or infirmity, are unable to gain their own living.

No Person can be a recipient who has not lived in the Parish one year, at the least, immediately before the day of distribution, or who follows any business on his own account, or occupies Premises above the yearly value of Five Pounds.

Geo. Capron,
Thos. Wilkins,
W. B. Stopford, } THE TRUSTEES.

JOHN T. NOTCUTT, PRINTER, BOOKSELLER, AND STATIONER, BRIDGE STREET, THRAPSTON.

Ringstead Charity Handbill

(With the kind permission of Christopher Capron)

In 1863, the newly appointed vicar, Percival Sandilands, was asked to become a trustee but would only accept if part of the funds were applied to the maintenance of the school. The Reverend Sandilands was successfully driving through a scheme to establish a school in the village at this time. He was asked by the trustees to submit a scheme to the Charity Commissioners. This he duly did and in 1864 the Ringstead Gift Charity was registered and three quarters of the income from the rents was to be applied:

> *. . . towards the benefit and support of a school or schools for the instruction and education of the children of labourers and those persons of the poorer class residing in the said Parish of Ringstead including the industrial education of the female children or of any limited number of such children to be selected by the trustees, so long as such school or schools shall be efficiently and properly conducted and there shall not be any rule or practice in the management thereof which shall exclude any children from admission thereto upon the sole ground of their particular religion, creed and persuasion.*

This only left a quarter of the rents for the poorest of the parish or, to be more exact, 'the deserving and necessitous'. The Gift Charity was to provide them with 'clothes, bedding and fuel, medical or other aid in sickness, or other articles in kind'.

We see a year later that the allotment holders were being instructed to gather stones from their plots and to place them in a heap near the road. They would be paid a maximum of 8d. a load and the stones would be used to improve the allotments' cart road. On December 26th 1868 the Minutes clearly reiterate that the allotments are:

> *. . . intended to help the deserving poor; that if a man is in a position to open a shop he no longer requires the aid of an allotment; and that in the case of any holder of an allotment so embarking be made he shall, if the Trustees think fit, be called upon to quit his allotment.*

In December 1870 it is resolved that no man will be eligible for an allotment until he has lived in the parish for a year. It seems likely that some of these rules were created to exclude certain individual claimants. We see a constant list of people who are told to give up their allotments either because of non-payment of rent or because their circumstances had changed and they were not now considered deserving enough. The allotments became known as 'Mr. Capron's Gardens' and an 1898 Agreement between the Rev. G. Capron and John Pearson for Garden No. 9 clearly sets out the rules of occupation which include the condition:

> *That he will cultivate the Garden well and keep it free from weeds and that he will not in any year sow more than 20 poles with potatoes, nor more than half the Garden with white straw corn, and will sow the remainder with root crops, vegetables or beans.*

The charge for the allotments is set as 2s 2d. per rood per quarter on 1st January 1897 and by the time of John Pearson's agreement, in October 1898 it is set as £2 10s. 0d per acre per year. At the start of the nineteenth century measurements could be slippery concepts with many local variations but we can assume, by this time that four roods were equal to one acre and the rental had increased by over forty percent. This seems excessive so there may have been other factors.

By the 1890s the aid distributed was mainly given in the form of money instead of clothes and bedding with, in 1895, a single person receiving six shillings and a couple nine shillings. The allotments and the small weekly sums would perhaps have helped the very poor survive outside the workhouse, especially if they had a family to help them.

The Ringstead Charity would have helped generations of poor Ringstead people. If we look at the cash book for 1879/80 we see a typical list of payments:

Widow Abbott	6s.
James Attlay	6s.
William Bates	6s.
Thomas Ball	6s.
Widow Bull	6s.
Widow Burnham	6s.
Widow Cottingham	6s.
Widow Dix	6s.
Henry Dix	6s.
Widow Fox	6s.
Noah Green & Wife	9s.

Noah Green and his wife had been the Post Master and Mistress so we see that once their working lives were finished many elderly people, not just the poorest, became dependant on charity.

Even as late as 1968 the trustees of the charity were being reprimanded by the Charity Commissioners for spending too much of the income on the poor rather than using three quarters for educational purposes. This educational part of the charity became a separate charity called Ringstead Educational Foundation.

Like the Poor Law, the Gift Charity was very Victorian in its fear of giving to the undeserving. Increasingly the income designated for those in need was used for the relief of the poor elderly, before the national old age pensions came into being early in the next century. Nevertheless many would have been grateful to the small handouts which would have made their lives a little easier even if it was not always enough to save them from the Workhouse.

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Henry Atley (1846 -1896)

In the life story of William Weekley Ball we told of the disappearance and probable death, by his hand, of his heavily pregnant mistress, Lydia Atley [sometimes Atly or Attley] on a warm July evening in 1850.

We can see in the Parish Registers that she had a child, called Sarah Ann Atley, probably named after her sister, who was born in 1848, baptised in the parish church on 9th June 1849 and buried in the churchyard, aged six months, just ten days later. Sarah Ann Dix, her sister, gave evidence at the trial of Lydia's alleged murderer in 1864 where she states:

> *I cannot say if Lydia Attley kept company with Wilkinson before the birth of her first child.*

We learn that James Wilkinson, a journeyman baker, was alleged to be the father of Lydia's first child. I had thought that this was taking the child whom she was carrying at the time of her disappearance as her second child. What I had not found out at the time of writing that biography was that Lydia had had a child in the Thrapston Union Workhouse some two years earlier. For all its harsh regime it was often the best place for a poor woman, especially a single one, to have a child as there was at least basic food and medical care.

Henry was born in the Thrapston Workhouse on 10th March 1846, the illegitimate son of Lydia and, possibly, James Wilkinson. We do not hear of Henry in the accounts of Lydia's last day at William Ball's trial so perhaps he remained in the workhouse. Certainly he is there in 1851 aged four years old. He is shown in the Census list next to the nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Major also from Ringstead. The Census was conducted on 30th March and Elizabeth gave birth to her illegitimate son Thomas on 14th April who died just 5 weeks later. Was Elizabeth able to give some comfort to Henry?

By 1861 he is working as a 'milk boy' for Thomas Freeman, a Ringstead farmer of 350 acres employing 12 men and 2 boys. Henry is living with Thomas and his wife Lucy and a 'maid-of-all-work' Elizabeth Bluff, so perhaps they had taken him under their wing. In her evidence at the trial Sarah Ann Dix had told of Lydia's last day when she had sent her to take dinner to her husband who had been working in 'Mr Freeman's field'. Perhaps the Freemans, who had been wealthy yeoman farmers in the parish for many years, felt an obligation to help this orphaned boy.

When we next find Henry, in the 1871 Census there is one of those unexpected and yet far from uncommon moves into a totally different environment. He is a twenty-five year old mechanic boarding with George Smith, a miner and his wife Jane at 20 Church Street, Wednesbury in Staffordshire. Henry was to make the West Midlands his home. Could it be, with the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864 that it was thought that he would be better away from Ringstead, in a place where he could leave his past behind?

In 1872 Henry married Emma Partridge, the daughter of James Partridge, a screw forger who lived in nearby Darlaston. The couple had a daughter, Harriet Emma, born on the 16th June 1874 at their home in 90 Old Park Road, Wednesbury. Sadly, Emma died in childbirth and, understandably, it was another six months until the child's birth was registered. At the time of the registration, on 14th December 1874, Henry was a 'Stock taker in an Iron Works'.

In the 1881 Census he is a thirty-five year old widower, once again boarding, but this time with Elder Cooper, a moulder, and his family at 30 Hill Street, Wednesbury. His daughter, Harriet is staying with her grandparents, James and Ann Partridge and their grown-up children at 107 Cobden Street, Wednesbury.

Henry was now a 'Time Keeper'. It would seem likely that he was working in one of the local factories checking that workers arrived and left on time. He had moved from being a worker to being someone who worked for the company checking on workers. Depending on the personal qualities of the person employed it could be an unpopular job as lateness could be punished with large deductions from wages.

In 1886 Henry married again, this time to Mary West and by 1891 the couple have three children, Nellie, Edith E and Dorothy. That Henry was moving into management can be seen from the 1991 Census for he is now the 'Manager of a Nut and Bolt Works'. The family are living at 1 Bills Street in Darlaston.

This was an area with houses and small workshops cheek by jowl. Many of these were gradually taken over and the work moved into large purpose-built factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We can see in the streets around them, a boiler tender and a file cutter, a breaker down (sheet mills) and an iron straightener, a blacksmith and a blacksmith's blower. There are also a number directly involved with the nuts and bolt industry: bolt screwers, forgers and machinists, an orders clerk and stock taker.

In 1892 he is probably the, "H. Atler, Bills Street, Darlaston, Clerk", who is given in the local newspaper as one of the signatories in the Memorandum of Association to change *James Simpson & Sons* from a partnership to a limited company. The company were iron founders and manufactured iron and steel, bolts, nuts and tools. The firm was based at the Acorn Works, Bills Street, Darlaston so Henry was very close to his work. With mostly coal-fired, steam driven machinery it would have been a noisy, smoky environment in the factory and also in the area around.

It is quite a remarkable journey that Henry has made from being the 'bastard child' of a poor murdered woman in Northamptonshire to the manager of a works in the West Midlands. Unfortunately Henry died some five years later in 1896 aged just fifty years old. His widow, Mary, lived another thirty-two years.

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Louisa Cobley [also Tomlin, Norris and Elliott] (1839 - 1913)

Louisa was one of the few young women that entered Thrapston Workhouse to have a child who were already married. She was the daughter of William and Elizabeth Cobley and was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on the 10th February 1839. She was a twin but her brother, David, died just three weeks later. Her father was a carman and, in the 1841 Ringstead Census, we see Louisa, aged two, with her older brother Samuel and her parents. A carman was someone who drove a horse-drawn cart of some kind. It may be that he was taking coal around the village.

Living next door was Lydia Atlee (Attley), a widow, with her teenaged daughter whose disappearance was to cause such concern some nine years later. Lydia, the mother was a pauper, as was her neighbour Rose Manning. We cannot be sure but it seems likely that they were all living in London End, the small group of poor cottages where Back Lane joined the Denford Road. Certainly, Lydia was living there at the time of her disappearance in 1850.

William and Elizabeth had seven children between 1831 and 1849 but three died in the first two years of life. William died too in early October 1848 aged just forty-four years old leaving Elizabeth with four surviving children. The death of the main breadwinner would often have led to the workhouse for a poor widow and her family but Elizabeth, in an action which her daughter seems to have noted, married quickly, on 17th June 1850, and perhaps was financially better off than before as a result. Her new husband was Lovell Warren, a coal dealer, some sixteen years her junior. One can

only wonder if he was the employer of William as a carman. These quick remarriages will only seem cynical to those who have not endured grinding poverty.

The 1851 Census has Elizabeth with Lovell, together with Louisa aged 12 together with her siblings, Samuel, Joseph and Martha. Louisa married John Tomlin, a young brickmaker from Raunds on 13th February 1859. The Marriage Certificate gives Louisa's father as William Cobley but gives his occupation as coal merchant which may refer to her stepfather Lovell Warren. Neither bride nor groom were able or willing to sign their names. The honeymoon period was short because by the 1861 Census she was an inmate in Thrapston Union Workhouse. With her is her daughter Sarah E Tomlin who was born in the workhouse a month earlier on 4th March 1861.

Where is her husband John in 1861? From other evidence it seems that the couple spent some time in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Could he be the S, T or J Tomlin in Sheffield Union Workhouse? This man is a stone mason who is said to come from Ireland. Perhaps he did not want to be sent back to his home parish. It is possible but it is unlikely. Sarah Elizabeth was baptised in Raunds Parish Church on June 30th, just a few months after her birth. John is shown as a labourer.

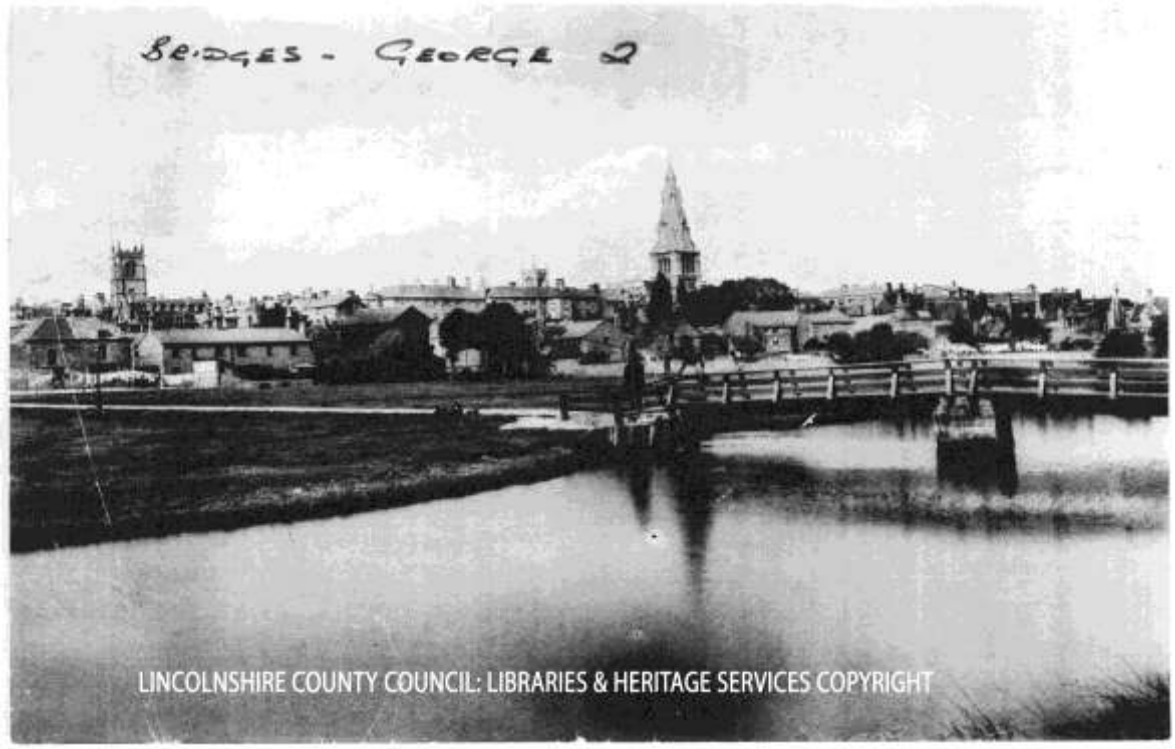
The truth about the often 'lost' years between Censuses can be filled in because of a shocking sequence of events which brought Louisa to court. It is from this case that we discover that John Tomlin deserted Louisa in September 1863 at about the time of the birth of their son, Alfred. This forced her back into the Workhouse where she remained for some years. On 22nd November 1866 a shoemaker from Raunds called Edwin Goldsborough (or Goldsboro) came into the Workhouse. At 9 am on 25th February 1867 Edwin Goldsborough left the Workhouse and two hours later Louisa with the two children left, too, with another woman called Elston and her child. The Workhouse Master, Robert Bray, delayed letting out Louisa because he had heard of her intentions of going with Goldsborough and of leaving the children somewhere.

Two days later Sarah, who would be nearly seven years old, was brought back to the Workhouse by Louisa's brother's wife but whether she was abandoned, ran away or was left with the brother's family we do not know. Edwin and Louisa, with four-year-old Alfred continued walking north to Deeping St James in Lincolnshire where they stayed for a couple of weeks. Edwin managed to get work as a shoemaker with a Mr. Fowler in Market Deeping, which was about two miles away. Louisa sometimes went, with her young son, to the 'shop' to help him. After some ten days Edwin left and Fowler, the employer, advised her to beg her way back to Thrapston rather than stay with such an idle man.

Goldsborough made it clear on many occasions that he was not prepared to work for another man's child and told her if she did not get rid of Alfred he would leave her. On 14th March Louisa went to the Bourne Union Workhouse, some nine miles further north, and asked them to take Alfred in. She told them that Alfred was the son of her sister, Mary Winterton and had been born in Bourne Workhouse. The Relieving Officer could not find the birth but said that he would take them both in but not the child on his own. All Unions were worried about being left with the expense of looking after deserted children. She also went before the Board of Guardians but they again refused unless she too entered the Workhouse. She hurried out of the room saying, "I shall do something different to that".

They left Deeping St James and walked the further nine miles west to Stamford. Edwin stayed in a lodging house while, carrying Alfred, Louisa walked around the town. It was a cold moonlit evening with snow on the ground. She was seen at times around the town wearily trudging along with Alfred a heavy burden in her arms. She was passed, by a witness, on her own at the George Bridge and she made no mention of a missing child. At 9.40 pm the couple reported the loss at the police station.

Louisa told the police that she had been very tired and had sat down on the footbridge and put Alfred down beside her. He had “slipped through the rails and got drowned”.



The George Bridge around 1870/1880 showing the bars under which Alfred rolled to his death.
The cross bars were later replaced by large diamond lattice work

By kind permission of Lincolnshire Library & Heritage Services

We find all this information from the several court cases that followed over the next months when the couple had to answer to a charge of wilful murder. From the start the police were suspicious and took them immediately into custody. Edwin immediately became violent and it took four police officers to drag him to his cell. At the various Petty Sessions they were both remanded until the Summer Assizes in Lincoln Castle in July 1867.

Alfred’s body was not found until 5th May about 200 yards downstream from the George Bridge and the cause of death was established as drowning. He was found still in the hood, dress and shoes that he had left the Thrapston Workhouse dressed in, the body protected by the thick mud. Edwin’s lawyer submitted that his client had no case to answer and he was discharged. He also claimed that the “uniform kind treatment of her child by the prisoner negative the theory of the prosecution that she had thrown her child into the river on purpose”. The jury was out for forty minutes and returned a not guilty verdict on Louisa.

At first it seemed likely that the couple moved north to the Sheffield area for Louisa had a child there in about 1870 and then returned south to Thrapston Workhouse where we find her back with her ten-year-old daughter Sarah (who may never have left the Workhouse) and her new child, Martha who is one years old. There is no sign of Edwin Goldsborough in the Workhouse with her. Here the picture becomes confused for further research reveals that he was in the Thrapston Workhouse on 12th January 1868 because he was sent to prison for six weeks for assaulting three other inmates after a dispute over his interference with the fire in the room. In February 1871 he was once again

sent to prison for a month for, 'misconduct in the Union Workhouse'. This is the reason he is not in the Workhouse in the 1871 Census. His behaviour always volatile seems to have worsened for the Northampton Mercury of the 8th April 1871 reports:

> *One male convict has been removed to Pentonville prison. Edwin Goldsborough was brought into prison on 10th February for misconduct in the Thrapston Union Workhouse, was certified as being insane by two medical gentlemen on the following day, and removed on 16th February to the Northampton Lunatic Asylum by an order from the Secretary of State.*

There we will leave him.

On April 2nd 1871, while Louisa was in Thrapston Workhouse, and Edwin Goldsborough was probably in Northampton Lunatic Asylum, her husband may be the John Tomlin who is a labourer born in Northamptonshire, lodging in Ilkeston in Derbyshire. It seems unlikely that he was the father of any her children after Alfred and it is also not clear, as he was in Thrapston Workhouse in 1868 and 1871, if Edwin Goldsborough was the father either, although it is possible. In the 1871 Census Louisa is shown as a widow. Of course few working class people could afford to divorce in the nineteenth century and this may not be true. We have not yet found the death of John Tomlin but there may be a number of other reasons for this.

By the 1881 Census Louisa is shown as thirty-seven years old, although actually a few years older, and is living in Marshalls Lane in Raunds. With her is her ten year old daughter, Martha, (who we would expect to be at least eleven). There is also a boarder called Caleb Norris, a shoemaker born in Irchester. He is thirty-eight years old which may explain the reduction in Louisa's age. In the Raunds High Street is a man called George Elliott living with his wife Hannah and their family. We will meet him again a little later.

A few months after the Census Louisa married Caleb Norris. She must have felt, for once, secure from the workhouse but Caleb, died just two years later, only forty years old, in August 1883. Life would once again have been very difficult and in 1891she is a charwoman lodging with a sixty-six year old bachelor called Thomas Nobles in Hargrave Road, Raunds. Also in the house is a young visitor called Nellie Elliott who is just eleven years old.

George Elliott's wife, Hannah had died on 27th December 1886 in Northampton Infirmary which would explain in part why Nellie was staying with Louisa at the time of the 1891 Census. A few months later, in July-Sept 1891 Louisa married Nellie's father, George Elliott who was just two years her junior. They are together with George's daughter, Ellen Elizabeth, who is twenty-one years old and probably the Nellie of the last Census. They are living in Scalley Lodge in Marshalls Road, Raunds and George is a horsekeeper on a farm. A year later, in April-June 1902 George died aged 60.

By 1911 Louisa Elliott is a seventy-one year old widow living on her own in Baker Street Irthlingborough. It seems almost certain that she is the Louisa Elliott from Irthlingborough who died in the Wellingborough Workhouse Infirmary on 5th January 1913 The name of her deceased husband is unknown and her age is given as eighty-four, ten years older than her real age. Her cause of death was entered as senile decay which could explain this mistake. She may have been unable to give her correct age.

In the end she could not escape the workhouse. How we look on her life depends on our view as to her guilt over the death of her son and her various, "marriages". Was she a vulnerable woman who had the misfortune to attract men who treated her badly or was she an evil, scheming liar who would do anything to get by? As usual, the truth may be somewhere in the middle.

And what of Louisa's children? How did their troubled lives affect them? In 1911, while probably suffering from 'senile decay', Louisa said that she had had seven children of which three were still living. If this is true who is the third (or possibly fourth) child? Sarah Elizabeth married John Ablett, a shoe finisher from Irthlingborough in 1879 and is there in the 1881 Census. Then she disappears and in the 1891 Census John, now 32, is shown married to Rhoda who is 24 and born in Kettering. Rhoda is possibly Rhoda Olney (or Onley), a shoe liner, who in 1871 and 1881 is seen living with her grandparents in Gold Street, Wellingborough. I find no further sign of Sarah after 1881 nor of Rhoda after 1891. I cannot find the death of Sarah or her re-marriage or the death of Rhoda. John possibly re-married to Dinah Ekins in 1905. It seems likely that John and Sarah parted and found new partners outside marriage. There is more to be discovered but there we must leave her. Martha's life is even more hidden and I have not yet found her after the 1891 Census where she is with her mother in Raunds.

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Jane Weekley (1816 – 1877)

In the life of Louisa Cobley we saw how marriage and motherhood had put her in the Workhouse but also how she married twice more and so almost managed to live the rest of her life without the stigma of pauperism. Jane Weekley's life followed an opposite and harsher, path.

She was baptised on October 27th 1816 to Elizabeth, the wife of labourer James Weekley. At the time, of her birth the young couple, who had married in Ringstead Parish Church on 11th December 1815, were living in Hargrave, some four miles to the south-east. They soon after moved back to Ringstead and had the usual list of regular births, and infant deaths, over the next two decades. The exact number of children is complicated by the probability that at least one of the 'children' in the Census was actually an illegitimate grandchild, adopted as their own: a not uncommon practice.

In the 1841 Census James and Elizabeth and their surviving children are back in Ringstead. The children are listed in chronological order except for the last two daughters. Mary, aged one, is above Eliza who is two years old. This could just be a mistake by the enumerator but, when we look at the list of births in Thrapston Union Workhouse we see a different possibility. On 1st March 1839 an illegitimate female child had been born to Jane Weekley who 'belongs' to the parish of Ringstead.

This first universal, detailed census does not give the relationships to the 'Head of the House' as subsequent ones do but the 1851 Census does show twelve-year-old Eliza Weekley as the daughter of James. She was born in Thrapston, however, and it seems certain that Eliza was actually the illegitimate daughter of Jane who has been adopted by her parents. Of course there is the possibility that James is still the father but we have no evidence to support this apart from the Census entry.

Jane had two further illegitimate children born in Thrapston Workhouse. The second was a boy who was born on 28th April 1843 but who died the next day. A youthful Richard Jefferies, in 1874, wrote of the 'Field-Faring Women':

The overcrowding in cottages leads to what may be called an indifference to decency. It is not that in families decency is wantonly and of a set purpose disregarded, but stern necessity leads to a coarseness and indelicacy which hardens the mind and deadens the natural modesty even of the best girls. Then the low scandals of the village talked over from cottage to cottage, the rude jokes of the hayfield, the general looseness and indifference which prevail as to morality all prepare the girl for the too common fall. If she remains at home and works in the fields after the age of fifteen, unless uncommonly strong minded, it is an open question whether she will or will not succumb.

By 1851 James, still a shepherd, and his family had moved to Titty Ho in Raunds. His wife Elizabeth and daughters Jane, now thirty-four, Sophia and Eliza (Jane's daughter) are all shown as stone gatherers.

Clearing the fields of stones was often miserable, hard work. It seems that Jane endured field work most of her life and she would have been weather-beaten and old before her time. Richard Jefferies again, although writing of Wiltshire, gives some idea of the working life of a field-working woman:

At seven or eight years old the girl's labour begins. Before that she has been set to mind the baby or watch the pot, and to scour about the hedges for sticks for the fire. Now she has not only to mind the baby, but to nurse it; she carries it with her in her arms; and really the infant looks almost as large as herself and its weight compels her to lean backwards. She is left at home all day in charge of the baby, the younger children and the cottage. Perhaps a little bread is left for them to eat, but they get nothing more until the mother returns about half-past four, when woe be to the girl if the fire is not lit, and the kettle on. . . A little older – at ten or eleven or twelve – still more skinny and bony now as a rule, she follows her mother to the fields and learns to pick up stones from the young mowing grass, and place them in heaps to be carted away to mend drinking places for cattle. She learns to beat clots and spread them with a small prong; she works in the hayfield and gleans at corn-harvest. Gleaning –poetical gleaning – is the most unpleasant and uncomfortable of labour, tedious, slow, back-aching work; picking up ear by ear the dropped wheat, searching among the prickly stubble. . .

Growing plainer and plainer as years go by, the elder women are wrinkled and worn-looking, and have contracted a perpetual stoop.

Some eighteen months after the 1851 Census, on the 9th September, 1852 another son was born to Jane in Thrapston Workhouse. I have found no further sign of this child's life or his death. Was he adopted at birth? He is not recorded with Jane in the 1861 Census. She is still unmarried and living with her elderly parents. James is now seventy-two and Elizabeth some seven years younger. James is still a shepherd and Jane is a field worker, as are her younger sisters Mary Ann (21) and Sophia Cobley who, at twenty-nine is a young widow with a daughter, Charlotte. It seems that times were still hard for the family.

In his book, *The Common People,* J.F.C. Harrison reminds us that:

Women were an essential part of the harvest team. But their work was not limited to the special effort required at that time of year. Of the 2 million people employed full-time in agricultural occupations in 1851, 11.4 per cent were women and in 1901 the percentage was 5.9. Women worked in the fields at gleaning, potato gathering ("tatering"), turnip-pulling, hoeing, weeding, thinning, hop-binding and in all kinds of fruit and vegetable picking. In some jobs the children worked alongside their mothers.

I have not analysed the Censuses and, because the work was often seasonal, some women field workers would not be shown there but the impression one gets is that the percentages of recorded field workers in Raunds and Ringstead was less than the ones given above. In general shoe work or lacemaking would be preferred by most women able to make the choice.

In 1862 Jane's younger sister Sophia had an illegitimate son, Owen, with Joseph Smith named as the father. In 1863, 1867 and 1868 Sophia went to court to obtain weekly payments from Joseph who had paid 1s 6d for the first fifteen weeks after his son's birth. Unfortunately Joseph Smith was also 'indigent' and so served a one month prison sentence in default.

Eliza Weekley, daughter of Jane

With the kind permission of the Sylvia P. Weatherhogg (nee Cobley)

In 1864 James Weekley died and five years later, Elizabeth followed him to the grave. Jane would now have been on her own but in the summer of 1863 her sister Mary Ann had married William Webb Braybrook and in 1871 Jane was living with them. They are living in Chapel Road, Ringstead. By now, aged fifty-five, Jane is on Parish Relief Her hard life was almost certainly taking its toll. Six years later Jane died and was buried in the Raunds churchyard on 11th June 1877. No sign of her grave remains.

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Elizabeth Figgis (1864 – 1918) and her siblings

Samuel Figgis had been born in Bassingbourn in Cambridgeshire in 1820. Some time after 1841 he arrived in Ringstead and by 1851 was a carpenter's apprentice lodging with George Smith. We do not know what drew him north but in 1852 he married local girl Maria Hill.

Maria was the daughter of James Hill, the landlord of the *Black Horse* and the Hills were related by marriage to the Greens who were the other major landlords in the village. It would have meant that Samuel would have quickly become part of the Ringstead social web. We have seen in the life story of Korah Dicks that Samuel had been appointed to the old parish post of constable which continued alongside the new professional constabulary. Unfortunately, in 1855, he allowed the rascally Korah to get drunk in Northampton on his way to the County Gaol for which he was taken to court and fined.

Samuel and Maria's eldest son, Henry, was born in 1853 and there then followed seven more children until, in 1864, Elizabeth was the last. None of them were baptised in the Parish Church which probably means that they were nonconformists. Some time before 1869 Samuel became the landlord of the recently built *New Inn*, although he still kept on his carpentry work. The *Northampton Mercury* for the 17th February 1871 reports that he had been sued by a Mr Briggs, a farmer and brickmaker from Denford for £24 17s. 10d. (about £1200 today) for bricks. He had paid off some of the debt and the case seems to have been amicably settled.

We find in 1871 Samuel and Maria with six of their children living in the *New Inn* with one lodger, Timothy Chandler. Life seems seemed set fair with the two businesses and the children soon beginning to contribute or leave home. In 1873, however, Samuel died, aged 62, and was buried in the local churchyard on May 1st. Three-and -a -half years later, on December 13th 1876, Maria was buried. Henry, the eldest son had returned to the village and taken over the running of the New Inn but the family exploded and we pick out the individual children as they try to reconstruct their lives. Some seem to have managed quite well but three had contact with the workhouse although in very different circumstances.

If we start with Henry, the eldest, who had become the new landlord at the *New Inn*, it seemed at first that he would find it easiest to make a new life after the death of his parents. He had left Ringstead to become a journeyman baker in Lady's Lane, Northampton before returning to take over the pub. He had married Elizabeth Clarke from Brigstock in 1875 and in the 1881 Census we find the couple in the *New Inn* with their three children. Henry has simply described his occupation at 'Inn Keeper' but Elizabeth has had herself listed as a, 'Licensed Victualler's wife'. There seems a certain pride in their new life. They are listed in an 1885 Directory as still being in the *New Inn* but we know that the family left soon after.

For some reason it did not work out and Henry had to work for a time as a farm labourer at Ecton. The family are there when Eliza, his wife, died on 22nd September 1888. The cause of death was Phthisis which was a medical term for a wasting disease but usually referred to T.B., one of the great scourges of Victorian England. She had been ill for fifteen months and was just thirty-six years old when she died. The family's fortunes were rapidly falling apart.

In 1891 Henry was back in Northampton as a journeyman baker, boarding with his new employer, Edward Kightly at 51 Scarletwell Street. Writing earlier, in 1869, Richard Rowe described this part of town:

> *. . . which is almost solely peopled by shoemakers and their purveyors. Neatly built, yet squalid, unfragrant, two-floored cottages; roadways splashed with slops and littered with garbage; dirty children quarrelling, grubbing in the dirt, racing, squealing, squatting on the kerbstone in rows; vixenish women and beery men, in and outside of the low "publics", are the salient features of this area.*

His eldest son, George is an 'aerated water van boy' boarding just down the road from his widowed father. But where are his other children? We find Rose, Samuel, Margaret, John and Leonard all in Northampton Union Workhouse. It seems that poverty has ripped his children away from Henry but the truth is sadder. The children had been taken away to the Workhouse to protect them from their father. It was his nine-year-old daughter, Rose, who was the butt of his violence. He had accused her of selling bones and keeping the money and had told her to go upstairs. The *Northampton Mercury* for the 25th July 1890 continued:

> *Rose said that when he came up she ran under the bed and he told her to come out. She had no bruises before that beating. He had beaten her before but not many times.*

The family were living at 9 Little Cross Street and Eliza Quick, the wife of a lamp-lighter from Number 2 had seen her with a bleeding shoulder which Henry claimed in court had come from her hiding under the iron bedstead. Other of his children testified against him and 'Sammy' told how he had chopped the stick up' after his father had gone out. The Police Sergeant who went to the house found the children 'insufficiently clothed and very dirty'. He added:

> *The house was also in a very dirty condition. In both bedrooms you could not put a pin anywhere for fleas, and the stench was dreadful.*

Henry was sentenced to one month's hard labour. We now see that his employer had taken him in as a lodger after his release. Some six months later, on 19th December 1891 he died in Northampton Union Workhouse of Phthisis, like his wife. He was thirty-nine years old. By 1901 Rose and her sister Margaret had become maids in Eastbourne. We can only hope that they had happy lives.

Fanny Figgis, Henry's sister, had married Thomas Mitchell Chambers in 1873. He was a soldier who in 1871 had been a private in the 99th Foot in East Cowes Barracks. When we next find Fanny she is living in Leeds with six of her children. We discover what has happened in the meantime as five of the children have been born in various parts of India and only the youngest has been born in Leeds. Thomas returned to civilian life and by 1901 is a boiler stoker in a tannery and two of his girls are 'leather blackers'.

Thomas Figgis, in 1881, was a general labourer, lodging in Butchers Buildings in Irchester. By 1891 he has moved to West Ham with his wife Zillah (sometimes Lillah). The family then moved back to Wellingborough and in 1911 we still find Zillah in Melton Road but there is no sign of Thomas. In fact Thomas was probably paving the way for their emigration for he and Zillah emigrated to Summerland in British Columbia and certainly Zillah, in 1929 moved on to Ohio in the United States.

Harriett Ann is something of a mystery and I have found neither her death nor other appearance in the records. Her younger brother James, however, seems to have reacted badly to the death of his parents and shows up in the local newspapers. In July 1879 he was fined for being drunk and disorderly in Denford and in 1880 he was again fined for the same offence in Thrapston. He remained in Ringstead as a lodger and worked as a farm labourer. It does not seem that he married and on 9th December 1896, aged just thirty-eight, he died in Thrapston Workhouse.

Arthur, like his brother, Thomas, moved to work in West Ham and then on to Maidstone in Kent, the birthplace of his wife Rose. By 1911 he is a widower there, living with his son, Sidney, and working as a labourer for the Maidstone Borough Council.

The family, of course, like others would have naturally spread as the children grew up but the comparatively early deaths of their parents and the sudden change of lifestyle, caused great hardships to many of the children. In some ways, Elizabeth, the youngest child, seems to have initially suffered the worst of all the siblings.

By 1881 she was a pauper in Thrapston Union Workhouse and just eighteen years old. Normally that would have meant that she was pregnant but we have found no sign of that. When we look at the Census page, we see around her, Harriett Beeby, 53, imbecile; Abigail Clarke, 49, imbecile; Eliza Fairey, 81, blind and imbecile; Elizabeth Dix, 26, imbecile, Mary Ann Matthews, 39, imbecile and Elizabeth Richardson, 33, imbecile. It is likely that they were all in the women's dormitory together. It must have been an unpleasant and, at times, frightening place for a young girl to live. It seems strange that she was not given a temporary home in the New Inn with her brother, Henry, and his young family, but perhaps we can now understand that there may have been good reasons why she preferred to go to the Overseer and present herself at the Porter's Lodge of the Workhouse.

Like a number of women, marriage was a way of escaping from desperate poverty to bearable poverty. In early 1883 she married Thomas Mitchell who was some nine years her senior.

Thomas came from a large family in Raunds. His father, James, was an agricultural labourer and it would have been a hard life for them all. Thomas followed his father into farm work. Elizabeth and Thomas first lived in Raunds and their first child, Ernest Leonard Mitchell, was baptised there on 3rd May 1883, shortly after their marriage. Sadly, Ernest died a little later in the same year. Their second child, Edith, was baptised on 15th February 1885 in Raunds and she survived to have children of her own. The next two children however died very young. Sometime around 1890 the family moved to Chapel Lane, Stanwick and Thomas became a limestone digger at one of the local pits. A son, Fred, had been born in 1888 and baptised in Raunds on 19th February 1888 and another daughter, Florence Maud, had been baptised in June 1890 but she was buried in early 1892 and Fred, who seems to have been baptised again in 1892, followed soon after.

We cannot be sure why Thomas changed his work but a brief article in the Raunds section of the *Northampton Mercury* for 23rd January 1891 gives some insight into the seasonal, unreliable, nature of much farm work and the suffering that this could produce.

> *DISTRESS – In consequence of the prolonged frost the agricultural labourers and all those following outdoor employments have experienced a considerable amount of privation, if not actual distress, since Christmas. Soup and other necessaries have been distributed.*

Elizabeth and Thomas stayed in Stanwick for at least five years but then moved to Knuston Farm Cottages in Knuston, near Irchester. They are there in 1901 and Thomas is now a horsekeeper on a farm. Only Percy (9) and Ellen (5) are till at home for Edith, at 16, is a domestic servant to Walter Woodward, a plumber, and his wife Alice and their young family at 55 Moor Road, Rushden. Such girls were very vulnerable and she gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, Georgina, a couple of years later. Thomas may have had a cottage but it would have been tied to the job and it may be that they lost both for by 1911 they are back in Raunds at 4 Woodruff's Yard off the High Street. Thomas is once again a farm labourer and Elizabeth is working as a charwoman. The two children are bringing some money to the household, Percy as a shoe riveter and Ellen by working half days as a domestic servant.

We are reminded by the 1911 Census that Elizabeth has had seven children, four of whom have died. The small, almost unnoticed, griefs of many families in the nineteenth century. Their daughter Edith had married Harry Marshall and was living in Rotton Row with a family of her own.

Things seem settled but once again fate was against the family for in 1913 Thomas died and five years later in 1918 Elizabeth followed him to the grave. She had lived to see all her three remaining children married and her son Percy, return alive but wounded from the Western Front.

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Maud Emma Kate Burgin (1878 – 1897)

In this brief story of a brief life we can see the useful work that the Workhouse could do but also its limitations and bureaucratic heartlessness.

Maud was the daughter of Edward (or Edwin) Burgin who had been born in Wolverhampton of Irish parents. His wife Sarah Kettle was from Spittlegate in Lincolnshire and the couple had married in the Grantham area in the spring of 1871. In 1861 Sarah had been staying in Ringstead with her much older sister, Mary, who was married to agricultural labourer, Thomas Wills. It was presumably this connection that brought the young couple to the village. Their first two children Mary Ann and Elizabeth were both born in Spittlegate so it seems likely that the couple moved south between 1875 and 1878 when Maud Emma Kate was born, followed by her sister Alice in 1880.

The family were in Carlow in 1881 and moved to London Road by 1891. At first Edward had been an ironstone labourer but by 1891 was a farm labourer, perhaps because of the closure of local pits. The children kept being born, and dying. We know from the 1911 Census that Sarah had fifteen children of which only five survived.

It is Maud Emma Kate with whom we are concerned with here. On 14th August 1896 she gave birth to an illegitimate son in Thrapston Workhouse. We know from a later newspaper report that it was a very difficult birth. The boy was called Bertram Leonard Burgin and it seems that he remains in the Workhouse for he is there in the 1901 Census aged five years old. In the November of the following year Maud was coming to the end of a pregnancy again. Once more she was having a very difficult time.

She gave birth to a female child on the Friday and was attended by Mary Mitchell, the midwife. On the following two days she complained of pains in her stomach and chest. She seemed comfortable on the Saturday night but then deteriorated and, on the Sunday afternoon, Mary Mitchell tried to get an order for a doctor as Sarah, her mother could not leave her daughter and the other children. Dr. Ramsay told her that he would not attend Maud without the money or an order. She went to a

Mr Whitney and then to Mr Fisher who said he was the overseer but could not give her an order. He sent her to Mr O. Smith who also said that he could not give her one and in desperation to one of the Workhouse Guardians called Smith but he too could not help. She told Edwin (Edward) that his daughter needed a doctor but he could not afford to pay for one.

Maud became very ill and, before eight o'clock on the Monday morning, her father went to Thrapston to see Mr. Parish, the Relieving Officer to get an order for a doctor but he said he could only give an order for her to come into the Workhouse.

Edwin pleaded that his daughter was dangerously ill and not fit to be moved but Parish still refused to give a doctor's order. On returning home he found that his daughter was dead.

At the Inquest held on the following Tuesday, at the *Barber's Arms*, Dr. Mackenzie said that Mrs Mitchell, the midwife, had come to see him (presumably when he was busy or out and Doctor Ramsay took the message). When she returned soon after, he told her she need to get an order from the parish but she again returned and said that she could not obtain one. The *Mercury* report continues:

> *. . . he told her to go to the Relieving Officer and also told her what to do with the patient. He gave her some pills and told her to poultice the patient; in fact he told her just the same as he should have done had he attended. . . [As a result of a post mortem examination] he found that the cause of death was puerperal peritonitis*. He did not think that he could have prevented this had he attended the confinement. He could not say if he had been called in sooner he could have saved her life. Deceased was a very unhealthy and bloodless woman. There was no sign of unskilful treatment by the midwife.*
>
> *[*A not uncommon cause of death at this time, in mothers after childbirth, especially if there had been tissue damage during a difficult birth. The use of hands (or instruments), that had not been properly sterilised could also be a cause.]*

The case naturally led to an outcry in Raunds and the Inquest jury asked the Coroner to pass the following resolution to the appropriate authorities:

> *That the jury has heard with consternation that the overseers of Raunds have received no instructions as to the granting of orders in cases of urgency and necessity:- That the jury strongly recommend the Thrapston Board of Guardians to appoint a resident Relieving Officer for the parish of Raunds.*

We see the inadequacies and bureaucratic callousness of the old system which would eventually lead people to call for a 'free' National Health Service.

The Thrapston Board of Guardians met on Tuesday 30th November and considered the criticism levelled at its officers and doctors. The members defended the actions taken and made it clear where they felt the fault lay.

> *The parents must long have known what state this poor girl was in, and it was possible for them to make preparations beforehand. Not only did the father earn 18s. a week, but the girl herself and another daughter and a son were earning money and with the income coming in they could not find fault with the Relieving Officer in refusing to give an order. If he had done so he would not have carried out his duty according to the interests of the Board, because they did not want to encourage parents to neglect their children or encourage people to get*

> *into these immoral ways. . . Mr Lovell pointed out that if the doctor had not put his foot down and got an order he would never get any fees at all.*

The Board decided that:

> *. . . under the circumstances they would pay the expenses of burying and they also exonerated the doctor, the overseers and the Relieving Officer from blame, taking no steps regarding the recommendations to appoint a Relieving Officer for Raunds. – The matter then dropped.*

When we look back through the newspaper reports we see part of the reason for the attitude of the Board to the Burgins. In 1885, while they lived in Ringstead, Edward was charged with leaving his wife and family chargeable to the Thrapston Union. In 1890 he was found guilty of not sending his daughters Alice and Maud to school. In 1895, just two years before Maud's death, her mother's fifteenth and last child was stillborn. The midwife, Ann Wells, went to the doctor to ask him to certify the cause of death but he refused without an order. Joseph Bird, the surgeon said that he did not consider Ann Wells qualified to do such work and that was his reason for denying the certificate. On the requisition of the coroner he had since certified the death. We can see the coming of a more qualified, but often still unaffordable, medical profession. There was little thought for the mother.

The Burgins were a "problem family" and they were clearly labelled as the "undeserving poor". Maud suffered as a result.

The daughter, born just before her young mother's death, did survive and was also called Maud in memory of her mother. By 1911 she was boarding with her brother 'Bertie' in Twywell with a widow called Elizabeth Percival. In the First World War Bertie enlisted with the Royal Sussex Regiment and died of his wounds on 26th April 1917. There appears to have been no correspondence about obtaining the medals due to him at the end of the war.

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Chapter Ten

The Cycling Revolution

Ernest Cottingham, Nathaniel Fox & Ellen Warren

We have seen in other biographies how, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, much of the village life for the next century was set in place**.** Mains sewerage, the Parish Council, telephones, street lighting (oil at first), organised football leagues and the bicycle.

Although there are stories of early bicycles, the first bicycle type vehicle that we really know existed was the French 'Draisine', or English hobby horse which was made of wood with iron shod wheels. It had no pedals but was propelled by pushing with your feet on the ground, rather like a child's ride-on toy. The year 1819 was its heyday in England when the Regency dandies rode them round Vauxhall Gardens and the streets of London. They quickly became a menace and heavy fines were imposed for riding them on the pavements (a continuing problem). The craze was quickly over.

The next big breakthrough came in the 1860s when the velocipede or 'boneshaker was invented. The frame was increasingly made of iron and the front wheels were driven by the use of pedals attached to its axle. It was called the boneshaker because of its stiff frame and iron wheels, although later it did gain solid rubber tyres. It is unlikely that many ordinary people rode these expensive, cumbersome beasts although many performers tried to include this new craze in their act. Dozens of songs were written for the Music Hall and under the title. 'The Velocipede Mania' the *Worcester Journal* for Saturday 21st August 1869 had the following article:

> *A velocipede artist gives an epitome of his accomplishments. He states that during the performances he "draws a four-wheel cab, containing four persons, runs up an incline, leaps twelve feet into the air while on the veloce, performs with chairs, bottles &c., carries six men at one time, and within a space of eight feet." A French illustrated paper publishes some special hints this week for the use of these new machines. Amongst them is a sketch of a funeral conducted on velocipedes. French humour is nothing unless it is either grim or nasty.*

A little earlier in the year, on April 10th there was an advertisement in the *General Advertiser* for:

THE NEW BICYCLE OR VELOCIPEDE

It invited, 'Gentlemen wishing to inspect this favourite vehicle' to do so at 'Mr. Wilson's Coach and Harness Manufactory in Gold Street, Northampton. In July there was an advertisement for a 'Grand Display of Fireworks, Velocipede Races'.

Once again, its time was quite short. The problem was that with the pedals directly on the front wheel the speed that it could attain was quite limited. This was solved at first by increasing the size of the front wheel. In order to make them mountable and allow the rider to reach the pedals still mounted on the front axle, the rear wheel was similarly reduced. The 'Ordinary' or to use, what was a derogatory name, 'Penny Farthing' was born. At the same time the all-metal frame was lightened. We now see the Penny Farthing as rather sedate, elegant machines but the reality was very

different. They were fast and dangerous and were mainly ridden by young men from well-off families.

We know that at least some bicycles were being ridden around Ringstead however because the *Northampton Mercury* report on the Baptist Sunday School Feast, on the 6th August 1881, states that:

> *At an early part of the day a bicycle accident befell R. Pearson, a member of the Ringstead Band, who was riding his machine and carrying his trombone. The instrument slipped between the front wheel and suddenly sent the rider over the handles. In his descent his chin came into contact with the trombone and he suffered severe cuts and bruising.*

Was this a boneshaker or a penny farthing? One can only guess that it was the former. Ralph Pearson was a twenty-nine year old married shoemaker who lived in London End and one suspects that it may have been an old machine. Was it the same bicycle that his younger brother, Stephen, was caught riding without lights on 31st May 1883. Stephen was about sixteen years old and he was let off with a payment of 6s. 6d costs and the police consented to waive a conviction.

The *Northampton Mercury* reported on 6th June 1885 on an American, Thomas Stevens, who was on a 'Velocipede Journey Round the World'. Thomas had started out on April 22nd 1884 and the adventure took him three years. He wrote of his journey and we see from the photographs that he was in fact riding a Columbia Standard model high-wheeler' or a penny farthing. This confusion over names continues and there were numerous disputes, when new laws came in about bicycle lights or riding on the pavement, as to what the law was referring. We sometimes have to infer what type of bicycle was being described by the date.

Again it is unlikely that many were owned in Ringstead although some might have been seen passing through. It is difficult to imagine it on the still often rutted and muddy roads. A man writing in the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* on the 24th October 1882 told of his tricycle ride from Northumberland to London and back in three weeks. He complained about the terrible state of some of the main roads and also mentioned his ride from Oundle south, stopping briefly at Ringstead to look at the church and especially the East Window. His tricycle, a "Salvo", could be folded together to go through doorways. Earlier, in 1881, the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, ordered a "modern tricycle" for one of his daughters. It did seem that the tricycle might become the main type of cycle for everyday use. There were also experiments to produce a motorised version. In August 1880 the *Manchester Evening News* carried a report of an advertisement headed, "Every Man His Own Locomotive" in which an "American mechanician" claimed to have perfected a tricycle:

> . . . "to emancipate mankind from the tyranny of the railroads". By means of compressed air, pumped into an iron reservoir, constituting the seat of the rider, the tricycle in question can be propelled forwards at the rate of five-and-twenty miles an hour; and the inventor proposes to erect pumping stations in town and country districts at which the travelling tricyclist will be enabled, on payment of a trifling fee, to renew his supply of pneumatic force. Ladies, who are at present debarred by sumptuary considerations and muscular disabilities from economising time and cab fares by aid of the velocipede, will assuredly welcome an appliance which will waft them comfortably seated and without the least physical exertion to their favourite shops at twice the speed of a parliamentary train.

It is interesting to note that at least in radical Manchester there was no moral outrage at a woman riding a cycle. "Sumptuary" normally refers to one being economical but I wonder if it refers to the bulkiness of dresses making riding a velocipede impossible.

Nothing seems to come of this and the 'safety bicycle' was invented in 1885. The big change was that the back wheel was driven by a chain onto a cogwheel on the back axle. Suddenly the need for a large front wheel had disappeared and with a lighter frame (although heavy by modern standards) the modern bicycle was born. Some historians say that the bicycle was not a vehicle of the working classes until the First World War. This does not appear to have been the case in Ringstead and some of the shoemakers and their sons and daughters seem to have taken to the bicycle in the 1890s.

This period was not a good one for the local military boot and shoe trade and it was only the Boer War at the end of the century that alleviated the position for a time. Nevertheless the shoemakers probably had more disposable income than many working people. They were also a radical group and, in Ringstead there was a strong temperance movement. The early history of the bicycle was tied up with these other movements in a way that we might find surprising today. Working people were gaining more leisure time and the bicycle gave them a cheap access to the world that they could now reach in a day's journey.

Author's uncle, Cyril Hardwick, probably in Stanwick about 1917.

You can still see the influence of the penny farthing.

Probably in 1890 a bicycle club was formed in Ringstead. Certainly we know that on Saturday 3rd October 1891 the club celebrated its first annual gathering with a tea at the *Axe and Compass*. There was also a grand costume parade of the village and a run to Thrapston. I have not found further

reports so it may be that it merged with the Raunds Cycle Club. Nevertheless it does show that a good number in the village owned a bicycle

Previously that year, on Saturday 8th August 1891 two of its members, Ernest Cottingham and Nathaniel Fox, left Ringstead at 4 o'clock in the morning bound for London. They were attempting to beat the record set by a Raunds rider, W. Wheatley, who had ridden to London and back in just eighteen hours.

Ernest had been born in 1871 to John and Martha Cottingham and in 1881 he was living with them in the High Street. Next door is his young cousin Edwin Turner Cottingham, who became a master clockmaker and whose story we have already told in *Ringstead People*. By 1891 Ernest's family was living at 1 Little Lane, Shop Street but it is likely that this is a different name for the same house. He was now twenty years old and a shoemaker.

His partner in the cycle ride was Nathaniel Fox, also the son of a shoemaker. He was living with his parents, Joseph and Dinah in Leveratt's Row in Carlow Street in the 1891 Census. He was only seventeen years old and a shoemaker too.

Just a few months after the 1891 Census the two young men had set out on their adventure. They arrived back in Ringstead at five minutes past eight in the evening. They had completed the journey in sixteen hours and five minutes. Unfortunately, the newspaper report gives no details of the journey but presumably they went straight down the A6. The journey would probably been about 145 miles in all so they had averaged about nine miles an hour.

We can only imagine the welcome they received from their club mates and other villagers when they returned. Ernest Cottingham married Sarah Daisy Braine in 1897. I wonder if the couple were teased with the popular Music Hall song of the time:

> *Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,*
> *I'm half crazy all for the love of you.*
> *It won't be a stylish marriage,*
> *I can't afford a carriage,*
> *But you'd look sweet upon the seat*
> *Of a bicycle built for two*.

As we have seen, there was much experimentation during the last quarter of the nineteenth century with bicycles, tricycles, quadricycles and tandems and even impractical designs of cycles for many riders.

Cycle racing now featured in many local feasts and athletic meetings. The *Mercury* reporter seems a little disgruntled from the start in having to attend the Ringstead Feast in September 1892:

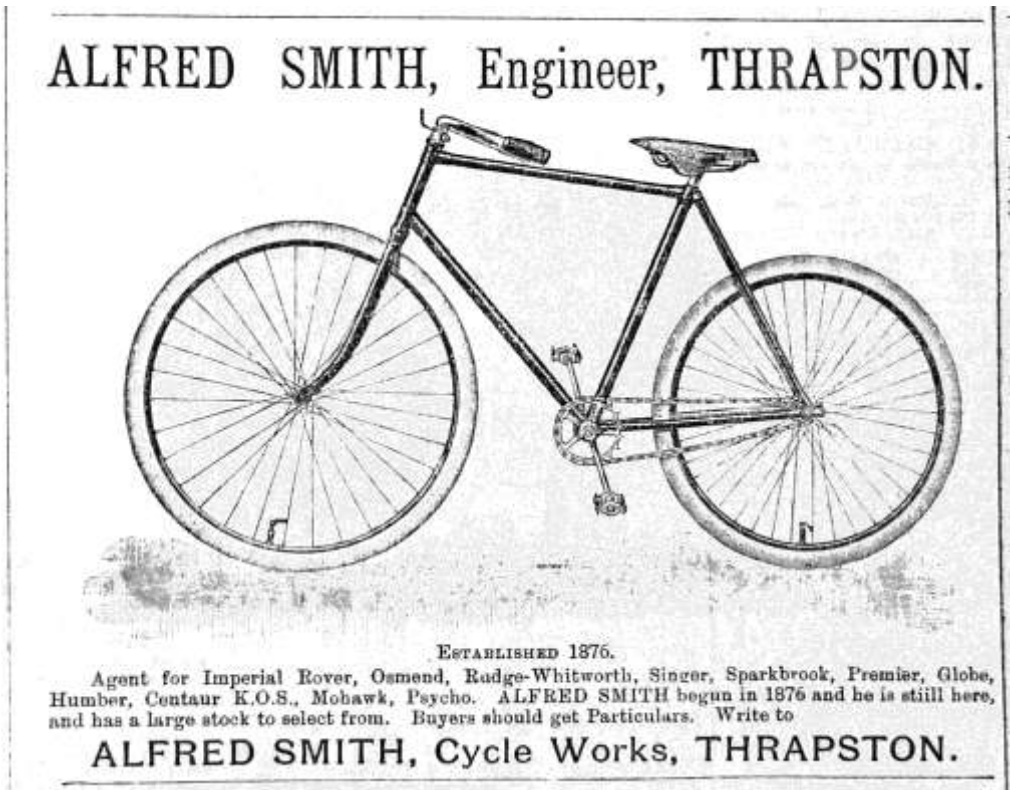
> *Coming late in the season in the midst of harvest, and also being just in front of the Rushden and Finedon festivals, Ringstead Feast does not fall at a good time for holiday making. Still it is always a time for many family reunions, for pleasuring in various forms, and this year's festival, which commenced on Sunday, is no exception to the rule. Indeed there seems to be a little more life than usual during the last few years put into it.*

He later reports:

A good course was laid out for the foot-racing but for the bicycles it was awful. The sport was not very interesting and the fields were as a rule limited.

Many of the same problems that people complain about today were causing anger in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *Stamford Mercury* reported on 14th September 1894 that Mr R. Smith at the Wisbech Town Council meeting complained about the danger of 'persons cycling on the footpaths of the town . . . contrary to the bye-laws'. The *Mercury* had reports, in 1901 of Alfred W. Worthington from Denford who was summoned for riding a bicycle on the highway at Ringstead on June 5th 'at a quarter past eleven p.m. without having a lighted lamp attached'. In 1903 Frank York of Raunds and Thomas Pentelow of Ringstead were also summoned for riding bicycles without lights. We see that bicycles were far from uncommon on the Ringstead roads.

If we look at the local advertisements for cycles in the *Wellingborough News* we see that, very quickly, the cycle that we would recognize today had evolved. We see the hollow-tubed triangular frame with Dunlop's new invention of the pneumatic tyre, and the chain driven back wheel, but still with no signs of brakes (although some models certainly did have brakes fitted). It may be that this model had a "fixed wheel" which meant that you braked by slowing or stopping the pedals going round.



Wellingborough News 1st March 1895
From Wellingborough Museum Archive

We have said that the cycling had a political and social element in its early days and this is particularly true of the fight for equality for women. The early cycles had been impossible for women to use but with the introduction of the safety cycle women too took to the roads. The radical Scottish poet, Robert Buchanan wrote in the 1892 a *Bicycle Song (for Women)* which has the lines:

Praise to the Luck which sent me
The magical wheel I ride,
And now I know God meant me
To match Man side by side!
Wings the good Lord has lent me,
And oh, the world is wide!

By the end of the century women in Ringstead seem to have been riding bicycles with little comment. We know this from the sad case of Vinnie Ellen Warren, who was the daughter of Joseph and Mary Ann Warren. Mary Ann Phillips had married Joseph Warren in1873. She was just eighteen and he was some fourteen years her senior, but still a young man. He died, however, just three years later and was buried in the churchyard on October 19th 1875. Vinnie Ellen had been born just a few months earlier.

Mary Ann married again to an Ironstone labourer, Albert Orpin and they lived in the Seivers Buildings off the Carlow Road near to Mary Ann's family. They had one son, called Leonard born in 1889 and by 1891 the family were in Carlow Street with Police Constable John Puttnam lodging with them.

Vinnie, or Ellen as she seems mostly to have been called, appears to have been a bright girl. Like many Ringstead girls she became an army boot closer probably working in one of the local factories. She had also become a nurse in the Ringstead St John Ambulance Corps.

As we have seen in the stories of John Sawford and the Police Constable the Boer War came at the end of the century. A war in which disease was the greatest killer of the British troops and where some of the lessons taught by Florence Nightingale about hygiene in the Crimea had to be relearned.

Two of the Ringstead St John Ambulance Corps went to South Africa and John Sawford did not return. Although there were professional female nurses in South Africa there was reluctance by the army chiefs to send sufficient of them and, unlike the men, the St John female nurses were not used.

Along with the rest of the nation, she would have rejoiced when, in 1900, news of the Relief of Mafeking came through. On Saturday 19th May there were celebrations, bonfires and torchlight processions in towns and villages throughout Britain. On the following Monday the boot and shoe factory where Ellen worked as a machinist gave a half holiday to all its staff. She and her friends decided to hire bicycles and have some fun. Ellen was not a 'very confident' cyclist so she decided to have a practice and she, accompanied by her friends, went up the Raunds Road. When they reached the top Ellen started back down on her own, with the wind at her back. It seems the equivalent of learning to swim by jumping in at the deep end.

At the same time Charles Underwood was driving a dray for the Wellingborough brewery, *Campbell Praed and Sons*, loaded with mineral water, slowly up the hill to Raunds. He suddenly saw Ellen careering down the hill towards him and tried to pull up. Ellen was on the wrong side of the road and had lost control. She crashed into the side of the dray, cracking her head against the large brake block. It was at a point where the road narrowed and it is possible that she caught some old iron railings first. It is not clear just how close to the crossroads the accident occurred but the postcard below shows that there was little sign of rights of way and wheel tracks cut across the corner.

The driver of the dray and his mate as well as Ellen's horror-struck companions rushed to her side but she died almost immediately. They carried her to her house in Carlow Road and the doctor's

assistant came to her there. Dr Joseph Bird, himself, came from Thrapston and attended Ellen a little later but it was all too late. The Inquest was held at the Swan Inn on Tuesday 22nd May.

The bottom of the road from Raunds in the early Twentieth Century

Author's own postcard

In the Cemetery there is a large gravestone for Vinnie Ellen Warren. "who met with her death by accident" and the first two lines of the epitaph read:

> *We cannot Lord the purpose see*
> *But all is well that is done by thee.*

Her mother and stepfather are in the 1901 Census at 21 Carlow Road with their son Leonard. Albert Orpin had become a labourer in a sewerage works. Mary Ann died in 1904 aged forty-nine years, but in one of those unexpected changes that we have come to expect in these stories Albert and Leonard sailed for America . It may be that Albert's brother had emigrated to America first. They arrived in Ellis Island, New York on 18th August 1905 on board the *Baltic*. They settled in Alden, Hardin County, in Iowa and there both lived their lives into old age.

It is interesting to note that somewhere locally bicycles were available for hire for those who could not afford them and it may be that for most the cycling was a leisure activity rather than a general way of getting about. It is difficult to be precise but average earning would have been around £1 8s. a week so it would have been around two to three months wages to buy a new bicycle, although many would have bought them on 'easy terms'.

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Local Bicycle Makers, Lightstrung, selling bicycles from £8 10s. to £14

One of a series of regular advertisements in the Wellingborough News
From Wellingborough Museum Archive

Chapter Eleven

Vicars and Curates

Isaac Gaskarth: Charles Proby: John Watson: William de Pipe Belcher: Alfred John Sandilands: Percival Richard Renorden Sandilands: Edward Sandford: Edward Armitage Sandford: William Oram Leadbitter: Andrew Cavendish Neely: Charles William Cotes. (Also some curates including Robert Morgan Vane: Thomas Brownrigg: Harrison Packard: Thomas Martin Symonds: Benjamin Clay: Charles William Chalklen: Edward Bowman: John Gurney Rogers: Edward Kitson.)

It may come as some surprise that the smaller village of Denford had for centuries been the senior church of the Denford cum Ringstead joint parish. The two 'vicarages' were linked from before 1535 and Ringstead was described as a chapelry which meant that weddings could not be solemnized there. Nevertheless the Ringstead Marriage Register starts on November 26th1569. The relationship between the two churches is therefore somewhat unclear and it may be that the incumbent did not always live in a vicarage in Denford in the early decades of the century. John Glassbrook, an eighteenth century vicar, wrote a Memorandum in the Denford Parish Registers in 1763:

> *When I was first Vicar I found the two Parishes contesting about Ecclesiastical Superiority. I happen'd this year to meet accidentally with Brown Willis Esq. (one of the most eminent Antiquarians this Day in England) who answer'd me upon good Grounds that Denford was the Mother Church and that Ringstead originally was no more than a Chapel of Ease. This information is able to support itself but what in my opinion adds weight and strength to it is This, That the Parish of Ringstead is oblig'd to repair some Part of the Wall belonging to the Churchyard of Denford and I am credibly inform'd that it can be proved at this time by living Witnesses that it has been so repaired.*

There was certainly a vicarage in Ringstead in first part of the nineteenth century and this seems to have become the residence of the curate.

Certainly the same 'incumbent' had always had charge of both churches until recent times and these are recorded as far back as Peter of Chester in 1237. Of course, originally these priests would have been Roman Catholic. Starting with Henry VIII's break with Rome the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries were a time of religious turmoil when the church was splintered high and low. In 1662, after the restoration of Charles II to the throne after Cromwell's Commonwealth, an *Act of Uniformity* was introduced. This laid down that all clergy and Government officials should take an oath to follow the rites and prayers prescribed in a *new Book of Common Prayer.* Over two thousand clergymen refused and were expelled from the Church of England. Henry Raymond, the curate at Ringstead was one of these 'Two Thousand Worthies'. Another of these 'Worthies' from Desborough set up a church at Rowell (Rothwell). The local nonconformists made the long trek there until in 1714 forty-three people broke off from Rothwell and set up the Baptist Church in Ringstead. The division and occasional bitterness of this break from the Church of England smouldered in Ringstead throughout the nineteenth century, erupting into rows over education in the 1890s**.**

Isaac Gaskarth (1752 -1811) VICAR 1777 - 1811

We are looking at the nineteenth century in these lives but our first vicar is Isaac Gaskarth who was appointed the vicar of Denford cum Ringstead on 18th July 1777. These 'livings' were owned by wealthy patrons who would install their chosen man, although their choice had to be affirmed by the Bishop. In Isaac's case his patron was the local Lord of the Manor, Leonard Burton.

Isaac had been born in Crosthwaite in Cumberland and was christened there on 26thNovember 1752. The exact sequence of Isaac's career is a little unclear but we do know that he was ordained as a deacon at the Bishop of Durham's Chapel within the Castle at Bishop Auckland. Two years later, on 13th July 1777, he was ordained by the Bishop of Durham as a priest and five days later was appointed to the vacant vicarage at Denford cum Ringstead.

The Gaskarths of north-west England were linked to the aristocracy but any connection of Isaac's was a distant one. We know that he was admitted as a 'Sizar' to St John's College, Cambridge. A Sizar would have had a grant probably in the form of free meals or lower lodging costs. In return he would, perhaps, have had to do menial jobs for the better-off, full fee-paying students. Exactly how and when he gained a degree, M.A. and Bachelor of Divinity is again not clear. It seems that his B.D was obtained as a 'Ten Year Man' at Easter 1790. Isaac would have matriculated (enrolled) at St John's College on July 7th 1779 and then, as long as he was over twenty-four years of age, he could qualify after ten years had passed without having been tested in any way. As the Cambridge M.A. could then be obtained, again merely by the passage of time, it appears that his studying was not a great hardship for Isaac. Is it possible that he spent some of the term in Cambridge and much of his parochial work was done by a curate? This 'Ten Year' practice was not often used and was abolished in the middle of the nineteenth century

One of Isaac's earliest actions after he was appointed vicar was to apply, in 1778, for a Gamekeeper's Licence. This may seem a little odd for the local vicar. Was he moonlighting for extra income? The reason for his application can be explained by the laws of the 'game' at this date which would soon be challenged and mainly swept away.

E.V. Bovill explains, in *English Country Life 1780- 1830*, how the system worked:

> *Under an Act of 1671 the killing of game was prohibited, in general terms, to all except owners of land worth £100 a year, lessees of land worth £150 a year, the eldest sons of esquires or of persons of higher degree and the owners of franchises. A curious anomaly was that if an esquire or a person of higher degree had not the necessary qualifications to kill game, his eldest son was not debarred from doing so. Another was that although a lord of the manor might grant the right to kill game to his gamekeeper he might not do so to his younger sons. This led to younger sons sometimes engaging themselves as keepers in order to secure the right to shoot. The owners of only a few acres could not enjoy the game their fields harboured, and which destroyed their crops, unless they could persuade a qualified neighbour to shoot it for them.*

It seems that Isaac was obtaining a Gamekeeper's Licence so that he could shoot and fish on his patron, Leonard Burton's land and also, perhaps, on some of his neighbours'.

The living must have suited Isaac for he stayed thirty-four years in his post. We see, in the *Northampton Mercury* of 7thApril 1804, that he was supplementing his income by taking paying

students into Denford Vicarage. He advertises for ‘four young gentlemen’ to be given lessons in ’the Rudiments of the Greek and Latin Languages preparatory to their Entrance into any of the public schools’. It is from this advertisement that we know that he has an M.A. but whether obtained through hard study is unclear. We will briefly refer to this advertisement again.

In 1806 Isaac also took over as Rector of Islip, a living with a value of £275 a year. It was still possible to hold more than one living with the permission of the Bishop. Of course today, with smaller congregations and difficult economic times the Church of England has again been forced to gather parishes together under one vicar or rector. At this time it was often a way of gaining extra income without doing anything for it. It appears that at this point a clergyman called **Daniel Crofts** was appointed as curate of Ringstead. We can see this from the Parish Registers. From July 1796 until December 1808 all the christenings and until January 28th 1809 all the burials are performed by Isaac but from then until Isaac’s death they are all registered by the curate, Daniel Crofts.

Daniel came from a family of clergymen in Lewes in Sussex where Croft memorials still line the walls of the church. He had attended Kimbolton School and then Christ's College, Cambridge where he gained his B.A. in 1809 (or possibly late 1808). His first post was as curate of Ringstead and he then moved on to become Rector of Shelton in Bedfordshire where he continued until his death in 1866. Once appointed, barring gross misconduct, a vicar had a job for life whereas a curate had no security of tenure and could be removed at a whim.

Returning to Isaac Gaskarth, it has often proved more difficult to fill in the details of the clergymen's families than for most of their congregation. They may be at best only a brief footnote in Burke's Peerage but, as with many of the upper classes, their social lives often covered a wide geographical area and few, if any, were baptised, married and had children near Denford or Ringstead. Isaac Gaskarth was no exception. As we have said, he came from Cumberland and in his Will he mentions his sister, Sarah, and a Thomas Gaskarth, who is almost certainly his brother. We are sure, therefore, that he was the son of John and Sarah Gaskarth and had, besides Sarah and Thomas, at least two other brothers, John and James.

Unfortunately for us, there are a number of Isaac Gaskarths in Cumberland. We know that there was an Isaac who agreed to a bond of £200 for a licence to marry Elizabeth Coward on 29th December 1766 in the parish of Windermere. This couple had at least four children of whom two were called Isaac, the first named having died at just four years of age. Another Isaac Gaskarth married Jane Porter at Crosthwaite in 1791 and had three children. Our Isaac would have been very young for the first marriage and for the second would have been living in the Ringstead area. There was also the ambiguous evidence of the advertisement in the *Northampton Mercury* on 7th April 1804 for "four young gentlemen" to study the "Rudiments of the Greek and Latin Languages". The place for the teaching is "eight miles from Wellingborough and four from Thrapston" so it is certainly Ringstead or Great Addington rather than Denford but there are four clergymen to whom applicants can apply so we cannot be completely certain that the "Married Clergyman" who is to do the teaching is Isaac. There is also no sign of the burial of a wife of Isaac after this time.

All we can say is that there is a possibility that Isaac had been married. We do know that he did marry by licence to Rebecca West on 9th August 1810. His wife was a twenty-seven year old "spinster" and Isaac, some thirty years her senior, is described as a "bachelor". If this was his first marriage he would not be the last Ringstead clergyman to marry late in life.

Isaac made a Will later that same year, on 12th October 1810, and he died just over a year later on 2nd December 1811. He was fifty-eight years old. One of his first recorded acts in the Parish had

been to take out a Gamekeeper's Licence most probably so that he could fish on the Nene. One of his last was to bequeath to Lord of the Manor, Leonard Burton:

> *. . . his fishing-rods, fishing lines, hooks, nets and whatever belongs to the amusement of angling*

Ringstead had, and still has, a name for its fishing and Isaac would not be the last incumbent to be a field sportsman. He was also something of a craftsman it seems for he left to:

> *. . . Thomas Porter, son of John Porter [his long-serving Parish Clerk] his Turning Lathe and all my tools belonging to the Art of Turning. Also I give and bequeath all other Tools, Instruments and Goods in my Workshop to my godson William Geary of Denford Lodge. Also I give and bequeath to the said William Geary the sum of Ten Pounds.*

He left similar amounts to Jane, the daughter of Ann Geary and to his Parish Clerk, John Porter as well as to Thomas Gaskarth, of Bridge End near Keswick, for the maintenance of Isaac's sister Sarah.

After these few bequests he left the residue of his estate, including a house in Great Addington, to his new wife, Rebecca. In the Poll Book of 1806 Isaac is shown as having a vote at Denford but his residence is at Ringstead so it may be that the Vicarage for the joint Parish was in Ringstead at this time. It was in Ringstead churchyard that he was buried on December 9th 1811.

Charles Proby (c1765 – 1822) VICAR 1812 - 1822

The next vicar appointed was Charles Proby who was born on 20th January 1765. He was the eldest son of Captain Charles Proby who was the Commissioner of the Naval Dockyard at Chatham. Once again he was on the fringes of the aristocracy. He was the nephew of the Earl of Carysfoot and the family seat was Elton Hall in Huntingdonshire. Charles married twice, firstly, in 1791, to Susan Cherry whose father was Chairman of the Victualling Board and secondly, on 6thJanuary 1796 to his cousin Catherine Proby who was the second daughter of Baptist Proby, the Dean of Lichfield.

In 1781, at the age of sixteen, he had matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge, as had many of the Denford cum Ringstead vicars of this period. He gained his B.A. in 1785 and his M.A. in 1789. Charles then entered the Inner Temple in 1789 but seems never to have pursued a legal career. For many of his class the choice was the military, the law or the clergy. It was the latter that he chose for he was ordained as a deacon at Winchester, in 1790, and as a priest by the Bishop of Peterborough on 29thJune, 1792. His path was set and he became a curate at Tansor in the same year. A year later he was appointed the Rector of Stanwick. He also seems to have acquired the parish of Slawston in Leicestershire in 1802. In 1808 he was 'collated' by the Bishop of Lincoln to the Prebend of Lafford or New Sleaford. This was by this time just an honorary title, usually given to senior clergymen for good service and meant he could sit in the prebendal stalls, which were behind the choir, when attending a service.

On the 12th March 1812, following the death of Isaac Gaskarth, Charles was appointed to Denford with the chapelry of Ringstead. Except at his appointment and death he always seems to be referred to as the Rector of Stanwick and it would seem that most of the work of the joint parish fell to his younger curates. In 1812 the curate was **Robert Morgan Vane** who again was connected to the aristocracy. He was born 4thOctober 1785, the eldest son of Morgan Vane of Bilby Hall in Nottinghamshire. Unusually for the local clergy at this time, he went in 1804 to Emmanuel College in

Cambridge gaining his B.A. in 1808 and his M.A. in 1811. He was ordained as a priest in 1812 and became curate of Denford and Ringstead in the same year. He moved on to become Rector of Lowick and Islip in 1816 which he held until 1842, a post that he combined with being chaplain to the Duke of Dorset.

Robert Morgan Vane's successor as curate was **Thomas Brownrigg**. He had been the curate at Rushden and on the 6thJuly 1816 was appointed to Denford cum Ringstead. He was there for just two years, which was often about the length of time that curates served in a small parish before moving on to another curacy or vicarage.

It was during Thomas's time as curate that the frame for the bells was repaired. On Saturday February 8th 1817 the *Northampton Mercury* had an advertisement for:

> *Any competent Person who wishes to engage in putting the FRAMES of the BELLS **in complete repair** , are requested to inspect the same and give in their respective Estimate to JOSEPH BETTS and WM GEARY. Churchwardens of the Parish of Ringstead, Northamptonshire*
>
> *Ringstead January 29th 1817*

The church fabric was perhaps beginning to show the signs of rot and decay that would leave it in a ruinous state some forty years later.

We know little more of what he did apart from officiating at 35 baptisms, 10 weddings and 15 burials, but we do have some idea of how his house was furnished. The *Northampton Mercury* for 28thFebruary 1818 has an advertisement for the sale of the household furniture and other effects of the Reverend Mr. Brownrigg of Ringstead who was 'removing to Yorkshire'. The fact that he is said to be 'of Ringstead' implies that he was living in the vicarage there. The sale is of:

> *Handsome mahogany dining, Pembroke and other Tables; modern mahogany Chairs (horse-hair Seats);Scotch Carpets, hearth Rugs, mahogany writing Desk, ditto dinner Tray, tea Trays, Caddie &c; Bath Stove, Grates, Fenders and fire Irons, four-post and other Bedsteads, in cotton and check Furniture; well seasoned feather and flock Beds, Blankets and Counterpanes; bed-side Carpets; dressing Tables and Glasses, oak dining and other Tables, oak Bureau; deal painted Bookcase, with Drawers; Rumford Roaster, complete; two kitchen Grates and kitchen Requisites in general, in Copper, Brass, Iron, Tin &c., Glass and Earthenware and various other Articles, which are expressed in Catalogues to be had at the White Hart Inn, Thrapston, Green Dragon, Higham Ferrers, at the Place of Sale; and of the Auctioneers, Irthlingborough.*

Thomas moved to Bramham in Yorkshire and in 1841 we see him there aged 76 as a "Clerk in Orders". Looking after him is a female servant called Ann Winterburn. Would it be a lonely, solitary decline into his grave? Not quite. On 26th September 1844, aged 79 he married 36 year old Ann. It seems to have been a happy marriage for Thomas, when he died some four years later, left an annuity of £50 as well as:

> *All my furniture plate linen china pictures wearing apparel and such of my books as she shall select and other household effects of which I shall die possessed unto my dear wife Ann.*

In 1818, at about the time that Thomas Brownrigg was leaving, the Government had set up a Select Committee which was asking every parish to make returns on what educational facilities were

available for the poor. The returns for Stanwick, Denford and Ringstead were signed by Charles Proby but it looks as if the information for the latter two parishes was produced by a curate called '**H. Packarde'** and countersigned by Charles as the vicar. This curate is not on the Church of England clergymen online database but we know that it was Harrison Packard. The return for Stanwick is interesting in that we see a little of Charles Proby's attitude. He observes

> *There are a few of the poor who cannot afford something towards the education of their children but they put them to the lace pillow as soon as they can use their fingers; and when strong enough the boys are employed in husbandry.*

The return for Ringstead reveals that there is a Sunday School, supported by voluntary contributions in which about 40 boys and girls are taught. There are also two day schools kept by women in which about 24 children are taught at their parents' expense. At Denford we see there is also a Sunday School and 'a lace school kept by a woman, the parents paying for the education of their children.' It is in the final column where the entry for Stanwick given above had been made and in this column the entry for Ringstead has a different tone.

> *The generality of the poor cannot afford the means of education for their children and would be glad to possess them.*

Harrison Packard(e) was not long in the parish and from May 12th 1818 until December 7th of the same year he conducted sixteen baptisms. It may be that after the resignation of Thomas Brownrigg a temporary curate had to be drafted in. He was the son of a Suffolk Rector and had been born in his father's parish of Middleton in 1783. He had gained his B.A. and M.A. at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Apart from the short stay at Ringstead he spent all his career in Suffolk, finally taking over the Rectorship of Fordley with Middleton and the Vicarage of Westleton, on his father's death in November 1819. There is a memorial in Holy Trinity Church, Middleton to his father and also to Harrison and his wife Esther who died just two months before him in 1860.

Thomas Martin Symonds replaced Harrison Packard as curate on the 7th June 1819. He followed a well-trodden path. He had been born in Bury St. Edmunds on 13th April 1796 and after school in his home town he went to St John's College, where he gained a B.A. in 1818 and an M.A. in 1819. He was ordained a deacon at Salisbury on June 6th1819 and was appointed the curate at Denford cum Ringstead in 1819 and the following year ordained as a priest. Without delving too deeply into his pedigree he had apparent links, as many of the Ringstead clergy did, with the Irish gentry. In fact the Carysfoot title was a late ennoblement of the Proby family to which the Vicar was closely related, who lived just down the Nene at Elton Hall. In 1822 Thomas collected, with the help of the churchwardens, the sum of £10 11s. 9d. in aid of the *Fund for the Relief of the Distressed Irish*.

As later reports indicate, Thomas would have found Ringstead an appealing place to serve his curacy. An advertisement for a cottage with distant views of Ringstead in the *Northampton Mercury* on 17th July 1819, enthuses:

> *To a Sportsman, this Situation is truly desirable, as the River abounds with Fish and the Country with Game; and as a Hunting Box it is particularly adapted, being within a convenient Distance of three or four Packs of Fox Hounds*.

Thomas went on to become the curate at Elton where he lodged for many years with Valentine Jelly and his family in Dial House. Valentine was a farmer and former miller. He had a daughter, Ann, who Thomas married on 23rd April 1840. After their marriage they moved into the Rectory, for the incumbent, Dr Fisher had been appointed to be Master of the Charterhouse, and from then on spent

little time in the Elton parish. It may seem unusual that Thomas remained a curate for over twenty years. Alan G. Clarke, who has written a detailed history of Elton gives a clear reason why he stayed so long. He tells us, that according to some villagers at the time, he was:

> *. . . less than adequate in his parish duties and more addicted to the pursuit of field sports than the well-being of his parishioners.*

Throughout the nineteenth century hunting, and to a lesser extent, fishing were criticised as cruel sports and in particular, the hunting clergyman was condemned and ridiculed. Writing just before the start of the century William Gilpin remembered:

> *. . . hearing a story of a clergyman who was not remarkable for neglecting, at least the outward part of his duty; but once unhappily forgot it through his love of hunting. He was eagerly engaged in a fox-chase, when the fox* ***took to earth****, as they call it: on which he cried out, "Gentlemen, I must leave you: This puts me in mind that I have a corpse to bury at four o'clock this evening; and I fear I shall be an hour too late."*

By 1865, when Anthony Trollope published his *Hunting Sketches* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the criticism of the "Hunting Parson" was getting more vociferous. Trollope defended the clergy from this constant condemnation of them indulging in almost any pastime believing that, "it has a very strong tendency to keep out of the Church that very class, the younger sons of country gentlemen, whom all Churchmen would wish to enter it". He adds, however:

> *But not the less is the general feeling very strong against the hunting parson and not the less will it remain so in spite of anything that I may say. Under these circumstances our friend the hunting parson usually rides as though he were more or less under a cloud. . . He is never natural in his self-talk as is any other man. He either flies at his own cloth at once, making some false apology for his presence, telling you that he is there just to see the hounds, and hinting to you his own knowledge that he has no business to ride after them; or else he drops his profession altogether, and speaks to you in a tone which makes you feel that you dare not speak to him about his parish. You can talk to the banker about his banking, the brewer about his brewing, the farmer about his barley, or the landlord about his land; but to a hunting parson of this latter class, you may not say a word about the church.*

Nevertheless, it is a pleasure to read Thomas's clear neat hand in the Registers and he officiated at some 73 baptisms, 12 marriages and 30 burials during his time in Ringstead and is very rarely replaced by a "locum".

We will see that Thomas Symonds was not the last Denford and Ringstead clergyman to enjoy the chase but by the end of the century when Oscar Wilde famously described fox-hunting as , "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable", the time of the hunting parson had passed, although there were a few who still rode to hounds until the 1960s.

On July 3rd1822 Charles Proby died. He was always a shadowy figure in the background and we do not know how much his presence was known in Ringstead. John Wade wrote, ”The Black Book or Corruption Unmasked” between 1820 and 1823 which was a popular book at the time. In it he listed the ways that the Establishment gave public monies to their friends, supporters and relatives. In the case of the Church of England he shows how charges such as “Surplice Fees” once intended for the poor, were now taken as part of a clergyman’s income. He also told about the illegal but continuing practice of the selling of preferment (putting someone in a living subject to the bishop’s approval) and railed against the pluralists who had a number of livings or paid posts at the same time. He adds:

We hardly need remark that, those who are in possession of the greater number and most valuable benefices are connected by marriage, politics, or in some other way with those who have the disposal of them. Indeed, it is impossible to peruse the list of dignitaries and highly beneficed clergymen, without remarking that most of them are "honourable lumber", who have been handed over to the Church, from inability to succeed in the more arduous professions of the law, the Army, or Navy.

John Wade then gives us a "Peep at the Pluralists" by listing all the clergymen with more than one living, usually with a poorly paid curate to do the work. Among them is Charles Proby whom he lists as having the following livings:

Waddeson, Stanwick, Ringstead with Denford, Slawston, Tachbrook and Twickenham.

He also adds that Charles is Canon of Windsor and Prebend of Lincoln.

We know, however, that Charles's life was not always an easy one and that a number of his children had predeceased him and that his faith would have been tested by his children's deaths. His infant son, Granville Leveson Proby, (his exact namesakes were 3rd and 4thEarls of Carysfoot) died on 3rd March 1811: on 12th November 1817 Charles, his second son, died in his seventeenth year; on 6th June 1818 his daughter Mary-Catherine died aged twenty; on 3rd October 1818 his daughter Susan Mary died aged twenty-three years and on 2ndFebruary 1821, his daughter Georgiana aged twenty-four also died at Ham Common. These deaths of his family in the prime of their lives, does make one wonder if there was a genetic problem, caused by the in-breeding of the aristocracy. Their effect, one young death after another, may have hastened his own end.

John Watson (c.1782 - 1851) VICAR 1822 - 1851

John Watson seems to have come from somewhat humbler roots than his predecessors. He had been born in Great Yarmouth and baptised there on 1stFebruary 1782. His patron was Thomas Burton who now lived in Great Yarmouth and it may be that the two men were linked by marriage. He was ordained as a stipendiary curate of Hemblington, a small village between Norwich and Yarmouth, on 9th July 1815. An Act had been brought in, in 1806, which allowed the Bishop to take one fifth of a non-resident incumbent's income to pay for a stipendiary curate to do the work of the parish in his absence. His annual stipend was fifty pounds. John would have been about thirty-two at this time so it may be that he had gained his Doctor of Divinity and other qualifications before this time, although he is only shown with this qualification when he is instituted, on 23rdAugust 1822, as vicar of Denford cum Ringstead. I have not yet found what he was doing in the intervening years. It is possible that he was the John Watson who married Ann Carr on 13thOctober 1808 in Great Yarmouth.

A few months after his appointment to Hemblington he was appointed as 'priest' of Acle some five miles to the east which had a:

Salary £60 & the surplice fees with the parsonage house and 6 acres of glebe land.

An advertisement in the Norfolk Chronicle shows that John was also, like many other clergymen, supplementing his income by taking in pupils to prepare them for public school but, in his case, it may be there was also instruction at a higher level, perhaps for university entrance:

Acle Parsonage 28th June 1821

The Vacation for the pupils under the tuition of
The Rev' Dr. WATSON will terminate the 22nd July
TERMS
Above 16 years of age 50 Guineas
Under do 40 do.
Entrance Two Guineas
Two Vacancies

As we have said, John then became the vicar of Denford-cum Ringstead in 1822. Thomas Symonds had vacated the curacy around the time of John Watson's arrival. He went on to become one of the domestic chaplains to the Countess of Carysfoot in 1828 and ten years later Rector of Broomswell in Suffolk and finally to Adwick-le-Street in Yorkshire. He gained this last appointment on the hunting field when he became friendly with the patron of the living, Earl Fitzwilliam, after Thomas had lent him his gloves on a cold day. Adwick le Street, north of Doncaster, was part of the Earl's Wentworth Estate. Thomas Symonds died on 23rd April 1859 aged sixty-four.

Thomas had been replaced as curate by **Benjamin Clay**. Benjamin was the second son of the Reverend Benjamin Clay, who was Rector of East Worlington in Devon. As was the almost invariable rule for Denford and Ringstead clergymen at that time he had gained his degree at St John's College, Cambridge. He was ordained as a deacon by the Bishop in Exeter Cathedral on Sunday 31st August 1817 and as a priest on 3rd September the following year. It is also worth noting that the Exeter Flying Post for 11thSeptember 1817 records that, 'Clay, Benjamin, jun., gent, East Worlington' had obtained a General Game Certificate for the year.

When he had moved to the Ringstead Vicarage we know that he kept at least one spaniel, almost certainly, as a gun dog. It is likely that his sister also lived with them. We know little about him except that at about eight o'clock one June evening in 1826 he, and his sister, decided to take the spaniel for a walk along the banks of the Nene. The dog went into the water, perhaps after ducks or moorhens and became entangled in the weeds. The story was reported almost verbatim across the local newspapers of the nation.

> *Mr. Clay fearing the animal would be drowned, requested his sister to go forward while he took off part of his clothes, and went into the river to get out the dog; she accordingly did so, but had not proceeded far before she heard a loud shriek, and in a few seconds she ascertained that her unfortunate brother (who was no swimmer) in attempting to reach the dog, had got out of his depth and sunk to the bottom. Several men were near the spot at the time; but the body was not got out for three quarters of an hour afterwards, when means were used to restore animation, but without success. The little dog, for whose sake the unfortunate gentleman thus lost his life, swam ashore without the assistance of anyone.*

Much of the story is told on a marble plaque in the Ringstead Church tower which adds:

> *And by the last act of his life gave painful proof of that kindness of heart, which had endeared him to all who knew him.*

Benjamin Clay was replaced temporarily by Thomas Woodcock Brown. Once again he had come via St John's College. His stay was brief and he went on to become vicar of Horninghold in Leicestershire. He remained in post there until his death at nearby Blaston on 24th October 1850, 'after a lingering illness borne with Christian resignation'.

It was **Charles William Chalklen** (1803 – 1846) who was Benjamin Clay's more permanent replacement. He had been born in Deptford, in 1803, and educated at St Paul's School in London. He gained an "Exhibition" of £100 for three years from the Mercers' Company who were the patrons of the school which enabled him to go to Clare College and gain his B.A. before 'migrating' to Trinity College for his Master's degree. He had been ordained as a deacon on 21st December 1826 and as a priest a year later.

His first appointment as a curate was at Higham Ferrers, on the day of his appointment as a deacon, and then as curate of Ringstead with Denford, (is the changed order of the villages significant?), on 11th August, a few months before his ordination as a priest.

Charles William Chalklen was a curate with literary aspirations and one wonders whether there was friendship and fellow feeling with the older Leonard Abington who was appointed Pastor at the local Particular Baptist Church just three years later. Both published poetry with biblical themes. Charles was a contributor to the *Westminster Review, Blackwood's Magazine and Christian Monthly Magazine.* He also had written *Babylon: A Poem* (1821), and *The Hebrew, A Sketch in the Nineteenth Century: with the Dream of Saint Kenya* which was self published just after Charles had moved to Ringstead. He had sent it to William Blackwood who had not acknowledged that he had received it. Charles wrote a letter about this to Blackwood, from Ringstead Vicarage which may show that his sister actually may have been the author, but it is unclear, and we must assume that it is his own work. Blackwood had asked a David Macbeth Moir to read it for him and perhaps it is as well that Charles did not see the review that the reader had sent the publisher. Moir wrote:

> *"The Hebrew" is characterised by that eloquence and redundant imagery so prominent in all the productions of your writer, but I am sorry to add deformed by that extravagance of tone and puerility of feeling which would to a dead certainty prevent it as a tale of human interest from ever taking hold on public attention. . . I regret much to see talent of such fine description absolutely murdered from a defect of taste - for certainly no living writer would select such subjects for embellishment as this clever but unfortunate Charles Chalklands [sic].*

He married Elizabeth Leman at Roystonh on 29th January 1831 and moved away to become the headmaster of Bletchingly Grammar School in Surrey . For whatever reason he left this post in 1832 to go to Louth and, on 21stJanuary 1834, once more became a curate, at Northborough, near Peterborough. This was to be his last appointment and the 1841 Census shows him there, aged 37 with his wife Eliza. There are also two pupils and a female servant.

It is almost certain that Charles would have known that John Clare, the "Ploughman Poet" was living at Northborough at this time. Clare had moved there from his beloved Helpston and this move had become a metaphor for his sense of a lost Eden. In 1827 Clare had published *The Shepherd's Calendar* and in 1835, a year after Charles Chalklen had arrived, Clare's *Rural Muse* collection came out. On 5th May 1837 Clare wrote from Northborough to his publisher, John Taylor, in London. He ended his brief letter:

> *The curate here draws well and has made many sketches from the poems God bless you*
>
> *Yours Ever*
>
> *John Clare*

We see that Charles Chalklen and John Clare were well acquainted and we can imagine them talking of poetry and the natural world. Charles was to see the last years of John Clare's freedom. His

mental illness was worsening and it was in 1837 that Clare entered High Beech in Epping. He "escaped" from Epping in 1841 and made the long, hard walk home but, later the same year, he was taken to the Northampton Asylum, his final home, where he died in 1864.

In early 1846 Charles went to London to see his stepmother who was dying. While there, he had a tumour removed from his head. The preface to his last book states:

> *The operation was not a dangerous one, and he was rapidly recovering from its effects; unfortunately, in his anxiety to prosecute some antiquarian researches at the British Museum, he left the house too soon: the day being damp, he took cold; erysipelas came on, and after a few days of intense suffering, on 28th of January he died.*

He was buried on 1st February in the churchyard of Islington St. Mary. He was forty-two.

The *Westminster Review* mourned his death and reported on the posthumous publishing of *Semiramis, an historical morality and other poems* in 1857 by W. Pickering. It has a mixture of the natural, the classical, the antiquarian and the religious. It was published in two volumes, the second being taken up by *Semiramis* a (probably unstageable) blank verse drama about an Assyrian Queen who, like King Arthur, had been mythologized into a fictional character. The first volume included some of his earlier poems and it may be surprising that a young clergyman should write an elegy to the notorious Lord Byron:

> ***BYRON'S DEATH.***
>
> *Many master minds with fragrant song*
> *Have chapleted thy fair front, England strong:*
> *Princely, lovely country; fear'd and loved;*
> *Full many of thy sinewy sons have moved*
>
> *The world with the firm lever of their verse.*
> *None though tower'd 'mong those Titan spirits,*
> *None 'mong those our sad land yet inherits,*
> *Mightier than he who filled this day a hearse.*

The book had been published under the patronage of the Duke of Rutland, Earl Fitzwilliam, the Bishop of Peterborough and many others. The *Westminster Review* also reported that Charles had left a ‘destitute widow’. I have tried to find out what happened to Eliza Chalklen but without success. *Semiramis* is still available as a new 'print on demand' book via the internet

We now will return to John Watson, the vicar, living in Denford under who these curates, based in Ringstead, worked. He was to remain the vicar until his death in 1851 and we know that he did live in the Denford vicarage and spent some time in the parishes. We also know, however, that he also lived elsewhere. He was appointed the vicar of Doddington in 1838 and, more significantly, the curate of St. Vedast in Foster Lane, Brompton in the district of Kensington.

These facts emerge from the death of his first wife, Ann, who died on 17th July 1832, aged forty-eight years. When we look at the *St Vedast alias Foster* Parish Burial Register we find that Ann was buried on July 20th in the Chancel. The service was conducted by John Howard Rice who was probably the husband of John's daughter, Mary Ann. All the other burials at that time, stretching from February 24th 1832 to 19th September 1833, were conducted by John Watson. There are only sixteen entries on the double page of the Register so the burials were an occasional occurrence. Ann died of cholera

which was a new disease to England and had swept through Europe from Asia. It arrived here first in Sunderland in 1831 and was probably brought to London on the colliery boats in 1831/32. *St Vedast alias Foster* was originally a Wren church standing only a few hundred yards north-east of St. Paul's Cathedral. This London cholera outbreak had a final death toll of 6,536 people. Cholera was a product of the terrible housing conditions but for many years was believed to be caused by 'miasmas' or foul air. It was only the work of John Snow, who established that it was spread by the pollution of the drinking water, and the building of an efficient sewerage system under Sir Joseph Bazalgette and others that finally eliminated the disease from Britain.

John Watson may also have been conducting some marriages there for he officiated at the marriage of his daughter Jacoba to George Horsley on November 1st of the same year as his wife's death. He was also a Lecturer at St. Mildred's in the Poultry, in the City of London, which meant that he would have been required to give some 'lectures' or sermons there.

Looking at the Registers for both Parishes we can see that in the first part of his incumbency he mainly or entirely lived away from Denford and Ringstead and his curate performed the duties of the two parishes. We know that in July 1832 his curate was **Edward Lawson Bowman**, born in Carlisle in about 1791. He had previously been at Cotterstock, north of Oundle and near Southwick Hall. He had also established the usual sideline of tutoring young men. He 'received into his House six Young Gentlemen, to educate in the usual Branches of Classical and Commercial Learning'.

Edward Bowman and his wife, Elizabeth had children before they moved to Ringstead but a daughter, Christiana, was born there in about 1834. We know that at this time that a solitary cello was used to accompany the singing in Ringstead. Could it have been one of Edward Bowman's relatives? In the first part of the century there would have been instrumental accompaniment, sometimes in a Gallery or at the back of the nave, rather than an organ, in most village churches. Thomas Hardy, in *Under the Greenwood Tree* gives a touching account of the last days of one such set of players being replaced by the organ. In many churches the old metrical psalm singing would have been the only music with sometimes the clerk reading out each line ("lining out") before it was sung. The Wesleyans introduced hymns and at first they were opposed by the Church of England as being too personal but they gradually took over and a flood of hymnals were published.

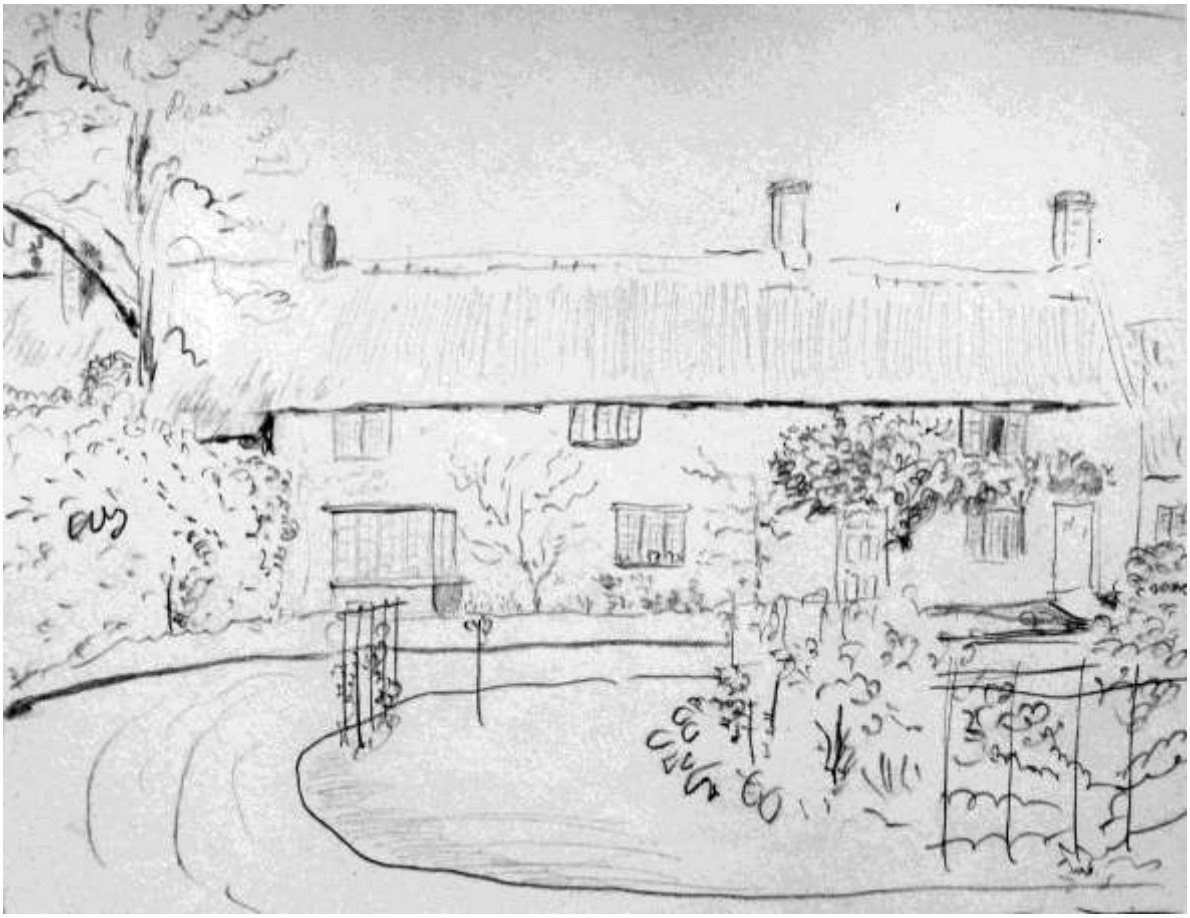
Edward Bowman moved on to become the Rector of Croglin near Carlisle where he had purchased the patronage. By 1837 he had opened a school at Seacombe in Cheshire, across the Mersey from Liverpool. On March 25th of that year he advertised in the Manchester Guardian that:

> *Young men are INSTRUCTED on the most approved systems in all the various branches of a classical and commercial education, liberally treated, so as to associate the comfort of home with scholastic pursuits, have the use of a good library, the advantage of sea bathing, and every attention paid to their morals and improvement. - Seacombe is seated on the Cheshire side of the Mersey, and is the nearest ferry from Liverpool, the steamers plying every half hour from the Prince's Dock Parade. - The situation cannot be surpassed for beauty and purity of air, and possesses every requisite the most desirable for a boarding-school establishment.*

Among the references that he quotes are the Duke of Dorset from Drayton House near Thrapston, the Rector of Woodford and John Watson.

The nineteenth century was a period of reform in the church. The tithe system was changing with a money rent replacing the old payment in kind and the Ringstead Enclosure largely separated the landowners from the villagers. Also the Nonconformists continued to attract many of the local

people away from the parish church. There was also an increasing outcry in the press about pluralism and the other uses of privilege within the Church of England. With the national secular certification of births deaths and marriages the church battled to keep its central position in the village. There is no sign of a curate in the 1841 and 1851 Ringstead Censuses and at some point Ringstead Vicarage is sold. In 1841 it appears to be lived in by Thomas Lee, the baker but this is not clear. These pressures could have forced John Watson back to his home parishes although there is no sign of him in either parish in 1841. The Parish Registers reveal to us, however that around May 1836 John, after having officiated at almost no baptisms, marriages and burials suddenly started performing at almost all of them until ill health intervened towards the end of his life.



Ringstead Vicarage June 21st 1847.

A rough sketch by George Clarke.
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office (GCPS Bk13 p20)

The state of affairs can be seen from an incident reported across England, and the Empire, which we have described in a previous biography (Book 1) but is worth repeating briefly here. Thomas Stains had fixed a wedding day for October 12th1842 when he was to marry Mary Roberts in Ringstead Parish Church. At this time only the church had a licence for weddings in the parish. On the morning of the wedding, John Watson sent for Thomas and finding, as his parents were Baptists, that he had not been christened, and even though Mary Roberts and her family were members of the church, he refused to marry the young couple. The report continues:

> *The disappointment was great; yet as the wedding-dinner was prepared and the invited guests assembled, they kept the day as pleasantly as they could, under the circumstances.*

The young man went to Dr. Watson to have his money returned; for it seems in that parish they demand the whole of the fees when the banns are put in. "Well," said the Doctor, "If Thomas Messer (the clerk) will give you his share (half-a-crown), then I will return you my part of the fees." The honest clerk instantly refunded his portion. Stains returns to the ***poor*** *parson, saying, "I am come for my money, Sir." "What!" says he, "did Messer give you up his?" "Yes Sir,* ***he*** *behaved like a gentleman." The poor Clerical Doctor, on examining his treasury, found it reduced to a solitary half-crown. This sum he gave to Stains, with a note written by him to the clerk, begging him to pay the remaining 3s. 6d. for him. But what now was to be done? The parties must be married somehow, and that legally too; their characters were irreproachable. The whole parish cried shame on the Vicar. The Dissenters in the village, with several staunch church people, immediately raised the 3l. [£3] requisite for licensing the Baptist Meeting at Ringstead as a place for marriage, which was instantly applied for and obtained; and on the expiration of the 21 days notice required by law, Thomas Stains and Mary Roberts will be the first couple married there.*

This led to the Particular Baptist Chapel being licensed for weddings.

The Wesleyan Methodists do not appear to have ever had a burial ground in the village. We see that John becomes exasperated with the Methodists who were not baptised in the church but wanted to be buried in the churchyard. We see his comments on infant deaths in the Burial Register:

7th July 1844 Elizabeth Rawson otp aged 2 years and upwards. So called by what is termed a Wesleyan naming but not an acknowledged baptism.

There are other shorter but similar entries which continue until 1849 when we know John's sight was failing.

At this time the son of the local "gentry" gave a helping hand. Thomas Wilkins was a landed proprietor who lived in Ringstead House. He was also a local Justice of the Peace. His son, **Thomas Hodsoll Wilkins** had been born in Wisbech in 1824 and gained his B.A. at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1846. He was ordained a priest in 1849 and became a curate at nearby Slipton in the same year. It was also at this time that he acted as the Ringstead curate and performed some 47 baptisms, 9 weddings and 18 burials in the few years before the arrival of the new vicar. To have the son of the local "gentry" as curate may have appealed to some parishioners but others would have been grateful that the confessional box had disappeared from the Anglican Church many years earlier.

After his brief stint in Ringstead he continued at Slipton and also became the Chaplain of Thrapston Union Workhouse from 1852 until 1860. At about this time his father moved away to Leamington and Thomas became an Anglican Chaplain at Damstadt in Germany from 1861 to 1867. He may have married there before he returned home to be with his widowed, eighty-four-year-old, father in Denbury in Devon. He is now a "clergyman without care of souls". The 1871 Census shows them there with other family and servants and it is here that Thomas junior is shown as married. I have not found any sign of his wife or children but there may be good reasons for this. Crockford's last has sight of him was at Ipplepen, near Newton Abbot but he died in Kensington in 1879.

Returning to John Watson, we know that he married his second wife, Martha, before 1851 as they are together in the Denford Vicarage then but so far I have not found her maiden name or the marriage. She was born in St Marylebone, Middlesex and is some fourteen years his junior. John is now sixty-eight and there is a note at the side of his entry in the Census form which tells us that he is blind. He died on the 23rdOctober 1851 in the old Denford Vicarage.

There is a marble plaque in the Ringstead Church to John and he is buried in Denford Churchyard beneath a slab outside the Chancel window.

Thomas Burton, the patron of the living had died in Great Yarmouth in 1841 and George Capron had taken over much of his former 'manor'. The connection between the Burtons and the parishes may have been severed, at least temporarily, and, while John Watson was still living, on 7th April 1849, the *Norwich Mercury* carried the following advertisement

CHURCH PREFERMENT
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

To be Sold by Private Contract

The next presentation to the united Vicarage of Denford and Ringstead in Northamptonshire. The present incumbent is in his 67th year. The Preferment consists of the Vicarial tithes of Ringstead committed at £145 per annum, a cottage and about 84 acres of land in Denford, Ringstead and Raunds let at £77 per annum. A railway runs through the parishes and there is a station at Ringstead.

The price and further particulars apply to Messrs Fishers Lucas and Steward, Great Yarmouth.

William de Pipe Belcher (1808 - 1891) Vicar 1852 - 1854

The new vicar was William de Pipe Belcher whose name may have attracted a few jokes in the *Swan* and the *Black Horse.* He had been born in 1808 in Ashbourne in Derbyshire, the son of a vicar. His father, Paul, had been to St John' College but William went to Magdalen Hall in Oxford on 20thJune 1827. He gained his B.A, in 1832 and became a deacon in 1833 in Lichfield Cathedral. In 1835 he was made a priest at Buckden Parish Church in Huntingdonshire (Buckden Palace was until 1842 the residence of the Bishop of Lincoln) and became a stipendiary curate (filling in for a non-resident vicar) at Croft in Leicestershire. We know that he enjoyed his fishing there because in June 1848 he charged six frame-knitters from nearby Earl Shilton with using nets to take fish in Croft Brook without the permission of the owner or of William who had the fishing rights. All were fined sums ranging from four shillings to two pounds.

He was appointed to Denford cum Ringstead on the 26th January 1852. One would have thought it would be a good place for William to enjoy his sport. He had also been married, on 5thMay 1852 to Sarah Emma Allsopp, a widow, at Newton Solney, not far from Burton-on Trent.

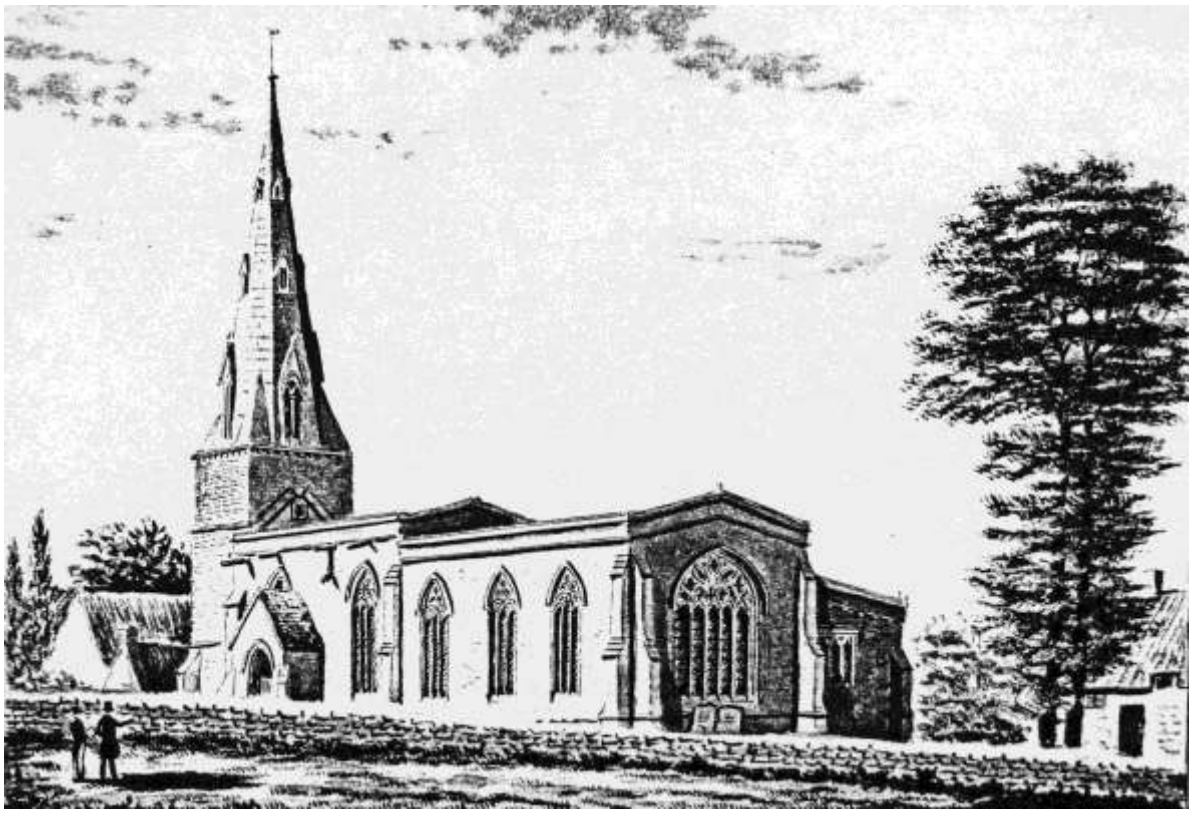
In August of that year the *Northampton Mercury* reported that:

> *The rector and parishioners of Croft, Leicestershire have presented the Rev. W. De Pipe Belcher, vicar of Denford and Ringstead, in this county, with a handsome memorial of their affection and esteem for him as their pastor over a period of fifteen years. The testimonial consists of an elegant silver inkstand, a chaste silver pocket communion service, a handsome silk gown and hood. We are informed that this is the second testimonial received by Mr. Belcher from the parishioners of Croft during his ministry among them.*

This does seem possibly a piece of news provided by William himself and if so, was he trying to impress a sceptical new congregation of his worth? Whatever the reason, his stay in Ringstead was short. He resigned and seems to have moved to South Darley in Derbyshire and then, in 1864 to the perpetual curacy of Thurlby in Lincolnshire. In the 1881 Census he was a widower living in 'The

Rookery' South Darley and was a 'clergyman without care of souls'. It looks as if he was set for a quiet retirement? Surprisingly, (and how regularly I use that word in these biographies), he married Harriett Susannah Wilton, nearly half his age, in 1882. William died in March 1891 and the Census a weeks later shows his widow living on independent means with her sisters in Cheltenham. With her is her six-year-old daughter, Pauline de Pipe Belcher, born in Darley Dale.

A curate named **J. G. Rogers** was the named minister at 10 baptisms, 9 marriages and 6 burials between 27th Match 1853 and 14th November 1854. This is almost certainly John Gurney Rogers who seems something of a mystery but whose life we can only briefly mention here. He had been born the son of a Royal Navy captain at Antron Lodge in the parish of Sithney near Helston in Cornwall and was baptised in St Allen's church on 24th May 1814. He married young, on 10th August 1831 to Frances Franklin Cove who was some three years his senior. John matriculated at Jesus College, Cambridge where he gained his B.A. in 1839 and was ordained a priest in 1841.



Ringstead Church from the south-east in 1847 by George Clarke

The church looks neat and tidy here but was soon said to be in an almost ruinous state

With the kind permission of Northamptonshire Record Office (Ref NAS 51)

By 1841 the couple are living in Dallington Vicarage in Sussex with two children and two servants. They had further children but by 1851 John is a visitor, staying with George Taylor, a farmer, and his family in Stanton in Suffolk, He is described as, "Clergyman. No care of souls". As we have seen, shortly after this he moved to the Ringstead area to act as the curate before moving to Oundle where he is lodging with a cabinet maker and upholsterer. Here, and in every subsequent Census, he is referred to a "Clergyman without care of souls". By 1871 he had moved to the Tything of Whistons near Worcester where he was in a lodging house, now with his thirty-five year-old unmarried daughter, Frances Georgiana. The 1881 Census shows the sixty-eight year old John at 17 Bridge

Street, Worcester, still with his daughter Frances. He was for a time the Chaplain of the Droitwich Union. He died at Worcester and was buried there on 3rd May 1886.

Meanwhile, his wife Frances had been an "Annuitant" with her younger children, in Chiswick in Middlesex in 1851. By 1881 she had moved to Hulme in Manchester where her married daughter, Esther Bolton and unmarried son, Charles, are shown living with her. Charles is an "Engine Fitter". She died at Chorlton-upon-Medlock in 1880.

After John and Frances parted what happened to the two of them? Did John wander, a poor clergyman, from place to place looking for work or did he have a good source of unearned income which enabled him to live his life without the necessity of work. Was Frances struggling on a small annuity, bringing up the younger children by herself or living a life of ease? We do know that by 1911 the eldest son John Antron Rogers was living in wealthy Lytham. He is now 69 years old and he describes himself as "No occupation Gentleman" and both his wife and unmarried daughter as "No occupation Lady". In 1881, aged thirty-nine he had put for his occupation "Retired shopkeeper". Obviously money had come through the generations at least to the eldest son and his wife.

What really happened must be left for someone else to tell. John Gurney Rogers, like the Baptist Minister John Collett, is one of those people who briefly left their mark on Ringstead but whose lives were largely lived elsewhere.

Alfred John Sandilands (c1803 -1862) Vicar 1854 - 1862

On 26thAugust 1854 Alfred John Sandilands was instituted as the new vicar of Denford-with-Ringstead. The newspaper notice states that it is on the presentment of Thomas Burton Esquire of Great Yarmouth but, as I have said, I am not sure if this is correct. Interestingly he was previously at St Mary's Church, Cross Green, South Darley, Derbyshire so he and William Belcher seem to have done something of a swap.

He had been a pupil at Westminster School and had then gone to Trinity College where he had gained his degree as a 'Ten Year Man', by the mere passage of time. He had been ordained and become a stipendiary curate at Haydon Bridge Chapel before moving on to a similar post at Bishopwearmouth in County Durham two years later. In the 1841 Census he is living alone in Bishopwearmouth with a female servant and a fourteen-year old boy as his man servant. In 1845 he moved to Cross Green, Darley in Derbyshire. He had spent his earlier career in mining areas and he had the confidence to take on the challenge of Denford and Ringstead. Alfred and his nephew Percival brought energy and a certain arrogance to the task.

He had married a widow, Ann Maria Leggatt, on 11thApril 1850 in Brighton and they came to Denford four years later. It is unclear how much they lived in the area because a London Directory of 1860 lists:

> *Sandilands, Rev. Alfred John, 17 Park square east, Regent's park, NW – Cross Green hall, Darley near Matlock – Woodford Cottage, Thrapstone.*

We can see that he did not live in the Denford vicarage. Nevertheless he set about his task and, in the case of Ringstead Church it was a large one. The Northampton Herald in March 1862 described the state to which it had been reduced:

The church is rapidly going to ruin. Two years since it could have been put in complete repair for about £200, but in two years hence it will require not less than £900 or £1000 to effect efficient reparation. It has been closed for some time, and the services are conducted at Denford, about one mile distant. The gates of the churchyard have had all the rails taken from them, the churchyard wall is falling into the street, and the yard itself is the resort of all the idle and mischievous urchins of the place who commit every act of violence and ill-usage on the sacred edifice. There is scarcely a whole pane of glass in the entire edifice, whilst in many places the window-frames have been taken out and flung into the interior of the church, so that the mischievously-disposed have not the least trouble in procuring admission into the body of the church and committing acts of sacrilege. The interior presents a most deplorable spectacle. The pavement is strewn with broken glass, remnants of the window-frames, stones, brickbats, dust &c. The stoves remain intact, but all the iron piping has gone. The dust-covered pulpit wears an air of utter desolation, and all round is exposed to the effects of wind and rain. The spire exhibits signs of decay, and the walls require repairs in many places.

It appears that there had been no services for some years in Ringstead Church and the village had been abandoned to the Nonconformists. This article may have been prompted by Alfred and he was aggressively trying to remedy the situation. He wrote a letter to the local newspaper and the controversy exploded onto the Letter Page of the *Northampton Mercury* as to whose fault the delay in the repairs was. First W.B Stopford replied in a letter to the *Mercury* on 10th May 1862 to which he added the correspondence between the vicar and Mr. Slater, the architect which he felt would explain the reason for the delay. These letters showed that Alfred was not prepared to let the repairs go ahead until he had seen all the plans and was happy with them.

Alfred then replied with a letter to the *Northampton Herald* on May 12th in which he states:

Sir, - As Mr. Stopford, of Drayton House, took upon himself last week to send you a copy of a letter addressed to me by Mr. Slater, the architect for the intended repairs of Ringstead Church, as well as my reply to that gentleman, I beg to enclose you my correspondence with the Bishop of Peterborough upon the subject, which will throw a different light upon the matter to that which Mr. Stopford wishes to convey in his letter to yourself of the 7th instant.

He then goes on to give the full text of his letters to the Bishop of Peterborough:

Woodford, Thrapston, April 1 1862

My Lord, - I beg to inform your lordship that, by the request of Mr. Stopford and Mr. Capron, Mr. Slater, the architect employed by them for the restoration of Ringstead Church met me and Mr. Allen, the churchwarden, yesterday, to submit his plans and to consult on the subject. After carefully examining them, as well as the specification, I felt greatly mortified and disappointed to find that so little was proposed to be done. Repairing the roof and taking down the chancel arch, together with reglazing the windows appear to be the chief part of the work, leaving the interior in its present melancholy, deplorable, and disgraceful state. I expressed to Mr. Slater my regret that he should be called upon to undertake such partial repairs, which would neither do credit to himself, nor the parties that employed him, and that I would certainly acquaint your lordship by the next post what was intended to be done, having promised you sixteen months ago that I would report from time to time what was done in the matter. I have requested Mr. Slater to forward to your lordship the pans and specification in the hope that your lordship's kind influence with Messrs. Capron and Stopford may alter their determination and cause them and their tenants to repair the church in a

more efficient and respectable manner. The specification goes no farther than to leave the church like the inside of a barn. There is not a pew fit to sit in, and the flagging throughout the church is broken to pieces. There are only two wrecks of pews in the chancel and the whole in a most dilapidated state. To make the church anything like decent, all the broken pews should be swept away, and replaced by open seats or benches. Had Messrs. Capron and Stopford followed out the plan recommended by Mr. Law the former architect they employed, I think great satisfaction would have been given, and the estimate he made would not be so much more in proportion as the present contractor, Mr. Parker, - claiming £570 for the work to be done. For myself, I would most willingly contribute handsomely if I could afford it. Having given largely to various improvements in Denford Church and the heavy expenses I have to encounter in building the house in at Denford preclude the possibility of my rendering any assistance to Ringstead Church. I should indeed hesitate to reinstate the fine organ I purchased expressly for the church until the interior was thoroughly restored. Hoping your lordship will excuse me expressing myself so strongly in the matter which I have so greatly at heart.

I have the honour to remain,
My Lord with the greatest respect,
Your Lordships' truly obliged servant,
ALFRED J. SANDILANDS.

In a second letter to the Bishop Alfred remarked tartly:

Considering Mr. Stopford receives a commuted tithe of nearly £400 a year in right of his wife, and possesses a large farm in the parish, and that Mr. Capron owns by far the greatest portion of the parish, I hope your lordship will acquiesce in my determination to oppose as far as lies in my power, anything being committed until the whole is finally arranged to be completed in a decent and becoming manner

W.B. Stopford once more replied in the *Northampton Mercury* on 20th May [mistakenly printed as March but corrected in the next issue]

Sir, - It is not my wish or intention to enter into a controversy in the newspapers respecting the lamentable state of Ringstead Church, but as the vicar, in his letter to the Bishop of the 3rdinst (published in the Herald last week), broadly insinuates that Mr. Capron, as the principal landowner in the parish, and I, as the proprietor of the great tithes, have not done as much as was our duty towards the restoration of the church, I hope that you will enclose the two letters I enclose. The first is from myself to Mr. Sandilands, dated April 1860, to which I have never received a reply: the second is a letter from me to the Archdeacon in answer to a private enquiry he had made to me as to the causes which had led to the present state of the church.

I may add that since my letter to Mr. Sandilands was written he has purchased the advowson of Ringstead and is, therefore, now patron of the living as well as the vicar.

I will not add one word to the contents of these letters, but will allow the public to form their own conclusions from them.

I remain, &c.,
W. B. STOPFORD.

The letter which he had written to Alfred was attached included the paragraph:

I will not conceal from you that we labour under very great disadvantages by the little support we receive from you. Your absence yesterday [with Mr. Capron] was most unfortunate. The parishioners imagine you are lukewarm in the matter; and the absence of any subscription on your part, however small in amount, produces a very bad effect, which we have hard work to combat in a parish composed principally of Dissenters.

I am, Rev. Sir.
W.B. STOPFORD.

The other letter was one to the Archdeacon telling him that they could not establish a Church Rate and so had tried a system of voluntary subscriptions but had only collected £120, and that the lowest estimate for repairs being £440, he and Mr. Capron had made up the shortfall in proportion to their property in the parish.

As an aside an advertisement in the Stamford Mercury for the 30th May 1860 tells of a forthcoming auction of the freehold, public houses, farms, arable and pasture lands, cottages and gardens in Denford, Thrapston and Raunds, caused by the death of Thomas Burton. Included in the sale is:

Lot 25. The Advowson or Perpetual Right of Presentation to the united Vicarage of Denford and Ringstead. This preferment consists of the Vicarial Tithes of Ringstead commuted to 145l. [£], and a Cottage and about 84 Acres of Land let for 210l. 15s. per annum. The present incumbent is in his 57th year.

Although not clear this may imply that the Vicarage house was in Ringstead. We can also infer that Edward then decided to build the new Rectory in Denford, [A Rector held the right to preferment himself and was entitled to all the tithes], and that Alfred and his family had been living at Woodford while it was being built. Unfortunately Alfred did not live to see either the renovation of Ringstead Church completed or the new Rectory (now the *Old Vicarage*) finished in 1863. He died suddenly at his home in Woodford on 22ndSeptember 1862. There is a memorial to him in the tower of Denford Church which quotes, 'the last words of his sermon spoken by him in this church twenty-six hours before his death'.

He that hath taken up the shroud and fought the good fight for a season, at the last day, when the books shall be opened, and the hearts of all men shall be known, the sword of his warfare shall be taken from him, and a crown of everlasting glory placed upon his head.

Alfred had married late (although it could have been his second marriage) and may have had no children of his own but his wife, Ann Marie had been the daughter of George Maximillian Bethune and had previously married Horatio Leggatt by whom she had had three sons and two daughters before his early death in 1838. Alfred left an estate of less than £3000 (a considerable amount of money) and among his bequests was the advowson for the parish to pass to one of his stepdaughters (probably Georgiana). The "vicarage" was offered in October 1862 with a value of £320 including the 'residence' which was obviously nearing completion.

There is one small mystery that may just be a result of not having the evidence available. In 1851 when Alfred was at South Darley with his wife Anna and daughter Georgiana there is also a twenty-nine year old "Housekeeper" called Jane L Watson who was born in Rothbury in Northumberland. In 1862 Jane, now living at Park Square in Middlesex, along with his brother, the Reverend Richard Samuel Butler Sandilands, were the Executors of his Will. They had some sort of disagreement over the wording of the bequests and Jane went to the Court of Chancery. I have not found her definitively in the next two Censuses but in 1881, aged a surprising 55, she is living at 65 Blackett Street in Newcastle upon Tyne and living "from her property and dividends". With her is her "half

sister", Georgiana Leggatt who is an "Annuitant", aged 52 and born in Crawley Sussex. Now, although there are some discrepancies, there are too many coincidences for it not to be the same two people. So who were the parents of Jane Louisa Watson? She is always spoken of as a spinster or unmarried so if this is true and Alfred was the father then she was probably illegitimate. Of course the description of Jane and Georgiana's relationship in the 1881 Census could be wrong and there may be other explanations.

Alfred came from a typical nineteenth century clergyman's family with links to the church and the landed gentry. His brother, George Percival Sandilands had died in 1836 and it was his son, who was the next incumbent under the patronage of Alfred's stepdaughter, Georgiana Leggatt.

Percival Richard Renorden Sandilands (1826 – 1890) Vicar 1863 - 1874

Percival Richard Renorden Sandilands was the eldest son of Alfred's brother. Like his uncle he seems to have been a formidable personality who achieved an amazing amount in his comparatively short stay in the joint parish.

He had attended Tonbridge School where he became head boy in 1843. He gained a Judd Exhibition Scholarship and was a Rustat. Exhibitioner at Jesus College, Cambridge. He was awarded a B.A. there in 1848 and an M.A. in 1851.

In 1849 he had been ordained as a deacon while, from 1848 to 1850 he had been an Assistant Master at Crewkerne Grammar School. He seems to have combined this work with his duties at the curate at Chaffcombe in Somerset from 1849 -50. He then moved on to become curate of nearby Seavington St. Mary from 1851-3 before becoming Classics Master at Cheltenham College, a post that he held for ten years.

It was probably the sudden death of his uncle, Alfred, that decided him to make a change from school teaching and to become the new vicar of Denford cum Ringstead. He had married Sophia Anne de Brett at Clifton in Gloucestershire on 3rdJuly 1851 where the service had been conducted by Alfred, whilst he was still the vicar of South Darley. The couple had a large family, mainly born while Percival was the Housemaster of Beaufort House in Cheltenham School.

They moved into the new Denford Vicarage and Percival began a period when the church and villages of Ringstead and Denford were transformed by his hard work. The Sandilands had a following wind for their work on the church. In 1839 Dr. John Mason Neal and Benjamin Webb had founded the *Camden* (later the *Ecclesiological) Society*. It had a journal on church architecture which promoted the returning of parish churches of a re-created medieval purity with the "Decorated Period" of Gothic Architecture being the ideal. Many new churches were built in this style and most parish churches were "restored". The old box pews, as at Ringstead, were ripped out and replaced with open pews facing the altar. Under the influence of the "High Church" Oxford Movement ritual and the altar became the focus of the church rather than the pulpit. Few churches were left untouched and then, and today, some rued the loss of much of the interior furnishings, but along with the improvements came renovation and the repair of the crumbling fabric.

Alfred would have lived to see the repair work begun. The chancel arch and part of the south wall and buttress of the chancel and north wall of the aisles were rebuilt. The tracery of the East and parts of the South windows were taken out, reset and partially restored. The roofs throughout the church were renewed with deal and were covered in lead. The clerestory windows were opened and

portions of the walls were restored and the parapet reset. Also drains were formed around the whole perimeter of the church.

Nevertheless, as Alfred had fought for, a second contract was taken out, for the full restoration of the church. The *Northampton Mercury* of 31st October 1863 listed what had been done:

> *The spire, which was in a very bad state, was taken down to the levels of the sills of the upper lights and rebuilt with a new vane executed by Mr. Potter of South Moulton-street. The tower walls were made good and underpinned and new floors of deal inserted. The septum walls of chancel and chantry, the internal stonework &c., was cleaned and restored, and the walls were replastered. The whole of the old pews and gallery were cleared away and the church has been re-seated with simple open seats of deal, the children being placed in the north chantry. The font has been replaced in its old position on a new step and the passages of the nave and aisles relaid with red and black Staffordshire tiles. There were remaining in the chancel in the chancel some of the old stall ends and fronts, these have been restored and replaced, and the new fronts &c., made to correspond with them, and of oak. The chancel has been paved with Minton's encaustic tiles in patterns. The pulpit is of stone and stands on the south-west side of the chancel arch: red stone is introduced in the shaft, angles and patterns in circles.*
>
> *The contracts for the whole of these works, including pulpit and chancel seats (the carving of which was executed by Mr. S. Poole, of London) were taken by Mr. Parker of Thrapston, and the whole of the restorations have been carried out by him from the designs of the architect, Mr. William Slater of 4, Carlton Chambers, Regent-street, London.*

It was not until October 1863 that the church was finally re-opened by Percival Sandilands at which time the Churchwarden's Minute Book indicates that the church had been closed for three years. The number of christenings and marriage ceremonies fell during those three years (burials cannot be deferred), followed by a large increase, especially in christenings of older children. Were the few ceremonies during this closure held in one of the porches?

Alfred had the last laugh, even if it was from the grave for, in the Churchwardens' Accounts we see that the initial cost of the renovations came to £1,500 and there is also notice of a £500 loan taken out on behalf of the Parishioners. It seems that the final bill was a little under £3000 instead of the £440 that W. B. Stopford originally envisaged. He had also given the new oak stalls in the Chancel as a gift to the Parish and the new pulpit was presented by a relation of Percival called French. Percival's uncle gave the Corona, font cover and service book. Percival also emphasised that the curtain, Communion Cloth, linen for the Holy Table, flagon and plate and a small harmonium were given by his friends and relatives.

The local landowners may have thought, with a sigh of relief that they had finished with this 'turbulent priest', but Percival first restored Denford Church in 1864 with a voluntary subscription of £1600 and then set his sights on educating the young people of the two parishes – and that was going to cost money!

Wooden notice in North Porch of Ringstead Church recording that a grant of £80 had been given for the reseating of the church in 1863.

It appears to be a standard notice with the local numbers inserted later. The old box pews had gone but the new open "free" pews were still "allocated", one suspects, along class lines.

Author's own photograph

We have detailed in a chapter on the schoolmasters, in Ringstead People, that Percival may have seemed to have a poor opinion of the Ringstead, 'labouring classes', but he was relentless in his pursuit of their moral and educational improvement by the provision of a 'National' (Church of England) School. In the story of the schoolmaster we told of the two reasons that Percival cited for the need for a school:

1 *The extreme ignorance and low moral tone of the population, particularly of the inhabitants of Ringstead.*

2 *The absence of any resident Gentry to exert a healthy influence on the lower orders.*

We can see this as a slur on the Ringstead working people but we can see now that it was also a criticism of 'Lord of the Manor' and landowners who were not resident.

He did not believe in the provision of a one education system for all and he continued to advertise for six pupils to be prepared for the public schools by him, aided by the **Reverend E. Kitson**, a 'Double Honour Man and Bell University Scholar'. Edward Bredin Blake Kitson was born in Malta on the 9th June 1842, the son of Ann Jane and the Reverend Edward Kitson. His father, a Royal Navy chaplain, had gone to Malta on *HMS Princess Charlotte* and had married there to Ann, on 30th March 1841. She was the daughter of Colonel Bredin and had been born in Portugal. After service abroad, his father had become the chaplain of the Royal Greenwich Hospital and Edward is with his parents in Greenwich in the 1851 and 1861 Censuses although by the latter one he was a student at Christ's College, Cambridge.

In August 1866 he was appointed to the Curacy of Denford-cum-Ringstead where he assisted Percival in the work of the parishes as well as his teaching. By 1871 he had left the post and had followed his father to become a "Chaplain to Her Majesty's Forces" based at the Herbert Hospital, Shooter's Hill, Kidbrooke and is living there with his unmarried sister Francis and his younger brother Thomas. This hospital was the first purpose-built to reflect the beliefs of Florence Nightingale (the architect was her nephew) with wards at right angles to a main corridor to maximise fresh air and daylight. Of course Florence still believed in the passage of diseases by miasmas or foul air. Edward was posted to Canada and on 4th November 1875 he married Katherine Ann Allison from St John's, New Brunswick. The wedding was at Halifax, Nova Scotia. The couple did not have any children and after returning home Edward worked first at Aldershot before becoming the vicar of Northaw near Potters Bar in Middlesex. He died, aged seventy-six in 1918.

After Edward Kitson had left, Percival advertised, in 1870, for just two pupils to be educated alongside his own sons

Nevertheless he was determined to give the children of working people in the parishes a proper education and he harangued and pleaded with all the local landowners so that, in spite of the costs borne by many of them in the recent renovation of the two churches, they subscribed again at a rate, according to their Poor Rate contributions. George Capron gave £50 and the Reverend G. Capron £75; W.B. Stopford also gave £50 and the Trustees of Ringstead Charity, £47; and so on down to Miss Beeby who gave £1. Percival was willing to practise what he preached and gave £70. It must also be remembered that George Capron gave the land on a lease so long that it was the same as freehold.

We will not go over the details of the building of the school which was covered in the previous book or the celebration of its opening in a chilly, if renovated, church on 13thNovember 1867. Percival Sandilands was a tireless worker who had given time and money to the erection of the school. He was also a stickler for discipline. At the Northampton Assizes, a Charles Blencowe was brought to court for 'embezzling suet' from him on 2nd January 1869. Charles was acquitted.

It was found that the children from Denford, especially the infants, tended to forego the slog up the hill and then down again into Ringstead when the weather was bad. Percival set about overseeing the building of an Infants School in Denford which opened in 1872.

Percival had also taken time to inspect Wellingborough Upper Grammar School in June 1868. The results were announced at a Prize Day and the class-stratified education that was envisaged was made clear by the speeches. First, the headmaster, the Reverend T. Auden, opened with a few remarks on the objects of the school:

> *To make the school as useful as it could be made for the town and neighbourhood – to make it, in fact, what the "Schools' Inquiry Blue Book" defined as a school of the 2nd class – that is, one which should afford a sound and useful education for the sons of professional men, farmers and upper trades-people.*

Percival then detailed his favourable 'examination' of the school and stated that:

> *He felt, in fact that this grammar school offered a complete solution of that problem about which so much had been said and written, and for which new schools had often been thought necessary, viz., the providing an education of immediate utility for boys intended soon to enter business or agriculture without, at the same time, neglecting the classics, which formed the best basis of education.*

All this work was done while Percival obviously continued with the sports of a country gentleman. The *Northampton Mercury* on the 8th January 1870 reported that:

> *We regret to hear that a very serious accident occurred on the 1st instant to the Rev. Percival Sandilands incumbent of the parishes of Denford cum Ringstead near Thrapston. It appeared that the rev. Gentleman was engaged in hunting, and that whilst following the hounds near the village of Coppingford, his horse slipped after a leap and fell over its rider, breaking his arm in two places, and inflicting injury upon the spinal column near its junction with the head. He was removed to a house nearby, and although for some time he was considered to be in a precarious condition, it is now hoped that, with due care, recovery will ensue.*

He had taken the baton from his Uncle and accelerated. During this time he had also taken on the post of Chaplain to the Thrapston Union Workhouse, a post that he held from 1866 until 1870. His work done, he moved on to become the vicar of Chudleigh Knighton in 1875. He still retained his interest in school and discipline. Besides being the perpetual curate at Chudleigh Knighton he ran a small private school at his house, called *Lyveden,* in Wolborough, Newton Abbot. He wrote from there to a friend on 26th September 1874:

> *I must not continue a member of the Northamptonshire Architectural Society though if I live and prosper three or four years longer I shall try to get back to the Diocese but away from the banks of the Nene.*

His school had, in 1881, fourteen boarders, aged between 9 and 13 years. There was a staff, besides Percival, of: Tutor, Matron, Cook and three maids. On 12th July 1883, the *Exeter Gazette* reported that Percival, acting in his capacity as a school manager, was charged with ill-treating a schoolboy, eight years old, who was causing a schoolmistress some trouble. He was found not guilty but the report felt that as a clergyman he should not lay himself “open the accusations of malicious parties”. It seems from the report that this is at the Chudleigh Church of England School rather than his own private school. For whatever reason, Percival’s school ran into financial difficulties and the *London Gazette* of March 4th listed him as those seeking a first meeting, “in the matter of liquidation by arrangement or composition” with his creditors under the 1869 Bankruptcy Act. Perhaps it was at this time that the right to preferment of the Denford and Ringstead joint vicarage was sold.

It seems that Percival’ private school had not prospered and he died on 6thOctober 1890 in Chudleigh Knighton. Whatever his faults the people of Ringstead and Denford had much to be grateful to him for his tireless work.

As an aside it is interesting to note, particularly in view of his successor’s son’s cricketing prowess that Percival and his wife had a son and daughter born at Denford besides older ones born elsewhere. The boy was Rupert Renorden Sandilands who played football for Old Westminsters and between the 5th March 1892 and 16th March 1896 also played five times for England at outside left, scoring three goals. Rupert, described as the "brilliant Old Westminster sprinter", who was on the staff of the Bank of England, played in a match against Wales on 18th March 1895. It was watched by 13,000 fans at Queen's Club in West Kensington. He scored a goal in the 74th minute which secured a draw for England. This was a historic match for it was the last time that England fielded an all amateur side. The Football Association had legalised professionalism in 1885 and now it began to take over the national side.

Rupert Renorden Sandilands

© Getty Images

Edward Sandford (1818 - 1879) Vicar 1874 - 1879

After the frantic time of the Sandilands the new incumbent put his energies into managing the schools and churches as they settle in. He was the son of the Reverend Humphrey Sandford and was born in 1818 in Shrewsbury, in the county of Shropshire where the family had been “since the Conquest”.

He had been educated at Shrewsbury School and St John's College, Cambridge, and had originally been intended for the legal profession. The 1841 Census finds him, aged 20 years old, as an “Attorney” lodging with a cabinet maker and his wife at 8 Lower Wharton Street in Clerkenwell. It appears that he was a solicitor of the Court of Chancery and an attorney of the Court of the Queen's

Bench but he decided that the legal profession was not for him and he became a student at St Bees Theological College. St Bees was a coastal village in Cumberland and the College was established in 1816 and took in its first students a year later. It was the first Theological College opened by the Church of England and was established by Bishop Law who needed clergymen for the exploding population of industrial Lancashire. What had been a ruined Abbey was repaired and rebuilt to become the college buildings with the local vicar acting as the Principal. Prior to this all curates had all been from Oxbridge or, occasionally, had been privately educated by a clergyman. St Bees was also a milestone in the introduction to the clergy of young men from the professional and middle classes rather than the gentry. The students lodged in private houses in the village and its intention was to "supply a good and economical education for candidates for Holy Orders". It concentrated on producing good parish priests rather than bishops. Soon other colleges, attached to universities, emerged and in 1895 St Bees closed.

Edward was ordained as a curate at Trinity Church, Coleham, Shrewsbury. In 1847 he moved to a tougher area when he became the curate of St John the Baptist, the parish church of Halifax. On 20th September 1848 he married Mary, the daughter of Joseph Armitage Esq. of Milnsbridge House, Huddersfield. He was briefly the vicar at the family living of Bicton but moved on to Elland, south of Halifax in 1853 as the perpetual curate and, later, Rector.

It was at Elland that he had his most obvious achievements of his career and perhaps where his heart seemed to remain. The church had many alterations, the Rectory House was built, Greetland Church erected, the National Schools enlarged and the cemetery consecrated. Elland was a small industrial town, originally based on the woollen cloth trade, but also with other small manufacturing industries, using first the canal and then the railway.

With middle age, Edward decided, in 1872, to move to the more comfortable parish of Grandborough, near Rugby, in Warwickshire but he did not settle and moved to Denford with Ringstead in July 1874. We know that Edward and his son Edward Armitage Sandford took and almost daily interest in the new school at Ringstead, checking on the children's progress and giving regular religious instruction. There are also records in the School Log Book of his wife and daughter visiting the school to inspect the needlework. The school helped to bring the whole of the vicar's families into the community.

His time in the joint parishes was not to be long for, after a period of very severe weather, he died in Denford Vicarage on 18thDecember 1879, aged 61 years. He was buried in the family vault in Elland churchyard. A muffled peal of bells was rung at Ringstead on the evening of his funeral.

There are no entries in the Ringstead Burial Register in the last six months of Edward's life but that does not mean that there was no work for the grave digger in the churchyard. This surprising fact is brought to light by an article in the *Northampton Mercury* of 9th August 1879 written, it seems, by the Ringstead Church Weathercock. From its lofty perch the Weathercock writes to the newspaper:

Ringstead Weathercock 2012
Authors own photograph

While taking an outlook on Tuesday evening, I saw what turned out to be a funeral procession, wending its way to a spot at the base of my support in God's Acre. It is not the first procession by many that I have witnessed, but, generally, I am accustomed to see an official in white, and to hear him repeat, for the consolation of the mourners, a form of service rich in comfort. This time I looked in vain for the white-robed comforter, and I ascertained that his services had not been requested, as the bereaved friends belonged to the uncompromising Baptist persuasion. The body, that of a young man of 21, and unbaptised, was lowered into the grave right beneath my eye, and though, unless my sight deceived me, I saw the resident Baptist minister of the village present, not a word was said. When I first saw this minister I concluded that he was going to hold a service, and yet he did not begin. I thought if he were the minister of a Gospel worthy of the name, surely this was the time for him to address some of its consolations to the sorrowing company around the grave, but, to my surprise, from first to last, he was as one dumb. I could not understand such conduct, and wondered why the silence was maintained. But after the mourners had departed a strange sort of explanation was given. I was told that the law would not allow any other than the comforter in white to dispense consolation to mourners within the sacred enclosure, though they call it God's Acre, and that the Baptist minister did not speak because the law would not let him. I was curious to know

> *what law! All I could ascertain was, that it was not the law of God, nor of His Gospel but some misconceived or misconstrued Parliamentary enactment. When I hear this I wished my voice was as good as that of the ancient cock in Scripture for then I would have administered a rebuke to Englishmen as telling as that which caused St. Peter to weep so bitterly. I had heard that civilisation had been making rapid strides of late, that the people had become very enlightened and that the Victorian era eclipsed all its predecessors, but such scenes as these, which I hear are of frequent occurrence in the country, make me doubt whether civilisation has advanced much since the stones which support me were first laid; and I have been wondering whether silent funeral are necessary to the safety of the church for, if they are, I shall soon wish that I could* spread my wings and fly away from a church needing such heartless safeguards as these.

This was a common practice and the weathercock would not have been disturbed by the tolling of the funeral knell for bells were also not allowed for Nonconformist burials in the churchyard. I do think, however that the burial would usually have been entered in the Register and it may be that Edward was ill and this was an oversight.

The name of the dead man was Thomas Ralph Mayes who was the son of Daniel and Charlotte Mayes. Thomas, a young shoemaker, had died at home on 4th August of Typhoid Fever. Typhoid was a major cause of death during the century. Public Health Acts of 1873 and 1875 had established Rural Sanitary Authorities which were based on the Poor Law Districts. In March 1890, the Medical Officer, Mr. L.B. Calcot reported:

> *Ringstead. – One death from typhoid fever. The wells are very shallow and liable to contamination by cesspits which should be abolished and re-constructed with earth closets. Pumps have been recommended to the dip wells and two wells were condemned and closed.*

As we would expect, Thomas Mayes does not appear in the Ringstead Baptisms Register but it may be something of a surprise to discover that, although buried in the churchyard, his name is not in the Burial Register. How many others went unrecorded? Of course the *Northampton Mercury* supported the Nonconformist cause and one wonders if the "Weathercock" was a staff reporter. The Baptist Burial Ground was still in use but there are very few burials recorded in the decades before its final closure and it may be that there were only a few reserved places left at this time.

Edward Armitage Sandford (c1852 - 1921) Vicar 1880 - 1885

Edward Armitage Sandford was probably the second son of Edward and Mary (née Armitage). It is difficult to be certain about the children of the lesser gentry without sight of the Parish Registers because, in the boys' cases, they are rarely at home after infancy. He was born in the Isle of Up Rossall, Bicton, near Shrewsbury in 1851 and by 1861 Edward, aged 9 and his younger brother, Henry Rossall Sandford, are at a small prep school in Lytham St Annes in Lancashire. Ten years later and Henry is 18 and at Clifton School, near York, and Edward is 19 and finishing his time at Shrewsbury School.

We know that Edward was a keen cricketer, although the two sets of statistics that I have found on the internet may not do him justice. He played in a two-day match for Shrewsbury School against Malvern College on the 27th and 28th June 1871. Edward was bowled for 6 in his first innings and 8 in his second. He bowled one over in Malvern's first innings and four overs for 3 runs in their second. He had an even greater honour later, in a three-day match, on the 6th – 8thJune 1878, for Elland, his father's parish, against the touring Australians. The Australians fielded 11 players and Elland 18, but

even so the home side could only muster 29 runs, to which total Edward, coming in sixteenth, added nothing, (it was a popular score). The Australian, Boyle, took seven wickets in two overs with Edward being part of a hat trick. In the match Boyle took 11 wickets but his colleague Spofforth took 16: figures that are unlikely to be repeated. In the second innings Edward scored one run out of 66, and he did not bowl in the match. The Australians only managed 90 and 85 although, with eighteen fielders, fours must have been difficult to come by. It would have been a great honour for Edward to play but perhaps he would have preferred the details to have disappeared by now.

After Shrewsbury School he had matriculated at Christchurch College, Oxford on the 14th October 1871, aged twenty. He gained his B.A. four years later and his M.A., in 1881, after his clerical career was well under way. He had been ordained by the Lord Bishop of Ripon in the Cathedral Church on 14th March 1876 as a deacon at Rastrick of *Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band* fame.

After his father's death in December 1879 Edward Armitage Sandford took over both the vicarage at Denford cum Ringstead. The 1885 Crockford Directory tells us that the living had 75 acres of glebe land and there was a gross income of £350 and a house. One of his earliest duties was to perform a double "fashionable marriage" for the Dearlove sisters in Ringstead Church, not something that was a regular occurrence. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 14th August 1880 described the scene:

> *The young ladies are both daughters of the late Mr. Joseph Dearlove, of Ringstead House. The family have so long resided in the village, and have been so generally respected and esteemed, that everyone was anxious to vie with each other in manifestations of goodwill and congratulations. Quite early in the morning arches of evergreens and flowers were erected over the gateways to Ringstead House and churchyard. . . .*
>
> *As the bridal party left the church, flowers were strewn in the path and quantities of rice thrown over them. After the wedding dejeuner, the newly-married couples went amid hearty demonstrations and the enlivening strains of the Ringstead band to the station, en route for Blackpool and Scarborough.*

It was during Edward Armitage Sandford's time that the Ringstead churchyard was declared full and unusable. There were some Ringstead people buried in Denford churchyard but there was an outcry and a new "secular" Cemetery was opened a little further out of the village. The first person to be buried was Thomas Stains on the 14th March 1881. Nearly forty years earlier he was the young man who had been refused a marriage ceremony because, as a Baptist, he had not been christened by the church. This was still a problem and Edward did not sign the Burial Register and "Unbaptized" was written in that column, seemingly by another, shaky, hand.

Edward married Mira Isabella Rodwell on January 3rd 1882, at High Laver in Essex, where her father was the Rector, and the couple settled in the Vicarage in Denford.

We saw in the chapter on schoolmasters in *Ringstead People* how both Edward and his father took a keen daily interest in Ringstead School. The times were changing and the schools also brought the vicar in greater contact with the children and the families of the village. On 9th March 1881, for example, he is part of an "entertainment" that the choir and church members gave in the schoolroom. There were songs by Edward and his sister as well as by the headmaster John Bannister, and his wife. He was also, not surprisingly, the captain of the new Ringstead Cricket Club and, in 1882, presided over their first annual meeting when John Bannister was presented with a "purse" of £8 3s. 6d. collected by the members of the club and friends, as "a small token of their esteem, and as an expression of their sympathy with him in the serious loss [of an eye] that he had sustained by an

accident in the cricket field on September 13th". The cricket pitch might be as dangerous as the hunting field but it was played with local people from many backgrounds.

There was still much animosity in the area between the Nonconformists and the Church of England which would erupt near the end of the century over the religious service in the school at the start of the day and we get a hint of it in a report of a meeting of the Bible Society which Edward attended on 20th May 1882.

> *The attendance, although not large, was larger than the previous year, and, considering the malevolent opposition the society had to encounter in the town and neighbourhood, it is satisfactory to find that it holds its own amidst such conflicting elements.*

Edward also had encouraged the local bellringers and had asked in 1884 that seven of them from Ringstead should be admitted into the *Raunds, Wellingborough and District Society of Church Bellringers.*

The Church of England has been described as the "Conservative Party at prayer", so it is no surprise to find Edward and many of the local clergymen at a banquet on 30th December 1885, given by the party to celebrate Lord Burghley's return to Parliament at the last election.

Edward Armitage Sandford was not to stay long in Denford and Ringstead but as patron of the living, appointed the Reverend William Oram Leadbitter to succeed him in January 1886. He had many years left to live and at first he seems to have taken a "sabbatical" for in 1891 he and Mira, his wife, at living at Avon Lodge in Malmesbury in Wiltshire. He became the curate of the parish in 1890 but describes himself in the Census as "late vicar": he is only thirty-nine years old.

He is recorded as the curate of Henbury in 1892 but by 1901 he is living in Bath and is now a clergyman with two female servants to look after him. His wife, meanwhile, is a visitor living on her own means at No. 1 Marlborough Place in Sidmouth. It may be she was "taking the cure" for in 1909 she dies and in 1911 Edward is at Pembroke House, 18 Hallam Road, Clevedon in Somerset. It appears that he remarried to Margaret C Teuton (or Teulon) in 1913 at Long Ashton in Somerset and it was there that he died in 1921, aged sixty-nine.

William Oram Leadbitter (1861 - 1920) Vicar 1886 - 1894

William Leadbitter came from a very different background than all the previous curates and vicars of the joint parishes and as a result we find him with his parents through his childhood years. He was born a month before the 1861 Census, the son of George Leadbitter and his wife, Margaret. George is a "house and commission agent" aged twenty-four and the family are living at 7 Pearson's Yard in Newcastle upon Tyne. Lodging with them is Isaac Patterson, aged eighteen, who is a Joiner and Cabinet-maker. Around them is a mixture of craftsmen and labourers, a number born in Ireland.

By 1871, George is an accountant living with Margaret and their three children at West Kyo in County Durham. It appears that his first wife, Margaret, died in 1863 and he married Mary McGuire in 1864 so she is William's stepmother. Another ten years and George is still an accountant, living next door to the Miners Arms in Kylance Head in Tanfield. Most of his neighbours are coalminers. All the couple's children seem to have been encouraged to look to the professions for work. William is not at home but his brother, James, at sixteen, is a law student and we know that thirteen-year-old George goes on to become a teacher.

I have not been able to find William in the 1881 Census he was almost certainly at University College, Durham, studying for his degree. On 6th June 1885 he was ordained as a deacon at Peterborough Cathedral, and, at the same ceremony, as a licensed curate at St Marks in Peterborough.

Confusingly, he was already acting as a curate in Finedon on 16thNovember 1884. We know this because he had been preaching at Islip and, on his way back to Finedon, disaster struck. The *Northampton Mercury* reported that he:

> *. . . returned home in a pony and trap, in company with Mr. W. Turner, who was driving. On ascending the hill near Finedon Poplars they were run into with great force by a trap, containing about half a dozen persons, coming in an opposite direction. Both Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Turner were very violently thrown out of the trap, Mr. Leadbitter being injured on the head and various parts of the body. Mr. Turner was injured in the arm. The shaft of the trap was broken off and the harness damaged, but the pony was apparently unhurt. The pony and trap belonged to Mr. Thomas Leach of the Bell Inn. The occupants of the other trap, we understand hailed from Woodford and were returning home. Several of them were thrown out, and one, a woman complained of being hurt.*

The report clearly shows who it considered was at fault and where one's sympathies should lie.

In January 1886 he became the Vicar of Denford and Ringstead with Edward Armitage Sandford still the patron of the living. While at Finedon he had obviously noticed Lillian Gertrude, the young daughter of the vicar, George Paul for they were married in 1887

William was a different kind of minister than the rather patrician ones that had preceded him. He was not connected to the landed gentry but that does not mean that he was always welcomed by all the people of the two villages.

We see hints of William's different approach in the brief articles that appeared in the *Northampton Mercury.* On 19thJune 1887 there was a flower service and "an appropriate sermon" was preached by William to the children. In January of the following year there was a "Grand Concert" featuring Ringstead Brass band and comic and sentimental songs. William "presided" over the show and the proceeds of "over £2" were to be devoted to "the purchase of a magic lantern [early type of projector] for the new Working-men's Guild". A little over a year later, the *Mercury* reported that in Denford:

> *The Rev. W. O. Leadbitter has this week opened a new reading-room at the Vicarage free of charge, for men for each Wednesday evening. Newspapers and games will be provided, and smoking will be allowed.*

At the same time, however, he began to upset some of the middle classes on whom his position in the community still largely depended. He accused Mr. Bird, the Medical Officer of the Thrapston Union of neglecting his duty. His complaint was heard by the Board of Guardians and dismissed. William was not cowed and wrote again to the Board of Guardians giving a detailed account of how Susan Gunn, who Mr. Bird claimed to have visited, had not in fact been visited. He also claimed:

> *. . . Indeed, so poor has been the treatment which the woman [Susan Gunn] has received that she has been compelled to go as an out-patient to the Northampton General Infirmary. She has been an out-patient since April 7th and although she has a certificate from the Infirmary doctor to say that she is unable to work, she is, by the petty spite of the Union doctor, prevented from receiving the extra sick allowance granted by the Guardians.*

The Board agreed that William did not understand the duties of a medical officer and Mr Peach believed that Susan Gunn was a “bad woman” to let Mr. Leadbitter act as he had. We need not judge who was right or wrong but we can see that William was trying to defend his poor parishioners even if it brought him in conflict with the authorities.

Throughout the century there was a clear identification of the Church of England with the Tory Party and the Nonconformists with the Whigs and, later, the Independent Labour Party. Affluence, however, was beginning to blur the edges and this could lead to increased animosity. J. R. Wilkinson, preaching at the opening of the new Ringstead Baptist Sunday Schools in 1887, stated:

> *It is a matter of regret that the descendants of many wealthy Nonconformists left them because society gives them the cold shoulder unless they attend church. We respect persons who honestly differ from us, but we despise those who have not the manliness to remain members of the humble Congregational or Baptist churches, and become Churchmen as a short cut to gentility.*

This was summed up by the saying that, "a carriage never goes to a meeting house for three generations".

It was at this time, in June 1889, that William’s brother, George, was drowned. He had become an assistant master at Exmouth House in Devonport. With some friend he had hired a boat and gone to Barnpool. George had dived off the boat and swum towards the shore. Suddenly he had disappeared and after a frantic search his body was found face downwards in six feet of water. It was assumed by the way he was curled up that he had been seized with a sudden attack of cramp.

We saw in an earlier episode that William had hired a horse and trap to get around his work. It may be that he also used the bicycle to get around his parishes. Perhaps we can deduce this from an article that was published in the *Northampton Mercury* which listed new inventions that had been recently patented. Included in the list was:

> *An adjustable revolving bicycle jack and stand – W.O. Leadbitter, Denford Vicarage, Thrapston, Northampton.*

The 1891 Census finds William and Lillian and their young family at the Denford Vicarage. With them is a daughter Margaret aged two and a baby son (later named Geoffrey) just one day old. There is, however, plenty of help at hand for Lillian’s sister is staying with them and there is also a nurse and three female servants. A sixteen-year-old young man is also there who is a “cow boy” so presumably William kept some cows on the glebe land.

It was in April 1892 that William received his worst publicity when under a heading, “A Perverse Parson”, the *Mercury* published the following brief report.

> *The annual vestry meeting was held in the Schoolroom on Monday morning. The usual time was at five in the afternoon, but at the last vestry meeting a resolution was passed unanimously that seven o’clock in the evening would be a more favourable time for working men to attend. The chairman was instructed to notify the same to the vicar, the Rev. W.O. Leadbitter, who instead of complying with the very reasonable wish of the vestry, called the meeting at ten in the morning. When questioned as to his proceeding his replay was that he had a perfect right to call it when he thought well, and refused to put it to the meeting for an adjournment. Ultimately the proposer, the Rev. R.A. Selby put it to the meeting himself and it*

was carried by about 40 to 6. The 40 then left the meeting, the vicar and a certain local preacher giving them a hearty clap of the hands.

When we consider William's defence of a poor woman his behaviour here seems a little odd. If we discover that the Reverend Selby was the local Baptist Minister we realize that this was part of a sectarian power struggle centred particularly on the school. There had also been anger at the way that the charity allotments had been run and a Vestry Meeting three years earlier, in 1889, had been the potential focus of this dissatisfaction. There had been an unusually large attendance but the meeting had passed off without incident. Nevertheless, whatever the history, William does not seem to have handled the situation well.

We see through the second half of the nineteenth century that the Vestry and Parish Meetings became a place where the increasing franchise coupled with the larger number of duties being delegated to it caused constant friction. The parish constables are still elected annually but we also see discussion about the state of the footpaths, the lighting of the streets and the collection of sewage and the burial of the dead. The vicar still often chaired the meetings but others also took this role and in 1894 the Local Government Act created new, secular, Parish Councils take over most of these duties.

In 1890 William had proposed, it appears unsuccessfully, that the Parish did not adopt the 1833 Lighting Act. Nevertheless the new Parish Council adopted the Lighting and Watching Act on 24th January 1895. We may look at the Vestry meetings at another time but it is enough to say here that we see an increasingly political and secularised view on parish matters as the new electors began to exert their influence.

William had another difficult situation to deal with at Ringstead School when the long serving John Bannister was replaced by Albert Crew as headmaster. The first chaotic five months of 1893 have been detailed in the story of the schoolmasters in *Ringstead People* but it involved William in meetings and letter writing and much local animosity

In the following year William Oram Leadbitter moved on from Ringstead. The report in the *Mercury* of his leaving shows a rather patronising attitude to him but also reveals a certain respect:

A good many people in East and North Northamptonshire will be pleased to hear of the preferment of the Rev. W.O. Leadbitter, vicar of Denford cum Ringstead to the important parish of St. Luke's, Leicester. Whilst at Finedon as curate (where he married a daughter of the Rev. G.W. Paul and sister of Mr. Herbert Paul, M.P.), he gained many friends, and in the quiet Denford district he was highly esteemed for his energetic work for his Church, although his zeal in that direction has sometimes brought him into collision with a section of the parishioners. A good preacher and an energetic worker, his proper sphere is in a town parish, where there is room for his energies; and I shall expect to hear a good report of his labours in Leicester.

That many people in Denford and Ringstead had a respect for William, and that he had an affection for them can be seen by the fact that still, in 1900, he came back to preach at the harvest festival service. Also there is a grave in Denford Churchyard for William's father, George who died on 29th September 1897 and perhaps had come to stay with him in his old age. The grave also remembers his brother George who was drowned in 1889.

William remained as vicar of St Luke's before, in 1906, he became the vicar of West Walton, north of Wisbech in the Norfolk fens. His daughter Margaret married an important Hebrew scholar called

Alfred Guillaume. His son, Geoffrey was killed at Gaza in the First World War and is commemorated on the war memorial there. William died a few years later on 2nd June 1920. He left £1946 12s. 7d. to his widow, Lilian.

Andrew Cavendish Neely (1860 - 1937) Vicar 1894 - 1898

Andrew Cavendish Neely who became the vicar after William was once again someone whose roots led back to the Anglo-Irish landed gentry. His father, also Andrew, had been born in Ireland in 1809. He married late and Andrew was his fourth child. Andrew senior had become the vicar of Ashton in Northamptonshire in 1853 but before that had run, with his brother, Lisburn Academy, a private school in the north of Ireland.

All the children were born in Ashton and Andrew Cavendish Neely was christened there on 14th October 1860 and spent his early childhood at the Rectory. The 1881 Census records him, aged 20, at the Rectory but notes that he is "an undergraduate – was Oxford". It seems that he transferred to London for when he is ordained as a deacon in December 1883 it states that he has come from London University. He became a curate of Market Harborough (1883-4) and then St Saviour, Leicester (1884-6). He was appointed his father's curate at Ashton from 1887 to 1894, possibly as he was getting too old to run his parish by himself, and combined this with being curate-in-chief with Hartwell from 1891 to 1893.

It was in November 1894 that he was appointed the vicar of Denford cum Ringstead, now under the patronage of Mr. S. G. Stopford-Sackville. His father came to live with him in at Denford when he resigned as vicar of Ashton in 1895. It seems likely that his two older, spinster sisters, Agnes and Julia, also came to stay with Andrew for the 1901 Census has them with him after he had moved on to Islip.

The vicar kept up the visiting and management of the Ringstead and Denford Schools. On July 23rd 1897 Andrew commented unfavourably on the work of Miss Standen and Miss March, the two assistant mistresses which seemed to lead to both leaving the school within the month. On March 31st 1898, he wrote in a letter to Mr Capron at Southwick Hall, mainly trying to get a subscription towards oak benches and book desks for the choirboys in the Chancel, to harmonize with the men's seats at a cost of £7 12s 0d. He also wrote:

> *I also hope the school may be maintained as Voluntary School. I hear, however, that the New Code is likely to make the carrying on of Voluntary Schools more difficult than ever.*

Those last four words emphasise the extra workload, as well as opportunities that the schools placed on the vicars and sometimes the strain showed. How did the Vicars cope with the two churches' services each Sunday? A Preachers' Book has survived which notes the services (and texts) as well as the collection totals from 1886 until 1907. We see that the general pattern seems to have been:

> *10.30 am Matins and sermon*
> *6.00 pm Evensong and sermon*
>
> ***and the following week**:*
>
> *8.00 am Holy Communion*
> *2.30 pm Evensong and sermon*

We cannot be sure but it may be that the reason for this fortnightly pattern was that the reverse pattern was happening in Denford Church, allowing the Vicar to be at all the four services. There were some guest preachers and other variations and Andrew Neely also introduced a Litany on Friday mornings.

Andrew Neely's time at Denford and Ringstead was not long but the independent shoemakers of the area seem to have made a deep impression on him that he carried with him for the rest of his life. In 1929 the *Northampton County Magazine* published a poem written by him about a supposed meeting in a railway carriage and a shoemaker's "shop" between an undercover reporter and a Ringstead shoemaker. It is set in 1896 but it is not clear exactly when the poem was written:

> *Of course you've heard of Ringstead in the valley of the Nene?*
> *Well that's the place I come from, where nearly all the men*
> *Their wives and boys and girls as well, are employed in making shoes,*
> *Yes! I thought you'd know about it; most folks do, but they confuse*
> *Our work with other sorts, you know, that's done in our towns*
> *Like Leicester and Northampton where they call us rustic "clowns".*
> *Those folks can't make shoes sir – not as I want to boast*
> *But they know no more of shoe work than they know the coast*
> *Of the South Pacific Ocean or of China or Japan;*
> *They can't make shoes from start to finish; us chaps at Ringstead can!*
> Then, later, the man goes to the workshop where the shoemaker tells him*:*
> *"Hard work?" Why, yes, of course it is. Just try to pull this thread.*
> *Can't manage it? I thought not. Try something else instead.*
> *Hammer this bit of leather, on this iron, on your knee,*
> *It don't hurt me a blessed bit – but you just try and see!*
> *"Don't want much of that" you say? Ah! You haven't learnt the trick,*
> *I'll tell you about it sometime. Can't learn it all so quick.*
> *You're right, it is hard work, sir and more than that, it's Art*
> *To do it all yourself like, and fit in every part.*
> *The missus sews the tops, of course, but then that's not so tough,*
> *But if you had a day at that, you'd say you'd had enough.*

These extracts show that Andrew Neely had much more respectful and sympathetic attitude to the working people of Ringstead that that shown by most of his predecessors, even those who worked hard to improve their parishioners' lot. In 1898 Andrew moved downstream to Islip as Rector, where his father died, and in 1902 he married Edith Mary, Canon Hodgson's daughter, at nearby Aldwincle. He became the organising secretary for the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospe*l in the archdeaconry of Oakham and then Northampton. He moved on to become rector of Milton Malsor in 1904 and Rural Dean of Preston in Northamptonshire in 1910 before retiring to Eastbourne, where he died in 1937.

Reverend Neely (top right) and Mrs Neely (middle of 2nd row with large white collar).

Taken from photograph of Milton Malsor Church Choir 1916.
With the kind permission of Milton Malsor Historical Society (www.miltonmalsorhistory.org,uk).

Charles William Cotes (1861 – 1900) Vicar 1898 - 1900

Charles William Cotes had been born in Highworth in Wiltshire. He was the eldest son of a Solicitor, also Charles, and his wife Lucy. His father died when Charles junior was still a small child. He was sent to Abingdon School and then on to Pembroke College in Oxford.

It seems that there was a strong Australian connection for, on the 23rd July 1876, his mother had remarried, to Joseph Guillaume, who was from the department of the "Honourable Chief Secretary, Melbourne, Victoria. The wedding notice also discloses that Lucy was the sister of the late Bishop of Grafton and Armidale in Australia. This brother was called William Collinson Sawyer who had become the first Bishop of this new diocese where he arrived in Grafton, after many months of travel on 13th March 1868. Two days later and, perhaps significantly, he and one of his sons were drowned when his boat was upset on the Clarence River on Sunday 15th March 1868.

With this Australian connection it is no surprise that after being ordained first as a deacon and then as a priest by the Bishop of Llandaff and then serving his curacy at nearby Roath that he too travelled to Australia and became the curate at Christ Church in the South Yarra diocese of Melbourne. In 1891 he moved on to New Zealand where he was the incumbent at St Mary Mornington with Green Island (the parish was split soon after his arrival) and finally became vicar of Wakatipu from 1894 to 1896. It was while he was in New Zealand that he married Brenda Marian Traill on 5th April 1894 at the Holy Innocents Church in Dunedin.

Brenda was the daughter of John Traill who had been born in the Orkneys, son of a local Laird He was a civil engineer with the Admiralty and Brenda had been born in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). In 1891 she was living with her parents and siblings in Glamorgan in Wales but there were Traill families in New Zealand including three of her uncles who had set up businesses there but were also well known

local naturalists. Charles the eldest had died in 1891 but his two half brothers, Walter and Arthur lived well into the Twentieth Century. It seem s likely that soon after the Census that Brenda travelled out to visit them, perhaps with others of her family.

Charles seems to have had little home life as a child, being either at boarding school or staying with his widowed aunt and her elderly spinster sister at Purton, near Wootton Bassett. This lack of a home base may have given him a restlessness and it was perhaps this trait, or possibly illness, that brought the couple back to England in July 1897.

In 1898 he became the curate at Wellingborough Parish Church and a year later was offered the living at Denford cum Ringstead by the current patron, the local M.P., Mr Stopford-Sackville. For some reason he fell out with his church wardens so that they resigned although they still continued to attend the services. He seems to have been in poor health and was in the habit of sitting up very late at night. The *Evening Telegraph* continued with what happened on that night of Saturday 3rd November 1900 and the following morning. His widow, Brenda, gave evidence at the inquest held at the *Cock Inn* in Denford.

> *On Sunday morning she saw deceased about two o'clock. He came up to the bedroom and he said it was a nice fire she had. He came back in a quarter of an hour and witness asked if he was coming to bed. He replied, "Yes, in a minute or two," and then went down again, and witness went to sleep. She missed him at seven, and as he had been to bed she went to see if he was in the study, but she did not find him there. Next she sent the maid to the church, and the answer that she brought back was that he was not there. Witness then sent the maid to the sexton, whilst the girl also found the boat was not in the boathouse. Witness saw their boat down the river empty. The man Groom went down the river and found the boat and oars. Deceased had not been well for twelve months, but she did not know that he was depressed at all. He never threatened to commit suicide, and she knew no reason why he should. He was in no financial difficulties. Deceased was in the habit of sitting up late, and often used to fall asleep on the sofa and come to bed when he woke at two or three o'clock in the morning. It was no unusual thing for him not to come to bed till two. It was not usual for him to go out in the boat at that time in the morning. Deceased was a very good swimmer. He had fainting fits lately and nearly fainted in church once or twice.*

Although his body was not located at first, Groom confirmed that he later found William face down in the river, just over the side of the boat. Dr. J. W. Gainer of Thrapston stated that he knew that William had a weak heart.

The jury returned an open verdict of "Found Drowned" but it would seem likely that William was struggling with depression and had committed suicide. He was thirty-nine years old. He was remembered in the *Northampton Mercury* that he had become:

> *. . . a warm favourite for his singular gentleness of disposition, transparent consistency, and devotion to his sacred office and there i9s not one of his parishioners of either place who had other than a good word to say of him. Always of delicate health the work of looking after two villages was rather too much for him and probably told upon his weakened constitution.*

There was a large procession at William's funeral at Denford on Monday 5th November 1900 led by the St. John Ambulance Corps and the local clergymen, but there is no gravestone or memorial in either church or churchyard. Is that because of his suspected suicide? His widow, Brenda, was staying in Newcastle on Tyne where her brother Ronald lived. She moved on to Wales, where she had grown up, so perhaps William is remembered elsewhere.

He was replaced by Francis N. Pickford who had also been in the Australian clergy before returning home but our century is up and we must leave the Anglican curates and vicars of Denford and Ringstead. As Percival Sandilands pointed out, there was not a resident "gentry" and for most Ringstead people the vicar or curate would have been almost their only contact with University graduates or the old aristocracy. For much of the century the vicar and his family would have looked outside the village for their social lives and spent much of their time away from the area. By the end of the century this was changing and the vicar and his family took an increasing part in village events. This was partly the changing times but the school had also been a catalyst in this greater integration in the community. It could have been a lonely life sometimes, of the village but yet set apart from it by position and education, and some of the clergy, like William Cotes, may have found this hard to cope with.

The local vicars and curates would have buried a number of men, women and children claimed by the waters of the Nene and two of their own also drowned in those quiet, dangerous waters.

Some of the London newspapers confused the death many years earlier of the former curate Benjamin Clay and thought it referred to the former vicar so that Andrew Neely found himself reported dead. He commented that this was the second time in the last few years, (the first perhaps being his father).

Throughout these stories of the local clergymen we have seen an increasing undercurrent of animosity between the vicars and some sections of the village community, especially the Non-conformists. We might believe that Ringstead was a particularly rough-and-ready place which, as Percival Sandilands remarked, had no resident landed gentry to set a proper example. However, recent research by Robert James Lee, focussed on Norfolk, has shown that the problems of Ringstead were mild compared to many rural places elsewhere. Henrietta Batson, the wife of a Berkshire vicar, wrote both novels and gardening and genealogical books. In an article in 1892 in the magazine, *Nineteenth Century,* she stated:

> *Our labourer hates his employer, he hates his squire, but above all he hates his parson. They are all richer than he is, and he has been told by social agitators that they have taken the money and lands which should be his . . . He hates them but he conceals his hatred as well as he can, so that he may still benefit from their kindness.*

Others saw the animosity arising, not from misplaced envy, but from the part the parson played in the landowners' and politicians' attempts to keep him in his allotted place. Whatever the interpretation of the reasons for these stresses, the fact is that they did exist. Henrietta Batson's bitterness was perhaps born out of the daily observation of her husband, a clergyman who suffered from severe depression. All the men we have looked at would have had different personalities, prejudices and work ethics but, in broad terms we see the change from the hunting and fishing vicars of the early years to the hard-working resident clergymen at the end of the century. The new workload of the management of the school, and the religious instruction there, together with an increased pastoral role within the community would have led to a very different lifestyle to that enjoyed by men like Charles Proby and John Watson. The vicars also began to come from different backgrounds and be educated at Anglican Colleges and the new redbrick universities. The world was changing and vicar's son and labourer's son both died in the terrible war that was soon to come.

The church from south showing group of small children and a well trodden Friar's Path to Raunds

Pre 1906 Postcard from Author's collection

Comparison of Ceremonies performed by Vicars and Curates in Ringstead in the Nineteenth Century

The table below shows what proportion of ceremonies were conducted by vicars and curates. I had to make decisions about some entries so it is important not to see small differences in comparison figures as significant. It might be argued for the less active vicars that they were looking after Denford while the curates saw to the Ringstead flock. However, if we look at the first half of the century at the Denford Registers we see a very similar pattern of attendance for the clergymen. With Isaac Gaskarth, the curate, only seems to be doing most of the duties in Isaac's last years. Charles Proby was accused of being a pluralist and the figures bear this out with him officiating at only 5% of christenings in Ringstead. John Watson began as a largely non-resident pluralist and his curates carried out almost all the ceremonies. There is a sudden change and from July 1837 he conducted most of the ceremonies sometimes helped by his son, also John, who became the curate at Doddington and other members of his family. It is only in the last year of his life, when his blindness and old age prevented him, that he conducts few ceremonies. Apart from the short incumbency of William de Pipe Belcher, for the rest of the century, the vicars ran both parishes and only called on curates or other clergymen in times of illness or for other temporary reasons.

One of the watershed moments for the church was the first half of the 1830s. The bishops of the Church of England were seen as key in the throwing out of the 1831 Reform Bill in the House of Lords. On November 5th 1831 effigies of bishops replaced Guy Fawkes on many bonfires. There was a cholera outbreak starting in 1831 (which claimed John Watson's wife) and many saw it as a judgement of God upon the nation. King William ordered a national day of fasting and humiliation on 21st March 1832. Church of England clergymen were abused and even stoned in the streets of London and the new industrial cities. The abuses of its powers by the church with its control of the only two universities, and some of its clergymen getting very rich through influence led to a

Commission which started to redistribute the church's wealth among the clergy and to stamp out pluralist and non-resident clergymen. Added to the death of his wife, it may be that these were factors in the move of John Watson back to his country parishes

VICAR	**VICAR or** CURATES (C) officiating		**Approx** **Years**	**Baptisms**	**Marriages**	**Burials**	
ISAAC GASKARTH 1777 – 1811 *(figures from 1800 only)*	**Vicar**	-	**11 (from 1800)** (24 total)	**95** **(70%)**	**31** **(91%)**	**64** **(74%)**	
	Daniel Crofts (C)	-	-	40	3	23	
	Others	-	-	-	5	-	
	TOTAL (approx no. per year)			**135** (12)	**34** (3)	**87** (8)	
Note: Isaac officiated at all baptisms up to 12th December 1808 and all burials until 24th January 1809. All Curates & Others after those dates. Similar for marriages although Isaac did take 2 marriages in later period.							
CHARLES PROBY 1812 - 1822	**Vicar**		**10**	**8** **(5%)**	**5** **(9%)**	**9** **(12%)**	
	R. Morgan Vane (C)			56	18	16	
	Thomas Brownrigg (C)			35	10	15	
	Harrison Packard (C)			16	8	6	
	Thomas Symonds (C)			53	10	22	
	Others			7	6	6	
	TOTAL (approx no. per year)			**175** (17)	**57** (6)	**74** (10)	
JOHN WATSON 1822 - 1851	**Vicar**		**29**	**159** **(37%)**	**68** **(42%)**	**130** **(41%)**	
	Thomas Symonds (C)			20	2	8	
	Benjamin Clay (C)			38	18	23	
	Thomas W. Brown (C)			7	1	12	
	Charles W Chalklen (C)			55	17	36	
	Edward Bowman (C)			91	34	60	
	T. H. Wilkins (C)			46	9	18	
	Others			19	12	27	
	TOTAL (approx no. per year)			**435** (15)	**161** (6)	**314** (11)	
Note: John Watson's tenure was in 3 distinct phases: 1822 - 1836 he officiated at 1 baptism. 1836 – 1848 he was at almost all baptisms and from then until his death his blindness meant the curate took over most duties. A similar story for marriages (I have not included 3 marriages between death of John and the appointment of W Belcher.) T. H. Wilkins acted as a "locum" and is in							

"Others" before he became an "Assistant Curate". Burials are broadly similar. (6 burials between death of John and appointment of William not included.)							
WILLIAM de PIPE BELCHER	**-Vicar**		**3**	**17**	**7**	**16**	
				(55%)	**(44%)**	**(57%)**	
1852 - 1854	J. G. Rogers (C)			9	9	6	
	Others			3	-	6	
	TOTAL			**29**	**16**	**28**	
	(approx no. per year)			(15)	(5)	(9)	
ALFRED J. SANDILANDS	Vicar		**7**	**34**	**29**	**64**	
				(87%)	**(88%)**	**(90%)**	
1854 - 1862	No Curates			0	-	-	
	Others			5	4	7	
	TOTAL			**39**	33	**71**	
	(approx no. per year)			(5)	(5)	(10)	
Note: I have not included 5 'others' who officiated at Baptisms and 2 others at marriages between death of Alfred Sandilands and institution of Percival Sandilands. John Bywater officiated at 9 burials between death of Alfred and 30 May 1863							
VICAR	**CURATE**		**Approx Years**	**Baptisms**	**Marriages**	**Burials**	
PERCIVAL R.R. SANDILANDS	**Vicar**		**11**	**157**	**26**	**109**	
				(97%)	**(84%)**	**(89%)**	
1863 - 1874	No Curates			-	-		
	Others			5	5	14	
	TOTAL			**162**	**31**	123	
	(approx no. per year)			(15)	(3)	(11)	
Note: 1 "Other" baptism and 4 burials between Percival Sandilands and Edward Sandford not included. Percival employed a curate (E. Kitson) but he seems to have acted as schoolteacher. Percival had a hunting accident on 1st January 1870 which accounts for most of the "Others".							
Edward Sandford	**Vicar**		**5**	**39**	**26**	**45**	
				(74%)	**(84%)**	**(85%)**	
(1874 -1879)	No long-term Curates			-	-	-	
	Others (incl. 12 E. A. Sandford)			14	5	8	
	TOTAL			**53**	**31**	**53**	
	(approx no. per year)			(11)	(6)	(11)	
2 marriages and 2 burials between death of Edward Sandford and his son taking over are not included							

Edward Armitage Sandford	**Vicar**		**5**	**48**	**23**	**74**	
				(98%)	**(88%)**	**(85%)**	
	No Curates			-	-		
(1880 – 1885)	Others			1	3	13	
	TOTAL			**49**	26	87	
	(approx no. per year)			(10)	(5)		
1 marriage and 4 burials for "Others" between E. A. Sandford and W. O. Leadbitter not included.							
William O. Leadbitter	**Vicar**		**8**	**111**	**45**	**74**	
				(90%)	**(88%)**	**(85%)**	
(1886 – 1894)	No Curates			-	-	-	
	Others			12	6	13	
	TOTAL			**123**	**51**	**87**	
	(approx no. per year)			(15)	(6)	(11)	
2 marriages and 4 burials between W.O. Leadbitter and A.C. Neely not included. From burial of Thomas Stains on 14th March 1881 all burials in new "secular" Cemetery.							
Andrew C. Neely	**Vicar**		**4**	**71**	**18**		
				(100%)	**(100%)**		
(1894 – 1898)	No Curates			-	-		
	Others			-	-		
	TOTAL			**71**	**18**	*	
	(approx no. per year)			(16)	(9)		
Burials not included from now on as now in new Cemetery and many "certified" people officiating							
William Charles Cotes	**Vicar**		**2**	**25**	**10**		
				(100%)	**(100%)**		
(1898 – 1900)	No Curates			-	-		
	Others			-	-		
	TOTAL			**25**	**10**	*	
	(approx no. per year)			(13)	(5)		
2 marriages after his death not included. Burials as for Andrew C. Neely*.							

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Chapter Twelve

Hard as Iron

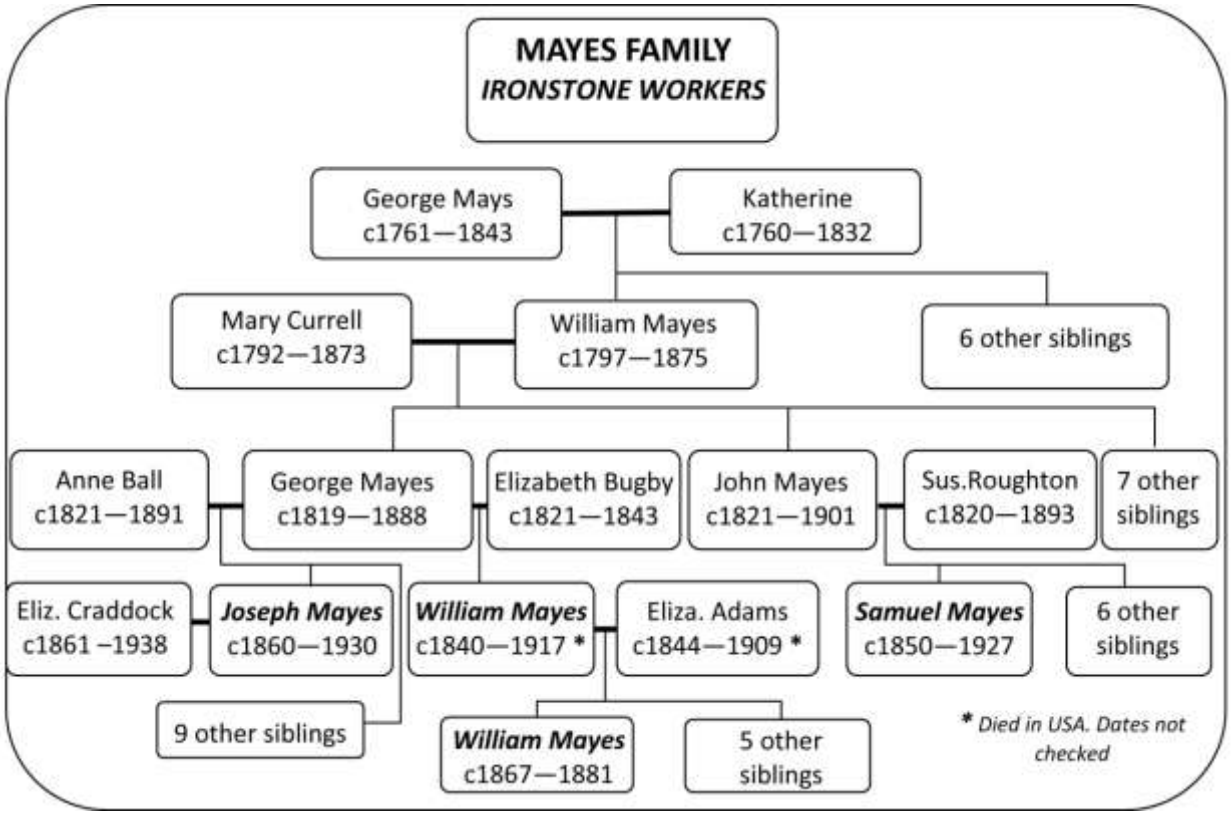
William, Samuel and Joseph Mayes

In *Ringstead People* we told the story of John Ball who was killed by a fall of earth in a quarry in Islip in 1886. Ironstone had been mined along the Nene Valley in Northamptonshire in small pockets since Roman times at least. Most had been small pits which were quickly abandoned and little sign of them or the smelting remains. We only see the warm brown ironstone blocks in some of the older local houses, built before the local brickworks and then the larger ones of the Whittlesey area went into production. The ironstone once again became valuable with large-scale coal mining and the coming of the railways which made fast, cheap transport available. The building of the railways also revealed the iron ore deposits not far beneath the Northamptonshire soil. This ore was exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851 and ironmasters were attracted to Northamptonshire, mainly from the north. At first ironstone went to Derbyshire and Yorkshire to be smelted but then Derbyshire coal started being brought south, first to Islip and then to Corby.

A quick count through the Ringstead Censuses gives some indication of the short duration of quarries in the village and the surrounding parishes. There were quarries at Great Addington, Woodford as well as briefly at Raunds, and along the north side of the Nene. We cannot be sure, therefore, that all the men shown in the Census worked in the Ringstead Quarry. We know that John Ball was a Ringstead man, and that he was killed near Islip and it seems likely that men also came into the parish to work. Nevertheless the figures do mirror the rise and fall of the local pit. In 1871 there were no ironstone labourers but by 1881 there were twenty-eight plus Low Smith who was an ironstone contractor and Frederick Green who was a clerk in an ironstone works. By 1891 this number had reduced to thirteen, only five of whom had been working in 1881 and by 1901 this had reduced to seven. The younger men seemed to be looking elsewhere for work. Of course, some men stayed on and so the workforce aged from Census to Census but this was only a part of the story and by 1901 none of the workers were under thirty years old. The Ringstead Quarry near Cotton Farm (Ringstead Grange) had closed in 1891 and presumably some would have worked clearing the site and levelling the ground after that. Nevertheless the Ringstead men in 1901 would have been travelling out of the parish, probably to the Islip area, to work.

We will mainly concentrate on one local extended family to see how those members who became ironstone labourers fared. The Mayes or Mays family name was a well-known one in the Ringstead Parish Registers. The first entries for the name are twin girls, Mary and Martha, born to Thomas and Susanna May, who died in January 1772, a few weeks after their births and Mary Smith May, daughter of Thomas and Jane May, baptised on 3rd April 1773. There is also a Daniel Mays, son of Michael and Sarah, baptised on 22nd January 1792. There is no other sign of these families however. The first entry for the children of George and Katherine (or sometimes Catherine) is for the baptism of a son, John, on the 15th July 1787. It is this couple who seem to have been the main source of the name in the parish throughout the nineteenth century although there is another smaller branch of the family emanating from William Parrish, or Parris, Mayes who may be related in some way to George as both sides of the family make use of Fairy or Farey as a first or second name. However, Fairey, and its variations, was also a common surname in the area so this may be due to a number of intermarriages. The Mayes surname grew steadily in the parish until there were 58 with that name in the 1901 Census.

Of course not all the family remained in the parish and it is one of these travellers who we will look at first. William Mayes was the sixth child of George and Katherine and was baptised in the Ringstead Parish Church on 10th September 1797. He married Mary Currell from Great Addington on 13th July 1818 and their first child was George baptised seven months later. Seven further children followed of whom five died in childhood, including twins Matthew and Mark. George married Elizabeth Bugby in 1840 and they had two children, William soon after their marriage and Daniel who was baptised on 28th July 1843 on the same day as his mother was buried. Daniel died too four months later. George remarried, to Ann Ball in Ringstead, on 14th October 1844. Ann(e) was one of the few children of Daniel and Phoebe Ball who did not either emigrate or join the armed services and so leave the parish. George and Anne then had a further ten children, of whom four were baptised as Wesleyans, but it is William the only surviving child of George's first marriage that we will be following first.



William seems to have remained apart from the new family after the death of his mother Elizabeth for in the 1851 Census he was a ploughboy, living with his grandparents, Thomas and Mary Ann Bugby, in Higham End, Raunds. His grandmother died in 1853 and in 1855 his grandfather married again, to Susan Black who was some twenty-five years younger than him. William was with them both in 1861 and he was now a farm servant. Thomas Bugby was shown as a farmer of 40 acres so it may be that William was working for his grandfather. A description of someone as a farm "servant" rather than farm labourer usually meant that the person "lived in". (Thomas Bugby and his second wife died within a few weeks of each other in 1874.)

On the 16th January 1862, William married Elizabeth Adams from Raunds, (although born in Northampton). It appears that the couple moved to London some time before 1869 because both of their eldest children were born in Old Ford or Bow in the East End. Their eldest son, William, was born in 1867 and a second son, Frederick, was christened Frederick Fairy Mayes on 19th December 1869. At the time of his birth registration the couple were living at 11 Usher Road (now near the 2012 Olympic Park) and William's occupation was just recorded as "labourer".

We next encounter the family at 59 Railway Terrace in New Marske, near Redcar in the North Riding of Yorkshire. New Marske, as its name implies was a small village which had been built recently to house the ironstone miners of the local pits. The discovery of workable iron ore deposits in North Yorkshire had coincided with a depression in agriculture in the East of England. Men flocked to the area from Cornwall, Wales and East Anglia and some of the ironmasters sent their agents down to the agricultural fairs to try to hire labourers for the mines. The couple are there in 1871 with the two boys but it looks as if they tried their luck again in London for in the 1881 Census when they are back in New Marske, now at 26 Dale Street, the two youngest children, both daughters, Elizabeth (3) and Eliza (1) are both shown as being born in Bromley in London. This almost certainly refers to Bromley by Bow which is not far from Usher Street. There are two middle brothers, Daniel who is eight and Albert who is five, who were born in New Marske. It seems therefore that the family were there from about 1870 until 1877 going back to London until 1880 before returning to Marske. Of course, it is possible that Eliza went to London, perhaps to a relative, to have her two daughters but it would be very unusual for this to happen at the time and it seems most likely that William and Elizabeth moved each time with their young family, looking for a better life and failing. We know that the youngest son, Albert joined the Marner Road School in Tower Hamlets on 18th August 1879. He would have been four, a little later that year, on the 15th October.

Others from the East Northamptonshire area also tried their luck in the Yorkshire iron-ore mines. In the 1881 Census there is a George Mayes at Marske in Guisbrough who was born in Aldwincle. William's half brother George, baptised in Ringstead in 1850, seems to have tried his luck in the Marske area. He was a shoemaker by trade and in the 1881 Ringstead Census he is an army shoemaker again. He is living in Church Street with his wife Ruth and daughters Florence, Hannah and Eliza. The eldest and youngest girls were born in Ringstead but Hannah was born in Marske by Sea in about 1875. We cannot be sure but it seems that this George was lured by the chance of better wages, but, not surprisingly, found the work was not for him. Perhaps he left when William went back to London to try his luck there again.

William is, in 1881, once again an ironstone miner in Marske. His eldest son, William at thirteen years old, is still a "scholar" but his school education was soon to be over. We know that some time that summer he became a "Trapper" at Upleatham, one of the local ironstone mines. The trappers were the youngest boys employed in the mines. At one time children as young as six did this work, often remaining in the mine for eighteen hours a day and so, for much of the year not seeing the daylight from Sunday until the Saturday following. A *Children's Employment Commission* had been set up and its Report shocked the Victorians with its firsthand accounts of the treatment of women, girls and young boys in the mines. Samuel Scriven was one of the Commission Inspectors who looked at conditions in the West Riding of Yorkshire. He wrote:

> *The children that excite the greatest consideration are those who stand near the doors to open and shut them for the "hurriers" to pass. They are called "trappers" who in the darkness, solitude and stillness as of night eke out a miserable existence for the smallest amount of wages. In the best appointed pits the air is rarified by a fire which is kindled at the foot of the upcast shaft, the atmospheric air being directed down another called the downcast shaft and then made to pass the remotest corners of the pit by doors place at intervals in the main gates or byways.*
>
> *The trappers are therefore made to stand at the back of these holding a cord in their hands all day long. I can never forget the first unfortunate creature that I met with. It was a boy of about eight years of old which looked idiotic, like a thing, a creeping thing peculiar to the place. On approaching and speaking to him he slunk trembling and frightened into a corner*

under an impression that I was about to do him some bodily injury and from which neither coaxing nor temptation could draw him.

The Commission led to the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 which stopped the employment underground of females and boys under ten years old. A further Act in 1870 made 12 the lowest age that a boy could work underground and also reduced the maximum working week for under-16s to 54 hours. So conditions had improved a little by the time William became a trapper but it was a miserable, boring, cold, lonely job carried out in almost complete darkness with, perhaps, a single candle for light and comfort. It was also a dangerous one. Boys had been injured or killed when they "deserted their posts". William too wandered from his post, whether from boredom or to stretch his limbs and on the 29th September 1881 and just a few months after he had left school he was crushed between the "tubs" and a pit prop. He was buried in the churchyard of St Germain's in Marske-by-the-Sea. It was an open windy spot near the cliff edge and beyond the churchyard wall was the wide expanse of the sea. Only the tower and spire of the church now remain and there is no sign of young William's grave.

This is an earlier drawing but although very young children had been stopped from working underground the trapper's life would have been little changed.

Perhaps it was their son's death that decided William and Eliza to try for a new life. William, with the older boys, Frederick and Daniel, sailed from Liverpool on the *City of Berlin,* an "intermediate" ship with three masts and a funnel. They arrived in New York, via Queenstown in Ireland, on 3rd September 1886. They were obviously the advance party for, on the 25th June 1887, the *British Princess* with Eliza and the younger children, Albert, Elizabeth and Eliza aboard, docked in Philadelphia. It would not have been an easy life for the family in its new home. The 1890 Federal Census was largely destroyed in a fire but the 1900 Census shows William and Elizabeth with sons Albert (24) and a mystery son called Earl who is 20 and born in October 1879. "Earl" may be a clerical error and, perhaps, it is Eliza. William is now 59 and they are living in Old Forge, Lackawanna, Pennsylvania. He is a day labourer but owns his own house. The 1910 census shows him as a widower living on his own in Old Forge. His age is given as 67 years but he was actually 69 years old and his occupation is shown as a miner in a coalmine The anthracite pit of the area was what put the township of Old Forge on the map, (although it also had many Italian immigrants and is known today as the" Pizza Capital"), but mining is no occupation for an old man. His son, Albert was also living in the area with his family and was also a coal miner. We must leave the family there.

If we return to Ringstead we find two other members of Mayes family who were ironstone workers. There were some shallow mines in the Northamptonshire iron ore fields but at Ringstead the ore was quarried. The ironstone was taken from a moving deep trench, the topsoil taken off first and then any overload of subsoil or rock was barrowed precariously on planks, two or three inches thick and 12 – 15 inches wide, over the trench to a parallel spoil heap behind. These planks, supported by trestles, could be as much as 45 feet above the ground although it is unlikely that they would have been anywhere near this height at Ringstead. The ironstone beneath was removed by blasting and picks and loaded into trucks on a track which ran along the bottom of this trench and was occasionally shifted sideways as the quarry face was cut back. The land would be reinstated behind the trench so there would not have been a large hole in the landscape but, rather, a deep scar creeping across the hillside. The workers would not have had to suffer the claustrophobic, cramped darkness of the mine nor the perils of flooding and bad air but it was still a very dangerous occupation and accidents were commonplace.

An Ironstone Quarry near Burton Latimer (probably in 1890s).

This picture show the planks only a few feet above the ground but there are concrete supports on the extreme right of the picture which probably indicates that the "gullet" becomes deeper. We can also see the mess beneath the planks on which man and barrow might fall.

With the kind permission of Burton Latimer Heritage Society
(www.burtonlatimer.info/industry/ironstone-mining.html)

As we saw with the death of John Ball at Islip, the overload of soil would be undercut by digging and the earth allowed, or helped, to fall so that it could be barrowed away and the ironstone strata exposed. Only too often the soil fell prematurely and men were engulfed and killed. In 1889, a young Ringstead man was nearly killed in the same way as John. The *Northampton Mercury* reported under the "Ringstead" heading:

> *On Thursday, July 18th, a young man, named Major, of this village, had a very narrow escape from death. He was at work in the ironstone quarries, near Ringstead Station, when the ground above gave way. He just noticed it in time to run out, but not before a portion of it caught him on one side, inflicting serious injuries, though, fortunately, no bones were broken. He was immediately placed under the care of Dr. Mackenzie, of Raunds, and is doing well.*

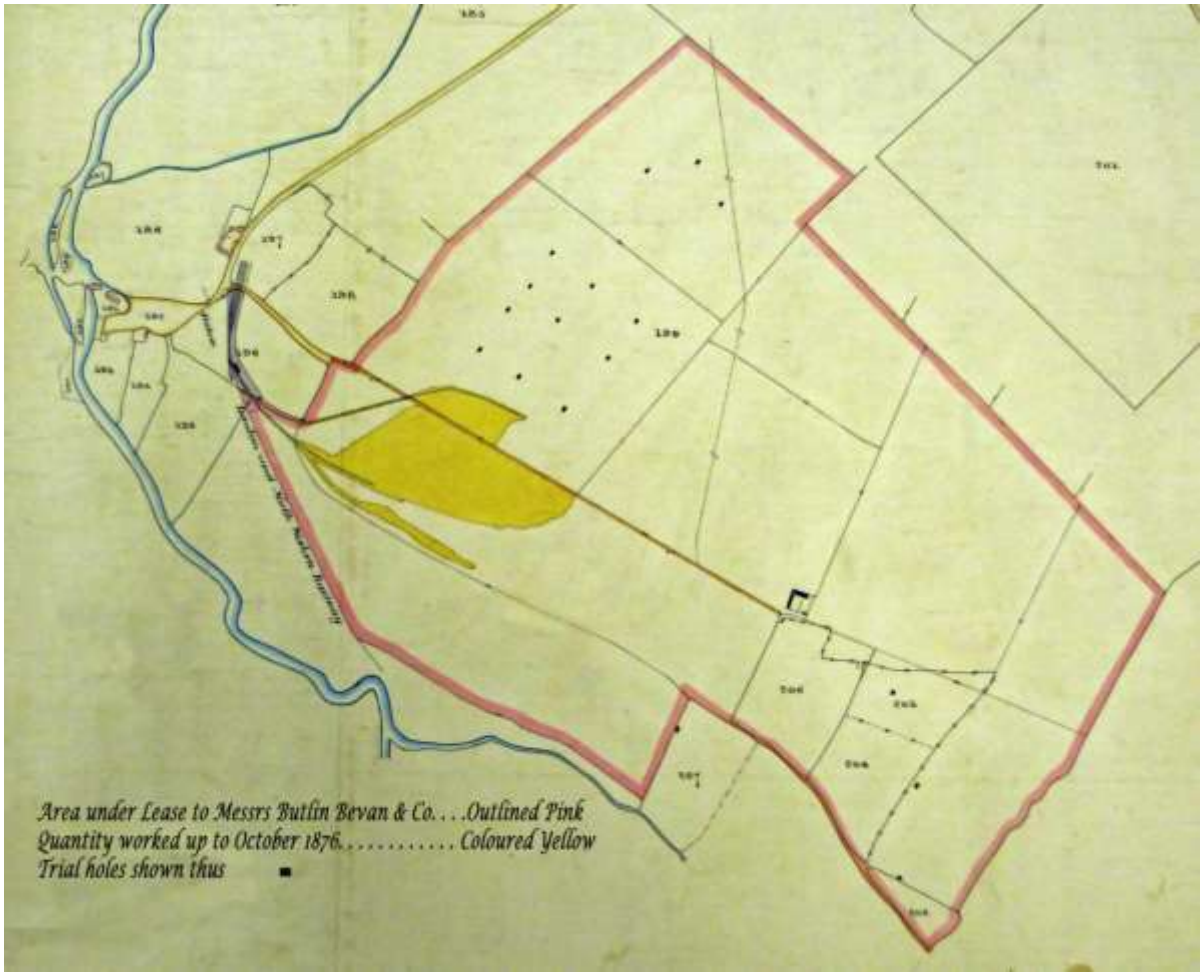
Of course, the reason that the men took these risks was that they were paid by piecework at a rate of about 3d. to 4d per cubic yard of iron ore. These rates included:

> *. . . excavating the cover and wheeling it to the dump side and, in some cases, removing topsoil and subsoil separately, levelling the ground and putting it back into cultivation.*
>
> *[Notes to accompany an Industrial Archaeology in Northamptonshire Exhibition at Northampton Central Museum in 1970]*

It is difficult now to imagine what an industrial area parts of the Nene Valley were. The first modern ironstone quarries were opened in the Wellingborough area in 1855, (although there was a small earlier pit at Woodford), and 74,084 tons of ironstone were excavated in Northamptonshire. This increased to 1,412,255 tons by 1873. Thomas Butlin worked out how to smelt the difficult Northamptonshire ores but good, cheap transport was a vital factor in making the extraction viable and the coming of the railways to the area made this possible. The other factor was the opening up of the Derbyshire coalfields which the railways could bring to the area. C.H. Plevins was a coalmine owner in Derbyshire and, with his partner John Kidner, he opened up the Islip blast furnaces.

There were several quarries in the Ringstead area. One, run by the Newbridge Iron Ore Company, operated from 1873 to 1881. It was near Glebe Farm to the west of the bridleway going northeast from Willy Watt Mill to Woodford. It had a tramway operated by a small locomotive, to sidings near Willy Watt Mill. It linked to a tramway from the Addington Quarries, run by Thomas Walters, which were just to the north and midway along, the road from the mill to Great Addington. There was also a tramway which brought the ore from further west, via a level crossing on the Great Addington to Little Addington road.

There was only one quarry, however, that was in Ringstead Parish in this period. It was operated by Butlin, Bevan and Company and was open from 1871 until 1891. Looking at the Ordnance Survey 25inches to a mile map (1st edition 1885) produced a few years before the site was closed, the quarries are not mapped, but it does show a horse-drawn narrow gauge tramway with a short southern spur. There had been two quarries south of Ringstead Grange (Cotton Farm on Eric Tonks' map in *Ironstone Railways and Tramways of the Midlands*.) and perhaps this spur was a siding or led to the smaller western quarry. This tramway led down to sidings to the east of the railway tracks near the station.



Map of showing Ringstead Quarry and trial holes for future work (1876)
Based on 1840 map with relevant details added in 1876.

With the kind permission of Northamptonshire Record Office (Ref: C(S) 164.)

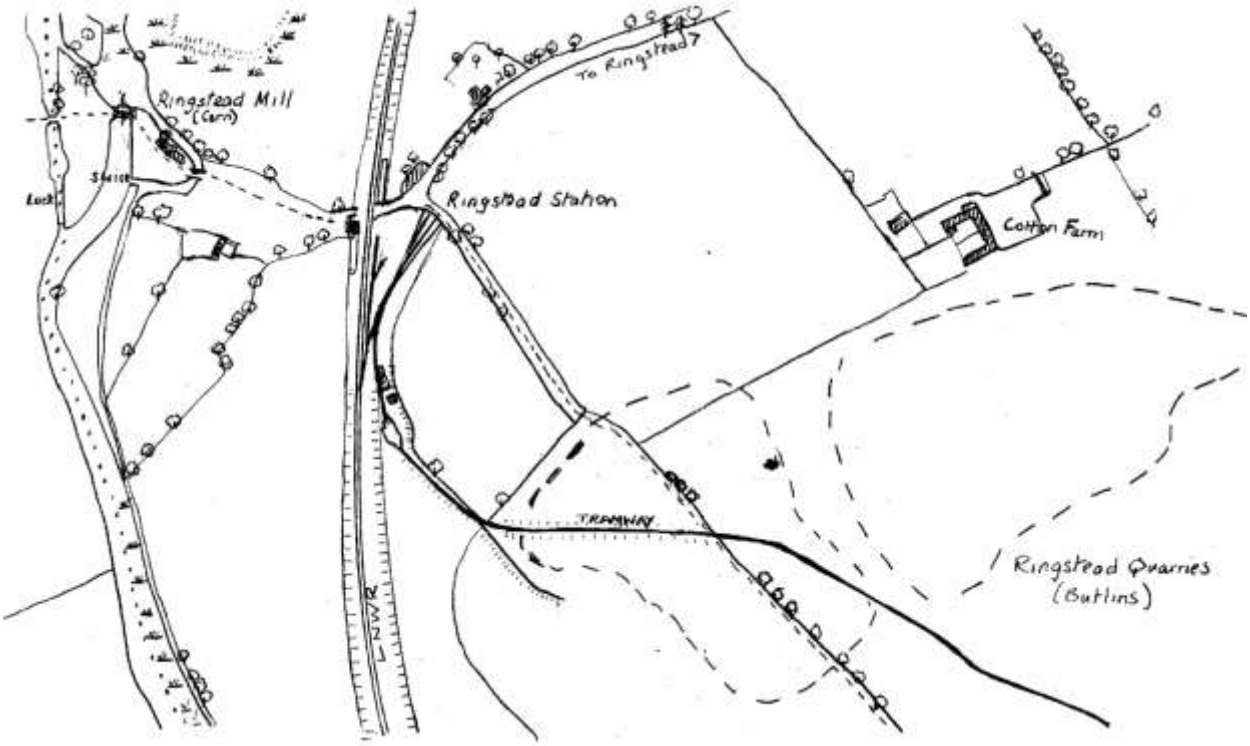
We cannot be certain of the exact process by which the ore was put into the railway trucks but it seems likely that the quarrymen would have loaded the ore manually into the tramway "tubs" and these would have been taken by gravity down to the valley beneath. A brakeman sitting at the front would have controlled the speed with a simple brake block system. The horse would probably trot behind, perhaps tethered to the last truck. At the bottom the load would be dumped, probably using side-tipping trucks. It was believed by Eric Tonks, who wrote the definitive books on these tramways, that the ore was "calcined", probably in the valley bottom. This was best done in kilns with the air excluded but it is likely that at Ringstead the ore was just made into large clamps over a bed of coal and mixed with slack coal and set on fire. The coal would have been brought in by railway and the calcining clamps may have been made where there is a break shown on the map between the tramway and the standard gauge sidings.

This process burnt off much of the moisture and carbon dioxide content and made the ore lighter and thus more valuable, cutting down on transport costs. Once the ore had cooled it would be loaded again by hand into standard gauge trucks. Some mechanical shovels were beginning to be used but it is unlikely that they would have been employed in a small quarry like Ringstead. The job of loading up the calcined ore was dusty unpleasant work and the men doing it would have been

recognizable as they walked or cycled home by the layer of red dust that caked their faces and arms. There would have been no pithead baths for them.

The empty tramway wagons would be taken back up the slope by the horse or horses ready to be filled again.

It would have been hard, back-breaking labour in all weathers. There would also have been smoke and fumes from the clamps always drifting around the area. It was said, of the ironworks at Islip that it made pigs and old men.



Ringstead Quarries.

Map and tramways based on Ordnance Survey 25 "to mile 1st Edition 1885 (NRO). Quarries based on map by Eric Tonks (see References). [Note: Cotton Farm now Ringstead Grange].

In the 1881 Census Joseph Mayes is shown with his parents, George and Anne. As we have seen after the death of Elizabeth, mother of the William who went to America, George remarried, to Anne Ball. Both Joseph and his cousin Samuel, son of George's brother John, are ironworkers in the local quarries. We can only guess that it was at the Ringstead quarries near Cotton Farm. It certainly would have been the most convenient to walk or bike to. We said that the quarry gangs had a preferable life to the underground miners but the winter of 1880/1881 had been one of the bitterest on record. The Mercury reported on 22nd January 1881:

> *THE WEATHER.- The frost set in here on Tuesday last week and had, at the time of writing, continued with increased severity. On Wednesday and Thursday from 12 to 14 degrees of frost were registered. The severity of the frost further increased. Before sunrise on Saturday morning the thermometer had fallen to eight degrees Fahrenheit. The water in the meadows*

was all frozen over on Friday and Saturday and great numbers repaired thither for skating and sliding. Scores were congregated on the ice on Sunday. On Monday the river was all frozen over and the ice was so firm and good from Raunds meadows to the Ringstead Paper Mills that a fine piece was opened up for skating and hundreds of people of both sexes from the surrounding villages of Raunds, Ringstead, Stanwick, Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough, and the Addingtons (Magna and Parva), assembled and disported themselves. A bonfire was lit on the ice and hot coffee and other refreshments supplied. Tuesday was one of the roughest and most inclement of the season. A strong wind prevailed from early morning, and, blowing from the east and northeast was bitterly cold and searching. This increased to a gale in the afternoon, when a snowstorm also set in. Tuesday night may be pronounced to have been one of the roughest nights ever experienced in this locality for a great number of years. The storm continued more or less all night so that on Wednesday morning the streets and roads were completely blocked with drifts which lay on the roads to a considerable depth and the traffic along some roads had to be altogether suspended. The snow-drifts along the Ringstead, Chelveston and Hargrave roads were from four to six and a half feet deep, and a gang of from 30 to 40 men were employed in cutting a way through them for vehicles to pass.

Would the men have been working and seen from the quarries this laid out before them? Certainly, in the terrible storm in early 1877 that killed three boys on those same hillsides, it was the quarry men who came to the collapsed barn and tried to rescue the boys. [See story of the Gale Tragedy in *Ringstead People*]. At times they might have settled for the moderated temperature of the mine rather than the intense bitter cold and wet of winter or the baking heat of summer.

The two Mayes cousins would have found the work hard and tedious, as much labouring work was. It was also, as we have said, dangerous, with the fear of being buried alive. The tramways themselves were also another hazard and, as with young William in the mine, a moment's inattention could be fatal. On the 4th March 1882 the *Wellingborough News* reported:

One day last week a labourer on these works [Ringstead Ironstone Quarries], was knocked down by several wagons descending an incline. The whole of the wheels passed over both his legs nearly severing them from his body. It appears the poor fellow remained where the accident happened for nearly three hours before any doctor arrived. He was then removed by rail to the Peterborough Infirmary where it was found necessary to amputate the left leg above the knee and the right leg below it. He is progressing as well as can be expected from the serious nature of the injuries.

One wonders if a man could survive for so long, with such a loss of blood that an accident like this would have involved, unless someone had given him some first aid. We described earlier how the wagons were loaded and moved and it may be that empty trucks rolled back down the slope and knocked him over. It they had been fully loaded it seems certain that they would have severed his legs completely. Perhaps the brake failed or had not been properly applied. We can only speculate. I have tried to find out who it was that sustained these terrible injuries and what happened to him but so far without success.

For whatever reason, Joseph decided that quarry work was not for him and he moved to Wellingborough. It was there, in the parish church, that he married Elizabeth Craddock on 11th March 1888. He was twenty-eight years of age and living at 19 Gold Street. He is shown as a labourer and it seems likely that he was now a bricklayer's labourer for that is his occupation in the 1901 and 1911 Wellingborough Censuses. In the year after his marriage he was summoned by Mr. Ford, relieving officer of the Thrapston Union to show cause why he should not contribute towards the

support of his mother, Annie Mayes who was “chargeable to the common fund of the Union”. His financial position was discussed and he was ordered to pay the 10d a week that he had been originally asked to pay by the Guardians.

Joseph and Elizabeth had four children and he died in Wellingborough in 1930 age sixty-nine years.

His cousin Samuel, some ten years his senior, was the son of John Mayes, an agricultural labourer, and his wife Susannah. John and Susannah had at least seven children and Samuel was the sixth, baptised on 26th May 1850 in the Ringstead Parish Church. In 1851 he is with his family but they are all living with Elizabeth Roughton, Susannah’s widowed mother, who is a pauper. John and Susannah and their family moved into their own house and by 1871 they were living in London End, that triangle of poor cottages where Back Lane met the Denford Road.

Samuel’s grandmother, Mary was buried on 22nd July 1873. In November 1875, Mary’s widower, William Mayes, now seventy-eight years old, blind and living alone after the death of his wife, becomes increasingly depressed and one Monday morning he cuts his own throat. An inquest was held at the New Inn and the jury heard that his behaviour on the previous evening had been very strange. Their verdict was, “That deceased committed suicide while in an unsound mind.” William, unlike poor Thomas Bates who took his own life in similar fashion in 1840 was allowed a church service before his burial in the churchyard.

There were regular accidents at the Ringstead Quarry. The *Northampton Mercury* reported on an Inquest held at the *Black Horse Inn* on 28th September 1889. It was on the body of Alfred Smith from Ringstead who had been a labourer at the local quarry. On 26th September he had been loading ore into the trucks when it appears that he had an epileptic fit. He fell backwards “some six or seven feet into the truck and struck his head”. He recovered enough to walk home but complained of a pain in his stomach. The following day he was dead. Mr. J. Bird, the surgeon, believed that it was probably from peritonitis, caused by the fall.

There was another serious accident at the quarry when a twenty-one-year-old local man, Herbert Coleman was wheeling a barrow of ironstone over a plank ten feet above the ground. If you look at pictures (also see end of chapter on John Ball, Ironstone Miner in *Ringstead People*),which show the way the men pushed heavily loaded barrows across the narrow planks over the ditch to the spoil heaps behind , it would seem that accidents were inevitable. Herbert fell to the ground onto his head and face: The Northampton Mercury of 3rd October 1890 reported:

> *Dr. McKenzie of Raunds immediately attended and found the upper lip completely cut through and lying on the right cheek and the chin all separated from the lower jaw. The wounds were stitched up and dressed and are progressing favourably.*

Herbert, who was the illegitimate son of Ann Coleman before she married elderly widower, William Major, some forty-five years her senior, continued as an ironstone labourer in 1891 but Samuel had become a navigation labourer. Samuel was still living with his parents. He was a bachelor and remained so all his life. His father John, at 70 was described as a “cottager”, which by this time, especially after the loss of the Ringstead Open Fields in 1841, was a rather archaic term. It probably meant that he had a small piece of land round his house and kept a pig and some hens. Traditionally he would have had to do some day labouring and John’s entry does record that he also did some general labouring to give him a small income.

By 1901 Samuel had returned to ironstone labouring. The Ringstead pit closed in 1891 which may have forced Samuel to look for other employment. It may be that he was now working in one of the

pits north of the Nene but because the name Mayes was so common locally we cannot be sure which one. He could have been the Mayes mentioned in the "Woodford" section of the *Northampton Mercury* on 30th August 1895 but we cannot be sure; (in the photograph below we see a G. Mayes):

> *On Saturday a man named Mayes, at work at the ironstone pits, was driving a peg to loosen the earth. It suddenly gave way and caused him to fall a great distance with the earth on the top of him. One of his legs was seriously injured.*

This photograph is labelled "Five men digging ironstone at Woodford House". On the back, the men are named (assuming names are as if looking at photograph). The Man with head cut off by photographer: J. Major (possibly Ringstead man James Major who was an ironstone labourer born in about 1850). and then from left: G. Saunders, G, Mayes, E. Manning, W. Riddle.

With the kind permission Of Northamptonshire Record Office. Ch(H)127

We do know that by 1911, now aged 61, he had become a jobbing gardener. He is living in what seems a spacious six-roomed house with his widowed sister Elizabeth Sawford keeping house for him. It is perhaps a surprise to see that Samuel, who would have been born too late to attend the Ringstead School, writes and signs the 1911 Census form with an assured neat hand.

The Mayes surname was widespread in Ringstead and the neighbouring villages by the end of the Nineteenth Century. We see it in the local musical entertainments including the Ringstead Brass Band, parish events, football teams, bell ringing and on most local committees. We have looked at three members each some ten years apart in age who at some time were ironstone labourers. The quarries were short-lived and so it was not a job for life and only the unmarried Samuel stayed in Ringstead. His widowed sister, Elizabeth Sawford died in 1924 and Samuel followed some three years later.

The Ringstead Quarries near Ringstead Grange have long gone and it is almost impossible to make out where once there was noise and dust and the occasional crack of an explosion, nor the trucks

clanking behind the horses on the way to the sidings where it is possible that the ore was calcined (or burnt). I am writing this on 23rd April 2013.and earlier today as I stood on the bridleway, all I could hear was birdsong and the occasional sound of traffic on the road below. In the distance there was the urgent cry of a cuckoo trying to herald in a late spring. If you look carefully you may be able to see that at one point where the bridleway crosses the old route of the tramway that the ground is lower than the hedge. That is all. Like Mallows Cotton village, the quarry sites have gone. Who would now want it back?

View from Mallows Cotton bridleway, near the site of the quarries. 23rd April 2013

Authors' Photograph

References

My thanks to Vivienne Marshall for alerting me to the death of William Mayes in Marske and for checking the Mayes family details. My thanks also to Philip Morris for his advice on the tramway workings. Any mistakes are, of course, mine alone.

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Chapter Thirteen

End of an Era?

Centuries do not in themselves define eras, nor do the reigns of kings and queens. Often it is the spread of new technology such as iron smelting or steam power and sometimes it is terrible wars which change the mindset of a nation. Usually it is a more gradual process than our old history text books would have us believe. We have seen that the Boer War was a terrible precursor of the First World War and that much of the new technology that would define the Twentieth Century was already being developed before the death of Queen Victoria. We have also seen the increasing political strength of working men (although not so obviously of women yet). We will end these accounts of Nineteenth Century Ringstead people with the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902.

Edward, like the present Prince of Wales, had to wait into old age to succeed his mother to the throne. Fat philanderer he may have been but he was popular in the country and after the austere Victoria of the final years Edward seemed to bring the hope of happier times. The Boer War was also in its final throes and communities across the country set up committees to celebrate the new king.

Victoria had died on 22nd January 1901 and Edward's Coronation was set for 26th June 1902, The *Northampton Mercury* for 20th June carried advertisements and news of preparations for the great event. You could send off 2½d in stamps for the "Song of the Coronation" subtitled "Sons of England Raise Your Voices" which was a "good stirring song with telling chorus, giving utterance to feelings which are at present time uppermost in the heart of every loyal subject of the King". There was also an advertisement from the Dorman Engineering Company of Northampton for:

> *A Coronation Gift. – The Minerva Lock-stitch Sewing Machine makes a right Royal present at a moderate price*

The readers arealso asked to buy a new Coronation cycle from *W. Harding and Company*, Cycle manufacturers whose premises are opposite Marefair Post Office.

We also are told that *Brice's* is the best place to hire or buy a flag and that they have rosettes from a penny each.

In Ringstead too all was set for the big day under the guidance of the "energetic hon. secretary" Thomas Johnson", the schoolmaster. Then two days before the big day Edward was taken ill with appendicitis. The Mercury for the 27th June reported:

> *It would be difficult to put into words the effect produced on the nation by the ill news so suddenly sprung on them on Tuesday mid-day. Up to that time the enthusiasm of the approaching Coronation festivities and gathering farce as the day of the great event drew near, and then in a moment the nation fell from the summit of jubilant expectations to the deeps of anxious apprehensions and bitter disappointment. "The Coronation is indefinitely postponed" was the unwelcome announcement.*

Up to this time appendicitis was not operated on generally and the mortality rate was high. There had been many improvements in antiseptics and anaesthetics in the last half of the Nineteenth Century and the royal doctor Sir Frederick Treves drained the infested abscess through a small incision. The next day Edward was sitting up in bed smoking a cigar. Appendicitis became a vogue operation and many people alive today carry the scars of its popularity.

We see below a photograph of a group of men who have just set up a large garlanded arch across the road in Carlow between the *Axe and Compass* and the *Swan.* This area was often used for festivities. If we compare this photograph with the Ringstead Band picture on page 66 of *Ringstead People* we can pick out a number of familiar hats and faces. It seems likely that it was taken in the week before the cancelled June Coronation.

Group of men who have probably just put up a garlanded arch for the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902. I have enlarged the picture to show men's faces but have lost the arch as a result.

From the Ringstead photographic archive held by Peter Davies

The Coronation went ahead, finally, on 9th August 1902 but we learn from the *Mercury* of the 15th August:

> *The Coronation festivities were continues on Saturday. The original programme was carried out on June 24th in its entirety. Leaving a balance in hand of £11, with which a free tea was again provided for all the children under 14 years of age, all persons over 60 and all the widows and poorer inhabitants. A public tea at 4d. was also provided. The weather was all that could be desired, but owing to the two days' previous wet weather the teas were held indoors. The children assembled in the Schoolroom at three o'clock to the number of 200, and after tea each one was presented with a Coronation medal. Afterwards the elderly*

people and the general public assembled in the Schoolroom and Temperance Hall to the number of 400. Tea over, all adjourned to the paddock known as the Grove, kindly lent by Mr. W. Ratcliff. The Woodford Prize Band played selections. Various games and sports, principally for the youngsters, were provided and dancing took place. All seemed to enjoy themselves well.

We see that in Ringstead they had decided as all had been planned that the original celebrations should go ahead. We are not told what these "original celebrations" were but we have a report from the *Mercury* of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, some five years earlier, in June 1897 which may give us some idea of what would have happened in 1902.

Proceedings commenced with a procession formed as follows:- Four horses gaily decorated, their riders representing sailors and soldiers; these were followed by a dozen cyclists; then came the band and the children numbering over 100, the boys having scarlet bands across the shoulders; wagonettes conveying members of the Parish Council and Jubilee Committee; and the infants brought up the rear. The first stoppage en route was made against Mr. Peny's shop, where the band first played the National Anthem and the processionists then sang the verse. The Rev. J. Bates gave a brief address. The procession then wound its way through the streets stopping again opposite Mr C. Ratcliffe, where the anthem was again sung, and Mr. George Smith incidentally referred to the age of the Queen, stating that he was born in the same year and the same week. Having arrived at the New Inn, the company dispersed, the children going to the Temperance Hall for their tea. The adults proceeded to the Factory for a meat tea, which was done justice to by 350 people. An adjournment was afterwards made to a close, where the usual games were indulged in, the band enlivening the proceedings with their selections of music, and a very enjoyable and memorable day was brought to a close by again singing the National Anthem, and the children received as they left the field an orange and a bun each.

The people of Ringstead may have had two bites of the cherry but it was not the same throughout the county. In Daventry the Board of Guardians discussed the Workhouse food. The members were concerned that officers seemed to have special 9d. (pence) joints and they went on to discuss the extra food for the inmates:

Mr. Lucas gave notice that at the next meeting he should move that a committee be appointed to go into the whole matter of officers' joints. – The Board resolved to postpone the extra out-relief granted for the Coronation and as far as possible stop the extra diet for the inmates until the Coronation actually takes place.

As we look at this wonderful photograph we can remember again the description by H. E. Bates of the Northamptonshire shoemakers:

The impression I really get is of a dry, droll, unshaven independence and it is not at all an unlikeable quality.

Although we do not see so much evidence of the women of Ringstead, and there is no similar photograph of them, we have seen from the accounts that they were in general a strong, independent group too who would not be easily cowed by authority. Perhaps this later photograph

from the 1920s of the Mothers Union will give a hint of their character. One would not wish to cross them.

Photograph of the Mothers' Union 1920s

Reproduced with permission of the Northamptonshire Telegraph.

My time with the village of my father's ancestors has now finished. I have come to admire many of those people for the qualities that Bates described. I hope that people today will not generalise the past of the village but see it for the place it really was and the people for the individuals that walked its streets. If you can stroll down to the river and picture the quarries by the path to Mallows Common or the often noisy station yard by the level crossing or the mill making paper or grinding corn on the Nene: If you can look at houses and imagine the real men and women and children who lived in them and see the families being waved off on their epic journeys across the world: If you can wander among the graves in the churchyard, old Baptist burial ground or the Cemetery and remember some of the personalities that lie beneath those stones, now sometimes crumbling into anonymity: If you can do just some of these things then I will feel that my time has not been wasted.

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Appendix

Amendments and Additions to *Ringstead People (Book 1)*

I have found some extra information and also some errors in the Ringstead People book since publication and have put these amendments and additions in this section with the original chapters to which they refer. (In the Second Printing of the book I did manage to correct the error in the William Roberts chapter).

David Ball

October 2013

Chapter s One and Fourteen: Elisha Ball, Thomas Ball, Daniel, John and Sarah Ball

A number of the life stories deal with the children of Daniel and Phoebe Ball. Most of their large family left Ringstead to become emigrants to the New World or soldiers. Phoebe is, as many women of the time, rather hidden from public view by the records. The style of this report is of the Music Hall variety, that one *Mercury* reporter seemed to delight in for his court reports. This one from 11th August 1849 does show something of her feisty nature, an essential survival tool in such a large household in those tough times:

> *Elizabeth Jacques, who failed to appear to a summons, was brought up under a warrant charged with assaulting Phoebe Ball. Both of these amiable ladies are natives of Ringstead, and appear to have a knowledge of the stronger terms of the English language. After a few preparatory shots, the war of words thickened something after the manner of the Railway Overture. You're a fussick, said Phoebe calmly. You're a liar retorted Bess, sharply. You, a blowed up strollegar! said Phoebe sharper still. After a few more puffs, both of the human engines were fairly off, and all that could be distinguished was - Oh you nasty - don't say so - dirty drab - fat cat - penny-bustle - splay-foot - red-nose - beer-gin - brandy - Oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! and then they softened down as though they had reached a station, to Oh Phoebe, for shame! Oh Bess, you may say so! - did you ever? - no never! - well, I declare! and then they stood and gazed at each other like exhausted first-class engines. After this process the case was heard, and Elizabeth fined 5s. and costs, which were increased on account of her refusing to appear to the summons, and in default she was committed for three weeks.*

Unfortunately, although we know that Bess was summoned for assault we have no idea why, how or where the assault took place. The reporter was too pleased with himself to bother with such questions.

Note: I could not find **fussick** in books on local dialect words but the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that it was used in Australia from the 1850s to mean picking about for gold or gemstones in abandoned mining excavations but came from the United Kingdom meaning 'to ferret about'. Originally *fussick* meant to bustle about and *fossack* or *fussock* meant a troublesome person. Obviously the meanings seem linked but it is the latter meaning that is being used here.

I think that **strollegar** simply astrologer?

Chapter Six. The Butcher of Ringstead? William Weekley Ball

I have found two articles in the *Northampton Mercury* (British Newspaper Archive) which add to the story of the disappearance of Lydia Attley. The 2nd and 9th April 1859 issues of the newspaper report that on March 24th a skeleton, with the head placed between the legs, had been found by some men when ploughing Mr Passmore's field in Little Addington. It reports that the spot where it was discovered was about a mile from Ringstead and it was shallowly buried in a field that had not been ploughed for some years. The link to the disappearance of Lydia Hetley [sic] and William Wheatley [sic] Ball is made and it reports that , "The discovery has caused quite an excitement in the locality". We see why there was some scepticism in 1864 when another body was found. We also see the belief in Ringstead that Lydia was buried somewhere in the area.

The other article is in the Saturday 6 September 1851 issue and throws some light on William's leaving of Ringstead for Ramsey. It tells of the 29 August Petty Sessions where Thomas Dunmore, a tailor from Ringstead, complained of an assault by William Peacock on 22nd July. It reports:

> *. . . Mr Ball, a butcher of Ringstead, was removing his household goods and furniture from thence; that a large concourse of persons followed the waggon to a considerable distance, insisting on Ball giving some account of the girl who was so mysteriously missing, before he left town. Whereupon the complainant, fearing the ropes of the waggon would be cut and the furniture injured, went up as a friend of Balls to protect him and his goods, when the defendant immediately struck him on the head with his fist. Fined 5s and costs £1. 8s. 6d.*

We see that William had to face the angry crowds as he left but we also see that he had some friends who stood by him. It was almost exactly a year after the disappearance of Lydia that William, too, left Ringstead

Chapter Eleven. Clicker: John Ball (b.1882)

My father had told me that John (Jack) Ball had been summoned for playing football and there is confirmation in the *Mercury* on Friday 27th February, 1901. Under the heading, *The Football Nuisance*, it reports that:

> *John Ball, shoe hand, Raunds, was charged by Mr. Corby, Clerk to the Urban Council, with playing football in the Pleasure Ground, at Raunds. - The Bench decided not to convict and the case was dismissed on payment of 6s. costs.*

[In my father's version it was for playing football there on a Sunday. I am not sure if this is a detail that has been missed out.]

Chapter Nineteen. Blood on the Stubble: William Roberts

Robin Stewart Bolton has alerted me to an error in this story. The baptisms of William's children are a little confusing and it seems that an unbaptised (as far as I can tell) daughter, Mary, was buried on 10th August 1804. William (born in 1805) **survived** and married Ann Maria Knight in Raunds in 1828. He did not die on 10th August 1806 as I have put in the book.

Chapter Twelve Papermakers William Mitchell and others

The mills of Ringstead are a little bewildering. Not only was Willy Watt sometimes called Ringstead Mill but some tenants moved from one to the other and both mills produced paper and ground corn at some time. It is also likely that both had two wheels operating on these different products at the same time. There are references to "Ringstead Mills" which seems to indicate that two wheels were operating, one of which seems to have always been for corn. The exact location of Ringstead Mill has also been difficult to define exactly although we know that it was on the Nene close to the Railway Station so we are talking of yards rather than miles when considering the alternative positions.

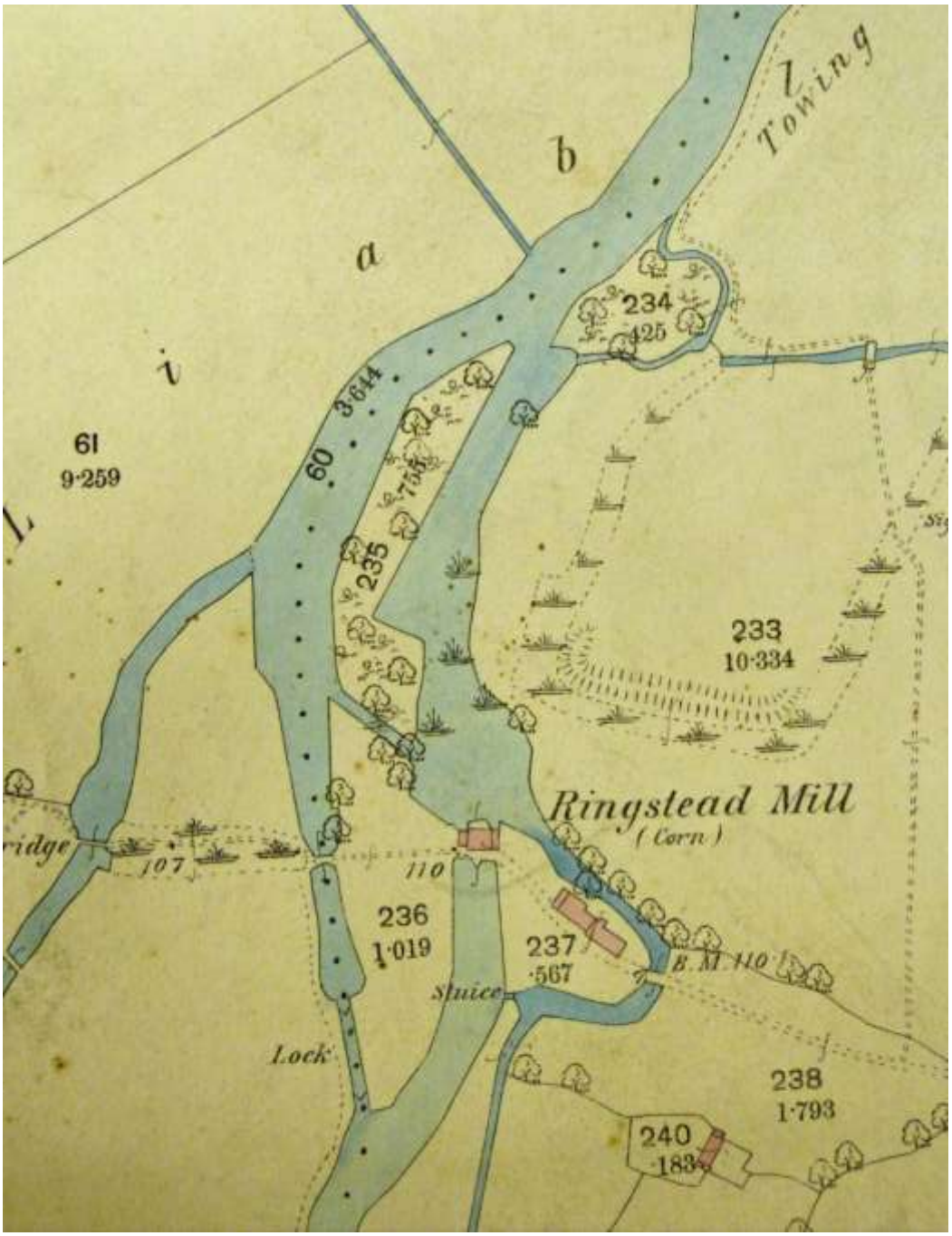
Looking at two pieces of evidence seems to confirm my belief that the mill was sited where the large modern sluice gate is now in place.

Ringstead Mill. (Early Twentieth Century)

From the Ringstead Photograph Archive held by Peter Davies

Firstly if you look at the photograph of the Mill in the early Twentieth Century when it was beginning to fall into disrepair it is clear that there are two arches possibly feeding two wheels. The building itself is square and does not appear to have ever provided living quarters.

If you look at the map, to the right of the number 110, you can see the division of the river shown. The long building to the east of this was a row of cottages in which the Muirheads were shown living in 1901 with a trade of shoemaking. There is a stream which curls around from a small sluice gate and around the cottages to the river but not near enough to them to power a wheel there. Was this an overflow stream in times of flood or was it perhaps a part of the process of papermaking. The rags would have to be washed and then stewed in water as part of the process of breaking the linen and cotton into its constituent fibres.



From1885 2½ inch to a mile Ordnance Survey map

With the kind permission of Northamptonshire Record Office

At the end of its life the mill became a part of the social life of the village although one suspects that the teas as well as the pleasure boats and fishing punts were organised form the cottages not from the mill building itself. William Muirhead had been born in Edinburgh and in 1901 he is living at No. 1 Mill Cottages with his wife. He is shown as a shoemaker. Next door at No. 1 Mill Cottages lives Ernest Holmes born in Chesterfield, and also a shoemaker, with his wife Elizabeth who was born in Birmingham. By 1911 William, now 65 is a widower living at "The Old Mill House" with his nephew, also William. William junior is 30 years old is an ironstone labourer from Norwich where his uncle had moved to with his parents before coming to Ringstead. His wife Eliza is a machinist in a boot factory and with them is their ten-year-old daughter Eliza. At some stage after this, as at Willy Watt, other businesses seem to have been tried. William Senior died in 1912 so it is the younger William who seems to have started the picnic and boating enterprise that a few older Ringstead people still remember. **A** swing was provided so it was hardly Wicksteed Park.

To PIC-NIC PARTIES, SCHOOL PARTIES
AND OTHERS.

WILLIAM MUIRHEAD,
Of Ringstead Mill,

BEGS to return thanks to his numerous Patrons for their kind support during past Years, and to inform them that he is still in a position to accommodate Parties (providing their own provisions) with . . . **Cups & Saucers, Teapots, Tea Urns, Cloths & Boiling Water, at a charge of 2d. per head**, and again solicits a continuance of their patronage and support.

Parties of 50 can be accommodated at one time.

PLEASURE BOATS AND A FISHING PUNT FOR HIRE.

A SWING IS PROVIDED FOR THE CHILDREN'S AMUSEMENT.

The Mill is close to the Ringstead & Addington Station and the main river.

From the Ringstead Photograph Archive held by Peter Davies

Chapter Twenty-one Wifebeater: Korah Dicks (Dix)

Brenda Hazel has found, through the Genes Re-united website some further brushes with the law of Korah Dicks and some of his sons.

In the *Northampton Mercury* for 12 July 1856 we learn that Korah Dicks was sentenced to six months hard labour for assaulting his wife again. It seems that this must have occurred soon after he was released from six months gaol for a similar offence. Korah's character did not improve with age for, on 20th February 1871, now an 'aged man', (although probably less than sixty years old), he was charged with assaulting a little girl called Catherine Phillips, six days earlier. Catherine alleged that:

> *. . . she was running past the defendant with a shoe in her hand when he raised a stick and struck her on the head as she passed him. - P.C. Balderson said that he was attracted to a*

crowd assembled round the parties just after the assault took place. The little girl was crying. Defendant said he would serve her ten times worse afterwards.

Catherine may not have been entirely innocent because, it was alleged that she had first spat at Korah. The report states that he had paid the £1 fine, but it seems not, for five days later he was committed to three weeks imprisonment, (the default sentence).

On 20th May 1871 he was again charged with stealing two handkerchiefs from Alice Brown but because of his 'great age', and his having been in prison for several days, he was discharged. [Korah died two years later and we gather from these reports that his drinking and, perhaps, the treadmill, which ruined the health of many prisoners, had taken their toll.]

Perhaps inevitably, some of Korah's sons also had trouble with the law. In September 1865 Odd Dicks was charged with stealing a mangold wurtzel, the property of Joseph Dearlove, who stated that he had taken him to court for him to be admonished, as thefts had been increasing. The *Mercury* also reports on:

Police Constable Packer, who caught the boy in the turnip field sitting underneath the hedge with the wurtzel beneath him.

Some two years later Odd was charged with assaulting Thomas Baker on the 10th June and had to pay a fine and costs amounting to £2 in all.

The *Northampton Mercury* of the 16th January 1969 reported that Hod [or Odd] Dicks, a lad of sixteen or seventeen, was charged with 'feloniously breaking into the house of William Major of Ringstead on 28th November'. William's son, Daniel had seen Hod escaping out of his father's window and found inside that the rooms in confusion and two watches taken out of the box in which they were kept, but still lying there. At the Quarter Sessions in March Hod was sentenced to three calendar months on gaol (he had already been in custody for two months). Hod had pleaded with the court:

'I hope you won't do much to me; I'll never do any more,' and then wept.

In the 19th November 1881 issue of the *Northampton Mercury* it reports that:

Lod Dicks and Hod Dicks, brothers, Ringstead, were summoned for being drunk at Irthlingborough on the 1st inst: - Neither Hod nor Lod appeared but the mother appeared for Hod but not for Lod. . . P.C. Brown gave evidence of seeing the brothers, Hod and Lod, on the evening of the 1st lying cheek by jowl on the road between Irthlingborough and Ringstead helplessly drunk and tried to put them on the right road home.

Their mother also paid Hod's fine but she left Lod to sort his own affairs out.

We should recognize that some of these were petty offences that many country boys and young men might have committed. I can certainly remember, when a small boy in a west Northamptonshire village, that the local children stole mangold wurzels from the fields to make lanterns for Halloween.

Chapter Twenty-four First Post: Noah Green and others

On the first page of the chapter Thomas Green is shown as being born in 1759 and married to Jane Meadows. This is a slip. It should be John Green. My thanks, again, to Robin Stewart Bolton for alerting me to this error.

RINGSTEAD PEOPLE

Final Stories

David Ball

Introduction

This booklet contains the biographies that, for one reason or another, did not make it into my previous Ringstead books or have been substantially revised. I have enjoyed all the time that I have spent over the years on this work but I think that now is the time to stop. I know that there will continue to be errors found and additions needed to most of the stories, but I hope that they will help future writers and family history researchers to tell a better story of the men and women of Ringstead. I am aware also, when I look through the books that I wish that I had had a good proofreader or been a better one myself.

David Ball

2021

Front cover picture with thanks to Peter Davies and Evelyn Bull

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Chapter 1

Two Final WW1 Men

In the stories of the Ringstead men who served in the First World War I tried to record all those who served in any capacity. Since the books have been printed, I have found a few people who, for a variety of reasons, were missed. I have tried to correct this omission.

James Edward Austin (1880-1951)

Thomas Austin had been born in Podington in Bedfordshire but he moved some nine miles north to Ringstead and worked as a local carrier. In the *Post Office Directory* for 1869 he is shown as a carrier and shopkeeper. By the 1871 Census he had become a baker and grocer in Shop Street but in 1876 he had "petitioned for liquidation by petition". He appears to have carried on in business, however, for in 1879 he was found guilty of selling bread "otherwise than by weight" and fined five shillings. His wife, Sarah, died and in the 1881 Census he was shown as a "baker and outdoor beer house" [off-licence], just two doors from the Black Horse Public House. Thomas died in 1890.

His son, Charles Edward Austin, had first followed his father into the bakery trade. In 1871, aged 17, he was lodging with master baker William Cook at 39 Bridge Street in Northampton and working in the bakery. Eight years later he married Mary Jane Kisbee from Barnwell (where the marriage may have taken place). She was over 30 years old (although she tended to underestimate her age in Censuses etc.). By this time Charles had become a railway employee and by 1881 was working as a railway porter. They were now living back in Ringstead and Mary Jane was a dressmaker and their son, James Edward, was just six months old.

By 1891 the family had moved to Mary's home village of Barnwell and they were near to the castle and the station. Barnwell was only a couple of stops north-east of Ringstead, on the Northampton to Peterborough Line (London and North-West Railway Company). Charles was working as a railway policeman and James, aged ten, was still at school. The term "Railway Policeman" is a little confusing for originally this was a term used for a "Signalman" dating back to when he would use flags to control the rail traffic. By 1901 Charles and Mary Jane had moved to Titchmarsh, but James Edward, now 20, was working as a Brewer's Clerk in Peterborough and lodging with John and Clara Sergeant at 233 Gladstone Street. We learn later that he had started work with the *Northampton Brewery Company* at Thrapston, straight from school. We also find out that he was an athlete and footballer as a young man.

Soon after this, he moved to Rugby where he was the assistant to Mr. T. Muffey, the brewer's agent in Little Church Street. He moved again and he was living in Daventry High Street on the 13th October 1907 when he married Rhoda Amy Smith in Holy Trinity Church in Rugby. She was the daughter of Joseph Smith, a butcher in Dale Street, Rugby and his wife Maria.

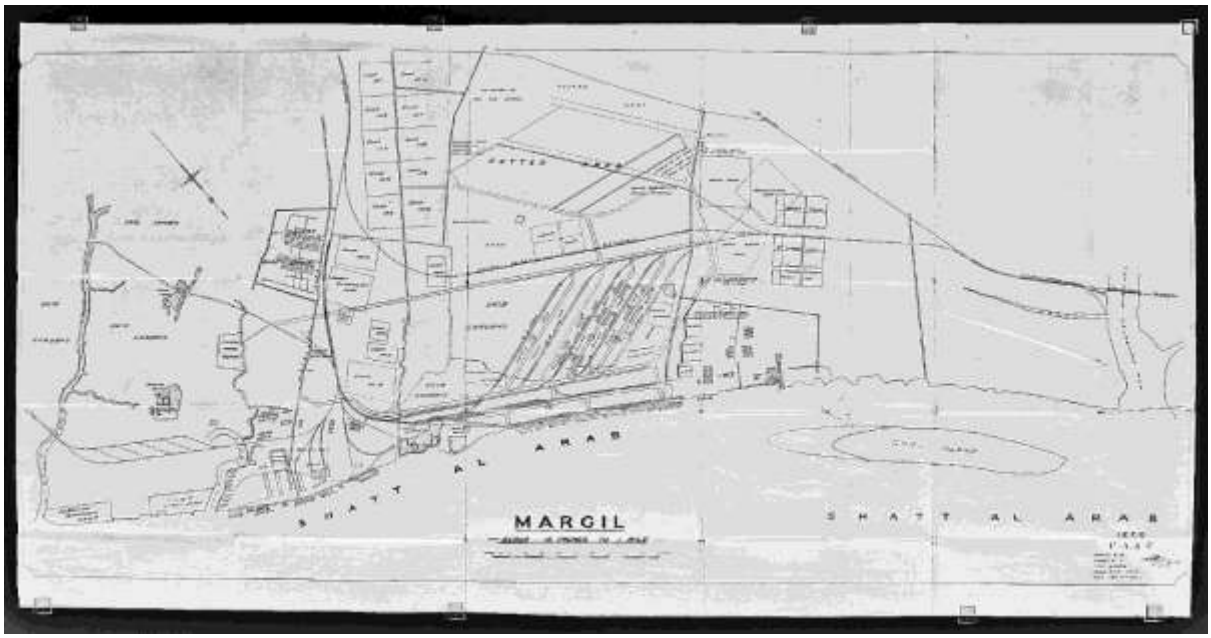
She had been born in 1878 in Sawbridge, a small hamlet between Daventry and Rugby.

By the 1911 Census, James, aged 30, was a Brewer's Agent. The couple were living at 8 High Street in Daventry. They had been married three years and had one daughter, Brenda Mary, who was two years old and born in Daventry. I believe that she was to be their only child.

War came in 1914 and on 15th December 1915 James enlisted in Daventry in the Army Service Corps (ASC) and was given service number M2/188290. It appears that he was not called up until the 16th of June 1916 when he was posted to Grove Park in London, which was the Number 1 Reserve Depot of the Mechanical Transport arm of the ASC. The ASC, among other things, supplied the troops with equipment and food and also transported them to and from the Front.

On the Imperial War Museum website, it records the memories of some of the men who served in the First World War. One of these was Walter Williams who joined the ASC as a driver in 1915: He remembered that:

> *Drivers in those days were not as they are today, ten a penny. It was quite an accomplishment to be able to drive. So, drivers were urgently required. I just went down to the recruiting office in Oxford Street, Weston-super-Mare, and went to the doctor. He passed me for the Army Service Corps. I had varicose veins and I don't think I would have got through for the infantry, but I was okay for the Army Service Corps. I went to Grove Park in London, passed a pretty severe test on a four-ton lorry, going up a steep hill and not letting it run back and so on. I was judged okay and so was mobilised to 14th M.A.C. right away and in three weeks I was in France!*



The medical that was taken when he enlisted showed that James was 5ft 6inches tall and weighed 191lbs (13½ stones or 86.6 kilos). He also had a 43inch chest with a four-inch expansion which was remarkable for the time.

James Austin did not go to the Western Front but, on the 13th March 1917, he embarked at Devonport for the Middle East. It was not until the 22nd of May that he disembarked at Magil near Basrah (Basra), in present day Iraq. A vast dockyard was being constructed to build vessels to carry troops and supplies for the war in Mesopotamia. Much of the boat and pontoon building was carried out by skilled mechanics and labourers recruited from Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

As we have seen in other WW1 biographies, disease was often the biggest threat to the British troops, especially outside Europe. James had arrived in Basrah on the 22nd of May 1917 and just two months later, on the 22nd of July he was admitted to Basrah Hospital with malaria. He seems to have been immediately put on the hospital ship H.S. Ellora. It may be that he was treated on the ship before sailing to Bombay (Mumbai) to the Victoria War Hospital, arriving there on the 28th of August. He was in Mesopotamia for 136 days (which may have included the voyage)

Victoria War Hospital, Bombay. c.1918. H12558. www.awm.au.

On the 17th of February 1918 he was posted to the ASC Personnel Depot at Bangalore. It is in the middle of southern India but, because it is on the Deccan Plateau over 900 metres above sea level, it is generally not too hot for Europeans. It may be that when he was deemed fit, he was taken on the strength of the 694th Company of the ASC at Peshawar on the 27th July 1918. This is on the North West Frontier some 100 miles east-north east of present-day Islamabad in Pakistan. James must have worked well for he was appointed an Acting Lance Corporal (without pay) on the 5th of November.

He remained in India after the war and moved up the ranks, finally becoming an Acting Sergeant (without pay) on the 29th of October 1919. On the 29th of November 1919 he embarked at Bombay for the UK on the *HMHS Marama*. He had been in India for 2 years 154 days and was finally demobilized at Woolwich Dockyard on the 20th of January 1920.

He returned to his small family in Daventry and his work as an Area Representative for the *Northampton Brewery Company*. He was now in his forties and all his working life was to be with the company. In 1957 it merged with the local *Phipps Company* and a few years later was taken over by *Watney Mann* and was closed soon after.

By 1927 the family had moved to Rugby and the *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows them at 196 Hillmorton Road. It is still largely a road of detached houses hiding behind high hedges and trees. James retired when he was 65 and spent his retirement enjoying angling and gardening. On the 30th April 1951 he was taken ill in his garden and died a few hours later. Rhoda died in the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby on the 17th August 1960. Their daughter, Brenda, never married and died in 2001.

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Alfred Percy Balderson (1880-1923)

In the *Ringstead People* books we told of the policemen who came into the village as part of the national service, organized county by county, that replaced the old village constables. One of these was Joseph Balderson who was the first Police Constable who was based in Ringstead following the establishment of the County Constabulary in 1840. There had been other constables who had Ringstead as part of their responsibility, but Joseph lived in the village. He had moved to the village to take up his duties in July 1868. He had been born in Spratton, some twenty miles west of Ringstead and, in the 1861 Census, he was living there with his parents and working as a farm labourer. Soon after arriving in the area he must have met Mary Elizabeth Boyfield from Raunds for they married there on 31st August 1869.

Mary's father, John had been a miller from Byfield. He had married Mary Beeby in Raunds on the 25th October 1847 and we see from the birth places of their children that they had travelled the country from Upwell to Leeds. John had died and in the 1861 Census Mary Boyfield was a widow and working as a school mistress in Raunds. John may have died in Manchester in 1857 when working in the large *School Flour Mills*.

Joseph was some ten years older than his new wife and, although in the 1871 Census for Ringstead he was only shown as 27 years old, he was nearer to thirty. They were living in Sivers Row and had a son, Edgar. Some five more children were to follow, one of whom, Mary, was buried in the churchyard. It is one of these children, Alfred Percy, born in Ringstead in 1880, who is the subject of our story.

The 1881 Census shows the family in Crick where Joseph had been posted as the local Police Constable. By the following Census, the family had moved do Badby but Alfred, or Percy as he was usually known was, aged 11, was a visitor, staying with William Reeves, a butcher, and his wife Sarah, in Crick. It may be that the family were in the process of moving but we cannot be sure. By 1901 his father, Joseph, aged 61, had retired from the County Constabulary and had become the landlord of the *Plume of Feathers* in Everdon. Next door was the Police Station House. Percy, aged 21, was with his family and working as a butcher, as was his elder brother, Leonard.

The following year Joseph died, aged 62, and was buried in the churchyard in Everdon on the 11th July 1902. By 1911, his widow, Mary, aged 61 was the owner of a dairy farm in Everdon. Percy, 31 and unmarried, was still working as a butcher and his oldest brother, Edgar was also at home working as a carpenter.

There was another part of Percy's working life not shown in the Census. On 28th March 1910 he had enlisted for four years with the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. This was a regiment that had been created in 1908 as part of the Territorial Force. It was attached for training to the Eastern Mounted Brigade and, like the other Territorial Regiments, was a volunteer force with weekly meetings and annual camps. He originally signed up for four years and was given Regimental Number 2298. On the 27th of March 1914 he signed up for another year. On the 25th of August of that same year Percy married Ellen Brown at Northampton Register Office

With the coming of war the Yeomanry had been formed into three full-time units and Percy was posted to "C" Squadron of the 2/1st which had been formed in September 1914. It appears that he had signed up for a further year's extension to his contract for he was finally disembodied on the 27th of March 1916. At about this time the 2/1st, which had never been posted abroad, began to be absorbed by other units. Perhaps surprisingly, soldiers in the Regular Army who came to the end of their time could elect to finish their service even in the middle of the war. The unit had been based near St Albans and this explains why Percy had been discharged from nearby Luton.

That was not the end of his service however for, on the 14th of October 1916, he was recalled to the colours. He was now 36 years 8 months old and shown as a farm labourer living in Everdon. He was 5ft 4 inches tall and weighed 154 pounds. The record is rather smudged and faded but it appears that he needed further dental extractions and was deaf in his left ear. His medical classification was "C2" which meant that he was free from serious organic disease, able to stand service conditions in garrisons at home, and, in addition, able to walk to and from work a distance not exceeding five miles and hear sufficiently well for ordinary purposes. His category meant that he would never be called for active service abroad.

He was first posted to the 3/1st Regiment of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry which was absorbed into the 3rd Reserve Cavalry Regiment at Canterbury. He was posted again to the Scottish Cavalry Depot which was at Dunbar on the 22nd June 1917 before being transferred to the Machine Gun Corps on the 6th July and then to the Machine Gun Training Centre at Belton Park.

Finally, on the 9th October 1918 he was attached to 436 Agricultural Depot at Northampton before being transferred to the Labour Corps where he was allotted service number 662748. You get a picture of a man who was being moved around wherever some help was needed. Perhaps some reason for this can be seen from a comment made on his discharge in 1916 for he was said to be hardworking and a *good butcher*. Was he being used in this capacity in the different units?

He was examined at Northampton on the 20th of February 1919 and now given medical category "B2". He was discharged and returned to life in Everdon. I think that the family had three children: John born in 1916 had died as a baby but Dorothy, born in 1920 and Percy, born in 1923 survived.

1923, however, was also a tragic year for the Baldersons. Percy's mother, Mary, died on Sunday 13th May 1923 and he followed her the next day. They were buried together on the following Friday at Everdon. He was 43 years old and left £104 in his Will. His widow Ellen had to find work as a domestic help. She died in 1959.

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Chapter 2

Ivy Elizabeth Adams (1892-1979)

In my account of the people from Ringstead, I have told the stories of the men who served in the forces. There were a few women, besides the ones who took over the roles that these men had previously held in farms and factories, who served as nurses at home and abroad. So far, I have only found one woman from Ringstead but there may have been others. I have already written a little about her in the biography of Stuart Dimbleby Bates who she later married but she deserves a place of her own to represent these women who, often voluntarily served the war effort.

Ivy was born on the 21st August 1892 to Harry and Elizabeth (née Childs) who were both born in Ringstead. Harry was a shoe rivetter in one of the local factories. The 1901 Census finds the family at 13 Carlow Road. By 1911 Harry had become an Insurance Broker and Ivy Elizabeth, at 18 years old, was a Pupil Teacher in a local County Council school. They were now living in "Ferndale" a six-room house in Denford Road.

War came in 1914 and by the end of 1916 most of the younger men of the village had been taken to serve in the war. Many of the men who went out were killed or came back wounded, ill or broken in spirit. As in the present Covid 19 Pandemic, the hospitals were soon filled with the casualties. The *Wartime Project* website records that:

> *The nature of the fighting during the Great War led to a huge number of injured soldiers and the existing military medical facilities in the United Kingdom were soon overwhelmed. A solution had to be found quickly and many civilian hospitals were turned over to military use, a large number of asylums were also converted to military hospitals, with the asylum patients being sent home, often to unprepared families. As demand for beds grew, large buildings such as Universities and hotels were transformed into hospitals and wooden huts sprang up in hospital grounds and at army camps to cope with the huge numbers. Additional nursing staff were needed and this was met by a mixture of qualified nurses and volunteers*.

The *Red Cross* and *St John Ambulance* had set up a Joint War Committee and they pooled resources under the *Red Cross* emblem which was internationally recognized. They set up V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment) hospitals, largely or entirely, staffed by volunteers. The Red Cross website describes how:

> *The buildings varied widely, ranging from town halls and schools to large and small private houses, both in the country and in cities. The most suitable ones were established as auxiliary hospitals. Auxiliary hospitals were attached to central Military Hospitals, which looked after patients who remained under military control. There were over 3,000 auxiliary hospitals administered by Red Cross county directors. In many cases, women in the local neighbourhood volunteered on a part-time basis.*

The hospitals often needed to supplement voluntary work with paid roles, such as cooks. Local medics also volunteered, despite the extra strain that the medical profession was already under at that time. The patients at these hospitals were generally less seriously wounded than at other hospitals and they needed to convalesce. The servicemen preferred the auxiliary hospitals to military hospitals because they were not so strict, they were less crowded and the surroundings were more homely.

The local V.A.D. Hospitals mainly took the men after their initial treatment who still needed care and rehabilitation. These hospitals were set up in Northampton, Wellingborough, Higham Ferrers and across the county. The Auxiliary Hospital in Higham Ferrers had been set up in the Parish Rooms with initially 16 to 18 beds (later increased to 22). It began in March 1915 and was largely staffed by St John Ambulance volunteers under the leadership of "Commandant" and Matron, Mrs. Clara Patenhall, with a local doctor in attendance.

Ivy Adams joined the hospital, as a nursing sister, assisting in the ward, on the 1st of July 1916 and she worked there until the 31st December 1918. In all, she completed 1200 hours service which would be about ten hours a week. At the end of December 1918, like many others of these temporary units, the Higham Auxiliary Hospital closed.

Ivy with Stuart on the farm (with thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott)

As the war was ending, the great “Spanish Flu” Pandemic swept across the world. In November 1918, a sister in charge of the Wellingborough Auxiliary Hospital for the past two years, died. I have not found if she was a relation of Ivy, but she was simply referred to as “Nurse Adams”. She had been infected either with flu or pneumonia, the reports vary, from one of her patients who had later died. The esteem that the nurses were held in, is shown by her funeral which was held with full military honours and attended by great crowds.

Higham Parish Rooms before they were used as a V.A.D. Hospital.

By this time many of the servicemen were returning home and among them was Ringstead man, Stuart Dimbleby Bates, son of the local Baptist Minister, John Bates. Stuart and Ivy married in the Spring of 1920 and lived at first with Ivy’s parents in *Ferndale*. Stuart’s mother died in 1924 and his father in 1928 and in 1931 the couple moved to Yew tree farm in Ringstead High Street. They ran a small farm with hens, pigs and a small dairy herd.

They sold milk around the village from churns which they ladled into customers’ jugs. Older villagers also remembered that Ivy sold home-made ice-cream at the back door of Yew Tree Farm and that airmen from USAF Chelveston were appreciative customers.

The couple had one child, Janet, born on the 8th of May 1932 and, besides looking after her and the house, Ivy also helped on the farm and was a dressmaker. Janet married Cyril Farr and later gave up her work as a School Meals Supervisor to help her parents with the milk business. It would have been a busy life for all of them. Stuart died in 1971 and Ivy, aged 86, in 1979.

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Chapter 3

Henry Raymond (1606 – 1666)

Henry Raymond was a minister at Ringstead through some of the most turbulent periods of British history. In the time of Henry VIII, the Church of England had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church because of the Pope's refusal to allow the divorce of Catherine by Henry. Underlying this, however, was the increasing belief of the Tudor monarchs that the Pope was an outside political power and that the crown should be the ultimate authority in England. As we have seen in the world over the last sixty years, once you remove an overarching authority from an area it tends to break up into bitter disputes between rival interpretations of religion and nationhood.

With each new monarch the imposed religious practices changed and at a local level the services and the interiors of the parish churches would also change. The Church of England had become part of the bureaucracy of state from 1537 when each parish had to keep, by law, Registers of Christenings, Weddings and Burials.

During the seventeenth century religious divisions widened leading in part to the English Civil War, the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell and then the Restoration of Charles II (which was not the end of the religious seesawing in the century).

Henry Raymond was a minister in Ringstead during this period of religious and civil turmoil.

He was born in 1606 (from his age at marriage), the oldest son of Francis Raymond of Dunmow in Essex and his first wife. In 1604 Francis had married Mary Eve of Maldon in Essex. They had three other children, John, Mary and Francis. After the death of Mary, Francis married Elizabeth Spilman and there were four further children, Hanna, Martha, Abigale and Francis.

In Easter 1623 Henry matriculated at, (became a member of), Emmanuel College Cambridge as a "pensioner" or "commoner" which meant that he had not gained a scholarship and so had to pay for his tuition and "commons" (board and lodging). At this time, with few exceptions students of Oxford and Cambridge had to be members of the Church of England and of the gentry. He gained his B.A in 1626-7 and his M.A. in 1630. Both awards were often largely a matter of payment and time rather than of any learning and examination.

Between these two awards he had been ordained as a deacon at Upton Chapel near Castor by Thomas Dove, Rector of Castor and Bishop of Peterborough, on September 3rd 1628 and a day later as a priest. The Doves owned most of the land in the Castor area before it was sold to the Fitzwilliams in the eighteenth century. Thomas was a noted preacher who had greatly impressed Elizabeth I. He died in 1630.

It seems that Henry became a curate at Ringstead in 1630 (or possibly 1628) and he was described as a Clerk from Ringstead on his marriage licence of May of that year, some five years after the accession of Charles I. The vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead was James Southwell (1617-38).

Charles the First began to reorder the church again, emphasising ritual rather than preaching. We cannot be sure how far each round of changes reached Ringstead but many churches prior to this had had a communion table lengthwise in the chancel with the seating around it on three sides. Charles, through Archbishop Laud particularly, had it moved back to under the East window as an altar and rails, communion wine, surplices etc., were reintroduced. They became more like churches before the split with Rome under Henry Vlll introduced changes, and to High Anglican churches today. In the Peterborough diocese these orders were rigorously enforced so it appears likely that the Ringstead Church would have undergone these changes. We get some sense that there was local resistance to this from an order given in 1631 to Ringstead Church to repair the chancel screen (which separated the clergy from the laity) and presumably Raymond replied by saying that the position of the pulpit had caused "inconveniences", (i.e., made this difficult to carry out).

James l had first issued a *Declaration of Sports* for Lancashire in 1617 and it was applied nationally in 1618. This had set down sports which were permitted on Sundays and holy days and those that were not. Those allowed included: archery, dancing, “leaping, vaulting, or any such harmless recreation” together with “May-games, Whitsun-ales and Morris-dances and the setting up of May-poles”. Recreations that were not permitted included Bear and Bull Baiting, “interludes” and bowling. On 18th October 1633 this Declaration was reissued by Charles with the addition of “wakes and ales” (countryside sports) to the list of sanctioned (allowed) sports. Although he denied it, the new *Book of Sports* was attributed to Archbishop Laud. Any parish priest who refused to read this declaration was to be deprived of his position.

The Puritans, who wanted to emphasise the keeping of Sunday "holy", led a Sabbatarian movement against this Declaration. Edmund Calamy, writing in the Eighteenth Century, stated that Henry Raymond was “an able Preacher and bold as a Lion” and Robert Woodford in his diary wrote that Henry Raymond “was a puritan divine who read a lecture at Ringstead sponsored by patrons from London in which he condemned the Laudian Book of Sports”. I am not sure when this lecture was read as obviously this has relevance to the bravery of his action.

In 1630, Henry Raymond, "Clerk of Ringstead, Northamptonshire", had married Susanna Eakins of Gumbley (Gumley near Foxton 5 mile north-west of Market Harborough) at Gumbley or Langton (St Peter’s Church, Langton is some five miles east) in Leicestershire. In the Marriage Licence transcription on the *Findmypast* website it states that Henry was 24, so born about 1606, and Susanna was 20. This seems to contradict the usual age of seventy given for his age at death. If the marriage transcription is correct, he was nearer to sixty.

Although, at her wedding, Susanna Ekins was said to be of “Gumbley” she was the “Susan daughter of Henrie Ekins” and his wife Susan (née Keyworth) christened at Ringstead on 12th February 1609. Henry was the son of Robert Ekins of Chelveston and Isabel, daughter of Alexander Travell of Weston Favell. His brother, Alexander Ekins, of Chelveston seems to have been the main heir. The country seat of the Ekins family was at Weston Favell, near Northampton (possibly through the Travells) with three generation of Alexander Ekins being the heads of the families in succession in the early 17th Century. [Looking at the family tree in *The Visitations of Essex, Vol.13* I think there was a brief interlude from about 1638 to1642 when Robert Ekins was the head.].

Henry and Susan Ekins had three other daughters, Elizabeth, Elinor and Isabell. Elinor had married John French of Gumley and it seems most likely that Susanna was staying with her sister and brother-in-law at the time of her wedding. It still may seem a little odd to have been married away from both of the couple's homes but perhaps the birth of a child quite soon after the marriage may have been another factor. The first child of Henry, now the Ringstead curate, and Susanna was christened “Marie” at Ringstead on January 25th 1630 which confusingly was some seven months after their marriage in May 1630, as the old calendar ran from Lady Day (25th March).

There followed regular entries into the *Ringstead Baptismal Register of Christenings* for the couple. I have included a couple of christenings of the children of Henry and Susanna Hayman although you would think that the children of the curate would have the correct surname written in the *Register*: Henry James (29/09/1633); Susan Rayman (26/12/1636); Francis Hayman (06/01/1637);Thomas (16/09/1639); Rebecka Ramone “daughter of Henry” (1641); Hanna Raymond (03/10/1643); John Raymond is recorded as born at Weston [Favell?] at the end of April 1645 and buried there ** months later [incomplete]; Marie again (26//09/1647); John (06/10/1647); Elizabeth (06/10/1648); Elizabeth again (04/05/1651) Finally there was another Hannah but no details were given although it appears to have been after 1651. There is a gap in the Ringstead Burial Register from March 8th 1639 to February 24th 1665 so we cannot check for infant deaths. The Puritan “Commonwealth” was from 1649 to 1660 and before this there was a tendency for parishes to lean towards Puritan or Catholic beliefs, within the Church of England, and it seems that Ringstead would have been in the former camp with Henry as the minister. It may be, therefore, that the two later entries are for adult baptisms.

The Vicar of the joint parish, Arthur Leonard, had been “sequestered” (removed from office) in 1647. In an article in the *History Review* of the 30th March 1998 John Morrill wrote:

> *Between 1643 and 1647 the Church of England was destroyed, its system of government by 'archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons etc.' (as a canon of 1640 expressed it) was scrapped; the Book of Common Prayer was proscribed and its use made a criminal offence; the celebration of the major Christian festivals – Christmas, Easter, Whit etc. – was also prohibited.*

The leaders of the church were all dead, in prison, in exile, or in hiding; the universities were ruthlessly purged; between a quarter and a third of the parish clergy were ejected from their homes and positions. Dioceses were replaced by county-wide ecclesiastical co-operatives, and cathedral churches were converted into prisons, shopping precincts, or large parish churches; and churchwardens and others were directed to remove all the 'monuments of idolatry and superstition' (stained glass, statues, carvings on fonts and other furnishings) which had survived the first reformation of images in the mid sixteenth century. The lands and revenues of the Bishops and of the Cathedral chapters were handed over to the creditors of the state.

Henry became Vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead in 1647 which Edward Calamy stated was worth some 40 to 50 pounds a year. During Henry's time as Vicar, witch trials were happening all over the country. Malcom Gaskill has written of John Stearne, the "Witchfinder" who worked with Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled "Witchfinder General" to find and see executed witches, both men and women. According to Stearne, a young man of Denford, 'who suffered for Witchery", confessed among other things to sending imps to kill the cattle of one Cockes (probably churchwarden Thomas Cox) of Denford.

The English Civil War had started in 1642 and 1647 was a brief pause before a short second conflict which culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649. The Commonwealth lasted until 1660 when the monarch was "restored" and Charles ll returned to England in what is usually termed the Restoration. Much of the old church practices and ritual were again reinstated and in 1662 a slightly revised *Book of Common Prayer* was issued. Every incumbent of church office had to take an oath of loyalty both to the new Prayer Book and to the monarchy. Two thousand ministers refused and were ejected from their livings. In 1665 the *Five Mile Act* forbade the ejected clergy to come within five miles of the place where they had held a living. Arthur Leonard was reinstated as Vicar of the joint parish.

It appears that Henry was one of the "2000 Worthies" who were ejected from their posts in 1660. In Robert Woodford's Diary he records that "Alexander Eakins of Weston Favell, whose servants were accused of brawling in the belfry of St. Peter's Church in Northampton in 1634 "died in Ringstead in 1666 where his family owned property". He left money to his kinsman, Henry Raymond, a puritan divine. If this date is correct the bequest did not do Henry much good as, it appears that he may also have died at about this time. His burial does not appear in the *Ringstead Burial Register* and I have not yet found it definitely elsewhere. During the chaos of this period much of the recording was not carried out and there are only three burials listed in the Ringstead Register between 1665 and 1668. Surely some must have gone unrecorded.

Henry would have been a lesser member of the landed gentry and Susanna also had strong connections to the landowning class. The Hearth Tax return for Ringstead taken on 30th September 1662 records that Henry Raymond had a house with three hearths (Mr. Ekins had 6 and Alexander Ekins 4).

After Henry's death, in 1666 his widow still had three hearths (so presumably in the same house), the widow of Alexander Ekins had four and Mr. Ekins six.

On November 21st 1665 Henry had made his Will and it was proved on October 15th 1666. It detailed his various bequests with his wife Susanna as his executrix:

> *To wife Susanna house and homestead with all land &c., in Ringstead, and all goods remaining after wife's decease to son Henry and his heirs; to son Francis 40/= [£2]; son Thomas £10; dau. Susanna Raymond, house, &c., bought of Rich. Lileman, paying to her brother Henry's children £10 a child at 21, that is to say, to his son Joseph, his dau. Mary, his dau. Susanna £10 each. To daughter Susanna R. my silver tankard; 2nd dau. Rebecca R. £80; dau. Hanna £80; dau Mary land in Ringstead bought of Anthony Aborne; dau. Elizabeth R. that little close I bought of Robert Gilbert in R. [Ringstead] and £50. To son Francis's son£10; my 4 youngest daus. a silver spoon each; to dau. Raymond wife of Henry 10/=; cosen Samuel Ekins and his wife Mr.Hilderssham's book upon the 4th of St. John and the 51 Psalme; Poor of R. [Ringstead] 20/= [£1]; wife Susanna exec.*
>
> *Inventory taken 29th April 1666, £220 4s. 6d. including his library £14 0s 0d.*

The Inventory itself does fill in a little detail to the house and lands of Henry. It does not include the houses and lands:

	£	**s**	**d**
His wearing apparrell	*06*	*13*	*04*
His Library	*14*	*00*	*00*
All the goods in the Hall	*01*	*10*	*00*
All the goods in the Parlour	*04*	*10*	*00*
The goods in the Milk House	*01*	*03*	*06*
The goods in the Buttery	*00*	*10*	*06*
The goods in the two Chambers over the hall	*04*	*06*	*08*
The goods in the Parlour Chamber with the Linnin	*04*	*15*	*04*
The grain and the goods in the kitchen and milk house chamber	*02*	*05*	*06*
The Cowes	*06*	*10*	*06*
The grain in the field	*08*	*04*	*06*
The hoggs pullen [chickens?] Mannard [Mallard?] in the yard	*01*	*12*	*04*
The debts	*160*	*00*	*00*
Total	***220***	***04***	***06***

Henry also had a licence for a "birden piece" (a small-bore gun used for shooting birds) so we see that he would have probably enjoyed the hunting and fishing as many country gentlemen of the time. One of the sporting parsons caricatured and derided by later generations. Nevertheless, he made a stand and was one of the two thousand "Worthies" and it seems that after his ejectment he never preached again.

The local church was now irrevocably split and the Baptists of Ringstead and Raunds trekked each Sunday to Rowell

(Rothwell) and back to hear another ejected priest from Desborough preach. In 1714 the Ringstead Baptist Church was established.

Meanwhile we know that two of Henry's sons, Henry and Thomas, had gone into the ministry and both "conformed" and stayed within the Church of England. Interestingly both are shown as being educated at Ringstead. Was there a private school at Ringstead at this date or were they educated at home, perhaps by Henry himself or by a tutor? The eldest son, Henry was first at Little Oakley but spent most of his career as Rector of Warkton, where he was buried. The third son, Thomas, spent most of his working life as Rector of Hardwick in Northamptonshire. In 1668 Susanna Raymond of Ringstead married Abraham Syannon [?] of Kettering. Is this Henry's widow or, more likely, his daughter? The following year Abraham Green of Moulton married Mary Raymond. Abraham is recorded as being a husbandman "of Warkton", parish of brother Henry.

Postscript

The Tuttle (various spellings) family of Ringstead are known as one of the early families who migrated to America. Originally, they came from Woodford but in 1896 Symon Tuttle had bought a large property in Queen's Way in December 1596 We see in the Ringstead Baptismal Register the christenings of the children of his sons, John and Richard and William from 1623 to 1634. It seems probable that Henry Raymond, curate at Ringstead from 1630, officiated at the later ones of these and possibly at the burial of Symon on June 15th 1630.

John Tuttle had been set up in the mercery business (which included linens, silks etc.) in St Albans by his father and, in 1640 the Will of Francis Raymond of Danbury (father or brother of Henry?), was described as a "Linen Draper". Was this just coincidence? In 1634/5 Thomas, was the last of William and Elizabeth's children to be christened in Ringstead. The family sold their properties to John Bellamy and Richard, William and families, together with their widowed mother Isobel, joined brother John in St Albans. In 1635, aboard *The Planter,* they sailed for Boston in America. They were not a family escaping poverty so probably it was their religion that played an important part in their decision to take the dangerous voyage to this Puritan settlement. Did the preaching of Henry have anything to do with this? Certainly, one wonders if Richard and Anne Tuttle talked about their plans with Henry.

There seems some evidence that Richard Raymond and others of Henry's extended family from Dunmow also emigrated in the Seventeenth Century, but this needs more investigation.

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Chapter 4

Alfred John Sandilands (c1803-1862) and Anna Maria Bethune (c1800-1880)

I have written elsewhere about John Phillips, whose few years as a soldier had been hidden in the space between the parish records. Another reminder, of how much of a person's life is often beneath the surface of the local records, has been brought to my attention. It concerns Alfred John Sandilands who was Vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead from 1854 until his death in 1862.

In writing about the long list of rectors, vicars and curates that were incumbents during the nineteenth century I tried not to stray too far from their time in the parish. In the case of Alfred this meant that I missed his extraordinary behaviour and its consequences in the period just before he took up the Denford with Ringstead living.

I wrote, "He had just married a widow, Ann Maria Leggatt, on 11th April 1850 in Brighton and they came to Denford four years later". I was wrong because "they" never came. Anna Maria (there are various spellings) Bethune, the daughter of the Reverend G.M. Bethune, the vicar of Worth in Sussex, was born in 1800. On 6thSeptember 1821 she married Horatio Leggatt, some twenty years her senior. Horatio, from the Norfolk gentry, had been indentured to Attorney, George Whemer at Reepham in Norfolk in 1793 and in 1800 he had gained a post in the Office of Taxes. In 1820, he had become Solicitor to the Board of Taxes. He had a salary of £1500 a year, an official residence in Royal Terrace, Adelphi so that, with other "perks", his income was equivalent to some £3,000 a year. Then, in 1833 his department was merged with another and Horatio was made redundant with a pension of £1,300 a year (worth about £150,000 a year in 2020, although estimates will vary. All his furniture in Adelphi Terrace, together with his paintings, fine china and wines, were sold by auction. The sudden reduction in his income together with his loss of position drove Horatio into a deep depression with terrible consequences. The *Leicestershire Mercury* of 29thDecember 1838 reported:

> *SUICIDE. – Horatio Leggatt, Esq. late solicitor to the Commissioners of Taxes, cut his throat at Morley's Hotel, London, last week. The deceased was 65 years of age, was pensioned off in 1833, on a large allowance, and was constantly saying that he was the most wretched man in existence, for want of active employment*.

The couple had had eight children, of whom two girls did not survive infancy and Anna Maria was left with six children under 18. A report in the *Newcastle Journal* of 7th March 1840 reported on a Parliamentary debate on another call for a pension for someone leaving office. In the debate the case of Anna Maria was raised. Horatio's pension had finished with his death and she was left with a "jointure" [provision made by a husband at marriage, for his wife after his death] of £300 a year for the support of herself and her six children, aged from 17 to 2 years old.

In recognition of his 34 years' unblemished service, she had "memorialised" first the Lord Chancellor and then the First Lord of the Treasury for a pension to relieve her state of destitution but had been refused as her case was not covered by the rules laid down by the House of Commons. On the 26th July 1841, the *Sussex Advertiser* carried details of Leggatt's house, called Oakfield Lodge in Worth, with its ten acres of land including gardens, orchards and a pair of cottages, which was to be auctioned under an order of the High Court of Chancery. On 10th February of the previous year the Court of Chancery had asked for all creditors of Horatio to come forward to prove their debts so perhaps the sale of the house was partly to clear these debts and the death duties.

Hugo Leggatt has kindly sent me a transcript of the Will of Horatio's brother, the Reverend Samuel Leggatt, made in 1841. In this he leaves bequests to pay Miss Gwynn £50 and £30 to the Miss Millers, who ran an academy in Brighton, to cover debts left by Horatio. In an 1847 codicil he revokes these bequests because Anna Maria had paid them. Samuel also left £500 pounds to Elizabeth Simpson, a widow, "*but if not then surviving the said sum of five hundred pounds to be equally divided between the several illegitimate children of my late brother, Horatio Leggatt or between their personal representatives."* It is not clear, but it seems that Elizabeth Simpson was his mistress, living in Gloucester Place in New Road, Marylebone and the children were hers. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find her in the Censuses. It seems likely that Horatio's, rather profligate, life unravelled when he lost his post with the Government and this led to his depression and death.

Anna Maria probably had gone to live with her father George Maximilian Bethune who was Rector of Worth and then, when he died, in December 1840, with her brother George Bethune who took over from his father as Rector. Certainly, she is there in Rectory House in the 1841 Census along with her widowed mother, also Anna. Her two youngest children Catherine (8) and George (4) were still at home with her. There were six servants for the small household. Her two older girls, Anna (15) and Georgiana (12) were in a small private school run by a woman with the Dickensian name of Susannah Grimley In Vassall Road in Lambeth. [Georgiana was wrongly named as *Georgina* Mary Bethune Leggatt in the Parish Register when she was christened at St. Martin in the Fields in Westminster even though the service was conducted by her uncle, George Bethune.]

Perhaps it was at Worth that she met another cleric, Alfred John Sandilands, for on 11th April 1850 she married him, just down the road, in Brighton. Alfred had been born on the 13th February 1803, the son of Richard and Jane (née Bradley), and christened in St George's Church in Hanover Square on the 27th of February. His mother died, probably in January 1810 and his father married Catherine Aleven on the 12th November 1816 at St Andrews in London. Richard had become a Minister of the English Church at St Omer, in France, where he died in 1836.

Alfred too, like most of the clergy, was linked to the gentry. He was ordained on 13th October 1827 and became a stipendiary curate at Heydon Bridge Chapel and then, in 1829, at Bishopwearmouth in Durham. In 1827 he had also been admitted as a "Ten-year-man" to Trinity College Cambridge. This was a type of mature student (over 24) who could become a Bachelor of Divinity after ten years without gaining a BA degree first.

It was criticised because the degree was awarded with no formal test of ability and was most used in the first have of the Nineteenth Century by men, who had already been ordained as clergy, and wanted to increase their status by taking a degree. It was also used by poorer men as a cheaper option.

In the 1841 Census Alfred was shown as 35 and still living at the Green in Bishopwearmouth and shown as a Church Minister. In 1845 he moved to the Vicarage of Darley in Derbyshire and in the 1851 Census for Cross Green in Wensley and Snitterton in South Darley, Alfred (48) is with his new wife Anna M. (49) and his step daughter Georgiana (21) together with two servants. There is also a mysterious figure, Jane L. Watson (29) the housekeeper, born in Rothbury in Northumberland, who appears regularly throughout the history of the family. Rothbury was not far from where Alfred had spent some time as a curate but this was some five years after her birth.

Unlike the poor of the nineteenth century, Anna Maria may not have had the imperative of desperate hardship to marry, but perhaps she needed security and did not want to be dependent on the goodwill of others: to be mistress of her own house again. Whatever the reasons, she soon regretted her decision, and any happiness seems to have been very short lived.

The newspaper reports on a case heard in the Queen's Bench on June 11th 1852 give some insight into what happened. The court was considering a case, *R. v. Horatio Leggatt,* originally heard in a lower court. Alfred Sandilands had brought an action of *habeas corpus* against Anna's son for withholding her from him. In the lower court this writ had been granted but the Queen's Bench judges confirmed that because she was living with her son of her own free will:

> "This court has no power to order a wife to be restored to her husband."

This was one of a number of important cases that established that a husband could not compel his wife to live with him, although he still retained the right to this power over their children.

The report of the case gives the bare bones of an unhappy wife desperately wishing to live apart from her husband. Hugo Leggatt, a descendant of Horatio, has written to me about the case and the light thrown on it by a letter sent to his father in 1957. The writer was Mary Nix who was 89 years old at the time. She had a note written by the wife of Anna Maria's brother, George Cuddington Bethune, which stated:

> *She (Anna-Maria) married secondly the Rev. Sandilands, curate of Worth, and they went to the west of England where he ill-treated her by locking her up in his house until she should make a will in his favour.*
>
> *She wrote this in her blood on a handkerchief, & dropped it out of her window, asking the finder to convey it to her father, then Rector of Worth, Sussex.*

> *The gardener picked up the handkerchief and took it to the Rector – who thereon took a trusty friend and a horsewhip & went to the rescue. He brought home Anna-Maria to Worth, where she eventually died. There is no further mention of the Rev. Sandilands.*

This sounds like an episode from one of the gothic novels that were popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. There appears to be some discrepancies and the reports on the court case describe what happened more prosaically:

> *Letters had been conveyed to the family, and her brother and son went to the husband's house in Derbyshire. They saw her and she left her husband's house with them. . .*

Alfred was the vicar of Darley in Derbyshire at this time which is hardly the "west of England". How far would the messenger gardener have had to travel? Further, the possibility of writing a letter in your blood on a handkerchief seems unlikely. Nevertheless, the essentials of the story appear to be true.

I had wrongly assumed that the couple came to Denford and Ringstead in 1854, but Alfred came alone, or at least without his wife. By 1861 we see Alfred in his house in Woodford (near Denford) with his stepdaughters Georgiana (31) and Catherine (28). There are also three servants, and Jane Louisa Watson (39) is a visitor. We know from the local newspapers that Alfred laid belligerently into the local gentry about the state of Ringstead Church and the Denford Rectory. Much needed work had started on the repair of the church when he died suddenly, aged 59, on 22nd September 1862 in Wodford House.

The summary of the probate on the 4th November reveals that he had "effects under £3000", a reasonably large but not huge sum. His executors were his brother Richard Samuel Butler Sandilands and Jane Louisa Watson, a spinster of Park Square in Middlesex.

There is a memorial monument to Alfred on the north wall in the tower. He had preached a sermon 26 hours before his death and the last words of this are inscribed on the monument:

> *He that has taken up the shroud and fought the good fight for a season, at the last day when the books shall be opened, and the hearts of all men shall be known, the sword of warfare shall be taken from him, and a crown of everlasting glory placed upon his head.*

He finished with a line taken from Revelations.

Anna Maria used the surname Sandilands all her life, although she is shown as just Anna Maria, relict of Horatio Leggatt on his memorial in Worth Church. In 1861 she was living with sister Catherine and her barrister husband in Slaugham in Sussex and in 1871 with her son Horace (Horatio) in Titchfield in Hampshire.

There is another twist to the story for, when Anna Maria died, aged 80, on 12th October 1880 at Brownwich in Titchfield, she left in her Will a personal estate of "under £10,000". She seems to have recovered from her "destitution" although much of this may have been from legacies from her parents. She bequeathed money to her children Horatio, Samuel and Anna Maria (Mence) but not to Georgiana, Catherine and George because she stated that they had "behaved to me most undutifully and improperly" She later, in a codicil, did leave something to George provided "he does not look like going bankrupt".

Can we infer that three children sided with Alfred? Life is rarely as clear cut as we would like it to be. A brief look at their lives may give us some clues as to why they were cut out of her Will.

Anna Maria remembered on the memorial to her first husband in St Nicholas Church, Worth.
With the kind permission of Charles Sale. www.gravestonephotos.com.
Photograph by Steve Lockwood.

George became a curate at Ilkeston and married Ellen Matthews, the daughter of a Farm Bailiff from Waltham in Leicestershire at St Marylebone Parish Church on 1st June 1867. In 1871 he is living with his in-laws and John Matthews describes himself as "formerly a farm labourer". In 1901 George and Ellen are together at Short Street in Rearsby in Leicestershire and written beside the entry for George there is a note, "paralysis". Ellen died in 1902 and George in 1904 in Essex.

Catherine Leggatt never married and became a governess in Mr. Tait's orphanage in Fulham and in 1911, aged 78 was a Sister in the Community of St Peter in St Peter's House of Rest in Woolverstone, near Ipswich. Woolverstone House was designed in 1901 by "Arts and Crafts" architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, and had gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll. It was built for Mrs C. Berners, a lay sister of the East End Sisters of Mercy. Catherine died at St. Peter's House in Mortimer Road, Kilburn on 2nd April 1918, and her executor was solicitor Gerald Esdaile Winter. She left £326. 5s.

Georgiana in 1881 was an "annuitant", aged 52, living with Jane L. Watson (55 – her age varies from Census to Census) who "derives her income from property and dividends". They were living at 65 Blackett Street, St Andrews, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Georgiana's place of birth is shown as Crawley not St. Martin in the Fields as we would expect. But, in a previous Census, she had used Worth as her birthplace and Crawley was then a village in the very large parish of Worth, although it has now become the major settlement. It seems too much of a coincidence not to be the same person. Surprisingly, Georgiana is shown as Jane's half-sister so there must be a family connection of some sort.

Even more confusingly Georgiana had married widower Robert Young Rowley, butcher then cattle salesman, on February 14th 1873, at the Parish Church of St Peter in Newcastle. He was 45 years old, a widower and the son of Robert, a cork cutter. Georgina [sic] Mary Bethune Leggatt was 39 and the daughter of Horace Leggatt, a clerk in the Admiralty which is all almost correct - but not quite. Robert Rowley, at least from 1881 until his death on 28th November 1904, (a *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* transcription has death as 83 which seems wrong but his age too varies between Censuses), was living at 20 Eldon Place (or Street) and in 1891 Jane L. Watson was living just two doors away from him. But in 1891 Georgiana M.B. Rowley, "wife of R.Y. Rowley" aged 62 and born in St. Martin in the Fields is in the Union Workhouse in Newcastle.

A few months later, on 2nd June 1891, Georgiana Leggatt Rowley, aged **59** died in the Newcastle Registration District. The Death Certificate has the date of death as 28th May, aged **62**, and her name as Georgina **Matilda** Bethune Rowley and confirms that she died in Newcastle Union Workhouse. It seems inconceivable that this is not the same person. She died of "General debility, Diarrhoea and Exhaustion". Robert Young Rowley is shown as a retired butcher and his address is given on the certificate as 31 Ryehill, Newcastle. He was shown as living at 20 Eldon Street or Place in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses and in his probate summary. There is a widower, John Scott, umbrella maker, living with his widowed daughter and other family at 31 Ryehill in 1891. There is much still that needs explanation but I suspect that much of the confusion is down to clerical errors.

So, was it her three children's life choices or their attitude to her split with Alfred Sandilands which so angered Anna Maria?

Finally, looking at Jane Louisa Watson, there is another possibility for her connection to Georgiana which needs to be explored. Robert Young Rowley's first wife was Ann Watson who died in 1864.

In the 1851 census Robert and his wife were living in the Cloth Market in Newcastle. He was a butcher aged 28 and, in a part of the same house, was a widow, Jane Watson aged 65, also a butcher born in Harbottle in Northumberland. It seems likely that she was Robert Rowley's mother-in-law and possibly that Jane Louisa Watson was Robert's wife's sister. It is in this sense that Jane and Georgiana are "half-sisters". At the moment this is just one possibility, another being that Jane was one of Horatio's illegitimate children, so, once again, more work is needed.

As we have said, Jane Louisa Watson was shown in the 1891 Census living at 18 Eldon Street, St Andrews, Newcastle, with a domestic servant. She was an accountant which would have been unusual for a woman at this time. I think that she may have died on 31st December 1899 while living at Willow House, Longbenton in Northumberland but there are other possibilities. If this is the correct person, she left £5,938 7s. 5d. in her Will and her executors were Joseph Watson, brass finisher (and possibly Jane's nephew) and Isaac Freeman, collector of taxes. She seems to have been an independent, self-made woman who showed another side of the women's movement for equality.

References

My thanks to Hugo Leggatt who sent me the fascinating information about the breakup of the Sandilands marriage and the Leggatt ancestry. Of course, any errors or assertions in the text are my responsibility.
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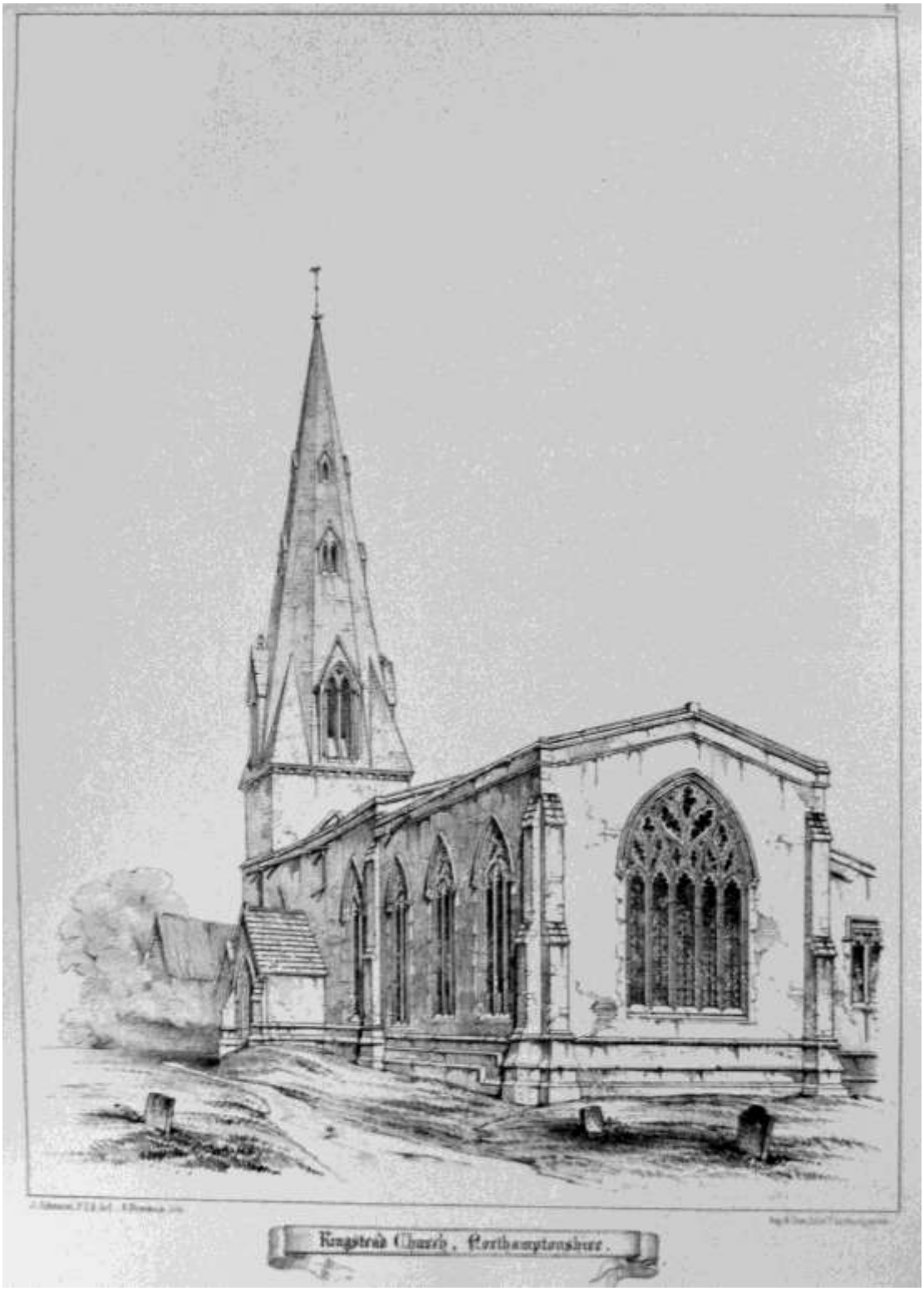

The Church from the south-east about 1858 showing the poor state that Alfred Sandilands saw when he came to the parish.

Lithograph after a drawing by John Johnson published in Reliques of Ancient English Architecture 1858. (own copy)

Chapter 5

JOSEPH SCOTT (1835– 1881) A POOR MURDERED STRANGER?

The story of Joseph Scott is one that reminds you of old folk songs and tales, or of the murder in *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee where the village, or some part of it, closed round to protect its own.

In the 1881 Ringstead Census, Joseph was shown as a 41-year-old shoemaker lodging, together with Charles Mayes and William Manning, with the sixty-five-year-old widow, Eliza Bull and her son Julian. Joseph was not local but had been born in Towcester, in the west of the county. I have not found him definitely in earlier Censuses but it is complicated by the newspaper account of the Inquest into his death where the Raunds' police constable, Thomas West, is reported as saying that he known of him from his time in Towcester and he was 64 years old. At his burial, his age was given as 46 and I think this may be somewhere near the correct age and the "64" was just a newspaper typo. Thomas West also stated that Joseph had no relatives left in Towcester and in the 1881 Census he is shown as a widower. There is a John Scott, of approximately the right age from Paulerspury, who was a shoemaker, but he was still in the west of the County in the 1881 Census. We must leave it as a mystery until further evidence is found.

Eliza Bull said that he had not drunk for some two months when, on 26th December 1881 he went drinking in the *Bakers Arms* in Raunds. At some point the landlord, John Cobley, asked him to leave although he could not say that he was drunk, and he had not caused any trouble. The Coroner thought that this was odd and one wonders it was the actions of others in the bar towards Joseph was what the landlord thought might lead to trouble. The report of the Inquest makes clear that he was well known by the local police and pub landlords and that he had a tendency to turn nasty when drunk.

There can be little doubt that Joseph was a drunk and today we would recognize that he was suffering from alcoholism. The *Northampton Mercury* records many of his appearances in the Wellingborough and Thrapston courts for being drunk and sometimes drunk and disorderly. The dates when he was arrested were: 25th April 1879 at Rushden; 17th September 1879 at Ringstead;10th March1880 at Ringstead; 4th February 1881 at Ringstead: 1st April 1881 at Raunds; 6th July 1881 at Rushden. These usually resulted in fines with prison sentences in default. At the hearing for the April 1881 offence, however, the Thrapston Magistrates sentenced him to one month's hard labour, "as he had just been liberated from gaol for drunkenness".

This list of appearances in court for drunkenness starts in 1879 and, although the constable knew him from Towcester, I can find no sign of a Joseph Scott being in trouble before that date in Northamptonshire. Perhaps the loss of his wife started his drinking (I have not found her death) or perhaps some of the details he gave to the Census officer were deliberately incorrect.

Joseph was turned out of the *Bakers Arms* at about 6.15 pm on Boxing Day and it was already dark outside. John Cobley saw Joseph fall down immediately after leaving the pub but also saw him get to his feet up and go on his way. Again, rather oddly the landlord stated that Joseph did not fall down through illness. If he was not drunk and not ill, what was the cause? Later in the inquest Eliza Bull stated that he was subject to falling fits. It may be that Joseph was a drunk but that he also had other health problems.

Much later that evening, at just gone ten o'clock, Thomas Hall, a shoemaker saw Joseph, lying in the street, surrounded by a large crowd of boys and others and one or two in the crowd were pushing him about. Thomas shouted to them not to hurt Joseph. He called to his friend, Bradshaw Harris and, having heard that Joseph was from Ringstead, they agreed to take him part of the way home.

The two men walked with him up the hill towards Ringstead but, part of the way up the Ringstead Road, Joseph had said that he wanted to lay down. Although the gang of youths was still following them, the men decided to leave Joseph by himself. They were by a field called Butcher's Close which was owned by Mrs. Pentelow They took the locked field gate off its hinges and put Joseph on the ground in the field beside the hedge. They then replaced the gate and thought he would be safe.

The next morning a boot and shoe salesman from Raunds called John Bass was driving past the field in a horse and cart when he noticed a body lying in the ditch beside the road. The ditch was outside the field so Joseph would have had to climb over the gate to reach it. There was, John stated, a "good stream" in the ditch but that Joseph was lying on his back, bearing a little on his right shoulder. The stream was high enough to cover his shoulders, but his face was not under water. His face was dirty and his coat and shirt on his right shoulder were torn and his shoulder was bare.

At the Inquest John Crew, a surgeon from Higham Ferrers, stated that he had examined the body in the stables of the Cock Inn where it had been taken. He said that there was a great deal of dirt around his nose and mouth and he believed he had died of suffocation either from drowning or from his face being pushed into soft wet earth. The Coroner also concluded that Joseph did not fall into the ditch as a result of a fit. In spite of this, the Inquest Jury found that he had fallen into the ditch by accident and had died of exposure. The foreman of the jury, Henry Perkins, did add that, "We believe his death was caused by being treated more like a dog than a human being".

Joseph, aged 46, was buried in St Peter's churchyard in Raunds on the 29th December 1881 (immediately after the Inquest). Letters followed in the local newspapers condemning both his treatment and that he had been buried without being washed and decently clothed. Others defended the jury's decision and believed that drink was the problem and a proper verdict had been reached. We do know that Joseph had been sentenced to hard labour in the year that he died. What this entailed varied from prison to prison but in the 1820s a treadmill, and a crank mill for grinding and dressing corn, had been installed at Northampton.

This hard, debilitating work on a poor diet broke many men's health and would probably have worsened rather than improved Joseph's health even if it prevented his drunkenness for a time. The County Gaol closed at the start of 1880 and prisoners were then sent to the new prison at The Mounts in Northampton so further research, again, is needed.

In Ringstead and other local villages many people were incensed about his treatment and the verdict and a letter was sent to the Home Secretary. I have not found that anything happened as a result. Was he a vulnerable man with an underlying illness who was tormented to death by a mob? His landlady stated that he had many falling fits, sometimes two in a night. So, was it a result of an underlying illness or was his death even more sinister? Did some of his assailants take their secret guilt to the grave?

References

1881 Ringstead Census. I have searched for him in various previous Northamptonshire Censuses but there is not one John Scott who fits the known facts. The name does seem associated with Paulerspury near Towcester but for one reason or another not one seems to be the correct Joseph.
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Chapter 6

Avis Fairey (c1804-1887) and Mary Ann Jenkinson (c1839-1919)

Lyn Watson recently e-mailed me to point out that there was an error in my account of Herbert Abington, the young son of the village grocer and chemist, who kept a diary detailing the last few years of his short life. Lyn also asked if I knew about the son of a Mary Ann Jenkinson who she believed was the illegitimate child of Leonard Joseph Abington, brother to the young Herbert.

This sent me looking through the records and I found an interesting family which was new to me although some of their stories have been well documented by others.

Avis Fairey was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 20th June 1813 (although born in about 1804), along with her sisters Phebe (Phoebe: born about 1801) and Pearcy (born about 1797). They were the children of John and Elizabeth Fairey (or Farey).

Pearcy (or Peacy) married John Cheney on 23rd February 1826 in Ringstead Church but died in 1830. Phoebe had married John Miller of Marefield in Leicestershire on 3rd April 1823 in Ringstead Church. In 1851 she, like her younger sister Lucy, was living in Mancetter, a small village in Warwickshire, where John was a small famer with 15 acres and no farmhands. We see that he had been born there and had been baptised in 1798 with his twin brother, Thomas, who was also living in the village. Lucy was with her husband Samuel Miller, also born in Mancetter and working as a Groom. They had married in Ringstead on the 31st May 1830. The brothers were the sons of George and Elizabeth Miller.

It is Avis Fairey with whom we are mainly concerned. She was married in Ringstead Church to Edward Jenkinson from Kettering on December 26th, 1827. The witnesses were Edward's brother, John Jenkinson, and Lucy Fairey, Avis's younger sister who had been born in about 1806 but I do not think was baptised until July 16th 1820.

Edward's brother, John Jenkinson, wrote in his autobiography that Edward had been seriously ill in the February of the previous year with "Brain Fever" which was apparently cured by:

> *. . . shaving the head of the dear sufferer, applying a blister* thereto, assiduous nursing, the skill of the medical advisor and above all by the Lord's blessing on the user of these means.*

*The Victorians believed that the body could not have more than one illness at a time. They caused a blister by acid or burning to create this second "illness".

John Jenkinson also tells of the wedding and the journey he and his brother made to Ringstead.

On December 26th 1827, my brother was married in Ringstead parish church (Dissenters being at that time precluded from having the marriage services performed in their churches).

I accompanied him for the purpose of giving away the bride. Our journey from Kettering was literally through the darkness and the deeps.

We started from home before daylight and after travelling nearly six miles, we met a person who told us the flood was so great he did not think we should be able to get across Ringstead meadows, but as we had not time to go round by Thrapston we kept on our way and as a consequence got nearly up to our waists in water. However, on reaching Ringstead we presently dried our clothes, and were at the church quite in time to have the marriage celebrated within the canonical hours. I preached at Ringstead Baptist Chapel in the evening and returned home on the following day.

John Jenkinson was born on 7th June 1799 and Edward on 13th February 1803 in Hallaton in Leicestershire. Although little mentioned in John's autobiography there was also a sister, Lettice and. Their mother's father, the Reverend John Ayer, was a Baptist preacher and certainly John did receive some basic education at Hallaton Free School. Their father, Stephen, was a boot and shoe maker employing some four journeymen and apprentices. He lost much time and money pursuing his belief, which was wrong according to his son John Jenkinson, that he had a claim to a Derbyshire estate. His son described him as 'some times more enterprising than provident'.

The whole family was struck down by a fever, but they all survived except the father who died on 23rd June 1807 aged 32 years. John was eight and Edward four years old. All his stock in trade and the household furniture had to be sold to pay his debts and John states that an Uncle took this money to stave off his own insolvency.

The family were now very poor, and John went first to act as a "monitor" for his father's younger brother who was the master of a charity school in Tilton, some six miles away. John relates that he, at nine years eight months old, ran the school almost single-handed, his uncle being often away at his shoemaking business. John was then apprenticed to another uncle as tailor but after being poorly treated, he left and was finally apprenticed to his great uncle, William Stafford, a blind seedsman and market gardener in Kettering. (The Safford and the Ayer family trees were twined together.) His uncle treated John as his own and left him the business in his will. John's brother Edward then joined him in the enterprise.

They both attended the Little Meeting House in Kettering which was a renowned Baptist Church. It was famous for founding the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 and in 1878, John Jenkinson's daughter died of typhoid in Madagascar in its service. Andrew Fuller was the main preacher at this time. When he died in 1815, it was taken over by Robert Hall but, as was common at the time, theological differences opened up divisions in the congregation and John led a small secession from the Little Meeting House and set up the Ebenezer Chapel. He became the pastor and main preacher.

John soon decided that he wished to become a full-time pastor and as, in 1825 he had purchased the gardens at auction off the bankrupted John Cooper Gotch, he rented the orchard and market garden to Edward who carried on the business. When John took up a new post in Oakham in 1848 it was also his brother Edward who tried to keep the Ebenezer Chapel going.

It appears that Avis and Edward had moved to Kettering soon after their marriage. Adult baptism makes it more difficult to work this out from the children's births but we know that daughter Caroline was born there on 2nd August 1831 (but baptised over 30 years later) In the 1841 Census they family were living there with Edward's brother, John, who was a Baptist Minister. John was a gardener and the couple had six children Caroline 12, John 10, William 8, Henry 6, Mary 4, and Alfred 1.

By the 1851 Census we see that Edward and Avis were in Meeting House Yard in Kettering. Older brother John had married Selina Ashford (whom, he tells us, he first met on April 2nd 1838 and that it was love at first sight), the daughter of a Baptist Minister of Harpole, in her home village and he had moved in 1849 to Oakham in Rutland to take up the vacant post of Baptist Minister. With Edward (48) and Avis (47) are John (19) a gardener like his father, William (18) a tailor, Henry (16) also a gardener, Mary Ann (13) Alfred (11) and Edward (7).

Alfred died, aged 17 years, and was buried on the 24th August 1856 and Edward, aged 55, died quite suddenly, on February 9th 1858, after a very short illness. His brother, John, had been a leading light in the local Chartists, Anti Corn Law League, Universal Suffrage Association, the Co-operative Movement (in 1829 he helped start the first, short lived, Co-operative Society in Kettering, and the Temperance movement (he spoke at the Northampton Temperance Union meeting in Ringstead on May 14th 1867). Edward's commitment to the Ebenezer Chapel and his membership of the Kettering Radical Association ((later Kettering Chartist Society), together with the warm relationship between the brothers suggests that they held similar views but we only know, from his brief obituary, that he was committed to the temperance cause. Perhaps his father's early death meant that he, as the younger brother, did not have even the limited educational chances of his John, and was always in a supporting role to his older brother. It also seems that Edward's son, John, was involved in the radical movement. He was a shoe manufacturer in a partnership which was dissolved in March 1874 and his life may have gone downhill after that. A John Jenkinson was involved in some fraud cases.

Life for Edward's daughter Mary Ann, with whom we are most concerned, changed rapidly at this time. In early 1859 she gave birth to an illegitimate child, whom she named Albert Abington Jenkinson. It seems likely, but is as yet unproved, that the father was Leonard Joseph Abington, the grandson of his namesake who had been the Ringstead Baptist Minister until his death in 1849.

If this is the case, he did not stay and "do the honourable thing" but escaped to London where in 1861 we find him, aged 24, staying with his uncle and aunt, John and Eliza (nee Bull) Edmonds, in Trinity Street, St Mary's, Islington and working as a journeyman butcher. Meanwhile Mary Ann had married John Plummer on the 19th November 1860 in Thorpe Malsor, near Kettering.

In the 1861 Census she was a milliner living with her new husband, a staymaker, in Job's Yard, off the High Street in Kettering. Next door is her widowed mother Avis with sons John, Henry and Edward and 85-year-old widowed "mother", (should be mother-in-law) Ann Whiting (she had remarried). There is also a grandson Albert A. Jenkinson aged two, who is Mary Ann's son.

John Plummer, Mary Ann's husband, was another radical, self-educated man who has written of his life and was an editor, pamphleteer and poet. He had been born in Aldgate and a childhood illness had left him partially deaf and lame. He lived with his parents in Royal Mint Street (then known as Rosemary Lane) where his father had a small business making stays (corsets). John writes with typical Victorian colour and prejudice about this area:

> *Near to the Tower of London exists a neighbourhood unequalled for squalidness, poverty and misery. I refer to the purlieus of Royal Mint Street as it is now ambitiously designated but which is better known by its ancient title of Rosemary Lane, although it is many, many years since it deserved a name which awakens the thoughts of sunny orchards, green meadows and all the glorious beauty of nature. Old clothes' shops, kept by persons of unmistakably Jewish extraction; dirty low places by courtesy termed "grocery stores", milkshops, potatoe[sic] sheds and flaunting handsome "gin palaces", line the main street which forms the chief artery of the labyrinth of long, narrow, filthy courts inhabited by Irish labourers and the lowest and most poverty stricken of the London poor; and where scenes are daily, nay hourly, enacted, which are sufficient to "make the Angels weep"; and to mock the proud boast of our vaunted progress in the path of civilisation.*

His father had a serious illness which left him unable to work for a time and his stay business failed so the family had to move into the attic of his grandmother and John was looked after by his uncle in St. Albans for a time. He had little education but taught himself to read from the old bookstalls in the East End, reading a few pages at a time. His father improved and became a foreman and then started up again with his own staymaking business and John worked for him as an errand boy. He started going to evening classes at the Spitalfields School of Design. He went straight from his work and was laughed at and bullied by the other students for his appearance but in spite of this did well and was presented with a prize by Earl Granville at Crosby Hall for "best online drawing from the flat".

Unfortunately, his father's business failed again, and he found a post in a Kettering factory.

John was offered the chance to continue his studies free of charge but could not afford to remain in London alone and so in 1853 he went with the family to Kettering. He found work in a factory on a steam cutting machine. He was offered a job as a local reporter on a penny newspaper, but his partial deafness meant that he could not hear well enough to follow meetings, but he did contribute verses and political letters to the local papers.

It was at about this time that he became acquainted with John Stuart Mill who was impressed by the way that he had educated himself. John also published *Songs of Labour: Northamptonshire Rambles and other Poems* in 1860 and, in the front, he gives an "Autobiographical Sketch" of himself...

He would not have been very popular locally because, when his brother was not allowed to work as a shoemaker, he wrote a pamphlet, called *Freedom of Labour*, attacking the monopoly of the union, and verses against the union were also printed in the *Songs of Labour*. It seems that he was a radical thinker but believing in self-help and co-operatives rather than trade unions. On the other hand, in a letter published in the *Northampton Herald* in 1863, which was the Tory newspaper, he stated that, 'the public house forms the alpha and omega of a working man's pleasure. "Most men went to the pub not to get drunk 'but for the pleasure of joining in social converse and sharing the pleasure 'of a bright fire, a joke, song or story.'" [A History of Kettering: R.L. Greenall.]

His mother died and John and Mary Ann moved back to London and, from a letter sent to him by J.S. Mill in 1864, it appears that John had become the London Correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In 1866 the couple were living in Homer Terrace at the east end of Victoria Park. Homer Terrace was built on land leased by J.S. Mill to John James Homer in about 1858 so perhaps this was instrumental in the family's move. Elizabeth Crawford on her website *Woman and Her Sphere* has told how John was leading a campaign supported by John Stuart Mill to preserve and extend Victoria Park and to prevent the erection of a large Gas Works. In 1866 a group of women had organised a petition demanding that women should have the same political rights as men and J. S. Mill, as an M.P. had added on their behalf an amendment to the Reform Bill going through Parliament to this effect. It was defeated by 196 votes to 73.

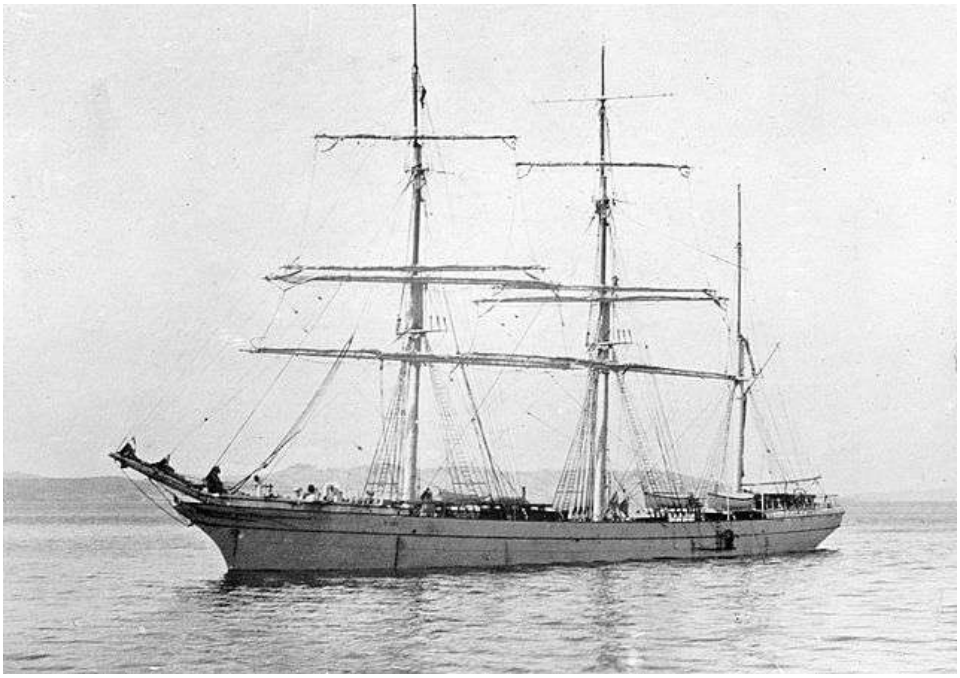
One of the women organising this petition was Mill's stepdaughter Helen Taylor and she approached Mary Ann who signed it. May Ann also approached some her neighbours and some of them signed the petition. Thus, Mary Ann had a small part in the Women's Suffrage movement.

There were many letters between John Stuart Mill and John Plummer and in Mill's replies he almost always gives his (or his daughter's) remembrances or kind regards to "Mrs Plummer". The couple were also invited to dinner at Mill's house on a number of occasions. We hear of John Plummer's lectures and of his various journalistic work, often aimed at promoting the cause of the working man. One project was a newspaper called *The Working Man* which soon failed.

We can only sense that Mary Ann was an active part of this scene but the fact that John Stuart Mill's daughter sent her regards via him seems to confirm that Mary Ann was well regarded, and perhaps particularly in the female suffrage movement. A typical reply, on February 9th 1867, from J.S Mill to John has information to show that it was a struggle for John and Mary Ann at times.

> *DEAR MR PLUMMER*
> *I have to congratulate you on the birth of your daughter, and at the same time to condole with you on the failure of the Working Man and on the termination of your engagement with Messrs Cassell. What have you in view for your next employment? I wish it were in my power to help you to a position of profit and usefulness.*
> *I am glad to hear of a local Jamaica Committee, and of your being a member of it. I think you should decidedly offer yourself as a witness to the Trades Union Commission. They will find few who know so much of the subject and feel so impartially on it. There must often be witnesses quite as hard of hearing as you are.*
> *With our kind regards to Mrs Plummer, I am [etc]*

In the 1871 Census John aged 39 was shown as a newspaper editor (possibly the London *Figaro*). Mary is 32 and there are two sons, Albert J (12) and George E[dward] (9). It looks as if, in Albert's middle name, that "A" for Abington has been replaced by "J" for Jenkinson. The Plummers had also had a daughter but on the 16th December 1870, aged four years and two days, Ada Mary had died of Scarlet Fever.



Auriga (barque) (In 1881 sold and renamed Sierra Blanca)
"Sierra Blanca (ship, 1875) - SLV H99.220-3260" by Unknown.
State Library of Victoria, Malcolm Brodie shipping collection.

On 6th August 1879 the *Auriga* from Liverpool arrived in Sydney, Australia. The 1591 ton boat had a crew of thirty men and carried just one family, John and Mary Ann, together with sons Albert (19) and Edward (16) and one other passenger, a Mr Dixon. It seems likely, therefore, that this was basically a cargo vessel which also carried a few passengers.

John Plummer c1885
Taken by J. Hubert Newman of Sydney: State Library of NSW P1/1365

It would seem likely that John already had a position lined up in Australia and he continued a long life of vigorous and respected journalism. On 4th June 1906 the Adelaide newspaper The Register reported that he had just had his 75th birthday. It continued:

> *He resides at Northwood, a lovely spot, on Lane Cove River, and is one of the most remarkable of literary men in the Common wealth. Notwithstanding his advanced years, he is as vigorous as most men of 40 and gets through an enormous amount of journalistic work daily. . .*

John Plummer died in March 1914 aged 84. His obituary in the Otago Daily Times records:

> *Johns's Notable Australians states that Mr. Plummer was born in London in 1831. For several years he was a member of Charles Knight's literary and statistical staff and one of the pioneers of the [Co-operative?] industrial movement. He joined John Cassell's staff in 1862, assisting in founding and conducting the London Figaro, was two years sub-editor of the Morning Advertiser, for two years associate editor with Mr Stephen Fiske, on the Hornet and Home Journal, editor of several trade papers and for 20 years English Social Affairs correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald. He wrote a cantata and several ballads for the Tonic Sol-fa Association.*

He arrived in Sydney in 1879 and became editor of the Sydney Illustrated News and also of the Sydney Tribune and several minor papers. He was a member of the Town and Country Journal staff for some time and State drawing master for nine years [at Fort Street Training School, 1881 – 90].

For seventeen years he was a contributor to the Yearbook of Australia and other works of reference and was the Australian representative of various British and American commercial, mining, financial and

other journals. He was a member of the Japan Society, Royal Society of Arts and Institute of Journalists.

Obviously, we have only skimmed the surface of a very full (and this is a far from exhaustive list) and, considering his disabilities, an astonishing life. He was buried in the Anglican section of the Gore Hill Cemetery. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* described him as a British Israelite but, if so, his Jewish faith does not seem to have been an important part of his life.

Mary Ann survived him. I believe that she died on 12th August 1919 in Sydney. The *Australia Death Index 1787-1985* gives her father as William, which is wrong, but her mother's name as Avis, which is correct and is so unusual a name as to seem to prove that it is our Mary Ann. As further proof she was buried in *Plot C of E Section M grave 80b* next to John in Gore Hill Cemetery in St Leonards Creek, Watcha Shire, NSW. Her son Albert J. (not A.) was buried in the same cemetery but in the Congregational Section.

Mary Ann's mother Avis Jenkinson had remained at 1 Meeting Lane in Kettering and in 1881 she was there, aged 75, with her unmarried eldest son John (48) who was now a shoemaker. She died on September 3rd 1887 and some seven weeks after the event the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried the following announcement:

JENKINSON – September 3 at Kettering, England where she had resided over 60 years, beloved by all who knew her, Avis Jenkinson, mother of Mrs John Plummer, Northwood, Lane Cove River, Sydney aged 83.

From birth to death she had travelled ten miles. Unfortunately, however far the distance travelled, history rarely records the lives of radical women.

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My grateful thanks to Lyn Watson for starting me on this biography, providing information sources, and for correcting some large mistakes in the first draft.

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Chapter 7

Charles Mawson Burgess (1868 – 1953)

Charles Mawson Burgess was born in Raunds in 1868, the son of Thomas and Ellen (née Breary) and baptised there, on the 26th January 1868. In the 1881 Census for Raunds Thomas had a tailor and drapery shop in Arnsby's Hill (Manor Hill near Rotton Row). Charles was a clever pupil and, in May 1883, the Queen's Prize was awarded to him by the Science and Art Department of the Council on Education in South Kensington (later this became Imperial College). A Charles M. Burgess was shown in the 25th February 1888 edition of the *Yorkshire Post* as being a first-year student at York Training College. Could this have been our man? By 1891, aged 23, Charles had left home and was an Elementary School Teacher lodging in Wakering Road, Barking in Essex.

The *Portsmouth Evening News* of 7th February 1900 reported that the Portsmouth School Board had appointed Charles Burgess as Assistant Master at Fratton Boys School and that he had previously taught at Wellington Place School. In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses he was still in the Portsmouth area and in the later Census he was 43, single, and still a "certified teacher" employed by the Town Council.

It seems that at some point he returned to the Ringstead and Raunds area for, in October – December 1925 he married widow Elizabeth Ann Wyman in the Thrapston District. She had previously been married to local farmer, Charles Wyman, who had been born in Great Addington in about 1850. They had farmed in Newton Bromswold but in 1901 Charles and Elizabeth Wyman had been living at 26 Church Street in Ringstead. In 1903 Elizabeth was presented with a marble clock in recognition of her devoted service as the church organist. Charles Wyman died on 10th June 1906 and left his widow £1841 4s. in his Will. By 1911 Elizabeth, aged 54, was a farmer in her own right, living at Middle Field Farm in Church Street, Ringstead. Living with her was her 93- year-old mother Mary Ann Smart.

Elizabeth's only remaining child (her other child may have been the Wallace who was buried in Newton Bromswold aged 7 months in 1880), William Beeby Wyman, had died on 1st April 1910 aged just 30 and her mother Mary Ann Smart died, aged 97, in 1914. Elizabeth had none of her family left alive. She was a churchwarden and, as Elizabeth Ann Wyman, donated a brass processional cross in memory of her husband and son to Ringstead Church on All Saints Day 1920.

In 1926 Charles Burgess bought the three cottages once owned by Chemist, Herbert Abington, (the ironstone cottages, now one house, on the left of the Post Office) from one of Herbert's descendants possibly for the couple to live in. It may be, however, that this was an investment for we know that they lived in Ringstead Cottage, a large building, now called Ringstead House, at the bottom of the hill from Raunds.

We get an odd glimpse of Charles Burgess when the *Northampton Mercury* of 15th September 1933 reported that he was summoned for aiding and abetting a 15-year-old boy without insurance in driving a car at Woodford on 18th August 1933. There was a collision, and the woman passenger of the other vehicle was thrown out and knocked unconscious. Charles was fined £10 with £1 5s 8d costs and had his licence suspended for 12 months. The boy was a shoe operative and does not seem to have been a relative. It raises a few unanswered questions although we know Charles was a good-hearted man and the boy (with insurance) could legally have driven at 16. He was only doing ten miles an hour at the time of the crash.

Charles in fancy dress (on the left)
In 1928 the Parish Church organised a fancy dress procession to raise money for the school. Could this have been the occasion? My thanks to Jon Abbott for this photograph

When they married, Charles would have been 57 and Elizabeth 68. Against the odds the couple were married for twenty years. Elizabeth died in Ringstead aged 89 on 28th May 1945 and left £3371 18s 1d with probate (Llandudno Probate Office?) to Charles. She was living in Ringstead Cottage at the time of her death.

There is a wooden plaque on the wall of the north aisle of Ringstead Church which states:

*Pray for the soul of ELIZABETH ANN BURGESS who worshipped here for 55 years and who died May 28th 1945 in her 90th year. Electric light was installed in 1946 as her memorial. Paravi Lanternam Christo Meo**

Paravi* **Lucernum *Christo Meo* is from an Ambrosian chant based on Psalm 131 and translates "I have prepared a lamp for my anointed".

It seems that Charles Burgess left the area soon after his wife's death. He would have been in his late seventies. Older residents remembered a sale at Ringstead House where Charles sold all his possessions. He laid out all his books on trestle tables and sold even the book he had been given as his Queen's Prize. He went as a Brother to Nashdom Abbey near Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire. Certainly, we know that he was living there when he sold the three cottages in the High Street on 25th August 1949. Nashdom was a large house built by Sir Edward Lutyens, which had been taken over as a monastery after the First World War. It was there that Charles Mawson Burgess, aged 85, died on 16th February 1953 leaving just £784 0s 6d. The executors were a solicitor and William Joseph Freeman, a road foreman.

Was he ever a teacher in Ringstead? Certainly, he was not a head teacher, but it is thought that he may have been employed for some supply teaching at the school.

References

Unbeknown to me Jon Abbott had already done some research and writing up of this story so my thanks to him for sharing his research and local knowledge to improve this biography. Ringstead Censuses 1861-1911; England & Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills) 1858-1966); Civil Registrations of Births, Marriages and Deaths. www.ancestry.co.uk. Northampton Mercury & Herald 15th September 1933; Yorkshire Gazette 25th February 1888: Portsmouth Evening News 7th February 1900. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk . www.RootsChat.com
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Chapter 8

John Ball (1817-1866)

John Ball (1) Abt1817 - 1866		Sarah Smith Clark(e) Abt1820 - 1902			John Sparks (2) Abt1841 - ?
Elizabeth Ball Abt1842R – 1882	George Daniel Abt1848R - 1920	Jeremiah John Abt1851 – 1880	William James 1859 - 1860	Ebenezer Thomas 1861 - 1926	*No children together Sarah was about 46 at time of wedding*

In a family tree littered with John Balls, I struggled, for many years, to find the details of this one's later life. He was born in about 1817 to John Ball and Sarah (nee Burkett). The Parish Registers record that he was baptised on May 18th 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. They also record that he married Sarah Smith Clark[e] on 21st November 1841. I believe that the 1841 Census records him with his brother Thomas staying with his mother and her second husband John Cheney who she had married some 10 years after the death of her husband in a fire at Denford. (They are sometimes transcribed as John and Thomas Bull.)

Sarah Smith Clark[e], daughter of Jeremiah and Elizabeth Clark, was baptised at Barnwell St Andrew, 2 miles south of Oundle, in Northamptonshire on the 11th June 1818. She may be the farm servant Sarah Clark living in with Ringstead farmer Richard Freeman, his wife Elizabeth, and their family in the 1841 Ringstead Census. Unfortunately, this Census does not record places of birth.

They had two children baptised in Ringstead Parish Church, Elizabeth, on 11th November 1842, and George Daniel on 11 August 1848. I could find no further trace of them and some Ancestry trees had the deaths of John and Sarah locally in 1891 and 1901 respectively. In November 2015 I finally found some details on various websites of a family which matched this one very well, but who had lived in Australia, so I began to hunt around and now I believe that I have a much clearer answer as to what happened to John and his family.

At this time the use of Australia as a dumping ground for convicts was coming to an end and the demand for immigrants to provide labour was being encouraged. Below is a typical advertisement from the *Northampton Mercury* of 8th January 1848:

> *EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA. – FREE PASSAGES to NEW SOUTH WALES and SOUTH AUSTRALIA are granted by HER MAJESTY'S COLONIAL LAND and EMIGRATION COMMISSIONERS, in first-class ships, sailing at short intervals in succession, from London and Plymouth, to persons strictly of the working class. The Emigrants most in demand are agricultural labourers, shepherds, and female domestic servants, and dairy maids. A few country mechanics, such as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters &c. are taken for each ship.*

Undoubted testimonials, both as to character and ability in calling and occupation are indispensable.

At the time of the last advices, the demand for labour in both colonies was urgent, and the rate of wages considerably higher than in England. On the other hand, provisions generally were at a much lower rate. Clothing was about the same price as in this country.

On arriving in the Colonies, the emigrants are received by an officer of the government, who will give them information as to where they may obtain work: and they are at perfect liberty to engage themselves to anyone willing to employ them and t make their own bargain for wages. No repayment is required of any part of the expense of their passage out.

For further information apply to [Among the list are Mr. C.W Ibbs, Thrapston, Mr. J. Strange, Kettering].*

By order of the Board
S. Walcot, Secretary.
Government Emigration Office, 9 Park-street,
Westminster, Dec, 1847.
**C.W. Ibbs was a printer and stationer and later a postmaster*

John and Sarah, perhaps, saw these advertisements or the various letters sent by emigrants who had settled in Australia extolling its virtues, (one wonders if they were ghost written by the Emigration Office). Perhaps they heard by word of mouth. Certainly, soon after the baptism of George Daniel, the family emigrated. It seems very likely that they are the ones described as "John Ball, wife and family" who arrived on the *Stebonheath*, a 926 ton three-masted ship, that had sailed from London, via Plymouth, which it had left on 31st January 1949. Besides a few "cabin passengers", it had 373 "government emigrants" aboard in steerage (the poorest accommodation) including 106 children, some of them born during the voyage. As we have seen, these emigrants would have had much of the cost of the voyage paid for them, which was subsidised by the sale of land in South Australia to rich farmers and developers.

Besides the families there were some 56 single men and 39 single women. In an 1858 voyage of the *Stebonheath* to Adelaide a sick pregnant single woman was taken ashore and died in hospital. This led to the revealing of life on board, showing a lack of discipline and moral standards with much debauchery between some of the sailors and single men and some of the single women. We can only surmise if conditions were the same in 1849.

They arrived in Port Adelaide, South Australia on the 11th May 1849 after a journey of about four months (some records say 114 days). For those in steerage it would have been an unpleasant, smelly, tedious, and sometimes dangerous voyage. When they arrived in Port Adelaide conditions had improved somewhat compared to the first immigrant voyages.

Many Irish families were being assisted to flee the Great Famine (emigration being seen as a cheaper long-term option for the government and landowners than poor relief) and the Bishop of Adelaide wrote a letter on July 30th 1849, printed in various newspapers, including the Manchester Guardian, and the Ballina Chronicle in Ireland on December 5th of the same year, in which he gave the following advice to immigrants:

> *I will now detail what steps are taken in the colony for the assistance of the emigrants. Captain Brewer is the emigration agent, whose duty is to board the vessels as they arrive, and after examining the conditions and discipline of the passengers, to offer such counsel as may be needed for their guidance. In the case of persons destitute of means he is empowered to pay the expense of the journey to Adelaide (eight miles) and transport of their baggage. There is a row of cottages, built by the government, at Port Adelaide, for the temporary accommodation of emigrant families, should they fail to procure situations before compelled to quit the ship. Fourteen days are generally allowed on shipboard, after reaching the port, during which time they are provisioned*.

Port Adelaide painted by Samuel Thomas Gill c1848.
Gill was employed by the South Australian Commissioners to paint pictures to promote the province in London. It is a view across the Port River to the Port settlement and the ships berthed at the wharf. The large building on the left is the South Australian Company warehouse with the Customs House in the middle and the British Hotel on the right. The Stebonheath would have berthed in the middle of the picture near the Customs House.

Information kindly provided by Meredith Blundell of the Port Adelaide Enfield Public Library Service. Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia

In the report of John's death in Mintaro 1866 it states that the family had been living there 17 or18 years so it seems that the family moved there soon after arriving in South Australia. If this were the case, they would have been some of its earliest settlers. Their first child born in Australia was Jeremiah John who was born on the 16th January 1851 "On the Wakefield" I am not sure if this means Port Wakefield or has some other local meaning.

Mintaro had been established about this time as a staging post along the Gulf Road, which was a bullock trail owned by the Patent Copper Company to take smelted copper from its mines in Burra to Port Wakefield for shipping. The bullock teams soon left for the richer pickings of the new gold fields and were replaced by mule trains. Then, in 1857, the town declined, for with the coming of the railways and a terminus at Gawler the trail was rerouted through Riverton. The town was saved by the finding and exploiting of good quality slate locally and the increasing importance of agriculture.

We know that John first worked as a labourer in the Adelaide district and that, by 1866, his eldest son (George) Daniel was a labourer in a Steam Flour Mill, established in Wakefield Street in Mintaro in 1859, by John Smith a substantial local property owner. It seems that his father, John, also worked there. This mill was used for grinding and dressing grain. On the morning of Thursday 26th April 1866 John, with the help of son Daniel, was taking a cartload of bran and pollards (a finely milled blend of bran and wheat middlings used for horse feed) from the mill to Burra.

The team of four horses had stopped at a creek on the edge of the Mintaro township and was unwilling to move on up the hill. Finally, John and Daniel got the team moving up the cutting but again, halfway up, the lead horses refused to go any further. They unhitched the lead two horses and tried to turn the other two around with the cart to go back to the creek at the bottom of the hill. John struggled in the confines of the cutting but told Daniel to go and wait beyond the creek out of harm's way. The horses suddenly swerved round and galloped down the hill knocking John over, and the cart wheels passed over his lower body and also hit his head. He was terribly injured, and he was carried to the Mintaro Hotel where he died soon after.

John was buried at 4 o'clock on Friday 27th 1866 and most of the Mintaro residents and many people from further afield were present at his funeral. The service was held at the Primitive Methodist Chapel which could not hold all those wishing to attend. The South Australian Register reported:

He was a quiet man and lived amongst us for the last 17 or 18 years respected by all.

In his Will he left "Lot 2162" to Sarah in trust for his children, to be divided equally, when the youngest reached 21 years of age.

Less than six months later, on 19th November 1866 Sarah married farmer, John Sparks, son of Simeon, who was some 20 years her junior. It was also held at the Primitive Methodist Church in Mintaro, where John's funeral service had been held.

In the marriage registration, Sarah's father was given as Jeremiah Clark, perhaps the final proof that this is the family who came from Ringstead. Sarah lived to be 83 years old and died on 20th September 1902 in Eurelia in South Australia some 105 mile north of Mintaro. She was registered as Sarah Clark Sparks.

The Children

Elizabeth (Bessie) Ball. One of the men who helped carry John to the Mintaro Hotel was called Jesse Smith. He was probably the man who had married John's daughter Bessie (Elizabeth) at Penwortham, some eight miles west of Mintaro) on 7th February 1859. Bessie was 17 years old. Jessie Smith died on 1st March 1869 in Mintaro aged just thirty years. Bessie remarried to James Greer Quinn, still in Mintaro. Bessie too died young, not long after the death of her 15-month-old son Thomas, on 7th November 1882 aged 39 and was buried on 9th November 1882 in Tarlee Cemetery where her gravestone can still be seen.

George Daniel Clark Ball, son of John Ball, married Frances, daughter of Joshua Jenner on 28th November 1877 at the residence of his stepfather, John Sparks, in Watervale, South Australia (Wakefield Registration District). Frances died, aged 27 on 27th July 1886 at Walloway in the Frome District. As was far from unusual, Daniel (or Dan) as he was usually known then married her sister, Susan, on 21st May 1888, again at John Spark's house but this time in Eurelia (5 miles north of Walloway) in the Frome District. When George's daughter, Frances Sarah, married Thomas Whittaker Vaughan on 27th December 1915, the marriage place was given as the residence of G.D.C Ball at Orroroo (14 miles south of Eurelia) in the Frome District. The Adelaide Chronicle of 27th March 1920 had a short notice in its Deaths Column:

> *BALL – On the 18th March at his son's residence, Broken Hill, George Daniel Clarke (Dan) Ball, the beloved father of S. Vaughan, E. Tate and E., G., F., J., A. And F. Ball, late of Orrero, S.A.*

Some of Daniel's children had died young. One of them, probably signified by the single "J" in the death notice was Joshua John Ball who died on 14th April 1918 at the battle of Amiens and was buried in the Bonnay Communal Cemetery Extension (A. 9). He had been in the 43rd Battalion (7th Reinforcement) of the Australian Infantry, enlisting on 9th November 1916 and embarking at Adelaide on 23rd June 1917, he had been a blacksmith's striker before joining up.

Jeremiah John was born in Little Para (On the Wakefield) on 16th January 1851 in the Adelaide District. He married Hannah Chapman, daughter of William, on 10th March 1875 at the home of Robert Smith in Manoora. Some trees have him dying in 1880 and it seems that Hannah remarried on the 18th December 1886 to August Dohnt. However, a John Jeremiah Ball born in 1851 died on 10th June 1902 aged 51 in Mintaro. It seems that John and Hannah had probably separated or divorced, for the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 14th June 1902 reported:

MINTARO

> J*une 11. - Mr. John Ball, 51 years of age. and an old resident of the locality, in the employ of Mr. Skewes. was found on Monday morning with his throat cut. The deceased had been very melancholy of late, and on the preceding Sunday had informed a resident of his intention of committing suicide, giving as his reason that he was without a home or friends, and tired of life. An inquest was held yesterday, and a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity was returned.*

William James was born on 17th July 1859 in Mintaro in the Registration District of Clare. He is shown as the son of John Ball and Sarah Smith Clark. He died the following year.

Ebenezer Thomas was born to the same parents on 24th May 1861 in Mintaro. I believe that he married for, in his will, he left his estate to be divided equally among his three children: Herbert David; Marjorie Clarissa Clark; Alexander Thomas. He appointed his son-in-law Archibald Clark as his executor so Marjory once again carried her grandmother's surname. Unusually he asked that the photographs and family relics be divided between the children. There is no mention of his wife Edith (nee Edwards), whom he had married in 1888, because she had died on 13th October 1922. She had left him her interest in the weatherboard, iron (?) and stone six-room house in Mica Street in Broken Hill. He died on 21st October 1926 in Broken Hill, New South Wales (some 240 miles north east of Mintaro). He was registered as a "Stableman" at his death.

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Chapter 9

SHOEMAKERS NOT THATCHERS

Roberts, Benjamin Ebenezer (c1858 -1925) & Roberts, George Henry (c1865 - 1941)

In this revised biography I have written about some of the Roberts family, particularly Benjamin Ebenezer and his cousin, George Henry Roberts, the son of his father's younger brother, Thomas. I have linked their stories to the shoemaking industry in Ringstead.

The Roberts family seem to have appeared in the Ringstead area in the late eighteenth century, probably from Wales. Our first sighting of the family in the village is when William Roberts married Ann Roberson on 12th October 1788. William's first wife and baby daughter, Lydia, died in 1790. He married again some seven months later, on 1st February 1791, to Elizabeth Jacks who was eight years his senior. They had four children; John, Mary, Samuel and Hannah but in January 1799 the three youngest were buried in the churchyard. There is some confusion in that a second Hannah was born on 3rd December 1798, twenty days before the death of the first Hannah. It may be that, when she was baptised on July 1st of the following year, it was decided to give her the same name as the daughter buried in January of that year.

On 18th August 1801 William killed another villager, Matthew Teat, with a scythe in a harvest field fight and spent some months in Northampton Gaol for manslaughter. Later, in 1805, a son William was born and a year later another son Thomas who died aged just 13 months. We see that from the seven children born to William only three John, Hannah and William survived into adulthood.

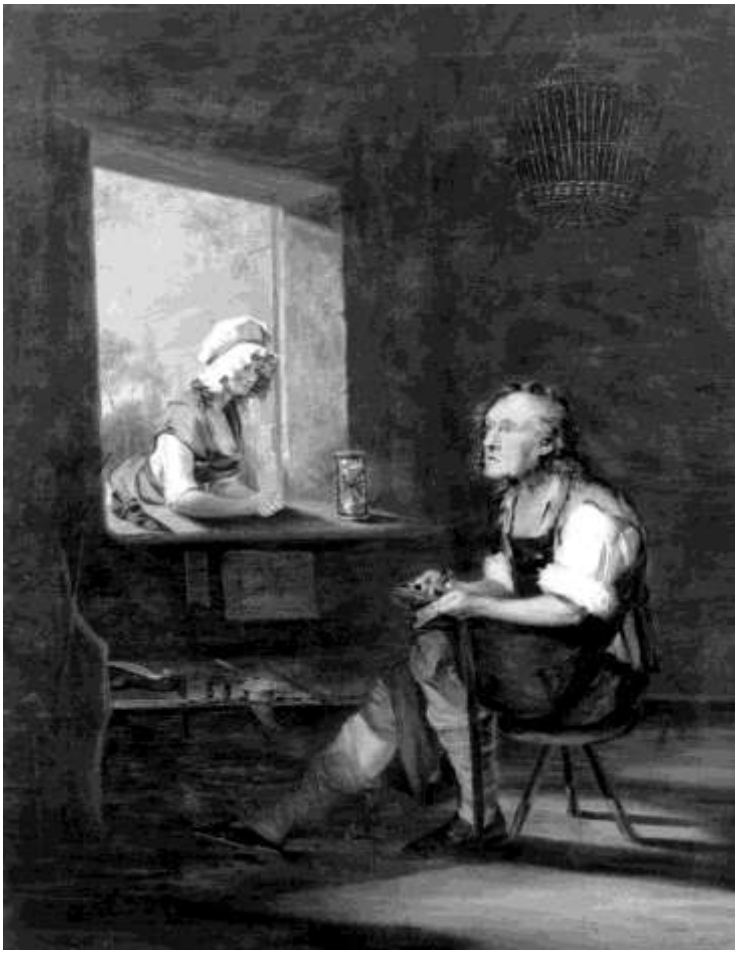
It is his son John Roberts who is the next link in his chain. His baptism was missing from the Parish Baptismal Register but is in the Bishop's Transcripts. He was born in about 1791 and baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 15th June 1792. He too became an agricultural labourer. He married Rebecca Horsfield at Swineshead on 16th February 1818. It is possible that Rebecca had moved to Ringstead before the marriage, but they certainly settled in the village and had three daughters baptised in the local church. Mary was christened on March 18th 1821, Elizabeth, who died as an infant, on April 6th 1823, and Susan on April 29th 1826. Unfortunately, there were to be no others for Rebecca (or Rebekah) was buried on 13th March 1828. Looking at the timing of the other baptisms, it may be that her death was associated with a pregnancy.

As his father, like many widows and widowers with small children, had remarried two years after his wife's death on 2nd August 1830. She was some fifteen years his junior and was born in Bythorn. At their wedding both John and Alice had signed the Register with an "X". Nevertheless, in the 1851 Census Alice is described as a "Church Sunday School Mistress".

This certainly implies some literacy skills and usually some basic musical ability which may have passed down the generations.

John soon had a second family of five sons between 1831 and 1842: William, who died at eight months old, John, William 2, Thomas and George. All are shown as shoemakers in the 1851 Census. George, the youngest is only nine years old but he is already learning his craft. John, at 17 the eldest, is not living with the family but is lodging with another shoemaker, John Pearson and his wife, presumably as an unofficial apprentice.

The younger John was married just two years later in 1853, at the age of nineteen to Letitia Phillips, who was a year younger. The children followed quickly with almost all working in the shoe trade. Elizabeth, born c1854; Owen, born c1856; Benjamin Ebenezer, born c1858; John, born c1860; Alice, born c1864; George born c 1866 and finally Herbert, born c 1868. All are in the shoe trade in the 1871 and 1881 censuses, including the girls, except for George who is in 1881 a "Railway Employee". (In 1891 he is a Midland Railway Station Master at Asfordby in Leicestershire where, later, his nephew Alfred Roberts held property).



Shoemaker 1780
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

The shoemakers, like the tailors and miners, were always known as a radical, freethinking part of the working-class population. In the book *Captain Swing* which looks at the agricultural riots of 1830, the authors compare parishes with and without shoemakers and concludes: “The average riotous parish had from double to four times as many shoemakers as the average tranquil one”.

If we look at the figures from the Censuses for Ringstead we find that there were some 36 shoemakers in 1841, 79 in 1851, 145 in 1861 and 186 in 1871. We must be careful in overstating this doubling of shoe workers every ten years in the early Censuses. Some of the increase is due to the lack of information on those who were not heads of families in the 1841 Census. Certainly, some of it is due to the movement of women and girls from lacemaking, which declined very rapidly from 1851 to 1861, although only 35 female shoe workers are recorded in the 1871 Census. There was a great increase nevertheless mainly based on the production of army boots and shoes. Some of this increase seems to have been the result of the various strikes in Northampton culminating in the ones of 1857, 1858 and 1859. The introduction of machinery, especially in the closing process where a form of sewing machine was introduced in November 1857 led to workers fearing for their jobs and strikes were held. The shoemakers refused to work on any boots and shoes that had been "closed" by machinery. At first there was no trade union, but the men belonged to benefit clubs to help see them through hard times. In April 1858, the *Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Makers Mutual Protection Society* was established with the main objective of preventing the introduction of machinery and to protect, equalise and raise wages, as far as possible.

The writer of an 1860 report on the strikes, coincidentally a man called John Ball, a common Ringstead name, criticised the action but did concede that:

> *It is, however, undeniable that the improvements in machinery, when rapidly introduced into any branch of trade, sometimes deprive workmen and those depending on them of their daily bread*.

In this case “daily bread” must be taken literally. The strike ultimately failed and many men left Northampton seeking work. The writer of the report estimated some 1500, mainly young men, left the town. There was a movement of some of the shoe making production to the Leicester area which had accepted the new machinery, often in larger factories. There was also a movement of the “coarser” boots and shoe manufacture into the smaller towns and villages such as Raunds and Ringstead. In these cases much of the work was “outwork”, based on piece work with comparatively low rates.

Well into the twentieth century much of the shoemaking in the Ringstead area was done either at home or in small workshops. In his novel, *The Feast of July*, H. E. Bates writing of the end of the nineteenth century, based mainly on the Higham Ferrers and Rushden area, talks of the two-storey sheds behind the cottages where the shoemakers worked. His heroine sees one such first-floor workshop for the first time.

She looked round the small oblong, white-washed shop, with its crowded benches under the cobwebbed leather-dusted windows; the rolls of kip and calf and belly leather and the untidy mess of tins and sprigs and eyelets and brass tacks and wax-end. A glue pot was cooling on its burner. You could smell the hot breath of it and with it the close dark odour, almost the stench, of leather.

We know that Ringstead had such workshops attached to cottages as can be seen from the various sales in the Northampton Mercury (e.g., 19th December 1868 "Sale of cottages with shoe-makers shops"). A few still can be seen today.

This is South Place Works, Long Buckby in the early Twentieth Century but does give some of the atmosphere of a workshop and little had changed in the previous one hundred years. With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

Others did not have that luxury and would work in the living room or in one of the bedrooms. This was particularly true for the women doing the “closing” which involved mainly sewing. Doris Watts speaking of the early years of the twentieth century in Rushden remembers:

Mother was a “boot finisher” and I can see her now in my mind’s eye in that little back room of our house in Cromwell Road finishing a boot that was strapped on one knee and with the other foot tapping the cradle that had a baby in it. It was a wicker cradle on rockers. Women in those days with boots and babies all in one small house had a very hard time. It was drudgery.

We must remember that in the Rushden area it was less likely to be the heavier, military boots that dominated the Raunds and Ringstead production. Incidentally Doris remembers her mother telling her of when her mother planned to marry her father, a Roberts.

> *When my parents planned to marry, Dad asked Mum where they should marry. The Roberts were brought up Ringstead Baptist but moving to Raunds became Wesleyans. The Raunds Baptists were known at Ringstead as a quarrelsome lot; in Raunds they were known as the "Chosen ones". Mother said that they would like to be married at Rushden Church, where her mother had been christened. To mother's surprise my father replied that he was broad minded himself "but had Grandfather been alive he would have forbidden it".*

In the early Nineteenth Century there had emerged entrepreneurs who acted as middlemen and they began to organise small workshops where the clicking (leather pattern cutting) was done and they put out most of the other processes to home workers. In Raunds and Ringstead it appears that the workers would go to the factory to collect the work and then also take it back when finished. The middlemen had in effect become the factory owners.

We do know that in 1867 there was only one major factory in Raunds, Wm. Nicholls & Son, because of a letter sent by a shoemaker to the Co-operator. Isaac Burton writes:

> *.... Raunds is a large village containing about 2,500 inhabitants, who are chiefly occupied in the shoe trade, but all under the control of one employer, who resides in the place. He keeps a grocer and draper's shop, and if you don't spend your money at his establishments, you must go and seek for work at another village about four miles distant.*

Underneath the letter is an article, *Serfdom in the Shoe Trade*, by Daniel P. Foxwell who, as a result of this letter, went to Raunds and spoke at the Temperance Hall, trying to get the workers to form a Co-operative society. Isaac Burton may have expected that Mr Nicholls did not read the *Co-operator* but word got back and a few weeks later his indignant rebuttal of the accusations was printed, although he does not deny the statement about the "company shop". Incidentally I have found Isaac Burton, born about 1835 in Raunds in the earlier censuses but in 1871, the census after his letter appeared, his parents and siblings are there (his brothers wrongly transcribed as Barton), but Isaac has disappeared. I could not find Isaac but his descendant, Tracey Huff has informed me that, shortly before the 1871 Census, Isaac emigrated to the United States still working as a shoemaker.

It is important to remember that shoemaking was not a single, uniform craft. Some master shoemakers made bespoke shoes by hand and did all the processes in their own workshops. Increasingly, most only did part of the process with the clickers being the aristocrats of the workforce. Their skill in cutting out the leather to produce matched pairs and to get the maximum from a hide was vital to the quality and the profit from boots and shoes.

The clicking was the first to be organised into workshops and factories because of the space needed and the importance of it to the whole process.

An article in *The Boot & Shoe Journal* in 1887 described the factories in Raunds, some of which appear to have had all the shoemaking processes within their four walls. He describes the factory of Messers W. Nicholls, for example, as "admirably arranged....The machinery which is of the best description, is driven by a gas-engine. The firm also curries the upper leather required and the whole factory is noticeable for completeness in every respect." Nevertheless, he goes on to say:

> *Commenting on the army trade generally, I look upon Raunds as the centre of the army-boot-and-shoe making in Northamptonshire and the village of Raunds reminds me of the old days when scarcely anything but hand work was in vogue. The prices paid for closing and making are far from extravagant. The closing of army bluchers is done by hand throughout, and occupies the female workers in the village. For closing bluchers the sum of 3¼d., on an average is paid per pair. A man must work hard to make ten pairs of boots per week and there are many who do not make eight pairs, yet the inhabitants are generally an enterprising class of people, thrifty and industrious, comparing favourably with operatives in the trade elsewhere.*

If we look in the *Art of Boot and Shoemaking: A Practical Handbook*, which was published in 1885, it describes many machines available for the shoemaking processes. These include the Upper Skiving Machine, The Rand Turning Machine, The Sole Moulding Machine, National Closing Machine, Welt or Forepart Stitching Machine, Mackay Heeling Machine, Inside Nailing Machine and Blake Buffing Machine. Many are like Victorian kitchen devices and are hand-powered mechanised processes. Raunds and Ringstead, however, tended to remain a cottage, outwork industry, reliant on the military's insistence on hand-sewn boots.

Our shoemaker, John Roberts, died on 27th December 1870 well before his fortieth birthday. His effects, which were less than £50, were granted to his widow. In the 1871 Census Letitia, was living at 36 is living on Shop (High) Street, on “Parish Relief”. Her oldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 17, was doing “shoework” and Owen (15) and Benjamin (13) were both apprentice shoemakers. She has four other children who are ten or under and are at school. It must have been a very difficult time for Letitia. Next door lives John Barritt and his wife Rebecca. He is a shoe maker and shoe agent. Perhaps after all there were still small middlemen who put out the work and collected it again for a commission. On the other side of her lives Sarah White who is fifty, also a widow, with two children, who is trying to make a living as a seamstress. All around are other shoemakers and their wives. We can only hope that she was helped and supported by the community in her hour of need.

By 1881 she was living in the High Street and is housekeeper for her family. Times are maybe a little better because Benjamin, John, and Herbert are all shoemakers and Alice is a shoe worker. Only George, at fifteen, is the exception and he is a railway employee. All her family will be bringing money into the house.

If she feels unwell, Emma Kitchen is only a few doors away and she can (possibly) help her because she is a vendor of patent medicines. Many would have had laudanum in them to dull the pain of what could not be cured.

Letitia married John Smith in 1884 and the1891 Census finds her living in Rushden with John who is a "Cemetery Caretaker" and by 1901 they are in Stanwick with John now a general labourer. Her children are all elsewhere. She dies in 1909 aged seventy-five.

We cannot follow all the Roberts family lines so we will select two, Benjamin Ebenezer, son of John and Letitia, and George Henry, not his brother, the railway worker, but the son of Thomas, John's younger brother. These two cousins carried on as shoemakers as the industry went through increasingly difficult times as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

As we have seen, in 1871, Benjamin was thirteen years old and already a shoemaker living with his widowed mother, Letitia. Ten years later he is still in High Street, living with his mother and siblings. Nest door, now, lives another widow and her twenty-three-year-old daughter. Catherine Smith is sixty-four years-old, born in Ireland, and working as a laundress but her daughter, Ellen, is a shoe worker. Although she was never to realise it, Ellen would play a part in the forming of history a century later.

Because of where this family line leads it is worth taking a detour to look at Ellen Smith's heritage. There is an isolated, ruined cottage, in a place called Dromanassig, some one hundred yards off the Kenmare to Glengariff road in County Kerry in Ireland. The windows have gone but the thick stone walls stand. Catherine Sullivan (or Selewin) was born in this cottage around the year 1811. It appears that she married a Thomas Smith and had two children in Kenmare; John in about 1840 and Mary some four years later. There are no records of the marriage, however, and some people assert that they were married in England. We do know that at some point between 1845 and 1853 they emigrated to England.

This part of Ireland was badly affected by the Irish Potato or Great Famine which began in 1845 and lasted until 1853. Estimates of deaths due to the famine vary between one and three million with a similar number emigrating. The main cause was the extreme poverty of much of the population, trying to survive on tiny plots of land. They grew potatoes as the staple of their diet and then the blight which, ironically came over from America, devastated much of the crop. The ineptitude and callous disregard of the British Government worsened the situation. Another name used in Ireland for this period is "The Great Hunger" because, as in many famines there was sufficient food but much of it was still exported and it did not get to those who were in desperate need.

An English Quaker called William Bennett, travelled round Ireland for six weeks to see the situation for himself. He wrote home to his sister who was a member of the Ladies' Irish Clothing Committee of London.

These letters were published in book form and one letter written in April 1847 tells of his visit to Kenmare, a beautiful, mountainous region. He arrived late in the evening and found:

> *The sounds of woe and wailing resounded in the streets through the night. I felt extremely ill, and was almost overcome. In the morning I was credibly informed that nine deaths had taken place during the night, in the open streets, from sheer want and exhaustion. The poor people came in from the rural districts in such numbers, in the hope of getting some relief, that it was utterly impossible to meet their most urgent exigencies and therefore they came literally to die: and I might see several families lying about in* the open streets, actually dying of starvation and fever, within a stone's throw of the inn.

Lord Landsdowne had a large estate at Kenmare and his agent, W. S. Trench, wrote later in "Realities of Irish Life" of conditions in Kenmare in 1849:

> *When I first reached Kenmare in the winter of 1849-50, the form of destitution had changed in some degree, but it was still very great. It was true that people no longer died of starvation; but they were dying nearly as fast of fever, dysentery, and scurvy within the walls of the workhouse. Food there was in abundance; but to entitle the people to obtain it, they were compelled to go into the workhouse and "auxiliary sheds" until they were crowded almost to suffocation.*

Trench persuaded Lord Landsdowne to offer free emigration to these paupers, who had to be in the workhouse, and some two hundred a week went via Cork to America, Canada and Australia. This could be seen as a humanitarian action, but Trench sold the idea to his master by pointing out how the scheme would quickly pay for itself by removing paupers from the parish rates immediately, and in future years.

Trench did admit that the people were a "motley type" who had tried to "break loose" from the ships not only in Cork but also in Liverpool where the ships called before leaving for the New World. The emigrants may have been volunteers but it seems that many went with heavy hearts.

It seems probable that Thomas and Catherine were part of this emigration, although we cannot be sure that they were in this scheme, for it seems they would have had to "break loose" at Liverpool in order to have remained in England. We cannot even be absolutely certain that Thomas was Irish, although it seems likely, as he has not been found in any Census. Could he have been an English soldier? Unfortunately, Catherine Sullivan and Thomas Smith are common name in Ireland and there are many Thomas and Catherine Smiths in England. There was even another couple with those names in Ringstead. On balance, however, it seems most likely that Thomas and Catherine, like millions of others, were forced by the famine to leave Ireland and seek a better life in England.

Tyler Anbinder, in an article in the *American Historical Review*, recounts that:

> *Landsdowne tenants were so desperately poor that they would often nail shut their cabins during the summer and walk a hundred miles or more through the counties of Cork, Limerick or Tipperary in search of work. "In autumn they go to the low country during the harvest" noted a Kerry resident, "and their wives then shut up their houses and go begging with their families until their husbands come home with their earnings" in time to harvest their own potatoes. After digging up the tubers some again went inland to find work before retiring home for Christmas.*

Tramping the road, looking for work, was common in the Nineteenth Century but we can see that the people from Kenmare would have been unusually accustomed to, trying to survive until they could find a place with more permanent work so that they could settle. It is said that the Smith family may have come via Bristol. We do know that the Irish came into Cardiff and Liverpool and swelled the numbers of paupers and it is likely that many west coast ports received desperate immigrants. I have found no proof of Thomas and Catherine's route, except that they came via Buckinghamshire. We do know that the family finally settled in Ringstead.

There is another family from Ireland shown in the 1861 Ringstead Census. The parents, Jeremiah Neal aged 44 and his wife Anne, 35, both were born in Kerry and the children were born in Cambridgeshire, Somerset and Kent before the youngest, who was born in Ringstead in about 1859. Both families seem to have wandered across England looking for work where they could find it.

Unfortunately, Thomas Smith died soon after reaching Ringstead and was buried in the churchyard on 27th August 1857 aged 47. Could it even be that it was his ill health and death and the imminent birth of Ellen that stopped the family's wanderings at Ringstead? His certificate just records his cause of death as due to "decay of nature" which tells us little but may indicate the hardships of his life in Ireland and on the road. The death was notified by Ann Barker which may seem odd. A possible explanation is that Ann, a widow, who is recorded as a lacemaker and pauper in 1851 and a charwoman in 1861, may have been an unqualified nurse and layer-out of the dead that most villages possessed.

In the 1861 Ringstead Census Catherine Smith, aged fifty, is a washerwoman, one of the first options for a poor widow, and the eldest son, John, aged twenty-one is a labourer on the railway. The eldest daughter, Mary Ann at seventeen has married agricultural labourer Richard Gidding. They are living with Catherine as well as the other children. Twin sons, Jerry [Jeremiah] and Thomas are just eight years old and are shown as born in Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire. Checking Jeremiah's birth certificate, we find that he was born at 3 pm on the 5th November 1852 at Moulsoe, a small village, now nearly swallowed up by Milton Keynes. Strangely there seems no sign of the registration of his twin brother Thomas. There are instances of twins being born weeks apart and the family may have moved in the meantime but, as yet, I have not found his birth. Of course, it may just be some discrepancy in the paperwork or my research.

There is also a daughter, Ellen, who is just three years old and was born in Ringstead. There is a large gap between Mary Ann and the twins, and it is possible that there were intermediate children who died in Ireland. Their long, hard time on the road from Kenmare, perhaps staying as casuals in workhouses, could have been another cause.

By 1871 the Smith family had moved into Church Street where Ellen, thirteen years old, is still a "scholar". By 1881 Ellen, now twenty-three, is a shoe worker and the only child still at home with her mother. Mary Ann has moved away with her husband Richard Giddings. Jeremiah has moved to Thrapston where he was an ironworker and had married Lavinia Medlow from Little Staughton (he later re-marries). I have been unable to find Thomas, perhaps because of his more common first name and the Smith children tend to change their places of birth to delete any Irish connection.

As we have said, next door to the Smiths lived Benjamin Roberts, with his widowed mother and it would seem that the two young people were attracted to each other for they married two years later. There is a slight twist in that the marriage was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Northampton on 2nd May 1883. Benjamin is recorded as living at 17 Laburnum Terrace which was on the Kettering Road in Northampton, but Ellen's place of residence appears to be Quinton which is a small village, some five miles south of Northampton. Benjamin is working as a shoemaker so may have gone in search of work but Ellen has no occupation shown. It is possible that she had been in service with one of the farmers or the rector in Quinton and had given up her place to get married.

Is it also possible that Ellen was a Catholic and she stayed with someone prior to the wedding in an Anglican church away from a disapproving mother? Certainly, it would have been unusual not to have married in their local Ringstead church. Once again, we have no evidence and there are many other possible explanations.

The witnesses to the marriage were Benjamin's younger brother, John Roberts, and Sarah Lockie. The couple were also to marry in Northampton some two years later.

Benjamin and Ellen moved back to Ringstead soon after the wedding and the 1891 Census reveals that their four children have all been born there. The oldest, Eleanor is seven years old, so was born in 1883 or 1884 which means that their time in Northampton was brief. Ten years later we see the family at 8 Carlow Street. Benjamin, now 43 is still a handsewn shoemaker, working at home as are Helena (Eleanor in 1891) aged 17 years, Harold 15, and Frances 13. George, aged 11, is still at school and Alfred, 8, Jessie, 6, and Edward, 4, have been added to the family. In the same house but having two rooms of her own is Ellen's mother, Catherine Smith now 82 years old. Benjamin's brother John and his wife Sarah are also back in the village with two children, Florence, 5, and John Owen, 3, both born in Ringstead. Perhaps as a portent, John's wife, Sarah Lockie had been the daughter of a grocer from Denford.

This is thought to be Benjamin with one of his sons outside his cottage in Carlow Street. He is wearing his shoemakers' apron (he worked at home)
My thanks to Jon Abbott and the Ringstead Heritage group for the use of this photograph.

Ellen's mother, Catherine, died in Ringstead on February 15th 1904 at the age of eighty-three and the 1911 Census reveals that Benjamin and Ellen had had eight children, one of whom had died. Four children are still at home; the three boys are in the shoe trade and Jessie aged 16 is an assistant dressmaker. It seems from the uncompleted column on homeworking that they all now working in local factories. The youngest child, Edward at 14, is a "Leather chopper in a Leather Lift Factory. A Heel (or "Lift") works had taken over one of the Ringstead boot and shoe factories, possibly the old Britannia Co-operative building. Eleanor, aged 27, and Frances, aged 23, are still single and working as Parlour Maid and Housemaid respectively, at Upton Hall in Northampton.

It is believed that Benjamin began married life in 18 Carlow Street and moved down the row to a larger house later. We know that the residents complained to the Sanitary Authority in 1880 about the state of the sewers. Two members of the authority had inspected the problem and reported. They found:

. . . a depression in the road immediately in front of the cottages, where, in all probability, after a heavy rain a body of water would accumulate and become stagnant, there being no sewer or drain to take it off. {Northampton Mercury 4th September 1880).

They found the old sewer from the cottages blocked and proposed a new one emptying into a cess pool and then emptying into Agutter Dyke which they recommended the parish should clean out. The "brook", which ran along the back of the cottages, was later culverted so it is difficult today to imagine the conditions at the time of Benjamin and Ellen.

Returning to the hand-sewn men they were in a difficult position, liking the control they had of their own lives and work but needing mutual support as the Government, via the employers, turned the screw on piecework rates.

Initially, many Raunds and Ringstead workers resisted unionisation because they had always made their own rules as to when they worked. Most would have initially echoed the words of an Irthlingborough shoe worker on the union's policy of speeding up the move from hand outwork to mechanised factory production:

The men do not thank the Union for doing so, they do not want their liberty meddled with, as they have shops to work in, and leading men will not go with their sons into such places as they know they will be. Some will leave the Union if they do not stop such interference.

(Boot & Shoe Journal 10th December 1892)

The shoeworkers and their families would also take time off to help with the harvest and earn some extra money for the family, especially when the trade was slack. The *Northampton Mercury* of 16th September 1882 reported in the Raunds section:

HARVEST OPERATIONS have been greatly facilitated by the brilliant weather of the past week. Most of the corn has been got in, stacked, and garnered. Gleaning is now almost entirely confined to the wives and families of agricultural labourers. The shoe trade being good this year, but few shoemakers' wives and families have turned out for gleaning purposes.

It was also a common practice to drink heavily at the weekend ("fuddling") and then take Monday off. It was known as Saint or Snobs Monday. It is no coincidence that Raunds had a Coffee Tavern a Temperance Band and a strong Rechabite movement.

It was recounted, many years later, by Major Henry Attley that the Roberts were a musical family and Benjamin played the flute and had a fine baritone voice. They were also staunch non-conformists and his younger brother. John was a well-known local organist. He also built organs in some of the local chapels. Mr Attley remembered "blowing the organ" for John and particularly one occasion, when his attention wandered, the pressure dropped. "Blow, boy, blow!" John hissed at him as loud as he dared without the congregation hearing.

The new unions saw the outworkers as undermining the rights, conditions and wages of workers in the factories. At the 1894 Conference of The *National Union of the Boot and Shoe Operatives*, a Stafford delegate complained about a navy contract being given to Raunds because non-union workers undercut the rates.

Nevertheless, more shoemakers were joining the *Amalgamated Society of Boot & Shoe Makers* and on the 10th October 1890 the *Northampton Mercury* reported that at the monthly meeting that the secretary had said that although a new section thirty more members had joined in the last month.

Benjamin Roberts at about 45 years of age

Taken from Ringstead Band Photograph with the kind permission of Vivienne Marshall.

The Reverend A. C. Neely, who was the vicar of Denford-cum-Ringstead, writes a poem some thirty years later about the Hand-sewn Boot makers of Ringstead in 1896. He tells of the first-floor workshop, reached by a ladder and of their disdain for "machine-mades". he also tells of the hard work of making the boots:

"Hard work?" Why, yes, of course it is. Just try to pull this thread.
Can't manage it? I thought not. Try something else instead.
Hammer this bit of leather, on this iron, on your knee,
It don't hurt me a blessed bit – but you just try and see!
"Don't want much of that" you say? Ah! You haven't learnt the trick,
I'll tell you about it sometime. Can't learn it all so quick.
You're right, it is hard work, sir and more than that, it's Art
To do it all yourself like, and fit in every part.
The missus sews the tops, of course, but then that's not so tough,
But if you had a day at that, you'd say you'd had enough.
.

Ironically, in view of what was to follow some ten years later the shoemaker is against strikes, although Neely gives a hint of what is to come:

"Did we go on strike last summer, when the chaps in town were out?"
No bless you, we don't want to strike; we get on best without.
I'm not going to say, though, that many would refuse
(If they chanced to get the offer) sixpence more a pair of shoes.

We also hear that any boots which were rejected by the War Office for minor defects were sold locally very cheaply and the good vicar had invested in a couple of pairs himself. He also liked to go to the workshop and sit and talk to the shoeworkers about "all sorts of things".

Taken April 2010 by author (no longer a factory)

The Ringstead Britannia Co-operative Society was possibly formed in 1891 according to some sources but moved into its new building in Denford Road in 1895. It was hoped that it would help the local shoemakers survive the industrialisation of shoemaking and poor prices for their work by sharing the profits. Unfortunately, the venture folded in 1897 and all its equipment and machines were sold off and it was only the later formed Ringstead Unity Co-operative Society that survived into the 1920s.

At this time, it was a campaign in Egypt which they had made boots for, but it was the larger conflict of The Boer War at the turn of the century (1899 – 1902) which came to the temporary rescue of the industry, especially in the Raunds area which was heavily dependent on military footwear. The orders flowed in and the agreed price for making a pair of boots was met by the War Office and the factory owners. Once the war finished, however, the orders dried up and the contractors tried to undercut each other to secure the diminishing orders. Suddenly the shoemakers' income dropped again.

The Ringstead Band included many from the Mayes family.
Back Row in the middle, holding a trombone, is Len Mayes; the two men on the left of the second row down are Benny and Ernest Mayes; the man, second left, on third row down is Harry Abbott Mayes. On the right of the front row, lying down, is Bill Mayes who later emigrated to Australia. Behind him on the right holding a flute is Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts
By kind permission of Vivienne Marshall, great-granddaughter of Harry Abbott Mayes.

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and there followed the Edwardian postscript before the modern age blasted the world apart. In 1902 the Ringstead Band played for the celebrations in the village for the coronation of Edward VII. Below is a picture of the band, many of whom, three years later, were on that hi9storic march.

Perhaps as we look at Benjamin, and the others in the photograph above, we can see something of what H. E Bates was describing in his autobiography:

> *The impression I chiefly gain from the recollection of those shoemaking men is not exactly one of coarseness; they lack the sheer belted belching muscle and guts of what used to be known as labouring men; they do not exhibit the beer-spitting swagger I remember of navvies, bricklayers or those wild-eyed drovers of cattle I sometimes used to see drunk and rosy-eyed, on Midland market days. Their roughness is of rather different order, and I find it difficult to describe. If I use the word rude, in the sense of uncouth, the impression will be a shade too strong.*

Nor are they loud; nor, in Rupert Brooke's words, excessively "black of mouth". Nor are they as forthright, or as blunt or as self-opinionated as Northern men. The impression I really get is of a dry, droll, unshaven independence and it is not at all an unlikeable quality.

The reduction in the piece-work rate led to a strike of the army boot and shoe makers and to the Raunds March of 1905 where 115 men (selected from the 300 who volunteered) marched to London to petition the War Office and Parliament. The views of the Union and the local workers were as one. Well nearly! All this is covered in J. Betts' excellent book which anyone interested should read. I will just quote, from The Times of May 15th 1905, to show what a considerable event this was at the time:

THE RAUNDS STRIKERS IN LONDON

A demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in support of the Raunds bootmakers who are on strike, was held in Trafalgar-square yesterday afternoon; and an audience of between 8,000 and 10,000 persons was addressed by Socialist and Labour leaders from three sides of the plinth of the Nelson column. The deputation of strikers assembled under the Charing-cross railway arch about half-past 2 and were there joined by contingents from Socialist and Labour organisations. A procession was formed and, headed by a brass band with twenty or thirty banners unfurled, the men marched to the square, where they met with an enthusiastic reception from the crowd. One of the 115 men who have marched from Raunds, a cripple who walks with a crutch, headed the strikers as they marched into the square to the strains of the "Marseillaise," and was loudly cheered..... The crowd was the largest which has been seen in Trafalgar-square for some years and it showed its practical sympathy with the strikers by throwing coins, not unmixed with silver, upon the plinth for their benefit. In this way a sum of about £10 was collected.

But what of our two Roberts' cousins? Some twenty of the marchers were from Ringstead including over half the brass band that accompanied them on the journey. Most were young men but Edward Bird from Ringstead at 59 was the oldest marcher. There were no Roberts on the march, but the conflict split the family. As we have seen from the more recent Miner's Strike of the 1980s bitterness can brew up in communities when some go hungry and others continue to work. Some, including George Henry tried to carry on collecting work from the factory in Raunds in defiance of the strikers and violence ensued.

It appears, although as yet I have no proof, that George Henry Roberts was the only one in his family who was a strike breaker. Certainly, his own younger brother, William, appeared on behalf of one of those accused of violence against George. Was it all quickly forgotten after the march or did it make George a pariah in the community? David Saint has reported that George was a church man unlike the rest of the Roberts clan who were non-conformists. He also says that George ran a welfare club to help members get health care but that his great nephew, Paul, insisted that he was a narrow-minded bigot and he had never heard anyone say a good word about him.

There is no real evidence in the official records except, perhaps, a hint in the 1911 Census in that Benjamin's children are all put down with one Christian name but George and Mary's all have two listed. Does it mean nothing at all, is it Mary's influence, or is it evidence of someone the locals would see as "putting on airs and graces".

All we can be sure of, is that in the 1911 Census, Benjamin is described as a “Handsewn Army Bootmaker” and George Henry is also a “Handsewn Army Shoemaker.” After George, however, is added the word, “Unemployed” Was this an indication that George was frozen out by the community. On the other hand, Benjamin has a son, called George too, who was a shoe hand and also unemployed.

When we look at the *Valuer’s Field Book* from the early Twentieth Century, which valued property and land for tax purposes, we see that in 1914 Benjamin owned a house in Carlow Street and in 1902 had bought freehold land in Denford Road which he had as grassland and allotment. He also had some 30 young fruit trees planted there. We see that although not a rich man he was by now comfortably off for a handsewn man.

Perhaps, for George Henry, like many others, it was just the difficult times in the shoe industry a few years before some help came from a terrible source. Jeremiah Smith, Ellen’s brother had been in the Northamptonshire Regiment since about 1904 and had served five years in India. He left the army but remained as a reservist and signed up again at the outbreak of the First World War. He was shot in the jaw at Contalmaison on 22nd July 1916 and died in the Queen Alexandra Military Extension Hospital in London and was buried in Thrapston. Many Ringstead families were to see their young men killed or wounded but it was the First World War that gave the hand-sewn men a little respite. Millions of military boots were needed, although the Government announced that for the first time men would be going to war in the cheaper machine-made boots. Although it gave them temporary respite, it was to be a mortal blow to the handsewn men of Raunds and Ringstead and shoemaking of all types in the area suffered a slow decline and death.

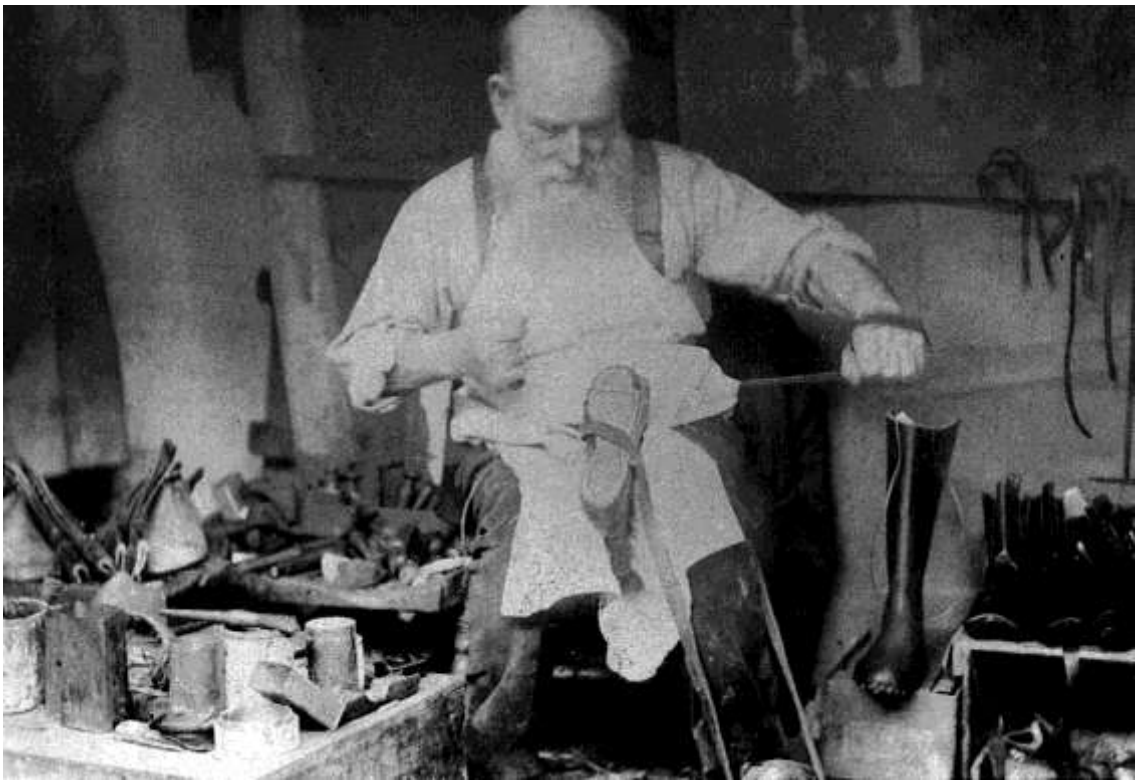
In 1922 the local papers told of their plight. In the *Northampton Mercury* of 5th May the monthly report of the Shoe Operatives Union stated that there had been a slight improvement in the shoe trade in March but:

> *At Ringstead employment was very bad owing to the completion of Government contracts.*

The industrialisation of the shoe industry and the dependence on the Government’s need for military boots and shoes was to see the end of the hand-sewn men and the death of a way of life that had sustained the village for a century.

We see the evidence of the effect on the handsewn men in the life of Benjamin Roberts foreshadowing in a small way the blight on the mining communities after the destruction of the industry in the 1980s. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 10th April 1925 reported that:

A dangerous accident occurred at Irthlingborough Station (L.M. and S.R.) on Tuesday afternoon when Benjamin Roberts, an elderly man whose home is at Ringstead apparently fell on the line in front of the Northampton-Peterborough passenger train which was drawing slowly into the station.



Thomas Amos of Long Buckby (early Twentieth Century)
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

In a later edition, on the 29th May, we discover, however, that it was no accident. At the Wellingborough Police Court, Benjamin was charged with trying to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a moving train at Chelveston (there was a one-field wide strip of the Chelveston parish in which the Irthlingborough Station was situated). It tells us that:

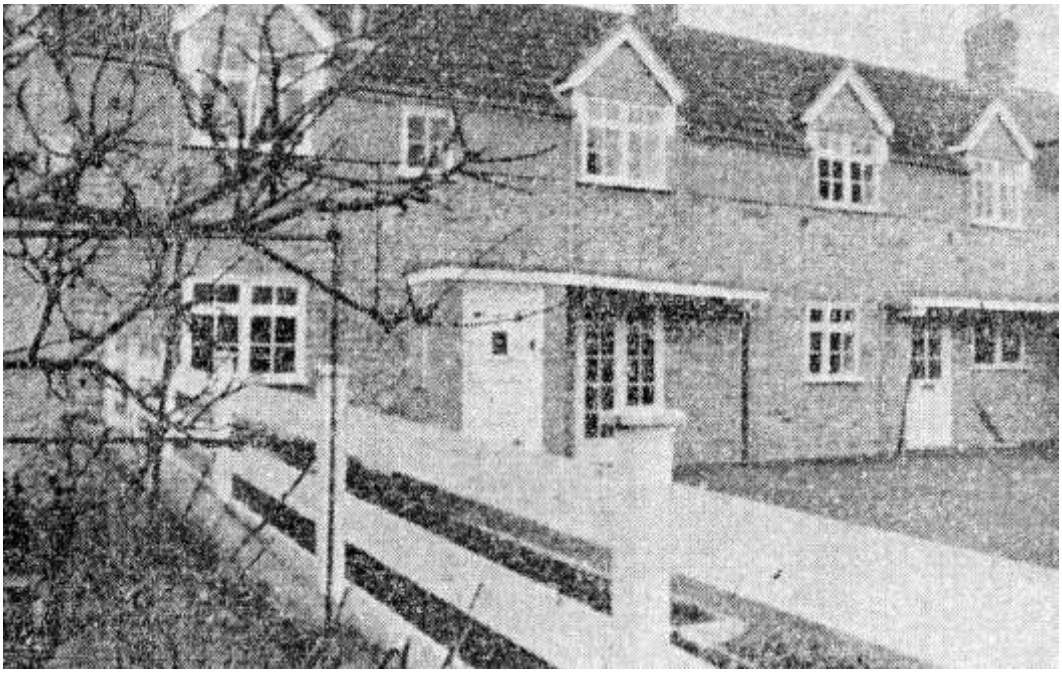
Roberts, an elderly man, crippled, and evidently very ill, was accommodated with a seat.

Walter Sydney Hern a railway porter gave evidence that he saw:

Roberts come from behind an oil shed on his hands and knees and place his head on the rail in front of a train travelling from Peterborough to Northampton. The engine at that time was about 15 yards away and was slowing down preparatory to stopping at the station. The lifeguard in front of the wheel of the engine caught him and dragged him along the road for some yards. Witness as soon as he saw the man going to the line gave a signal to the driver, who pulled up immediately. Roberts, who was severely injured was taken to Northampton Hospital by ambulance.

We hear from John Roberts, Benjamin's brother, that he was a skilled handsewn bootmaker and that there was little work for him. He had been suffering with a septic hand and this had caused lack of sleep and a severe nervous depression. He had tried to get his brother treated at St Andrews Hospital, a charitable institution opened in Northampton in 1838 for the "humane care of the mentally ill". John Clare, the poet, had spent the last twenty-three years of his life there. Only one doctor would certify Benjamin, however, so he could not be admitted.

Benjamin, who at first tried to say he was not aware what he was doing now admitted that, "he was irresistibly impelled to take his life because of his state of mind". The Baptist Minister, the Reverend Bates, gave him a good character reference as a "steady, religious, honest man" who was a "most useful member of the church and choir". Benjamin's wife, who was a St John Ambulance nurse, appealed to the Bench to let her take her husband home. They agreed and he was put into the care of his wife and his brother, John.



House in Carlow Street said by Wilfred Roberts to be where Benjamin and his family lived. His workshop was at the back (house much altered)
Chronicle & Echo 1975

Benjamin had not long to live. He died on 17th September 1925, aged 67, and was buried four days later in Ringstead Cemetery. He left all his assets of £237 7s 5d to his widow, Ellen. George Henry lived to be 76 and was also buried in the Cemetery on May 1st 1941. That part of the cemetery has been levelled into green anonymity and no headstone marks either grave.

One of Benjamin's sons, Alfred, was not able to follow his father into the craft. He was too short-sighted to do the work and was later said to have worked in Palmer's Grocery Stores in Raunds.

In 1911, aged 19, he was a grocery assistant in Oundle, boarding with a widow and her elderly sister. He moved on to Grantham, married and had two daughters. A few weeks after the death of Benjamin, Alfred's wife gave birth to a girl in a room over a small grocer's shop in Grantham.

She was a clever girl called Margaret Hilda Roberts who made Alfred one of the most famous shopkeepers in England. My Uncle, Dennis Ball, told me that he saw her, a very well-dressed little girl, visit her uncle "Barrel Roberts" in Marshalls Road, Raunds. Terry Collins has confirmed that "Barrell" was Harold Roberts, brother of Alfred and that he lived on the opposite side of Marshalls Road at number 58. One wonders if her Great Uncle George's views and his experiences in 1905 had some effect on Margaret Thatcher's attitude to unions nearly 80 years later. Certainly, it was not that of her grandfather.

Benjamin's brother, John, had been shown in the 1911 Census as living in *Mozart House* in the High Street. He had begun his working life as an army boot maker but had saved up and bought a second-hand piano, and later a harmonium, and took them apart to see how they were constructed. He began his business and. by his death, in 1933, was a well-known local businessman who had tuned, repaired, made, sold and installed organs of many types in churches and chapels across the country. The house is shown as having seven rooms. Ellen's granddaughter, Margaret Roberts, seems to have rarely visited her grandmother during those ten years but, in her autobiography, she tells of being thrilled to be allowed to play on one of the two organs that John had in his barn. She remembered her grandmother as a "bustling active little old lady who kept a fine garden". She also remembered how large John's house seemed, compared to Ellen's humble cottage.

Ten years after Benjamin, on 1st May 1935, Ellen, aged seventy-six, died. Judging by the churchmen officiating at their funerals, whereas Benjamin was a Baptist, Ellen was a Wesleyan, like Alfred her son, perhaps a compromise with her Catholic heritage. On her death the *Grantham Journal* of 4th May reported:

> *Councillor A. Roberts, a much-respected townsman of North-parade, has suffered a severe loss by the death of his mother, which occurred at Ringstead, Northamptonshire on Wednesday.*
>
> *Mrs. Ellen Roberts, who was 76 years of age, had she lived another day would have celebrated the 52nd anniversary of her wedding. She was the widow of Mr. Benjamin Roberts, well known as a singer.*
>
> *Mrs Roberts was never actively identified with public work but took a keen and lasting interest in the affairs of the Wesleyan Church.*
>
> *St. John Ambulance Brigade work claimed much of her time, and she had gained all the certificates. She was the first in the village of Ringstead of which she was a native, to take up the work.*
>
> *She had brought up a family of seven.*

Benjamin had not received an obituary in the *Grantham Journal*.

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My thanks to: Rebecca Shawcross, Shoe Resources Officer at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery for her help with research and the illustrations: Sara Sharman and Nicki Phillips for checking in the Ringstead Cemetery Register; Martin Curley in Ireland and Agnes Burton in Raunds for alerting me to Ellen's story; Jon Abbott for the newspaper references to Benjamin's attempted suicide.
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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.

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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

May 2018

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.

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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.

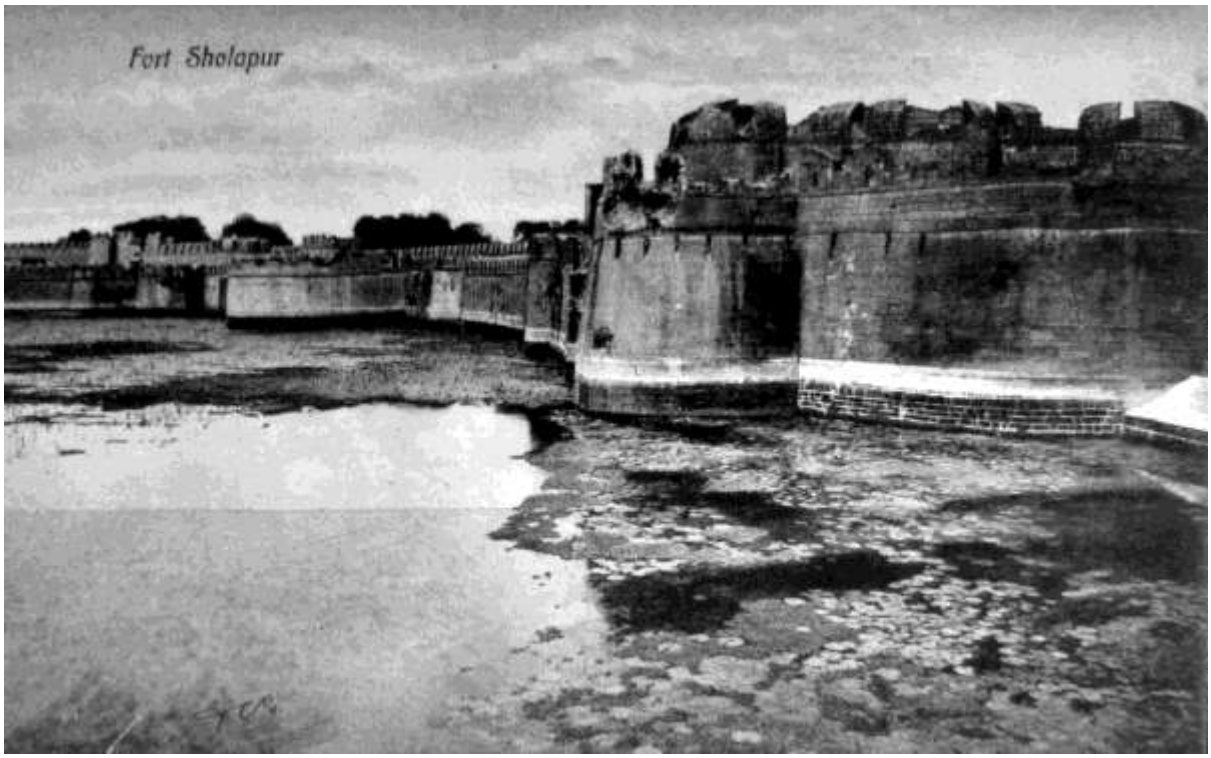
Indian Camp Scene in the Western Ghats in Maharash (c1817 – 1819)
From drawing by Captain Barton who was an artillery officer during this time
(Coloured lithograph by Rodolph Ackerman 1820). British Library. Public Domain.

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.

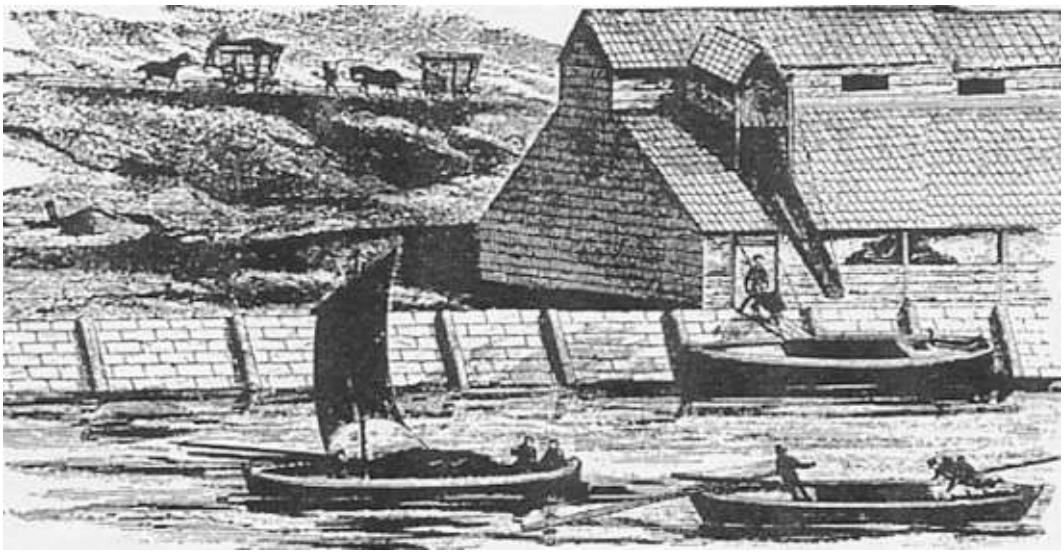
From The history of the keelmen and their strike in 1822. W. Stanley Metcalfe

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.

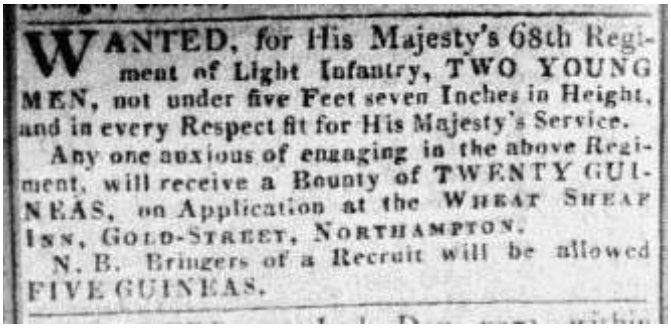
It was in the mapping of my family tree that I first came across John Phillips the maternal grandfather of my grandfather, John Ball. He had been baptised in Ringstead Church on 31st March 1793, the third child of Henry and Ann. Ann died on 24th February 1811 aged 49 and his father married Elizabeth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

References

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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.

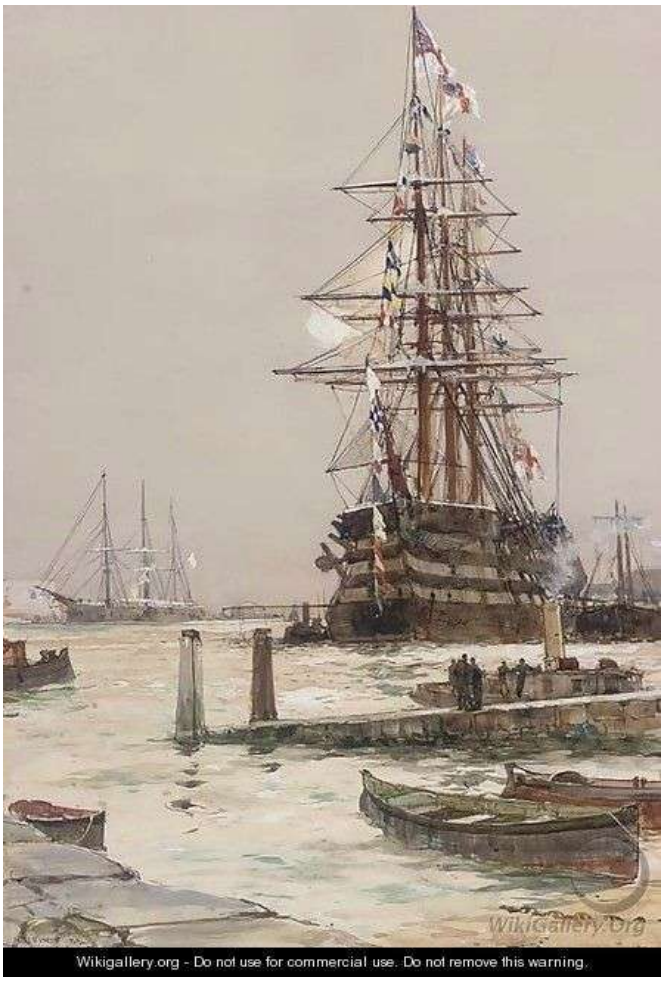
William Peters died in October – December 1864 so it may be that Ann's precarious financial security died with him. Was this the trigger that sent her to the Workhouse and her son then to become a boy sailor? By 1871 she is living with her 65-year-old sister, Elizabeth Edwards at 16 Moore Square. They 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.

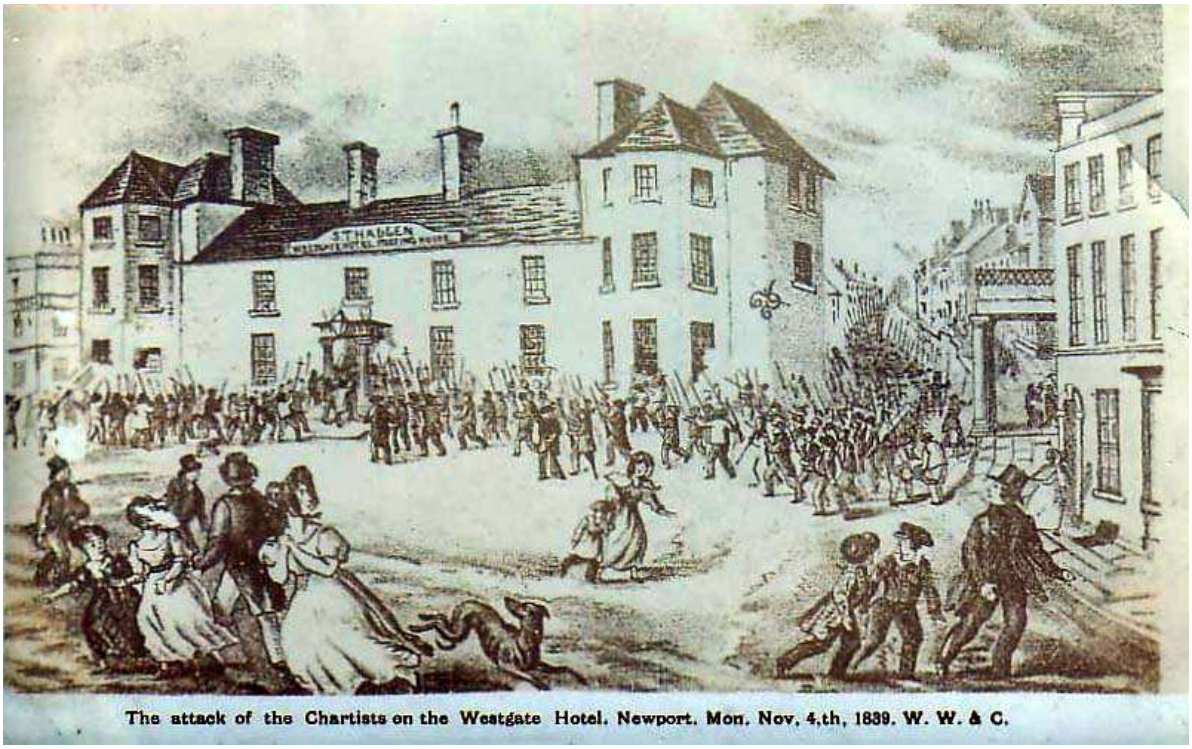
After enlisting William went with the 29th Foot to the Plymouth Citadel. Soon after he arrived he contracted a severe case of small pox and this seems to have had a debilitating effect on his constitution. He was, after that, "very delicate" and subject to "coughs and other pulmonary signs".

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.

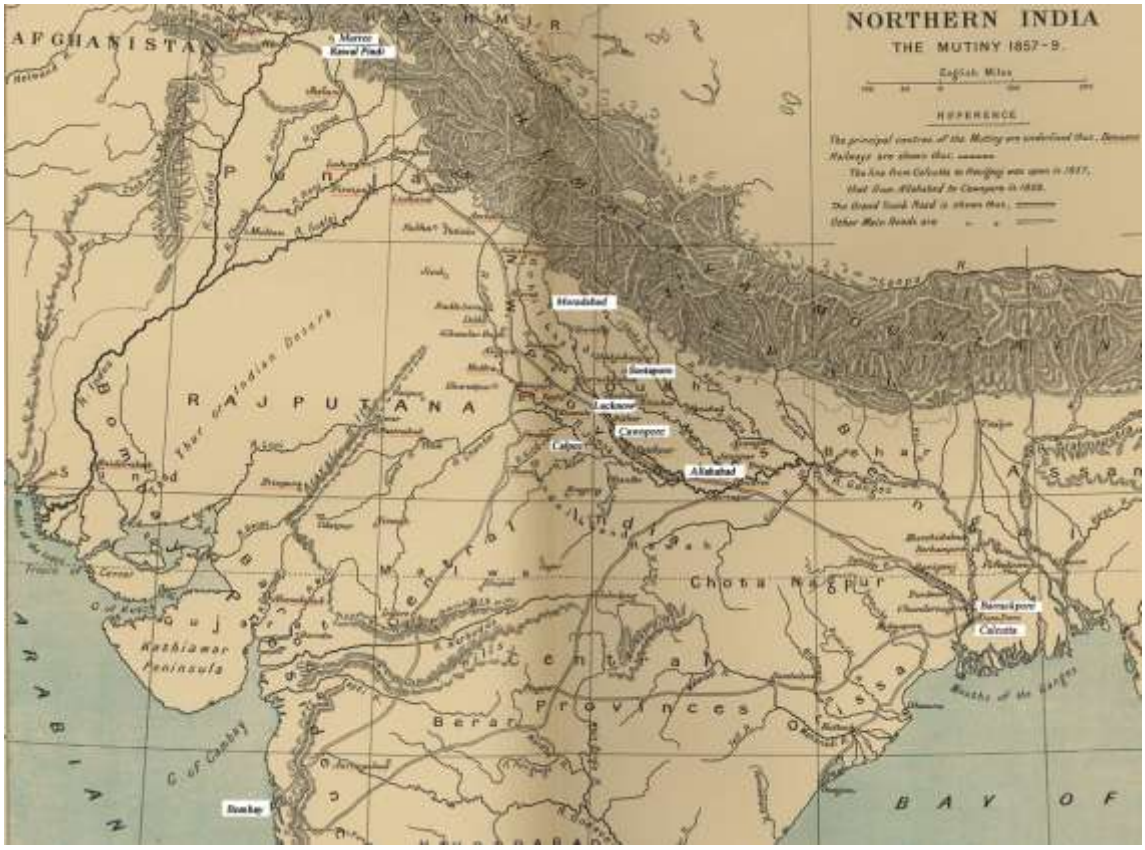
The regiment had just missed the vicious fighting of the Indian Mutiny and it seems that its time in India was comparatively uneventful. They were stationed, over the next seven years, at Allahabad, Calpee, Cawnpore, Lucknow and Calcutta. These had had been places where the rising had been at its most 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).

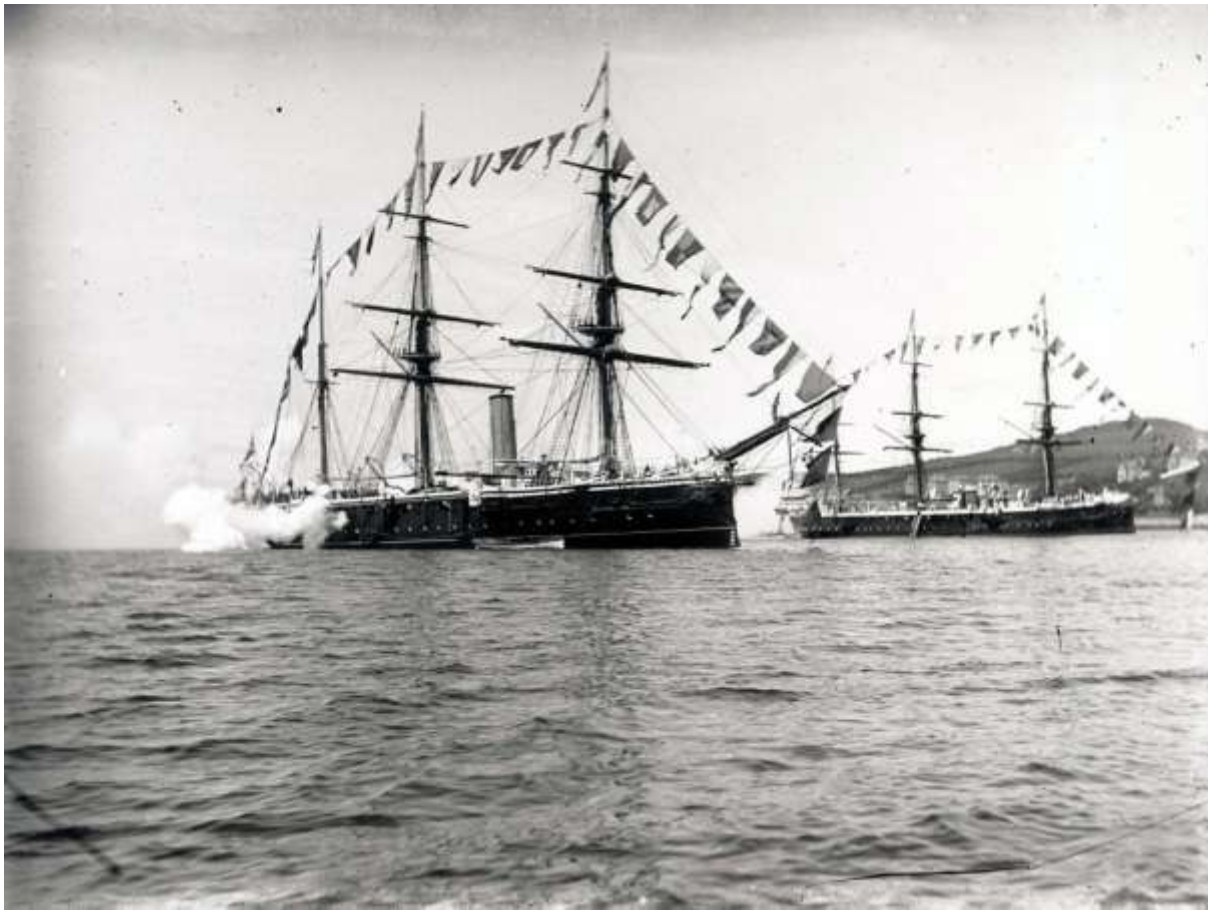
Isaac was a popular Minister, but the church had financial problems so, after six years he resigned although he continued to conduct services and live in the manse rent free with his salary paid by voluntary contributions.

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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My thanks to Paul Fleetwood for allowing me to use photographs from his Ancestry Family Tree and for sharing his research on Archibald and Estelle.

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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:

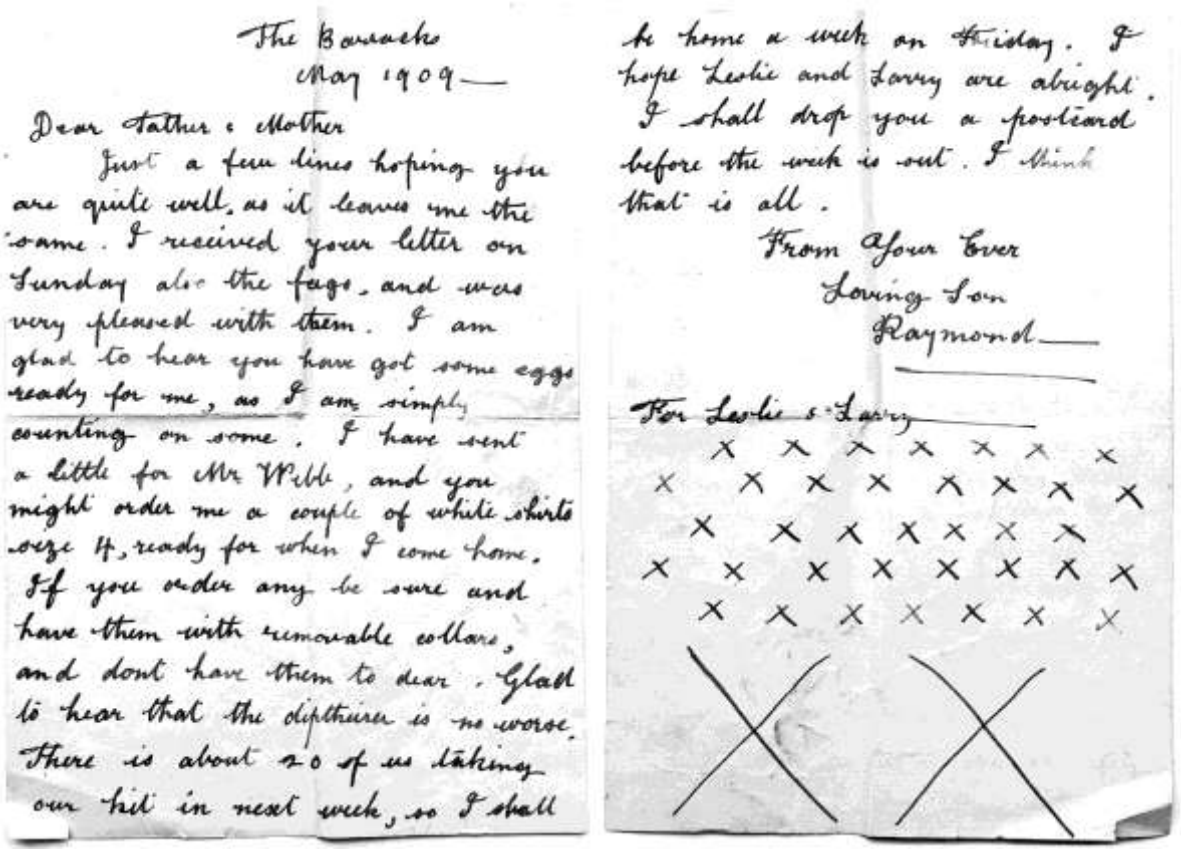
PS. Tell Ralph the barber his fags were alright and thank him for them.

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

X X X X X X X
X X X X X X X X
X X X X X X X
X X X X X X X X
X X X X X X X

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.

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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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My special thanks to Jim Parker from the www.blueyonder.co.uk website, for his many helpful information sheets and his individual help with the research.
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THE GREAT WAR

1914 - 18

Ringstead Men
Who Served
A to M

David Ball

THE GREAT WAR
1914 -18

Ringstead Men who Served
A to M

David Ball

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Acknowledgements

I have been helped by so many people that I cannot acknowledge them all here. I have tried to thank those who have assisted this work either in the text or in the *Reference Section* at the back of the second book.

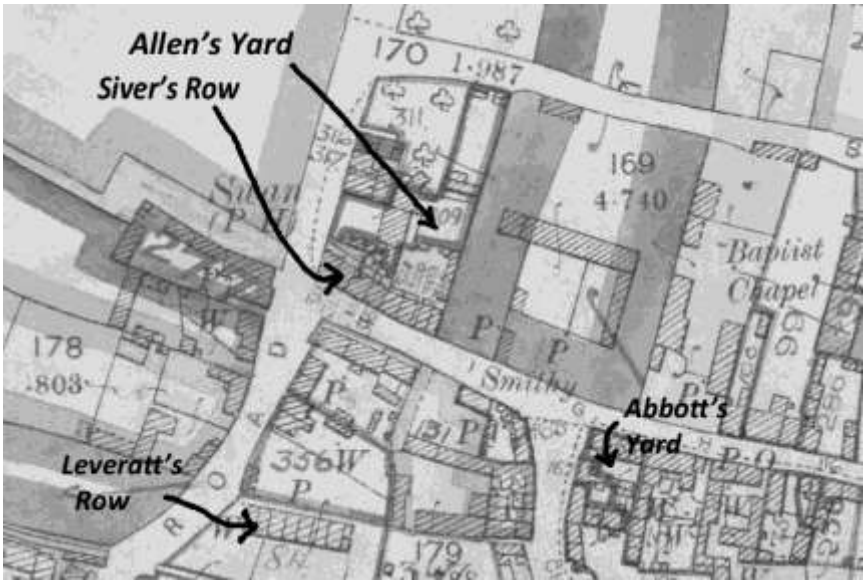
There are a number of people, however, who have given me consistent and vital support. I must first mention Jon Abbott of the Ringstead Heritage Group who has freely shared photographs, stories and introductions to descendants of the men. He also provided a copy of the original *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and helped with the map of *Rows and Yards*. I must also thank Kay Collins, Project Coordinator of Rushden Research, and the Rushden Heritage Group, for the use of the photographs and articles in Rushden newspapers on the Ringstead WW1 men.

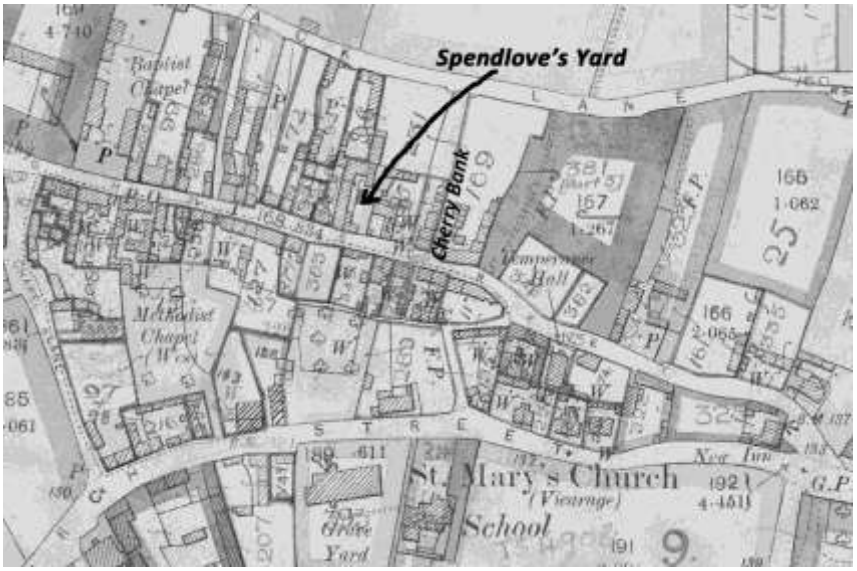
The other major source for the stories has been the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 which were held by the Northamptonshire Record Office. I have missed my visits there during the *Covid 19* Lockdown.

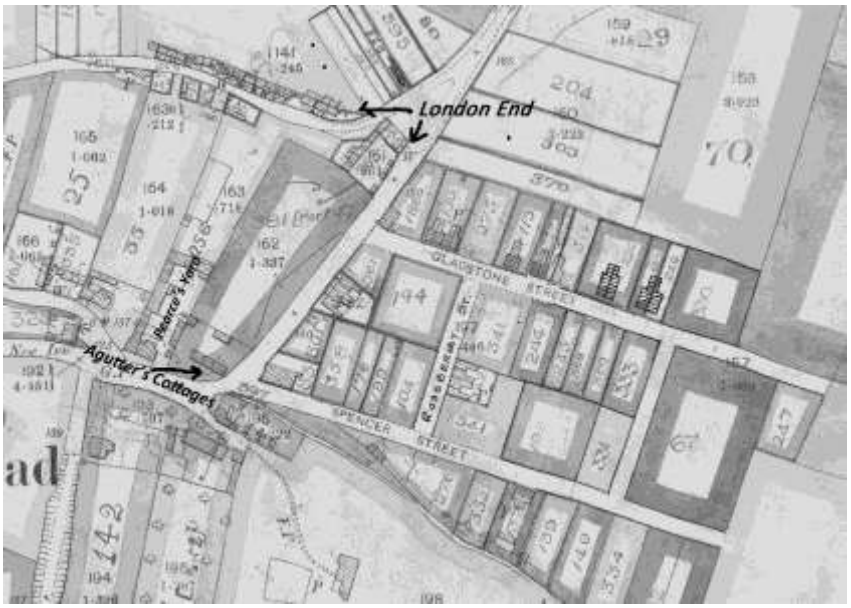
The members of the *Great War Forum* website have been invaluable in providing doorways out of blind alleys time after time. Without their help these books would have been very much shorter and lacking many men's service details. I have tried to thank each one of the members in the text and the references.

David Ball

Ringstead Rows and Yards (Spellings vary) 1910







Introduction

We tend to remember the dead of the First World War by neat white headstones and memorials. We can forget that they were ordinary young men, many of whom would not have travelled outside Northamptonshire. Like us, they would have been a mixture of good and bad in varying proportions. We also can forget the many who came back changed mentally or physically, or both.

In these short biographies I have tried to sketch in a little of their lives before and, for many, after the Great War. Official documents only give the skeleton of the men's lives and, in the accounts which include family pictures and reminiscences, we see much more of the whole person.

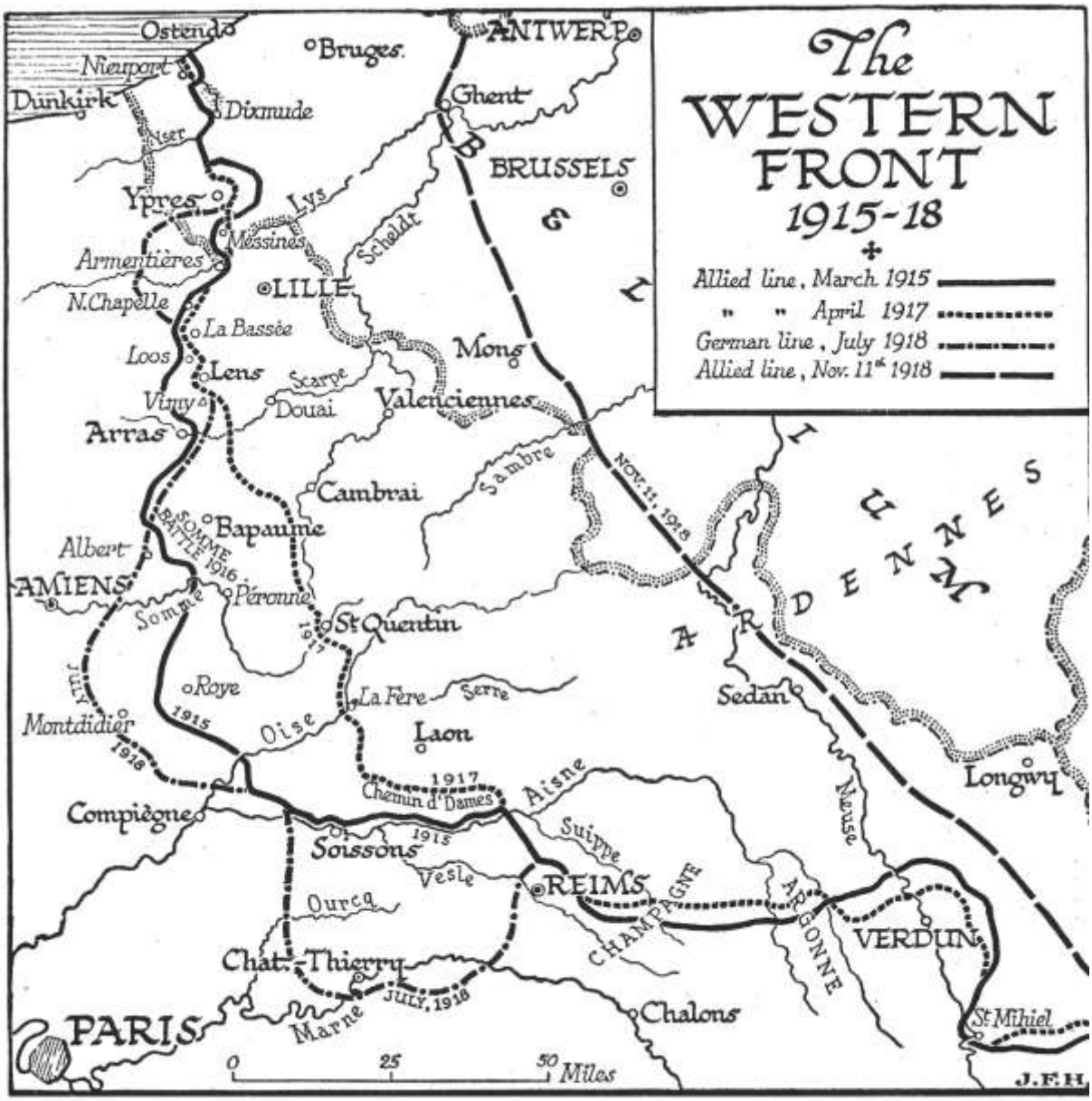
There is some repetition in the stories because I have tried to make each chapter stand as a separate piece. If a reader does follow through them all, I hope that they will gain a broader view of the war and the conditions that the men endured. These young men, many of whom would not be granted the right to vote until 1918, should be remembered by us all.

We should see ordinary men asked to undergo conditions that no human being should be asked to suffer.

I have written of these men, knowing that, for most, it is far from the final word. I hope that other records will come to light, and families will add their own stories to help this process of gratitude and remembrance.

David Ball

October 2020.



The Western Front 1915-18

H. G. Wells, The Outline of History (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1921)

Downloaded from *Maps ETC*, on the web at http://etc.usf.edu/maps [map #03695]

Chapter 1

The Abbott Family

William Abbot, a shoemaker from Ringstead, married Phebe (Phoebe) Wilson in the Parish Church on 21st July 1853. Phoebe had been a servant probably working for Margaret Ball, who had a draper's shop in Oundle. She was the younger sister of Hannah Wilson who had married William Weekley Ball and Rebecca who had married John Ball, William's brother. It was John Ball who was the witness who signed the Marriage Register.

The 1861 Census for Ringstead reveals that the couple had married quite late in life, for William was now 40 and Phoebe 35. They had made up for lost time, however, for with them are their children, Emma 5, Joseph 4, Elizabeth 3 and John 1. It is three of the sons of John and Joseph whose stories we are telling here.

Joseph married Annie Forscutt on 22nd April 1880. In the 1891 Census he was a grocer and coal dealer, living with Annie in Chapel Road, Ringstead. With them were children, Lilian, 9, Evelyn, 7, Olive 5, and William Henry 1. By 1901 Joseph and Annie were still at 2 Chapel Road with daughters, Lilian 19, Evelyn 17 and Olive 14, who was a pupil teacher.

Meanwhile, younger brother John had married Eliza Manning on 5th May 1884 in Ringstead. They too, quickly produced a family, Eva Emma in 1885, George, on 12th January 1888, Ted (sometimes Teddie) on 27th August 1890 and Reginald on 22nd March 1896. All were christened together on 10th May 1896. One suspects that Benjamin, was not expected to live and John and Eliza decided to baptise the other children as well. A final daughter, Kathleen was born in 1897 and her father, John, was buried the following year, aged just 38.

If we move forward to the 1911 Census we find George (23) and Ted (21) are living with their widowed mother Eliza in a four-roomed house in Allen Yard, Ringstead. In this small cottage Eliza has 3 children and one grandchild living with her. George is a stitcher and Ted a worker in a shoe factory making military boots and shoes. Meanwhile, in the High Street (with seven rooms) Joseph and Annie Abbott just have their two grown-up daughters at home. Lilian (29) was a manageress of the "Drapery and Boot Department" of the Co-operative Stores and Evelyn was a shop assistant.

In this Edwardian period of comparative peace, the military boot and shoe trade was in recession following the temporary boost of the Boer War. As we now know, just a few years later, another more terrible war was to suddenly explode across Europe and the globe. By its conclusion 8½ million people had died and some 29 million were wounded or missing.

It is the men of Ringstead who served in the First World War that we are looking at in these short biographies. The three cousins, George, Ted and William Henry Abbott are the first names on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour,* which was published in Thrapston in June 1919.

George Abbott (1888-1946)

George Abbott had been born to John and Eliza on 12th January 1888 so he was 26 years old when the First World War broke out. He was working as a hand-sewn boot maker and, probably, had already been captain of the Ringstead football team.

George in Ringstead Football Team in 1905-6 (about 17 years old)
With thanks to the Ringstead Heritage Group.

As we have seen, in 1911 he was living with his widowed mother, Eliza. At some point he enlisted in the army but unfortunately almost all his records have been lost or destroyed, like so many others.

George in his uniform
With thanks to George's son-in-law Alan Clipston for this photograph

We do know that he joined the 9th (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. We have his *Medal Roll* and the *Ringstead Absent Voters' List* confirms that his Regimental

Number was 12526. He entered the "Balkans Theatre of War" on 25th September 1915. He would have missed the terrible carnage that the Battalion, as part of the 39th Brigade, had suffered that summer in the Gallipoli area. He would have been part of the draft of new soldiers sent out to bring the Battalion back up to strength. Unfortunately, this was to be a recurring necessity.

A map of the warzone that George was in. The small peninsula at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara (west of Constantinople was where ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign was centred.

He would have joined the 9th in trenches near, what was called by the soldiers, "Chocolate Hill" because of its dark soil, where the 39th Brigade were pinned down, unable to move forward. On November 26th a torrential rainstorm broke and the trenches, cut out of the hard rock and clay, quickly flooded. At the time the 9th were resting in the reserve trenches where at least they could move around. Even here, the dugouts were flooded and washed away. Worse was to come, for the rain was followed by bitter frosts and then by blizzards of snow.

They were unable to light fires so the officers attempted to keep the men warm by marching them up and down and rousing those who fell asleep. There were many cases of frostbite and nearly two thirds of the Battalion were sick. When the weather abated it took some ten days to repair the trenches and dugouts while the men sheltered as best they could in holes and hedges.

Evacuation began in December and the whole of the battalion successfully embarked for Lemnos, a Greek island south-west of Gallipoli, and a short period of rest. They did return to the trenches again but it was realised that the enterprise had failed and the army was evacuated from Gallipoli. George would have sailed with the remnants of the Warwickshires to Port Said in Egypt, at the northern end of the Suez Canal.

Any respite was only temporary for they moved on into the area then called Mesopotamia, (mainly modern Iraq), reaching Basra (Basrah) where they disembarked. They journeyed up the River Tigris, reaching Sheikh Saad (Shayk Sa'd) on March 21st 1916. This area had been a part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire but only loosely held, mainly through local tribal leaders. The focus of the fighting was to relieve the town of Kut. Within a few weeks almost all the officers and many of the troops had been killed and some were forced to surrender. This pattern continued with the Warwickshires showing great courage in the face of a much larger army. Two of their officers were awarded the V.C. in this campaign.

The Battalion moved forward as part of the 39th Brigade, finally reaching Baghdad. The relentless fighting continued, the searing heat which producing shimmering mirages which masked the enemy's positions. As on the Western Front it was a warfare of small gains and terrible casualties often fought in almost unbearable conditions.

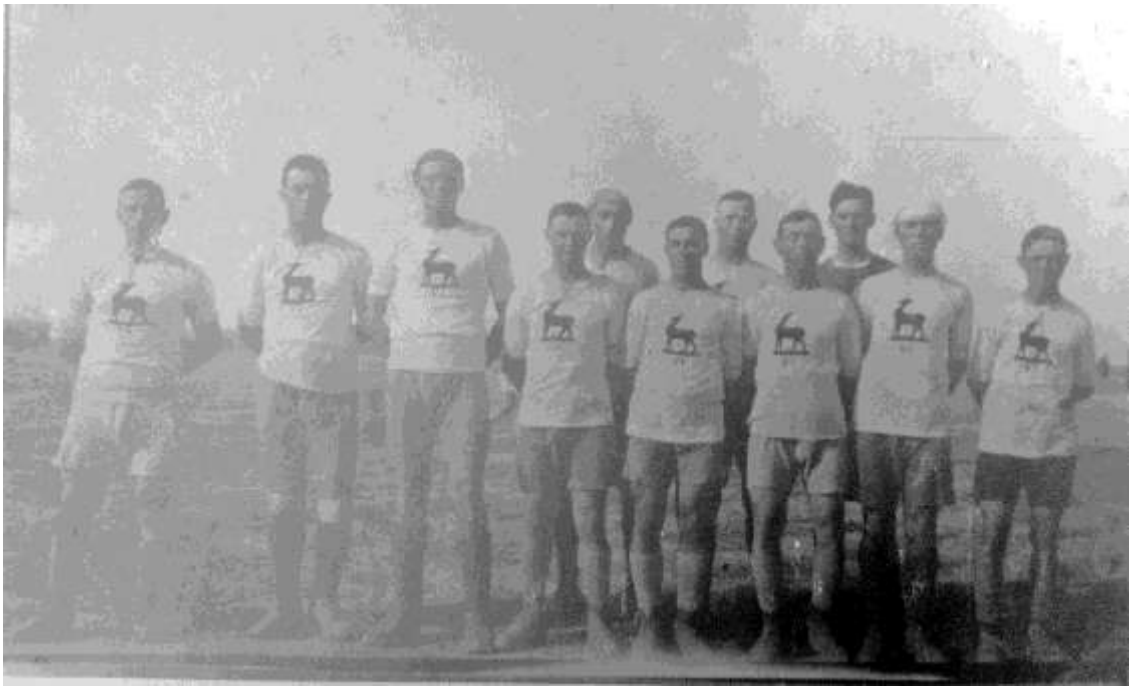
This is thought to be the 9th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshires in Persia in 1918 bartering with local traders near their camp. ©Imperial War Museum (Ref Q73062)

From late 1917 and into April 1918 the 9th, as part of the Brigade. were at Deli Abbas and Nahrin Kupri where they were victorious and took 1400 Turkish prisoners. They then moved into Summer quarters at Abu Said but on 10th July 1918 were ordered to proceed to Persia (now Iran). The civil war of the 1917 Revolution had left Russia unable for a time to

maintain an organised army. As a result, the German and Turkish armies had once more moved into Persia.

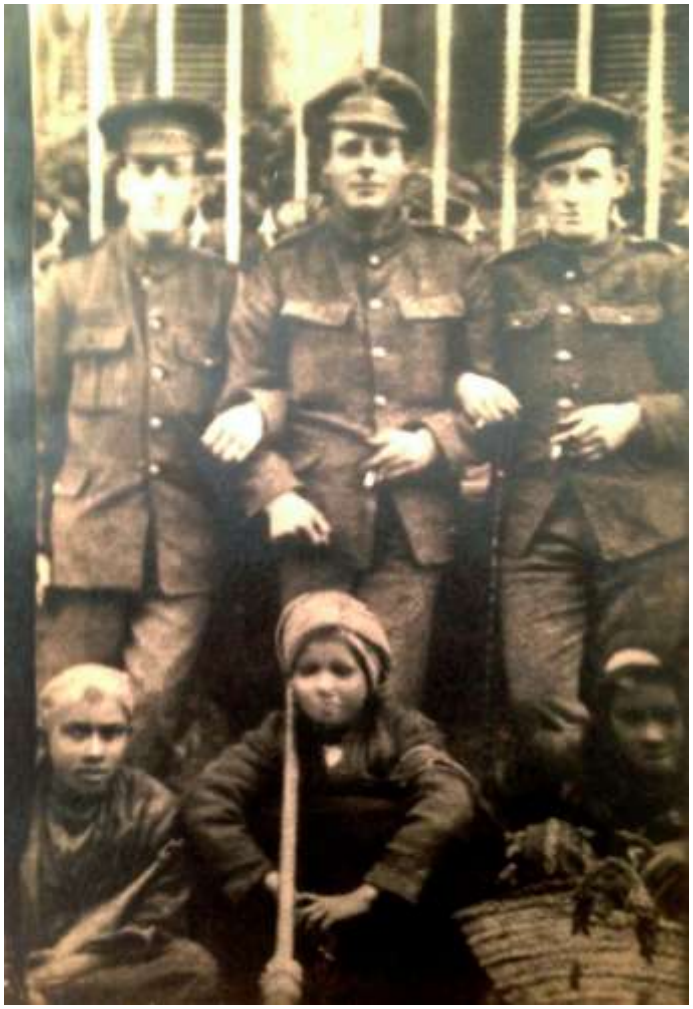
The final destination on the Allies was Baku on the Western coast of the Caspian Sea, with the task of safeguarding the oil wells there from the Turks and their German masters. The Royal Warwickshires travelled by train from Abu Saida to Ruz and then by lorry over the mountain to Hamadan. After ten days rest they marched over the Sultan Bulaq Pass to Kasvin (Qazvin). There they rested before being carried on by lorry to Kazian (Qaziyn) where they embarked for Baku.

Again, it was not a successful campaign and the British suffered a number of defeats losing many men, wounded, killed and taken prisoner. Once more they were forced to make an organised retreat to waiting boats and safety. On 28th September 1918 the Battalion sailed across the Caspian Sea to Krasnovdsk in Russia (now Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan) on its eastern shore. Here George and his comrades would have stayed until April 1919 helping to protect the railway against the Bolsheviks.



A photograph of the Battalion football team brought back by George,.
Notice the antelope crest of the Warwickshires.. With thanks to Alan Clipston

The family believe that he served in India. I have not found written evidence for this but in 1918 in the Royal Warwickshire 9th Battalion *War Diary* there are a number of "Leave Parties" bound for India. I think this must have been in lieu of home leave for the soldiers. Certainly, the photographs which George's son-in-law Alan Clipston has allowed us to use confirm that George was in India with the army. One photograph shows Dagshai a hill station in Northern India which had army barracks and gaol and was built originally as sanatorium for T.B. patients. An ideal place to recuperate, away from the burning heat of much of the campaign.



George in India with two comrades in arms and three local boys.
With thanks to Alan Clipston

By now the war on the Western Front was over and the attritional fighting had stopped. Early in April 1919 some of the 9th Battalion started the long journey home and, although the rest continued in the area, their numbers had fallen to five officers and 67 men. These last remnants of the 9th were transferred to the 9th Worcesters and the 9th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment was disbanded.

It seems likely that George Abbott returned with the first group. He appears to have been a brave reliable soldier and at some point was promoted to Corporal and probably to Sergeant. He was awarded the Victory, British and 1914/15 Star medals. At his demob on 31st July 1919 he was put on the "Class Z" list which meant they he might be called up if the Peace Treaty collapsed and there was another war or emergency. Fortunately for George it took another twenty years for this to happen.

George had endured 3½ years of continual warfare in burning heat and bitter cold with little respite and no chance to take home leave. He would have seen friends and colleagues in the 9th Battalion killed and wounded. The final release back to his home village and family must have been a wonderful feeling but many found it difficult to fit back into the lives of people

who would have found it hard to comprehend what the soldiers had endured and seen during the war.

George as captain of the Ringstead Football Team (date unknown)
With thanks to Jon Abbott

Nevertheless, he had to settle back into civilian life and early in 1925 he married Clara Braybrooke Smith. Clara had been born in Denford, on 27th April 1889, the daughter of Frederick Smith and his wife Lucy Elizabeth (née Braybrooke). Going back to the 1911 Census for Denford, Frederick had been a ganger in charge of a platelayer crew, working for the Midland Railway Company. Clara was an Elementary School Teacher.

George and Clara outside the shed where he worked. He sold his boots from this shed.
With thanks to Alan Clipston.

George and Clara had married late and had one daughter called Jean in 1927 who later married Alan Clipston. The 1939 *Register* has George and Clara in Church Street (I think the Register wrongly has Clara's middle name as Bertha). George was a handsewn boot maker, one of a diminishing breed. Clara was still an Elementary School teacher. They were just a few doors away from Harold Coates, the Ringstead Headmaster and his wife, but Clara would bike every day to Titchmarsh to work in the school there.

George died, aged 58, on 8th October 1946 having seen another World War come to a close. Clara lived another 25 years, dying in 1971, aged 81 years.

Ted Abbott (1890-1963)

Ted Abbott was born on 27th August 1890, some 2½ year after his brother George. It seems, from the Register of Births and Deaths, that he was christened "Ted" and it was not a nickname. He attended the local Ringstead School and then went into the shoe trade, like his father and brother. In 1911, after the death of his father, he was living with his widowed mother, Eliza, and his siblings.

Ted in the Ringstead School photograph (about 1900).

Unlike his older brother, Ted married before he went into the army, on 5th September 1914, just weeks after war had been declared. The marriage took place in Raunds and his bride was Ada Ellen Perrin, some three years his junior. Their first child, Rosalie Irene, was born in Raunds, 5 months later, on 20th February 1915. At the time they were living at 5 Wellington Road in Raunds but they soon moved to Ringstead High Street.

Ted first attested (joined up) in Raunds on 10th December 1915 and was put in the Army Reserve. He was 24 years 3 months old, 5ft 9inches tall, with a 34-inch chest when fully expanded. It was not until 15th January 1917 that he was "mobilised" and joined the Northamptonshire Regiment 7th (Service) Battalion (Regimental No. 202973). He reported three days later to the Territorial Force Depot 13 which was in Clare Street in Northampton.

The "Service" Battalions were ones raised at the beginning of the war from civilian volunteers. The 7th was known as Mobbs Own" after Edgar Mobbs, a famous rugby player, who was one of the first to volunteer and whose charisma prompted many others to join

up. Unfortunately, most of these men, like Mobbs, had been killed by 1917 and the majority were, by this time, conscripts.

Fred and Ada with children Rosalie and Jack
With thanks to Jon Abbott

The 7th (Service) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment embarked for France and, on 24th April 1917, they were at an Infantry Base Depot (IBD). This was a holding camp in northern France, near the coast where the men would be kept in training until they were moved up to the front. The 9th had been in France since 1915 so he would have been part of a draft replacing the sick, wounded and the dead. It is not clear if he had ever been moved up to the front line but he was only in France 43 days. On 3rd June 1917 he was diagnosed with an "inflammation of the connective tissue of the left heel" which could have been caused by too much "square-bashing" on hard surfaces. He was taken via the 138th Field Ambulance to No. 17 Casualty Clearing Station and returned to England for treatment.

He was back in England for 222 days before he was posted again to the Base Depot in France on 15th January 1918 before being posted back to the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment a day later. On his record sheet it states that he would now be in the Northamptonshire 6th "for Record Purposes" but it seems clear that he remained with the 7th and any stay with the 6th was only temporary.

He remained in France for 1 year 16 days. Returning home on 31st January 1919, some two months after the war had finished. It was in this period that Ted met Charles Laughton, who later became one of the most famous screen and stage actors of his generation. Laughton, born in Yorkshire, had originally been part of the 2/1st Huntingdonshire Cyclists ("The Gaspipe Cavalry") but finished up in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment at

the same time as Ted. After the war Ted and Charles exchanged a number of letters before fame and fortune beckoned for Laughton. Ted's descendants still treasure these letters.

In 1919, a former captain in the 7th Northamptonshires, H.B. King, wrote a history of the Battalion in the First World War in which he told of the area in front of Hargicourt where the 7th had moved on 26th September 1917:

> *Not a single house had been left standing for miles round, and hardly even a tree; the roads had been blown up at junctions, and all railway lines systematically destroyed by the enemy before he had withdrawn . . . except for a few huts, there was neither cover for man or animal.*

It was into this scene that Ted was taken into in January 1918.

As the "Revolution" of 1917 had for the time discounted Russia as an effective ally, the Germans began to make progress again and in early 1918 an offensive was expected between St Quentin and Cambrai. The 24th Brigade worked over the first three months of 1918 trying to build up strong defensive positions in the devastated countryside but the weather was very wet and the front was too long to defend along all its length. On March 21st when the Germans attacked, in what was called the Battle of St Quentin, much of the defensive system was still in the planning stage, or as H.B. King described it:

> *". . . defences existed only on maps or in tape marks over the country-side*.

The 7th, as part of the 24th Division had been had not been out of the line since the previous July but when it was clear an attack was imminent they were instructed that they would not be relieved. The Battalion were held in the Corps Reserve at Harcourt, ready to move to their allotted battle positions. At 4.30 on March 21st they moved up to these positions on high ground with trenches less than three feet deep and exposed to artillery fire. The enemy attacked in heavy mist and with its flanks overrun the 7th withdrew with difficulty to Harcourt. Their position was undefendable and further withdrawals took place to the high ground on the western bank of the Somme. In this withdrawal the troops had to cross a bridge at Falvey and the 7th were the last battalion to mount a rearguard to allow the retreat to the west bank.

After a brief respite the 7th were ordered to take part in a counter-attack but they were met by a much larger German force and were forced back to a line between Hallu and Chaulnes where they were placed on Brigade Reserve. Once more, they were called to the front and were involved in hand-to-hand bombing but the battalions on the flanks of the line gave way and, in danger of being encircled, the 7th had to withdraw again and again until they were given the task with others of defending the bridgeheads at Berteaucourt and Thennes.

The 24th Division had borne the attack of eleven German divisions from 21 March for some ten days although forced to lose ground in the process. They were finally relieved on April 5th. H.B. King wrote in 1919:

> *The whole army had been repeatedly threatened with annihilation, but the doggedness of the private soldier and the leadership of the subordinate commanders*

had saved everything; and the 7th Northamptons, though reduced in numbers, survived that period of stress as a unit – individually depressed, perhaps but collectively confident of eventual victory.

The 7th went on "motor buses to Saleux and by train to the mouth of the Somme at the village of Escarbotin, near St Valery. Here they were given new uniforms. They had a day on the beach at Ault where the companies were photographed. But the time away from the front was short-lived and after a ten-hour train journey and a nine hour march they arrived at billets at the small town of Houdain. German aeroplanes flew over on April 23rd and dropped bombs on the billet killing seven men and wounding nineteen. On the 30th they marched five miles only to be recalled when an attack elsewhere was expected. Next day they marched ten miles to Les Brebis and relieved the Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles in the "Hill 70" area which had been in German hands when the 7th had been in the area earlier in the war.

Hill 70 had a network of old mining tunnels through chalk which had been opened up by the 3rd Australian Mining Company and were a great defensive position but could be a death trap if there was a successful attack by the enemy. After a time at the Front Line they moved back to the Divisional Reserve positions where they spent the time making dugouts. There was no major attack but a form of influenza, sometimes called pyrexia (fever), or Spanish flu, broke out affecting some 200 men in the battalion and several thousands in the Division. Fortunately, it also badly affected the Germans. Within a fortnight, however, the worst was over.

Time passed, and the German attack did not materialise. The men spent their time on "spit and polish". King, in a slightly surreal report, relates:

At the 24th Divisional Horse Show held on August 8th the 7th Northamptons won first prize in the heavy draught horse class as well as the "VC race" for other ranks.

There was still night bombing causing casualties, and fighting continued among the ruins of Lens, where the Germans had taken over parts of the city.

On 30th September 1918 the 7th were relieved and marched to huts at Compigny and then by a series of train journeys and marches they reached the Front Line some four miles south-west of Cambrai. The 7th Northamptons and Canadian troops captured Cambrai. At 5.30 am on the 9th October, the Battalion moved forward against a German defensive position in the village of Cagnoncles. They won the day but with the loss of some 90 men killed and wounded. When this stronghold fell there was little further concerted opposition as they moved forward to Avesnes (Avesnes les Auber). Nevertheless, they again saw action at Rieux-en-Cambresis and Haussy while trying to cross the River La Selle.

After almost continuous marching and action the 7th they went to billets at Cauroir, three miles east of Cambrai, for a week's recuperation. Here the battalion won seven of the events in the sports arranged by the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

They were soon in action again and the 7th were detailed to capture the village of Wargnies le Petit, which they achieved, and then went into billets there, being treated well by the few

French civilians still in the village. They then moved forward to Bavai (Bavay) and on to high ground east of Marivaux. On November 11th moving back to near Bavai the battalion learned that the Germans had accepted the Allies Armistice terms. It seems it was greeted with relief and thankfulness rather than euphoria. They had been part of a war of attrition, sometimes losing ground but maintaining their discipline in the face of overwhelming odds.

Although the Armistice had been agreed, a Peace Treaty had not yet been signed and the 7th remained in France for a further seven months. The battalion made a number of marches before billeting at Bachy where, discovering that the 2nd Northamptons were a few miles away, a football match was arranged which the 7th won 1 – 0. The billets here were poor so they moved to Tournai. At Tournai, after disruption caused by an unexplained fire, they billeted in an Asylum. Classes were held in Arithmetic, French and other subjects. Christmas Day 1918 was spent in the Asylum! On January 11th the first party of other ranks were dispatched to England and then continued once or twice a week.

Ted Abbott received an advance of £2 on his pay and was given a 28-day furlough on 31st January 1919. He was given a *Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity* to prove he was not a deserter. His army career was over. He signed to confirm that he had no disabilities and was formally demobilised to "Class Z" on 28th February 1919 and he remained on this until 31st March of the following year. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. He returned to his wife and family in Ringstead and settled down to working in a shoe factory. It may have been a difficult transition.

The Old Post Office in High Street. Ringstead in the early 20th Century. Later, the Post Office moved and Ted and Ada lived there with their family.

The couple had five more children after the war to follow Rosalie and Jack. They were Leonard (1919), Dora (1922), William (1927), Derek (1929) and Greta (1937).

As an aside there is a strange glimpse of him in the "Out of Town Bargain Section" of the *Sheffield Independent* in November and December 1930 where it lists:

> *£2 ELGIN WATCH silver, 8-day; Charles II 5/= 1673; two Motor Covers, Tubes hardly worn 26x3. Offers – Ted Abbott, Ringstead, Northants.*

In the *1939 Register of England & Wales* Ted is still a shoehand in a shoe room. He is with Ada and family in Ringstead High Street. At some point he had problems with his right leg due to poor circulation and had to have part of that leg amputated. He contacted a disease of the lung and died in Oundle Hospital in the last quarter of 1963 aged 73.

William Henry Abbott (1889-1978)

As we saw in the introduction, William Henry Abbott was the son of Joseph and Annie and cousin of George and Ted. He was born on 26th September 1889 and in the 1891 Census he was living with his parents and siblings in Chapel Road, Ringstead. His father was a grocer and coal dealer but by 1891 he had become a shoemaker so perhaps the business had failed. William's older sister, Olive, was a pupil teacher and the other sister, Lilian was a shop assistant in the Co-op Stores.

I have not found William in the 1911 Census for he was not with his family. Also, when we look for his military career we find his records are part of the burnt papers which were destroyed in the Second World War by a German air raid. Much of William's records did survive, however so we can follow much of his wartime life.

William signed a "Territorial Force Attestation Form" for four years' service on 22nd November 1915 and was given the Regimental Number 5026. Initially the men signing up for the Territorial Forces were guaranteed only to serve in this country in defence of the nation. As the casualties mounted many volunteered to serve abroad and this guarantee was revoked. When William signed up he was 26 years 2 months old, 5feet 6½inches tall and had an expanded chest of 37½inches, with excellent eyesight and good physical development.

William was embodied into the 3/4th Battalion Territorial Force of the Northamptonshire Regiment. This Battalion had been formed on May 12th 1915 at Northampton, moved to Great Windsor Park and then In October 1915 to Halton Park near Tring in Buckinghamshire. On April 8th 1916 it became the 4th (Reserve) Battalion. Alfred de Rothschild had offered Halton Park as a training camp at the beginning of the war.

On the *Long, Long Trail* website it gives an insight into the what recruits should expect.

> *Training for ordinary Tommies began with basic training for physical fitness, drill, march discipline, essential field craft and so on. Later, as the soldier specialised (in the infantry, for example, as a rifleman, machine gunner, rifle grenadier, signaller or bomber, he would receive a course of instruction relevant to his role. Especially as he*

was approached being warned for the active fronts he would receive basic training in first aid, gas defence, wiring and other aspects.

William with his Sergeant's stripes
With thanks to Jane Baldock (née Riseley)

William's fitness and leadership skills were quickly recognized and his record card shows him moving through the ranks from Lance Corporal to Acting unpaid Corporal to Acting Corporal (29th February 1916) and finally to Acting Sergeant on 22nd November 1916.

A postcard produced by an enterprising Brighton company
With thanks to Chris Reynolds. www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk.

It seems likely that William's main role was as a PT Instructor getting the new recruits fit enough for useful service at the Front. The British Establishment was appalled at the terrible physical state of many conscripts especially from the poorer areas of cities like Glasgow.

In August 1917 the 4th moved to Crowborough in East Sussex. For William, his time in the comparative safety of English countryside would soon be over. On 27th February 1918 he was posted to the Light Infantry Base in France and he joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. His territorial promotions counted for nothing here and he "reverted to Private" on embarkation. He was given the new Regimental Number of 201286.

As we have seen his cousin, Ted Abbott, had been posted to the 7th and returned to France on 15th January 1918 after more than a year away due to an ankle injury. The first three months of 1918 were spent in trying to build up the defences in their area and it was at this time that they would probably have met up again. From then on, the two cousins would have been involved in the same military actions so we will not describe these again.

William had to revert to Private but, unlike Ted, he once more moved up the chain of command. He became an unpaid Acting Corporal on 8th April 1918, possibly helping to run the sports when the 7th had a brief respite on the coast near St Valery. For some reason, he fell foul of his superiors, for on 25th May 1918 he reverts to private "for inefficiency" the next day, however, he was appointed to unpaid Lance Corporal and on 5th December to Acting Sergeant.

William's only injury had been when he sustained a sprain to his left ankle on 3rd October 1918 while on duty but he was stated to be "not to blame". It was not a deliberate injury to buy him a ticket home.

The Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918 but, as we have seen with Ted, the 7th stayed in France into the new year. William signed his *Disability Statement* on 20th February 1919 and on this he is shown as Sergeant, so it seems that his promotion had been confirmed. He was examined in France and signed to confirm that he "was not suffering from a disability due to my military service". He was given a *Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity* at Purfleet on 1st March 1919 and was given a 28-day furlough. He was "disembodied" on 29th March 1919.

Oddly, the Medal Roll only has him listed as a Corporal but this may have been written up before his later promotion was established. He was entitled to the Victory and British Medals for serving in active theatres of war. William's war was over and for him there appear to have been, among all the slaughter and mayhem, some benefits. In the *British Trade Union Members Service and Casualties List 1914-18*, published in 1920, a W. H. Abbott is shown as a member of the National Union of Teachers who served in the Great War. The Union Board was Oundle but this probably included the Ringstead area.

William would have had to settle back into civilian life and after all his injury-free time at the Front the *Northampton Mercury* reported:

> *Mr. William H. Abbott of Ringstead, who recently suffered serious injuries in a motor accident is making good progress in Kettering Hospital.*

It seems that William went into teaching almost immediately after he returned, probably as a PT Instructor in a school, although this is not confirmed. We do know that he was a teacher from the following report in the *Northampton Mercury* on Monday February 19th 1923 under the heading "Physical Education",

> *The Elementary Sub-Committee reported that the Board of Education had intimated that the services of Mr. W. H. Abbott as Physical Training Demonstrator and Organiser could not be treated as "recognised service" for the purpose of the School Teachers' (Superannuation) Act, 1918, and that Mr. Abbott had made application for an increase of salary to compensate him for the loss of pension rights consequent on this decision.*
>
> *Mr Allebone said that the Board had treated the Committee in a mean and contemptible manner over this appointment, which was only made somewhat reluctantly, at the request of the Board. They could, of course, terminate Mr. Abbott's engagement and let him return to his old job as a teacher, but he thought the present work should still be carried on whatever the Board might say.*
>
> *It was decided that Mr. Abbot re re-appointed as from December 18th, 1922, at a salary of £303. 6s. 9d., rising as from April 1, 1923, to £325.*

Perhaps William was thinking of safeguarding his future life for, in 1924, he married Kathleen Bull. In the 1911 Census, Kathleen, daughter of John Bull and Emily, was an assistant teacher. Her father was the local Ringstead tailor.

Kathleen Abbott (Née Bull)
With thanks to Jane Baldock (Née Riseley)

Over the next decades we see William setting up a number of successful sporting bodies and running events. He was secretary of the Leather Trades Athletic Association and in April 1927 William, as the County Organiser of Physical Training for Schools, convened a meeting at Wellingborough to form a Northamptonshire Schools Athletic Association and to affiliate to the national body. In the years that follow we see William organising an annual Schools' Championships.

In 1939 the England & Wales Register shows that William and Kathleen, with daughter Jean were living at 44 Lime Avenue in Northampton. His occupation was given as, "Local Government Officer Physical Training Organiser". The last mention I have found of him in the newspapers is at the Northamptonshire Schools Athletic Association's 16th annual championship at the *Richard Thomas and Baldwins Sports Ground*. The *Northampton Mercury* of 7th July 1950 reported that the meeting "marked the retirement after 23 years of service as secretary and treasurer of the N.S.A. of W.H Abbott, County P.T. Officer". He was presented with a cheque in recognition of all his hard work.

William would have been about sixty years' old. I am not sure if this was also the end of his working life.

We do know that the couple moved to Mersea island, near Colchester, in Essex. William died there in 1978 aged 88 and Kathleen followed him a year later aged 87.

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Chapter 2

John Francis Agutter (1895-1975)

William Leveratt had been born in Thrapston, one of twelve children. He married Sarah Agutter on the 9th July 1838 and probably became the first stationmaster of Ringstead Station on the Blisworth to Peterborough line. Sarah was a relative of the Ringstead Agutters. Their son, Charles, followed his father as stationmaster in the village. Two other children, John who became a guard, and Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt who became one of the few women who worked in the ticket offices in the area, also followed their father.

When she was 37 years old Elizabeth married John Agutter, her cousin, and became Elizabeth Agutter Agutter. They had two children. Their daughter, Bessie May, died on September 9th 1893, aged five months and a son, John Francis was born on the 20th January 1895.

John Agutter died on the 4th February 1901 and the widowed Elizabeth took over the running of the farm. She too, died in 1907 and, at the age of twelve, John Francis was an orphan. In the 1911 Census we see that he was sixteen years old and was living and working on his uncle, Thomas Agutter's farm. In the 1919 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he is shown as living at Tithe Farm. Unfortunately the space for a named military unit is empty.

There is a J.F. Agutter in the military records and with other evidence I think we can establish that he is the Ringstead man. Our John's uncle, John Leveratt, who worked on the railways as a guard, lived in places from Doncaster to London. He married Sarah Rebecca Frankton on the 7th June 1869 in the village of Long Lawford in the Newbold-on-Avon parish. Her father, Thomas Frankton, was the village blacksmith. On John Leveratt's retirement the couple moved back to Long Lawford where they ran a greengrocery shop. Sarah Leveratt died and John followed in 1917.

If we now return to the orphaned John Francis Agutter, he was living with his uncle Thomas Agutter in Ringstead at Tithe Farm. As we have said, there was a J.F. Agutter who joined the Essex Regiment and we also discover that a "Mr. J.F. Agutter of Lawford, Rugby" was a founding member in 1920 of the *11th Essex Old Comrades Association.* The Lawford connection, confirmed by the later Electoral Rolls, verifies that this must be our man.

His records have been mostly destroyed but, by comparing him with another Essex soldier, Private W. Callaghan, whose Regimental Number, 18322, followed immediately after John's, we can sketch in his army career using his Medal Card and Roll. Callaghan, who was taken as a Prisoner-of-War, would have attested in the 11th (Bermondsey) Battalion of the Essex Regiment which had been formed in September 1914 at Warley of volunteers as part of Kitchener's Third New Army. It was based at Shoreham in March 1915 before moving to Blackdown Camp in June. John Agutter probably followed a similar path, and we know from his Medal Index Card that he was overseas from the 30th August 1915.

We have used the *Men of Essex Volume 11* produced by the Essex Branch of the Western Front Association and written by Bill Fulton for much of the following account of the 11th Battalion of the Essex Regiment's war.

The 24th Division had suffered in England with a lack of modern weaponry and of experienced officers to train the men. John, with the rest of the Battalion, disembarked in Boulogne on the 30th August 1915. Once there, the men were taken through rigorous training in battlefield tactics but, were still a very naïve unit, when forced to make exhausting marches to their first battle at Loos. This was to be a terrible baptism for the volunteers with much confusion and uncoordinated action. The death of their commanding officer seems of similar foolhardy courage to that of the Light Brigade in the Crimea over fifty years earlier.

> . . . when the order to advance was received, Lieut-Colonel Radclyffe simply said '11th Essex get out of the trench' and, leading the Battalion, cane in hand and with a small dog barking at his heels, he walked steadily forward until killed by a burst of machine gun fire which also killed his second-in-command Major J H Davies and badly wounded. the Adjutant, Captain H H Heppell - seven more 11/Essex officers were to die before the day ended.

The 11th Battalion alone had casualties of 18 Officers and 353 Other Ranks. The High Command realised that experienced units must be part of any Division. Bravery was not enough. The 11th were withdrawn to reform as a fighting unit and were then transferred to the experienced 18th Brigade of the 6th Division on the 27th October 1915 and remained with it until the Armistice.

The 6th Division spent the next ten months in the area of the Ypres Salient in the Flanders mud. It was largely a period of stalemate trench warfare. By November the 11th were on the banks of the Yser Canal which the troops remembered as much for the mud and the rats as for the fighting. So it continued, a war of attrition with constant fear of snipers, artillery fire and gas. The 11th were in and out of the Line as was the usual pattern across the whole Western front.

In August 1916 the Battalion moved to the Somme area and were part of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette from the 15th to 22nd September. As part of this battle the 11th were part of an attempt to capture a German strong point called "The Quadrilateral". The Essex had a hopeless task against the strongest point of the German defences and lost 20 men killed and 80 other casualties. The Quadrilateral was finally taken but the 6th Division suffered 3,500 casualties in the action.

A successful attack on Lesboeufs followed on the 25th September but Colonel Spring later wrote:

> *This period was about the most trying I went through during the war. The Somme fighting was done under great physical and mental strain. The ground was so heavy and muddy, cut up by shell-holes, that to walk any distance over it was fatiguing. In*

addition, we were continuously under shell-fire day and night, as we were living in old German trenches and so were properly taped.

The 11th Essex moved back to the Loos area where they had had so many casualties in 1915 but this time it was a comparatively quiet time but with trench raids and other small actions during which one 11th Essex officer, 2nd Lieutenant Frank Bernard Wearne, was killed and received a V.C. for his gallantry. On the 25th July 1917 they were relieved and had a much-needed rest during August.

At the end of 1917 the 11th were involved in the Battle of Cambrai where tanks played a significant part. It was believed that a single German gun took them all out but recent research has revealed that, although some were put out of action in this way, others survived to continue with the battle.

January 20th 1918 saw them in the Front Line opposite "Nine Elms", a name given by the army to a group of trees 460 metres east of the Arras-Lens main road, between Thelus and Roclincourt. On the 21st March the Battalion were in the Battle of St Quentin. An attack was expected, but the German "Michael Offensive was much larger than had been prepared for, and the German use of elite stormtroopers to blast holes through weak points and mop up the trapped Allied units was very successful. The 6th Division lost huge numbers of men, killed, wounded and missing, and the 11th Essex, already fighting with half a Battalion ended with only 7 officers and 77 other ranks fit for duty. Casualties from all causes totalled 16 officers and 411 other ranks. Was it in one of these times when new men were brought in to bring the battalion nearer to its full strength that John Agutter was appointed a Lance-corporal?

From late March to November, the 11th were back at the Ypres Salient where the Germans launched a second offensive known to the Allies as the Battle of Lys. This again began as a successful German offensive but gradually it became a war of attrition and the enemy, slowly at first, began to lose ground. When the Battalion reached the Somme area the Americans were now a significant force and it was becoming clear that the Allies would win the war. Small fierce rearguard actions by the retreating Germans still killed and wounded men. The last casualties suffered by the 11th Battalion were on the 25th October 1918. On the 11th November they were in billets in Busquigny when news of the Armistice was received.

The 6th Division moved into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. The *History* records:

All ranks worked hard at their equipment and the transport looked almost new, it being a proud and splendid Division which marched, with drums beating and colours flying, across the German frontier into the little town of Malmedy between 13th and 16th December. Marching generally by only one road, the length of the Division, when billeted, varied from 10 to 25 miles.

They were finally based in the Rhineland at Bruehl (Brühl), twelve miles SSW of Cologne by Christmas 1918.

I have not found that John Agutter was wounded or sick and he seems to have gone right through the war without significant physical harm, and was demobilised to Class Z on the 19th April 1919. He may have returned to Ringstead for he was shown as living at Tithe Farm

in the first Electoral Register of 1920. By the second Register of that year, however, he was in Main Street in Long Lawford, Warwickshire where we last saw his uncle John Leveratt. It seems most likely that he was lodging there with one of John and Sarah's children. Whatever the reason, he made the Rugby and Coventry area his home for the rest of his life.

By 1931 he had moved to Botomer Road at Cheylesmore in Warwickshire. He was living there in 1937 at the time of the Coronation of George VI. John celebrated too much and drove into a stationary car. He was arrested by the police. At the Police Court his lawyer pleaded on his behalf:

> *I ask your Worships to consider this case on the basis of a man who, on a great day, fell from grace.*

He also asked for leniency because, John had been "a professional driver for twenty years, for the last 15 with the Hillman Company", and he had been offered a promotion which depended on him not losing his licence. He also revealed that he had fought throughout the war and had an exemplary record of service. The defence hinted that his army service may have had an effect on him. This may have been just a bid for sympathy but in these biographies we have rarely found evidence of the mental health problems that many of the men must have suffered in the years after they came home.

The court did treat him leniently and he was given a small fine. He never married and in 1939 he was lodging with widow, Rose Jordan, and her daughter Carol, in 5 Latham Road in Coventry. Of course, as a "Mechanic and Driver", he may have only been there for a night or two or on a more permanent basis. None of the Censuses reveal this.

John died on the 11th September 1975. He had been living at 29 Glebe Close, Conley in Coventry at the time of his death. It would be good to believe that he died quietly at home after his experiences of near death on the Western Front. It was not to be. A month before he died, on August 12th, he stepped off a pavement into the side of a Corporation bus. The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* of the 2nd October 1975 reported that he had broken his leg and this had failed to heal. His leg had been amputated but the cause of his death, according to the pathologist was "Broncho-pneumonia as a result of his being confined to bed".

In these biographies we have tried to tell all the stories, including the men who survived into old age. These were the opposite of the men who are usually remembered.

> *They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:*
> *Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.*

Chapter 3

The Archer Family

The Archer family seem to have arrived in the Raunds and Ringstead area in the 1830s. William Archer had been born in Weekley, some ten miles north-west of Ringstead, in about 1800 and had married Elizabeth Purser at Great Barford Church in Bedfordshire on 23rd November 1819. Their earliest children, Emma, George and Ann, were born in Great Barford although Ann, along with three of her younger siblings, John, Jane and William, were baptised as a "family lot" in Raunds Church on February 10th 1839.

One of these younger children, John, born in about 1832 in Raunds, married Elizabeth Nunley there on 3rd October 1853. John had become a bootmaker and the couple were living in Brook Street. John and Elizabeth had seven children but it is only the descendants of the oldest son, Owen, born in 1853, and the third child, Arthur, born in about 1858, who we are following here.

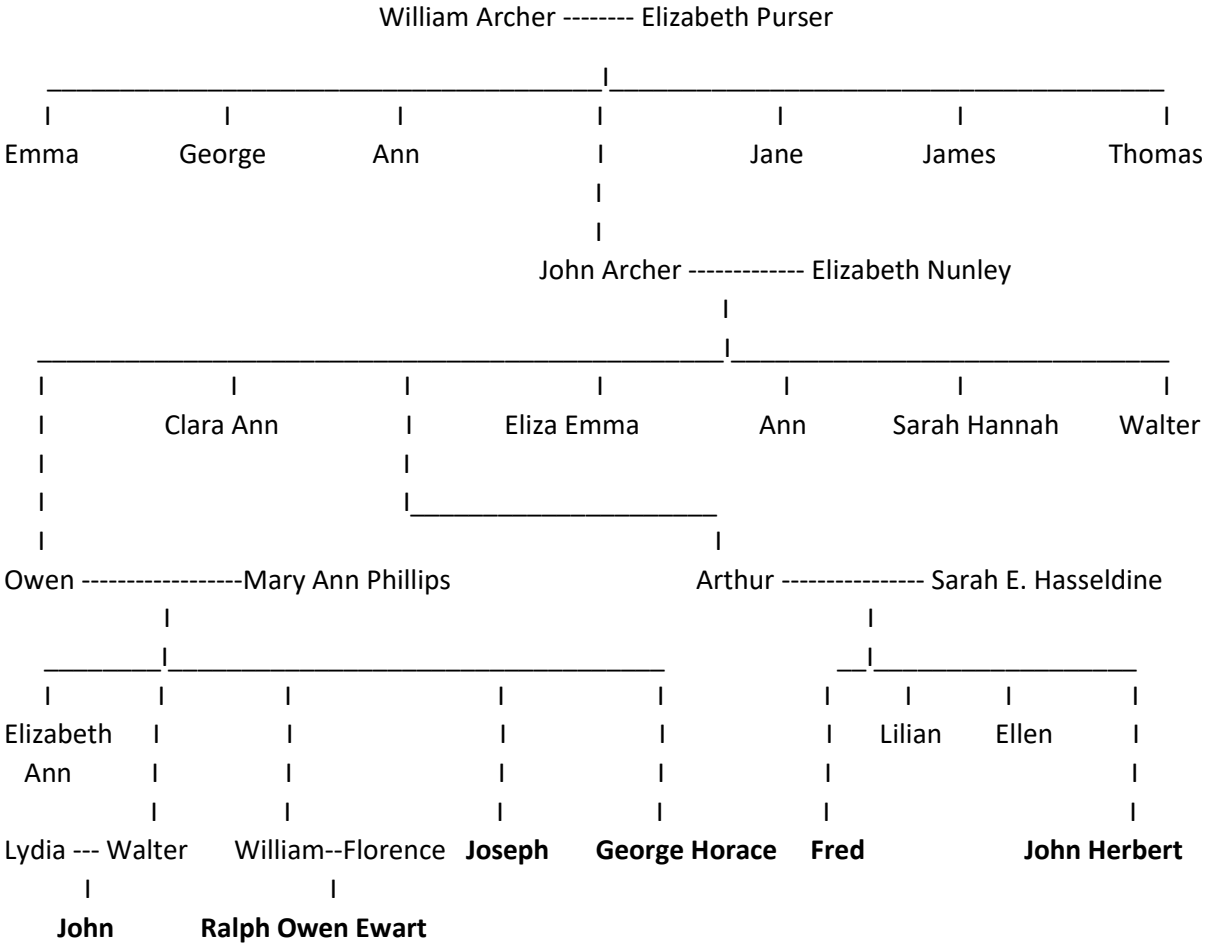
Owen married Ringstead girl, Mary Ann Phillips, in 1871 and the couple had five children all born there, including Joseph and George Horace. These two sons fought in the First World War. Another older brother, William born in about 1875 had a son Ralph Owen Ewart and he too also fought. Arthur, younger brother of Owen, married Sarah Ellen Hasseldine on 1st February 1884 and they had three children. The two sons, Fred born on 17th July 1884 and John Herbert, born on 11th June 1896, also could not escape the Great War. It was a time to be born in the Edwardian era for, with luck, the War would pass you by.

In this series of biographies we are considering the men in the Archer family who were from Ringstead and served in WW1. Some Archers, including the daughters who married, would have remained in Raunds or moved elsewhere. Those affected would have been wider than we are recoding here. An example of this is John Archer, born in 1895, the son of Walter Archer, older brother of Joseph, William and George Horace Archer. He married Lydia Harrison on 26th December 1894 in Raunds. They moved to Ringstead, like Walter's brothers, and had two sons. Theirs was a stormy marriage and in August 1906 Lydia accused Walter of persistently abusing her both mentally and physically. As a result she had moved back to Raunds to live with her father. The court granted a separation order and gave Lydia the custody of the two boys, John and Ernest, and ordered Walter to pay maintenance of 12s 6d, a week. Young John, who was only twelve, had to appear in court to corroborate his mother's story.

He became a Private in the 9th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and was killed on 21st March 1918 in France. Perhaps his parents had already reconciled or was it this tragedy that brought them back together? We do know that in the 1939 Register they were both, living in Grove Road in Raunds. So here we have a Ringstead born man who is not on the Ringstead Roll of Honour. Families would have had sons, brothers, cousins and uncles who served in that most terrible of wars, besides the men we are recording here.

The Archer Family

A Simplified Family Tree



Fred Archer (1884-1941)

As we have seen, Fred Archer was the son of Arthur and Sarah Ellen, born on 17th July 1884 and baptised on September 21st in Raunds Parish Church. Arthur was a shoemaker, born in Raunds but who, in the middle of the 1890s, took over the *New Inn* in Ringstead. Arthur continued with his shoemaking and, as was often the case, it would have been Sarah who ran the pub day-to-day. Most village pubs needed a second income to make them viable. Arthur died on 20th February 1913, aged 54 years, and his widow took over the licence of the *New Inn*.

Fred had already left the family home before then for, early in 1907, he married local girl Lilian Cobley and in 1911 they were living elsewhere in Ringstead with their three-year-old son Arthur.

Fred (rather than Frederick) was a popular name at the time because a jockey of this name had been the most successful and famous of the Nineteenth Century. He had died in 1886

and if we look at a record of WW1 soldiers, we find a long list of men with that name. One, born in Raunds a few years earlier, had joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was charged with deserting his regiment at Gillingham.

As a family man, and working in the military boot trade, Fred would have had some protection from the initial conscription but huge losses meant that, very quickly, most men in a wide age group became liable to being called up.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he served with the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). Unfortunately, most of his records have been lost so there is some uncertainty about his military career. Luckily, the *Absent Voters List*, which was first prepared in 1918 to give those soldiers still away from home a postal vote, lists Fred. His home was said to be Wyman's Road, which led to Slade Farm, and he was shown to be a Gunner in the R.G.A with Regimental Number 178148.

The Siege Batteries of the RGA had heavy howitzers firing large, high-explosive shells in a high looping trajectory from well behind the front line. Its job was to weaken and destroy the enemy before any soldiers "went over the top". Fred's entry in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was only engaged in "Home Defence". We must assume that he manned one of the coastal or other gun batteries which defended Britain in the case of air raids or invasion.

There is only one other record that I have found which records that on 20th February 1918 he had been serving six months so he must have enlisted in September 1917. It also records that he was in "B" Company, in No. 2 Siege Artillery Brigade of the Royal Garrison Artillery which was based at Catterick. He was admitted to the Camp Military Hospital there on 20th February 1918 and was discharged to two days light duties on the 5th March. Unfortunately for his place in posterity Fred had been suffering with piles, a painful condition that was the butt of many Music Hall jokes.

After the war Fred would have returned to Ringstead and it may be that he was home early for the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* of 21st September 1918, reporting on the Ringstead Fete in aid of War Charities, states that in the Fancy Dress Competition. . .

> Special prize given to Mr Fred Archer, Ancient Days, which created a great deal of amusement.

If he was our Fred, he could not have been home long for, as we have seen, he was on the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918.

Fred probably first went back into shoemaking but in April 1923, like his parents, he entered the beer trade and was granted the licence to run the *Red Lion Inn* in Raunds which was on the Stanwick/Chelveston Crossroads. It was demolished in the 1950s and replaced with a pub of the same name. Fred was there in 1925 but I am not sure how long he lasted as a publican. In the *1939 Register of England and* Wales he was back working as a clicker and his wife, Lilian was a heel maker. They were living in the new Council Houses in Denford Road, Ringstead. He died just two years later in 1941, aged 57 years.

John Herbert Archer (1896-1917)

John Herbert Archer, younger brother of Fred, was baptised in Raunds Church on 11th June 1896, the son of Arthur and Sarah Ellen. The 1901 Census, however, confirms that he was born in Ringstead where his parents ran the *New Inn*. By 1911 he was 14 and acting as an "Errand Boy", probably helping his mother in the pub and his father with his shoemaking.

If he had been born just a few years later he would have missed the call-up for the war but he was enlisted in June 1916 to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, also known as the City of London Regiment (not to be confused with the London Regiment). The Royal Fusiliers raised 47 Battalions for service during the Great War.

John Herbert Archer from his obituary in Rushden Argus (20th March 1917).
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society.

John was given the Regimental Number 5100 and by 8th December of the same year he was in France. He would first have been posted to one of the Base Camps near the coast of France, the largest being Étaples. From here he was posted to the 22nd Fusiliers just four days later.

He would have arrived at the front just after the terrible carnage of the Battle of the Somme when the war of attrition was halted more by fatigue and the coming of winter rather than any decisive victory.

In the following year the 22nd were involved in the smaller battle of Miraumont. It started on February 17th 1917 and was a disastrous one for the Allies. We get a glimpse of the, often futile, attempts to impose order on the chaos in this extract from *The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War* by H.C O'Neill. He was an officer at this battle and one can sense his frustration and anger at what occurred.

> *It had been freezing for months, and the ice and frozen snow in the broken trenches and "over the top" made the trek to the jumping-off position a trying and arduous task. A party of the battalion had a night or so previously spent time and patience in setting a tape to mark the line that was to be taken up at the start; but most of this was lost when the men arrived, tired and fed up, at about 11.30 p.m. on the night of*

the 16th. Most of the tape had been blown up by the enemy shells, and some trodden out of recognition.

It was not until the file of men bundled into a line of another regiment of the same brigade that the approximate position of our starting line was ascertained.

The Boche were ready for us, for his barrage opened even before our own, and before our battalion had passed over our own front line – a weak line of scattered shell holes – there were great gaps torn in our waves.*

Just over the second enemy line our "waves" became groups, and the steady advance appeared to be in artillery formation. The officers, many of whom were in an attack for the first time, did all they could to put matters right, and some of them managed to continue their advance on approximately the right bearing and in correct formation.

Presently the notorious "Boom Ravine" was encountered but we met with no further danger than a lurking German here and there who whiled his time away until he should be taken prisoner by sniping. After this point the battalion appeared to me to vanish, and instead one saw small parties here and there moving in varying directions.

**It was reported later that some British soldiers had deserted before the battle and given away the plan of attack to the Germans.*

Miraumont: four soldiers in a destroyed trench or shell hole, at least two of whom may be dead. By Adrian Hill © Art.IWM ART 283

The 22nd suffered many casualties and men taken prisoner. John managed to come through but it must have been a terrifying, disorientating time for him. Sadly, it was when the soldiers were back in their defensive lines that John accidentally killed himself while cleaning his gun after the battle. His death was reported in this way to the local newspaper by a Private Burgess, a Northamptonshire man who was serving with John. We have no way of knowing if his death was just a mistake caused by fumbling fingers in the bitter cold or if a young shell-shocked man taking his own life rather than face another day of terror.

His death is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial and on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was twenty years old.

Joseph Archer (1880-1966) and George Horace Archer (1881-1962)

We now turn to the cousins of Fred and John Herbert. Joseph and George Horace were the sons of Owen and Mary Ann Archer who had moved to Ringstead and all their children were born in the village. Joseph was born on 1st July 1879 and, in the 1881 Census, he was one year old and living with his parents in Ringstead High Street. In 1899 he married Florence Minnie Fox. Florence came from the large family of ten children of Joseph Fox, an army bootmaker and Dinah, his wife. In 1891 the Fox family were living in Carlow Street and Florence, aged fifteen, was a shoe closer.

By 1911 Joseph Archer, aged 30, was an "Army handsewn bootmaker" but was "out of work". Joseph and Florence had two children, Joseph Edward, aged nine, and Florence Winnie, aged three. They were now living in Carlow in Ringstead.

At the beginning of the war the army relied on regular soldiers and volunteers but, despite opposition, conscription became necessary. At first Joseph, as an older, married man with children in a protected trade, would have not been considered but as the slaughter continued the need for replacements stretched the conscription net ever wider.

Meanwhile, his younger brother, George Horace, born on 7th November 1881. I realised that I had come across George Horace Archer before, when telling the stories of the headteachers of Ringstead Church of England School. In January 1893, the School Logbook records the arrival of a new, very young headmaster called Albert Crew who tried to impose his will on the older boys and events quickly spiralled out of control. George had refused to salute the headmaster as they left school and laughed at his action. He was called back but tried to run away. The Log Book continues:

> *He was brought back to the classroom, took the cane and broke it up.*
> *Archer refused to receive any punishment and the master was compelled to resort to force. Archer lay on the ground and refused to get up. He was punished with a small cane, which was split halfway, as left by the late Headmaster. This cane has not and will not be used until after the 24th Inst.*
>
> *The master had to use forcible means for administering punishment as the boys was extremely violent. After he was punished he (Archer) stood and returned the usual master salutation – with a salute of 'Good morning, Sir'.*

George's mother, and older brother, William, then came to the school and a small fight ensued between William and Albert Crew. It all ended in an inconclusive court case a few months later and in May 1893 Albert Crew left the school.

After his school career, George went into the Army boot trade. In the 1911 Census, aged 22, he was the only child still at home with his widowed mother, Mary Ann. Nevertheless, it seems certain that he had a son aged four months old at the time of the Census with his girlfriend, Martha Hepsiba (Hepzibah) Knighton. The name of the boy was Horace Aubrey Archie Knighton and he had been born in Irthlingborough. One suspects that the names Horace and Archie are deliberate clues to his father. They had a second child born in 1913 who was called Fred.

I have not found that George was called to pay for the maintenance of his children but, in May 1913, he was ordered by the court to pay one shilling a week towards the upkeep of his own mother, Mary, who was chargeable to the Thrapston Union. In the following July, along with his brother Joseph, he was again summoned but the case was dropped when it emerged that they had both signed an agreement to pay the Union.

In 1916 George finally married Martha Hepzibah Knighton.

There are very few army records for either of the brothers but the *Medal Rolls* show that Joseph's Regimental Number was 178107 and George's 178297 so they were enlisted quite close together. Neither was entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Stars which confirms that they were conscripted in 1916 or 1917.

They both joined the 498th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery (R.G.A.) as gunners. It seems likely that both brothers and cousin Fred joined at a similar time because their Regimental Numbers were Joseph 178107, George Horace 178207 and Fred 178148. Unlike Fred, however, who also joined the R.G.A. both Joseph and George fought in France and Germany.

The 498th Siege Battery would have consisted of a group of five officers and 177 other ranks with seventeen riding, six draught and eighty heavy draught horses. There were also three two-horse carts and ten four-horse wagons. There would have been also a supporting ammunition column and a headquarters brigade. The 498th had six-inch Howitzers.

We cannot be sure when the brothers first saw action but we know that the 498th Siege Battery was attached to the 4th Army of the Allies and in 1918, after another German offensive which was pushed back, the Allies launched what turned out to be a decisive counter-offensive, pushing the Germans to the Hindenburg Line.

There followed what was later called the Hundred Days Offensive for, after years of stalemate and attrition, the Allies began to move forward in a number of small successful actions. The Allied commanders were not aware just how weakened and dispirited the Germans had become. The 498th had the difficult task of keeping up with the advancing troops. The Germans did fight a number of rearguard actions but they were forced to abandon large amounts of equipment and supplies. Finally, at 11am on the 11th November 1918 the Armistice came into effect.

A 6-inch 26 cwt howitzer being manhandled through the mud during the Battle of the Somme 1916. The devices round the wheels to stop sinking were called girdles.
©IWM (Q1490)

The 498th, as part of the Allied Fourth Army, rolled into the Rhineland and became an Army of Occupation. It was later considered by some historians that it was the shame of this prolonged occupation which created the fertile ground for the rise of Hitler and the Nazis.

After the war Joseph returned to Ringstead and we see in the *1939 Register for England and Wales* that he and his wife, Florence were living in Ringstead High Street, two doors away from the Post Office. He had now become a road labourer, probably because there was not enough work in the army shoe trade anymore. Still living with them was their son Joseph E[dward] who was single, 37 years old and a riveter of army boots in a local factory.

On 12th August 1966, Joseph, of 32 High Street Ringstead, died and probate was granted to William Joseph Freeman, a retired road foreman. His estate was worth £2,206.

George, too, returned to live in Ringstead High Street, probably living at number 55. He remained a handsewn shoemaker although in the *1939 Register* he was out of work. Martha was doing "unpaid domestic duties" and the three children were still living at home. Horace was doing "edge trimming and jointing" and Fred is "console lasting", both in the shoe trade. Dorothy Ann, born after the war, on 21st April 1920 was a tailoress and there may be another child whose record is "closed".

George died on 15th March 1962 and administration was granted to his wife, Martha Hepsibah with effects of £546. 10s. Martha died a few years later, on 29th February 1966 with administration granted to the oldest son, Horace Aubrey Archer, a shoe repairer.

Ralph Owen Ewart Archer (1899-1992)

George's older brother, was William Archer, born in 1875. It was William who had fought with George's headmaster when his younger brother had been caned. He married Florence Mayes in 1897and had one child, Ralph Owen Ewart Archer, born on 11th August 1899 in Ringstead. By 1911 William was 36 and a handsewn military boot maker, living with Florence (33) and "Ewart" who was 11 years old and their only child. They lived in Rosebery Street in a small housing estate that had been built on the east of the village. They had six rooms which would have been very spacious compared to most of the old Ringstead cottages.

It may be that Florence had an underlying illness for, in 1914 she died aged just 37. William remarried the following year (1915) to Lilian Georgina Home and, with Ralph, they moved to nearby Gladstone Street. It was here that Ralph was living when he signed his Short Service Attestation for the duration of the war on 2nd July 1917. He was just 17 years 11 months old and was placed on reserve. On 1st November 1917 the form was countersigned by the Lieutenant Colonel who commanded the Northamptonshire Regimental Depot in Northampton.

Ralph was just 5feet 5 inches tall with a 35¾ inch chest so he was small, but not particularly so, among the young recruits of the time. His Regimental Number was 47529. He became a private in the 4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on 4th November 1917. It was not until 9th April of the following year that he sailed from Dover to Calais and was taken to the Base Depot. He finally joined his battalion at the front on 20th April and remained in France until 5th March 1919.

He seems to have moved between battalions of the Northamptonshires and on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour for World War* One, written in 1919 he is stated that he was in the 3rd Battalion. The 3rd, however, did not serve abroad and I think that it was with the 6th Battalion that he served in France; (his records are now very faded).

If this is correct it means that on his arrival at the Front on the 20th April 1918 he would have found himself in the Somme area and under attack from a German offensive. The 6th were part of sporadic fighting with heavy losses on both sides. On 8th August, however, although it was not clear initially, there began one hundred days of an almost uninterrupted Allied offensive. The static trench warfare of much of the war was replaced by a succession of successful assaults. By 18th September the Hindenburg Line was reached and quickly broken.

There was fierce fighting, however, and a number of V.C.'s were won by some heroic actions. But the push was now irresistible and the German army was finally broken. On 11th November 1918 the Armistice was signed and Germany defeated.

It is not clear, but it seems that Ralph suffered with an abscess on his right thigh on 27th October 1918. Was this the result of a wound or louse bite? The records do not tell us. He

was first treated in the field hospital and then moved to No, 6 British Red Cross Hospital, known as the Liverpool Merchants' Mobile Hospital. It had 252 beds and from September to December 1918 it was based at Trouville.

It may be that Ralph was invalided home at some point in early 1919 and joined the 4th Battalion. On 4th February 1919 he was in hospital again, this time suffering from the terrible "Spanish Flu" which killed more people than the War. He was, however, treated in this country, in the 2nd Eastern General Hospital in Brighton.

When he had recovered, Ralph was posted with the Northamptonshires, possibly with the 1st Battalion this time, to Ireland. This was not a soft non-combative posting, for the soldiers faced a largely hostile civilian population, and the IRA was in the middle of a campaign to kill British soldiers. It was also recorded that the Northamptonshires went on a rampage, setting fire to buildings, whenever a soldier or policeman was killed.

On September 8th 1919 he was examined at Templemore and signed to confirm that he had no disabilities caused by his army service. Ralph returned to England and on 9th October 1919 he was demobbed and place on the "Z" Reserve List for those who could be recalled if there was a resumption of hostilities. His military career was over. He was twenty years old.

Ralph married Doris Maud Sawford in the Spring of 1925 and the couple were living in Gladstone Street in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*. Ralph was now a clicker in the shoe trade and Doris (also born in 1899) is a machinist. Living with them was Doris's widowed mother, Florence Sawford. Not far from them in 1939, living in Denford Road, was father, William Archer, still doing handsewn boot work, and his second wife, Lilian. When William died on 8th May 1964 he was living at "The Bungalow" in Denford Road.

Like many people, Ralph did not move far from his birthplace apart from some eighteen months from 1918 to 1919 which probably marked him for the rest of his life. His wife Doris, died in 1982 aged 83, and Ralph was 92 when he died on 14th May 1992. At the time of his death was living at 9 Gladstone Street in RIngstead. It appears that they did not have any children so his wartime trauma must be remembered by others.

Chapter 4

Henry William Attley (1896-1977)

Ringstead is mainly remembered in history for the alleged murder of Lydia Attley by William Weekley Ball in 1850 and for Margaret Thatcher's father coming from the village. Henry William Attley brought these two strands together. When Henry's grandfather, John Attley, died in 1907 the *Northampton Mercury* again linked him back to the death of John's sister Lydia and his belief that, although her body was never found, she had been "foully murdered" by William Weekley Ball.

John had married Sophia Pheasey at Ringstead on 17th March 1859 and among their children were Frederick, born in 1867, and Henry William, born in 1871. At first I thought that this Henry William Attley was the person I was looking for. Although he was a little old to enlist, older men did sign up and were often assigned to home defence duties..

I later realised that Frederick, who married Frances Alice Riddle on 25th December 1892 at Ringstead, had a son also called Henry William, born on 15th November 1896, and he was the man I was looking for. Some of the confusion was caused by the fact that he was born in Northampton. Frederick and Frances started their married life in Ringstead where their daughter, Lily, was born. They moved to the Northampton factories as a number of Ringstead shoemakers did in a time of hardship for the handsewn military boot industry. In 1901 Henry was four years old and living with his parents and sister at 30 Welby Street.

When Henry was five, however, the family returned to Ringstead and in the 1911 Census the family were living in Spencer Street in Ringstead. Lily was living in Finedon as a maidservant but Henry William was still at home and there were now other children; Ivy Francis (8) Bert Riddle (5) and twin daughters Iris Dora and Margaret Olive who were just one month old. It is worth noting, in view of Henry's later career, that these Censuses show that Frederick's wife, Frances, was born at Allahabad in India. The *India Select Births and Baptisms 1786 – 1947* shows her birth was on 30th November 1871 at Saugur in Bengal. We see that, at 14, Henry had left school and was working in a local factory at "heel building".

Henry spent most of his youth in Ringstead. In an article on Margaret Thatcher in the *Chronicle & Echo* in 1975, Henry recalled "blowing" the organ for Mrs Thatcher's great-uncle, John Roberts. The article continued:

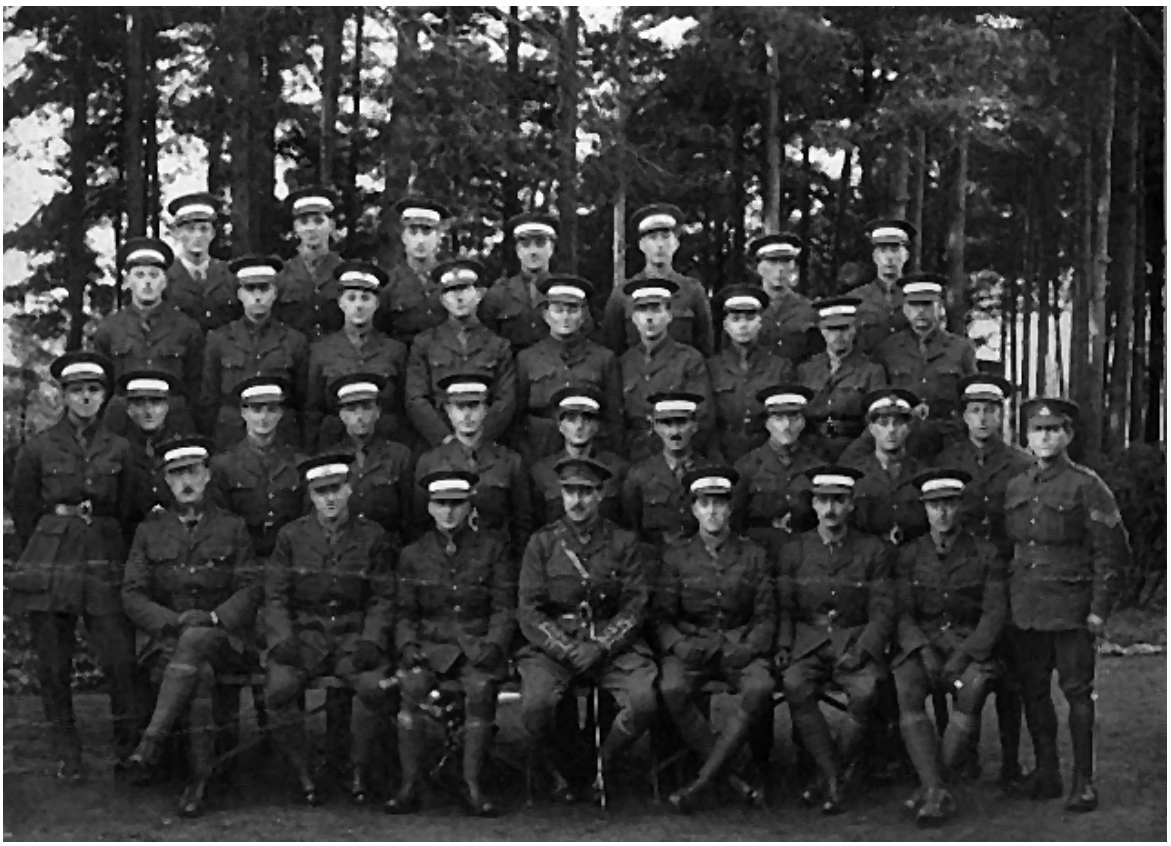
> *Particularly does he recall one occasion when, a bit inattentive to his job, he let the pressure drop.*
> *"Blow, boy, blow", old John hissed at him as loud as he dared without the congregation hearing.*

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour,* published June 1919, listing those who served in the Great War, recorded that Lieutenant Henry William Attley served with the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment in France and had been invalided home and was "now assisting

demobilisation at Crystal Palace". The Medal Card for Henry William Attley records that he served with the 12th (Yeomanry) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. There are other anomalies between the Medal Card and other reported information but the coincidences are too great to ignore and I believe that the matter is sealed because at the bottom of the card it gives two addresses: 198 Kettering Road, Northampton and Ringstead, Thrapston, Northants.

Fortunately, I also received advice through the online *Great War Forum* that Henry's records, probably because of his WW2 service, were still held by the Ministry of Defence. These help fill in some of the gaps although they do not clear up all the discrepancies. One surprising fact they do show is that Henry was educated in an unnamed private school. We do know, however, that by 14 years old he was already working in the shoe trade.

In an article published in the *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail* on 12th February 1943, it stated that Henry enlisted in 1915 at the age of eighteen and was commissioned in the Royal Norfolk Regiment in 1917. I think that the first part of this statement is just wrong and the M.O.D. records show that he enlisted with the 13th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment on 8th December 1915 when he was just nineteen. He was immediately transferred to the Army Reserve until his services could be used and was first mobilised for service on 26th June 1916. Two months later, on 21st August 1916 he was promoted to Lance Corporal. Perhaps his height and bearing were an advantage because he was six feet tall when he enlisted which was much taller than most recruits at the time.



Henry with other Officer Cadets. He is second from left on back row.
With thanks to the Attley Family

It does not appear that Henry was in a war zone during this early period. The 13th (Reserve), Cambridgeshire, Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment was locally formed in 1915 and moved to Trowbridge. In February 1916 they had moved again to Leamington and then to Richmond Park. On 1st September 1916 it became the 108th Training Reserve Battalion of the 26th Reserve Brigade in Wimbledon.

Henry must have shown some leadership qualities for he was promoted again on 17th January 1917 to Acting Corporal. He was then selected for officer training. The group picture above shows him with other officer cadets. It may seem remarkable that a working-class young man like Henry should become an officer but war and the heavy losses of young officers forced some democratisation of the army. In February 1916 a new system of training for officers was introduced. Entrants had to be over 18½ years old and to have served as a "ranker". The training course lasted just 4½ months and, if successful, the soldier would be given a temporary commission.

It may be that, after passing out, he was with the 1/1st Norfolk Yeomanry which became an infantry regiment, the 12th (Yeomanry) Norfolk Regiment, at the Suez Canal defences in Egypt, on 7th February 1917. Certainly the 12th are the first regiment to appear on his Medal Roll, when he was a Second Lieutenant. The 12th was attached to the 230th Brigade of the 74th Division and fought in the Second and Third Battles of Gaza, including the capture of Beersheba and of the Sheria Position. They were also involved in the capture and defence of Jerusalem and the Battle of Tell'Azur

The 12th sailed from Alexandria on 1st May, arriving at Marseilles on 7th May 1918. From there they would have moved north by train arriving by June at the Western front and were transferred to the 31st Division of the 94th Brigade on the 21st.

During the "Advance on Flanders" the Battalion was involved in the Action of Tieghem and crossed the River Scheldt on the 9th November 1918. When the Armistice was signed on the 11th November the forward units had reached Everbecque and the River Dender. The Battalion moved back to Arques-Blendecques and the process of demobilisation began.

At some point in these actions Henry was invalided back to England. His son, David, has a photograph of him, with a walking stick, in a group shot with other officers at a military hospital. They are all in uniform and in the centre is a very severe-looking matron. His uniform appears to be that of the Norfolk Regiment.

Henry then went to Crystal Palace and helped with the demobilisation at the end of the war. It was probably at this point that he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment (as reported in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*), because this "Reserve" unit was a training battalion which spent most of the war at Felixstowe and never moved out of England.

In November 1918, the British Army had numbered almost 3.8 million men. Twelve months later, it had been reduced to slightly less than 900,000 and by 1922 to just over 230,000. The supervision of the demobilisation was not the easy cheerful posting that one might

imagine. Lloyd George had promised that there would be rapid demobilisation but the transport and bureaucratic systems were overwhelmed by the numbers returning.

Writing on the *Kent History Forum* one of the posts by "*grandarog*" tells of his father who also helped at Crystal Palace:

> *He said that it was a real nightmare job as morale among the men was terrible. Lorry and busloads of men were arriving all the time from the holding camps so there was always a huge backlog throughout the day. The officers had extreme difficulty in keeping the men in order and fights often broke out as men tried to force their way to get to the desks. It was very bad late afternoons when new arrivals were turned away and some that had been waiting all day were sent back to the camps.*

At some point, in late 1919 or possibly in February 1920, Henry sailed to India and became part of the Indian Army. It may be that there is a clue to his career direction in his ancestry. His mother's father, Alfred Riddle, was a colour sergeant in the King's (Liverpool) Regiment. When we look back at the 1881 Census for York we see him there in the Fulford Road Barracks. Living with him are his wife, Bridget, from Sligo in Ireland and four of their children, three of whom were born in India and span a period of 11 years. Among them is Fanny (Frances) who later married Frederick Attley. Perhaps his grandfather helped Henry with his career through higher connections? We have no way of knowing.

According to his Medal Card, Henry was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the 89th Punjabis which had been formed in 1917 and later, in 1922, became a training battalion. The Battalion was stationed at Nowshera in the North West Frontier province (now in Pakistan) when it received orders to mobilise for service in Mesopotamia (Iraq). In October 1920 the Battalion joined the 52nd Indian Infantry Brigade, 18th Indian Division in which it served until at least March 1921. There is some confusion in that the form he completed to become an "Emergency Officer" in WW2 states that he was with the 2nd Battalion of the 11th Gurkha Rifles from 1919 to 1921.

We see that Henry Attley served on the North-West Frontier of India and Iraq in 1920 and 1921 and also in Persia. From his WW2 records we know that he had a good to fair knowledge of spoken Hindustani as well as some knowledge of French.

After the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 the idea of the League of Nations was to establish Mandates in the defeated central Powers so they would move towards independence under the "tutelage" of one of victorious Allied Powers. The Iraq Revolt started in Baghdad in the summer of 1920 by officers of the Old Ottoman Empire (which had been allied with the Germans) against the British occupation of Iraq. Although the revolt was largely crushed by the end of October 1920, it festered on until 1921. Some six to ten thousand Iraqis and around 500 British and Indian soldiers died in the conflict.

The British decided to rule Iraq by more indirect means and installed Faysal ibn Husayn as King of Iraq. His family remember that Henry talked of meeting "King Faisal" in Baghdad.

We do not have absolute dating of his service but we do know that on 7th February 1920 Lieutenant H.W. Attley left Liverpool bound for Bombay on the *SS Patricia*. The following

year he arrived in London on July 11th 1921 from Bombay on the *SS Sardinia*. Further, on this voyage we have the information that, on returning to England, Henry was intending to reside in Tilcroft in Ringstead, near Thrapston and was 24 years of age. It seems likely that these voyages define his service in Iraq and India, a period of about eighteen months. On 10th August 1921 he was placed on the Indian Army Reserve of Officers and retained the rank of Lieutenant.

He received the Victory and General Service Medals, India Frontier Medal (1919) and Iraq Medal with bar (1921).

On leaving the army and returning home his work was in the leather trade. The *Daily Echo* on Saturday May 20th 1922 reported on a visit that Earl Haig made to "two typical Northampton factories" on that morning. One of these was the Chrome Tanning Company, Ltd, in Grafton Street. Some 60% to 70% of the staff were ex-servicemen of which 37% were in some measure disabled through war service. Earl Haig was escorted around the works by H. W. Attley and a Mr. Cross who explained the processes. It seems certain, as neither man is in uniform, that the photograph above was taken during this visit.

On 22nd April 1924 Henry married Mary Bertha Roskell, in St Joseph's Catholic Church in Hartlepool. She had been born in Richmond in Yorkshire, the daughter of Richard Aloysius Roskell, a senior bank clerk. In 1911, aged 15, she had been attending a Convent School at East Wymer, Norwich, where her aunt was a sister and a teacher. It is not clear when and where Henry and Mary's paths crossed.

Earl Haig (left) shaking hands with Henry (probably taken 1922)
With thanks to the Attley Family

The war memorial in Ringstead churchyard was dedicated on Sunday 29th June 1924. A procession to the site was headed by the Raunds' Temperance band and included sixty ex-servicemen led by "ex-Lieutenant H. Attley".

By 1939 Henry and Mary were living in *Prospect House* in York Road, Wollaston, some ten miles south-west of Ringstead. Henry was a Leather Trade Agent, but the Second World War had begun and, on 30th October 1939, Henry was given the "Regular Army Emergency Commission" of 2nd Lieutenant and promoted the following day to Acting Captain. He had begun his second army career. His service number on the Ministry of Defence website is given as P104483.

For two years, he was in command of "A" Company of the 4th Northamptonshire Regiment. The 4th Battalion was a 2nd Line Territorial Army formed in 1939 which never served abroad during the war. In 1941 he became Adjutant of the 8th Northamptonshires Home Guard Battalion which recruited from the Rushden area and on 27th May 1942 was promoted to temporary Captain. On 11th May 1943 he was again promoted, to Temporary Major, and posted to RAF Tempsford in Bedfordshire to undertake special liaison work with Bomber Command of the RAF. RAF Tempsford was, during the war, the base for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) which flew underground agents and their supplies into enemy occupied Europe. The station was home to "Special Duties" 138 and 161 Squadrons. Over eighty aircraft and most of their crew were lost from Tempsford during the Second World War. It was here that he met well-known people such as Odette Churchill and General de Gaulle.

Henry in Northamptonshire Regiment uniform. WW2
With thanks to the Attley Family

He became the Commanding Officer of Shalstone Prison-of-War Camp in Buckinghamshire. The Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press of 29th November 1947 had a letter published which showed another side to the war:

> Dear Sir, - To many of us it has come as a surprise that the P.O.W. Camp at Shalstone is closing down during this week-end, those Germans not due for immediate repatriation being transferred to other camps. During the last few months many friendships have been made between the Germans and local people, and I am happy in the knowledge that some of the P.O.W.'s will return to their homes with pleasant memories of some contacts that they made in Buckingham.

Henry too made friends with some of the German prisoners, and his son remembers considerable correspondence between his father and former prisoners after the war. Henry went to Austria and Germany to visit some of them in about 1950.

Henry and Mary were involved in a great deal of community work and were particularly prominent in the British Legion which had been formed in 1921 to help look after soldiers and their families after they had left the services. Mary led the local women's section and Henry rose to become the chairman of the Northamptonshire branch of the Legion.

Major Attley
From 1975 Article about Margaret Thatcher (Chronicle & Echo)

He retained the Honorary Major rank in retirement and was awarded the War Medal 1939-45 and Defence Medal for his WW2 Service.

In later life the couple moved to Midland Road in Wellingborough. Henry died there aged 81 at the end of 1977. Mary died some six years later on 17th December 1983.

A display of Henry William Attley's Medals
With thanks to the Attley Family

Chapter 5

The Baker Family including Frank Robinson

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 (with their position in the family) 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

That 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 (née 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.

Herman Baker (1887-1948)

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 Ringstead 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' birthplaces, 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 tallest 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 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 in the trenches 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. In 1918, it was discovered that P.U.O. was caused by the excretions of lice, which were one of commonplaces of life in the trenches, being rubbed into a wound or abrasion.

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 was sent 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. Was the family photograph taken then?

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. 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 child, 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 violin. The photograph of the Ringstead Band in the chapter on Benjamin and George Roberts in *Ringstead People,* and the many newspaper reports, show 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 then moved on to Hull in about 1936, and Kenneth joined the West Hull Silver Prize Band as a solo cornet player. It is through the life stories 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.

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

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.

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 Head. 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 shown 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, probably on a short visit..

There is no sign of Kenny. He was 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.

Herman died in 1948 aged 61 in the Holderness District of East Yorkshire. Lottie married again as we shall see in the story of Herman's brother, Charles Baker.

Arthur Harry Baker (1889-1974)

The second oldest son was the last of the Baker boys to enlist. He had been born in 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 was enlisted in the Army Veterinary Corps, (the prefix Royal was added in 1918). This Corps had qualified veterinary surgeons as officers but farmworkers, ostlers, blacksmiths and others used to working 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 some 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 places 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 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 was 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 in 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 (1892-1978)

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.* Charles enlisted as a Sapper when he was 23 years old, joining the 118th Company of the Railway Corps of the Royal Engineers 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. Where possible, light narrow-gauge railways would be run even close to the Front Line.

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 appointed a Lance Corporal, then promoted to full Corporal and finally to Second Corporal. Second Corporal was a rank 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 the 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, the daughter of Robert, a bread baker, and his wife Clara from Irthlingborough. Clara had been a Britchford and in 1911 Winifred is staying with her mother's sister, Laura and her husband George Robinson. It does not seem that he was a relation of the 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 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 ws an electrician underground in the colliery), were living in a cottage at Measham Hall near the Colliery. Measham Hall is a few miles from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. 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 the couple 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 (1896-19??)

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 and a brief newspaper report.

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 Étaples, 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 became 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 152 casualties: 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, via a chain of casualty posts 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 the 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 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 worked in a Boot and Shoe Repair Shop living at 31 Cammidge Street, Withernsea. (Oldest brother Herman had also lived in Withernsea with a similar job.) With him is his wife Alice M. Baker, 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. The Banns had been called on the 11th, 18th and 25th September 1921 in the Owththorne with Rimswell Parish Church. Could there have been some confusion between the brothers or is it just a coincidence of names?

If the Withernsea man is the correct Walter, he died in 1977 in the Hull District.

The Three Baker Women in the Photograph

The two younger 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 black "widow's weeds". Ralph had been buried in Ringstead Cemetery in 1906 and although Annie moved to Rushden sometime in the 1910s, when she died on 31st August 1944, she was buried near her husband in her home village.

Francis Horace Robinson (1895-1970)

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 boot 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 list of 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 in 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 battle formation that 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. 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 (Horace) is on the left in the darker uniform
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society

Frank (wrongly entered in the roll as "F.A. Robinson") was deemed entitled to a "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

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 thanks to the Rushden & District History Society

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.

Chapter 6

The Ball Family

Thomas Ball (1879-1918)

Thomas Ball was born in Ringstead in about 1879, the third child of John and Susannah. In 1891 he was shown with his widowed mother, living in Findings Terrace, Raunds. Their father, John Ball, had been killed in a quarry accident in islip while they were living in Ringstead. His mother was an "army boot closer" and his older brother George (13) an errand boy but Thomas (12), although, it seems, attends part time at school, was also a boot riveter. By 1901 the family were at Hill Street in Raunds. Susan, at 46, was still an army boot closer, as was daughter Eliza (26). Her son, George (23), was now a clicker, as was younger brother John (19). Thomas (22) remained a riveter. All seem to have been working at home although George may have been employed in a local factory.

Thomas married Charlotte Cade on the 1st January 1902 in Keystone. Charlotte had been born in Bythorn in Huntingdonshire in 1880, the daughter of a farm labourer. By 1901, aged 20, she was working as a "general domestic servant" for Alfred Williams, a Wesleyan Minister, and his wife at Berrister House, Vicarage Place, Raunds.

Thomas and Charlotte had two children, Harold in 1902 and Leonard in the third quarter of 1905. At some stage, soon after the birth of Leonard, the family moved to Wollaston where they lived with his younger brother John and his family in York Cottages. Thomas was working as a "Bottom Stuff Rivetter "in a local factory and Charlotte was working at home as a hand boot closer. Leonard (5) was with his parents but Harold (9) was staying with unmarried Uncle George (33), Aunt Eliza (36) and grandmother Susan Ball (56) in Hill Street, Raunds. A further child Roland was born on 20th September 1912.

Soon after this, brother John and his family returned to Raunds but Thomas and Charlotte stayed in Wollaston and took over a fish shop in the village. He was also a well-known local Rechabite (a temperance organisation). He was 37 with a young family and establishing his own small fish and chip business. He did not wish to join the army and stated that he wanted to continue to supply fish to the area and also cited the threat to his business if he was called up. He was granted two temporary exemptions but finally, in 1916, the Tribunal decided that his business was not "of national importance", and his appeal was dismissed.

He was forced to enlist in Wollaston and initially joined the Northamptonshire Regiment (30339). He transferred to the 15th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles as Rifleman 41592. I have a copy of a picture from Gillian Jolley (daughter of Ronald Ball) which is said to be Thomas (in uniform) with son Harold. If this is the case it was probably taken about 1911/12 and means that Thomas was almost certainly in the Northamptonshire Regiment Territorials before the war. This may be one reason why his appeal was dismissed.

The 15th Battalion was engaged in the Battle of Courtrai on the Western Front in Belgium. This was part of the Allies final advance in Flanders. On 15th October 1918, it was in reserve in Gullinghem near Courtrai, after being in action on the 13th. The *Kettering Leader* of 29th November reported:

> Rifleman Ball was with a party that was in a farmhouse some miles away from the fighting line when a shell came and killed three of them (including Thomas Ball) and wounded several including the padre. The chaplain wrote to Charlotte, paying a high tribute to his "character as a soldier".

Thomas had been acting as a servant to the Chaplain and he wrote to Charlotte:

> *I was very fond of your husband and he was very good to me. He was a most upright man, and a man of good principles. We were good friends and he went with me everywhere I went. One day . . . we got into a very tight corner, where there was a lot of heavy shelling; we got out safely in the end, but during it all Tom never lost his nerve and was as brave and steady as he could be. That incident showed me his worth.*

It must have been a terrible blow to the family, especially being so close to the end of the war. The Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918. Thomas is on the Wollaston War Memorial. Charlotte died in the Wellingborough District in March 1964 aged 83, nearly 46 years later.

Thomas and Charlotte with their 3 sons (from left) Harold, Roland and Leonard (Thomas's hat badge is for the Northamptonshire Regiment)

My memory of the family is of the cycle shop. *L. & H. Ball*, in Cambridge Street, Wellingborough that Harold and Leonard ran in the 1950s. In 1956, when I passed the 11+, my parents bought me my first brand-new bicycle. It was one of the first breed of "teenage" bikes by Triumph, electric blue with straight handlebars, white plastic mudguards, cable brakes, and whitewall tyres. It came from Harold and Leonard's shop and my mother paid a weekly amount.

John Ball (1882-1953)

John, or Jack as he was usually known, was the third "John Ball" in a direct line, only separated by his grandfather Thomas. They span the years from 1783 to 1953 and he was the only one that I touched, in his old age. I did not know him well, for I was only seven when he died.

John was born in Ringstead, the fourth child of John and Susannah, (or Susan), Ball, on 11th February 1882. He followed Eliza, George Henry and Thomas. In 1881 his parents and his siblings had been living in Carlow Street, Ringstead. His father, an ironstone labourer in the Islip quarries, had been buried in a fall of earth in the limestone pit, on the 21st September 1886 and killed. John junior was only some three years old at the time.

We do not know how Susannah coped with four young children on her own but by 1891 she had moved back to her home town of Raunds. She had not been able to write her signature at her marriage in 1874 so opportunities must have been limited for her. She became an army boot closer, sewing the uppers, and her children also worked to help keep the family from the workhouse. Eliza was away from home, also working as a boot closer and the two older boys were 'Errand boy' and 'Riveter and School'. At nine years old, John was still a 'Scholar'.

By 1901 the whole family, including Eliza was living in Hill Street and all were engaged in the army boot trade. Susan, the widowed mother, and Eliza, her daughter, were both closers and Thomas was a riveter but John had followed his older brother George and was a clicker. It appears that all the family were working at home, except George and John who were probably in a local factory. This is what we would expect because 'clicking' was considered the most skilled work and the one which cost or saved the employer the most money. The ability to match parts of the leather and cut the maximum from a hide were valued abilities. It was also true that it required room and was for all these reasons was often centralised into a factory before the other shoeworking crafts. All around them in Hill Street were people in the boot and shoe industry, mostly working at home.

So, by 1911, the industry had changed. George Henry and Eliza appear to be working in a factory, George a boot clicker and Eliza a boot closer, although Susan, now 56, continued to work at home. They still lived in Hill Street. Two of the sons have left the nest. John had married Ringstead girl, Eunice Andrews, on 23rdDecember 1905, some five months before the birth of their first child. They were now living in Highfields Cottages, Marshalls Road, at the time of his birth. Thomas had married earlier, in 1902 to Charlotte Cade and the two couples have moved to Wollaston where they share York Cottages which had six rooms,

excluding the scullery and any outbuildings. Thomas was now a 'Bottom Stuff Riveter' and John a clicker. Both work in the local factory but the two wives are 'Hand Boot Closers' at home.

By 1914 Jack and Eunice and the family were back in Raunds, living at 63 Marshalls Road which was in Nene Cottages, built for workers of *R. Coggins and Sons* whose factory was on the opposite side of the road alongside Highfield cottages, an almost identical row. In the *1914 Raunds Directory* almost all the "Heads" of houses were shoehands.

Jack as part of the winning Wollaston Victoria team which won the Wellingborough and District League title in 1909-10.
From a newspaper cutting provided by the late Brian Ball, Grandson of Jack and Eunice.

John and Eunice already had three children, the older two, Aubrey (4) and Sydney (3), born in Raunds and Ronald (5 months) born in Wollaston. John and Eunice moved back to Raunds but Thomas and his wife stayed in Wollaston and ran a fish shop. I know this because Aubrey went to stay with them for a time to help in the shop and was, he believed, treated badly by Thomas.

The two rows of cottages were locally known as 'The Colony'. My father said they were cheaply built and always cold but they are still there today. Before central heating and insulation most terraced houses were freezing cold in winter with one coal-fired room sucking icy draughts from the rest of the house.

John, like his older brother, was conscripted. He enlisted on 24th June 1916 but was not called for service until 17th September 1917. He put his preferred option to be the *Essex Regiment* but he became a Gunner in the *Royal Field Artillery* with Regimental Number 236994 and was posted to the *4a Reserve Brigade* of the 56th Reserve Battery. This was based at Woolwich and as far as I have found, did not go to any war zone. We know from the army records that John was 5ft 7 inches tall with a 37-inch chest when he enlisted. He

was discharged on 27th November 1918 as being “surplus to military requirements”. His character was described as “good”.

John returned home and carried on with his life. It appears that some time near the end of the war he was awarded a “silver badge” which carried the legend, “ For King and Empire – Services Rendered”, which was given to those who were discharged as a result of sickness or wounds contracted during the war whether abroad or at home. He had a 20% pension for a time after discharge for a disability which was not attributable to his service years. He had been diagnosed with “neuralgia of the testicle”. It seems the pension was cancelled in March 1919.

John and Eunice with their sons (from left) Aubrey, Ronald, Dennis and Sidney (Probably just after the First World War).

As we have seen John played football but he had also been a talented local runner and won many prizes over the years. After his own career as a runner was over he trained some local athletes including his youngest son Dennis who was born in 1917 and whose middle name was Verdun, after the First World War battle, and his nephews, Harold and Len. These athletic competitions also reveal a weakness that he shared with many shoemakers. He was an inveterate gambler. Amateur race meetings were organised but there would be a line of bookies also at the meets.

I have an original copy of a photograph which fills in a little more of John’s history. It shows him standing in a clicking room. The same photograph is in *Raunds, Picturing the Past* and it tells us that it was taken in 1929 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of John *Horrell and Son Ltd* of Wellington Hill, Raunds.

The next glimpse of John came to me when I saw a copy of the *Rance Revisited* magazine in the local library. To my surprise I saw a piece on *Adams Brothers* by Paul Roberts. He movingly describes the clickers breaking into song as they worked. They would sing in harmony, with descant, songs from *Nellie Dean* to *Abide with Me* and *Crimond*, which was known locally as the 'Ringstead Hymn' because of its Dissenting associations. He goes on to tell of an incident involving Jack Ball (which seems to imply that he was working at Adams at the time).

> *They credited Jack Ball with causing Labour to lose the seat in the 1935 General Election. Wing Commander James, the Conservative candidate, had as his agent a Finedon man called Chapman, nicknamed 'Sugar Chapman'. They always introduced him at political meetings as a 'Conservative Working Man'. His presence at political meetings was like a red rag to some of the Raunds' Radical shoemakers. No one can recall hearing Sugar Chapman speak because of the uproar that his presence caused. As Wing Commander James left his Eve of Poll meeting in Raunds, Jack kicked his backside for bringing 'Sugar Chapman'. 'CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ASSAULTED AT RAUNDS,' said the headlines in the next day's Evening Telegraph.*

John (third from right) in Clicking Department of John Horrell & Sons Ltd (1929).

I first encountered John when I was a young child and I went on the bus from Wellingborough to Raunds to visit my grandparents. I remember my grandmother a little. She was a proud woman who kept a neat house with polished brass jugs, full of coloured wooden spills, in the fireplace. I can remember using these spills to make pictures and roads for toy cars on the mat in front of the fireplace. She had a special tiered plate for cakes and

was mortified when I discovered a fly in my Tizer. Of my grandfather I have only two memories. One is of him standing in the workshop in his son Ronald's garden where he was still doing outwork. He did the old clickers' trick for me of taking a circle of leather, sticking it to the bench with a small curved knife and then pulling to make a shoelace. Magic and shoemakers are often associated. The other memory is of him sitting silently in the corner in Marshalls Road, as the grandfather clock beside him ticked the seconds slowly away.

He died on the 8th February 1953 aged 70 years to be followed by his 'beloved wife' Eunice on 21stAugust 1956. They are buried together in Raunds Cemetery. In 1919 *The Shoe and Leather News Illustrated Biographic Dictionary of British Shoe and Leather Traders* listed six boot and shoe firms in Raunds: *Adams Bros.; R. Coggins and Sons; Tebbutt and Hall Bros Ltd.; The St. Crispin's Productive Society Ltd.; Regulation Boot Co. (Raunds) Ltd.* and *John Horrell and Son*. All have fallen silent and many have been demolished. Most of the backyard workshops have also disappeared. What was once the vibrant lifeblood of the Nene valley communities is now archaeology.

Sons of Thomas Samuel and Harriett Ball

This is another story of two brothers. Their grandfather was James Ball, born in Ringstead in about 1831. He was the son of Daniel and Phoebe Ball and most of the large family joined the military or looked for their fortunes in the New World. James was one of the few who stayed close to home.

James, together with his brothers Thomas, Samuel and Elisha, was baptised in Ringstead Church on September 12th 1841. He is aged 9 in the Census which preceded the baptism by a few months so he was born in about 1831/2. He left home early and I believe that he might be wrongly entered as John Ball, aged 19, born in Ringstead, a shepherd living in at Wold Lodges in Tansor which is downstream on the Nene, on the other side of Oundle.

James married Emma Storks (or Stocks) from Riseley, some ten miles south, in Ringstead Church on 17th October 1855. Like his siblings, James had to leave Ringstead to find work, but he did not have to travel far, and was by 1861 a shepherd, like his father, living in Titchmarsh. He was with his wife Emma and their two children Phoebe and John who had both been born in Denford. The family had returned to Ringstead by 1871 and two further children Thomas and George have been born (all children now shown as born n Ringstead).

It is Thomas whose sons we are following here. He was born on 29th December 1865 and had a Methodist baptism on 6th May 1866. It seems that his middle name was Samuel and he was sometimes known by this name. In the 1881 Census he is Samuel, aged 16, still living at home in the Ringstead High Street and working as a farm labourer. By 22nd April 1889 when he married Harriett Christiana Wright at Islip he had become a bootmaker.

Pearce's Row was in the narrow lane on the right between the Police House and the old row of cottages. Church Street now ends at the road sign but in the Census continues to the corner.

The couple moved to Pearce's Row, Church Street, in Ringstead and by the 1891 Census they already had two children, Thomas Horace (1) and George James who was just one month old. By 1901 the family had moved to High Street in Moulton where Thomas was an army boot maker. There were two further children, Leonard who was born on 28th February 1893 and Emma born about 1897. The couple moved back nearer to home and in 1911 were living in Francis Street in the Westfields area of Raunds. Only their youngest children, Leonard who was 17 and unemployed and Emma (15) who was a "shoewoman girl", were still at home.

George James Ball (1891-?)

Thomas junior and his younger brother, George James Ball, had already left home. It is George who we are following first. His story after the 1901 Census is a murky one and much of it I have found in retrospect as it is referred to in reports of later crimes.

In the Northampton Mercury of 12th April 1912, Inspector Dunn, who was a witness in a reported case against George, states:

> *He was a native of Ringstead and had on several occasions enlisted, each time deserting and taking with him valuable property. The Witness [Inspector Dunn] held a warrant for his arrest in connection with the robbery of £50 worth of silver from the barracks of the Loyal Lancashire Regiment.*

George was travelling the country trying to get money wherever he could and, it seems, usually by criminal means. We know that he had returned to Northamptonshire because the case which revealed his past wrongdoing was held at Northampton. George was charged with a jewellery robbery at the Corby warehouse of Leslie Ansell between the 16th and 19th of December 1911. The list of jewellery stolen was extensive:

. . . 247 gold rings, six long gold guards, eight gold bracelets, one rolled gold bracelet, eight gold chains, three gold pendants, one silver cigarette case, three silver matchboxes, eight long silver guards, 12 silver curb chains, 25 gold pins, nine silver brooches, and 16 watches.

George, as seems to have been his habit, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 15 months with hard labour.

After being released, George must have made his way down to Portsmouth, and enlisted again, this time in the Royal Navy. George James Ball born in Ringstead in Northamptonshire signed up for the Royal Navy on 25th November 1913. He had a union jack with "Unity" tattooed on his left forearm and a scar on the back of his left hand and a white scar on his chest. We know that he was 5ft 8¾ inches with a chest size of 38¾inches with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. (nearly all the military had grey eyes). He first served on *Victory ll.* This was the name given to the barracks and administrative base in Portsmouth.

He was given a "very good" character and ability rating on 31st December 1913 and moved to serve on a light cruiser, the *HMS Liverpool* on 7th May 1914 as a storekeeper.

It was at this point that something went wrong for he was discharged with "Services No Longer Required" (D.S.N.L.R.) on 27th May just a few weeks after his move. His record also notes the "Recovery of his GCB" [Good Conduct Badge]. He was sentenced to Confinement to Barracks (C.B.). There is some confusion because his official military service records give his date of birth as 26th March 1893 rather than 1891 but this is either a typographical error or perhaps part of George's subterfuge.

Under *The Prevention of Crimes Act* of 1871 habitual criminals were recorded in detail in a register. These records are now online and in them we find "George James Ball, alias Thompson and George Ball". His rank is now given as Stoker in the Royal Navy. He is shown as being born in Ringstead and to have a "flag, flower and UNITY" tattooed on his forearm and that at the end of his sentence he intended to live at 40 Pratt Road in Rushden, Northamptonshire.

From the *Calendar of Prisoners* tried at the Portsmouth Quarter Sessions of July 1914 we learn of the two thefts of which he had been accused. They both took place in May 1914 and included a suit of clothes, a vest, a cigarette case, a tie and a Post Office Savings Book. He had been arrested on 29th May and as we have seen confined to barracks. He was charged on the 9th June and pleaded guilty at his trial on 9th July when he was sentenced to two concurrent terms of six months with hard labour.

Great Britain had entered the First World War on 4th August 1914 when George would have still been serving his sentence. He was released on 10th December 1914 so what happened to him after that? Did he sign up again or was he the George Ball from Peterborough Co-op who was appealing against being called up in 1917. Without another lead we may never know.

Leonard Ball (1893 – 1917)

His brother, Leonard had a very different military career. When we left him in 1911 he was seventeen years old (but I think actually 18) and an unemployed shoehand living in Raunds. Late in the previous year Leonard had signed up for the Northamptonshire Regiment Special Reserve. He was 5ft 5¼ inches high, weighing 113 lbs. (8 st 1lb). He had scars on both knees and one wonders if this was from his shoe work. He received a reference from Mr. Lawson from Adams Brothers who said he had worked there for three years but had had to be laid off because of "slackness of trade". He was a private in the Special Reserve from 31st October 1910 until 30th March 1911 when he left to join the Royal Navy.

Like his brother, he started his training at Portsmouth (*Victory ll)* before joining various ships for periods of service, returning to Portsmouth in between ships. He was a Stoker Second Class on the *Renown* (30/04/1911-23/06/1911); *Hecla* (22/09/1911-30/04/1912; T*opaze* (01/05/1912-31/12/1912) where he was made a Stoker First Class on 1st June 1912; and *Princess Royal* (14/11/1912-14/07/1916).

As we can see, Leonard served on the *Princess Royal* from the start of the war until 14th July 1916. During this time, he had taken part in the Battles of Dogger Bank, Heligoland, Bight and the great Battle of Jutland. The *Princess Royal* went on to have a comparatively action free war but Leonard moved to the 10th Destroyer Flotilla of the Harwich Force He was first briefly on *HMS Dido* (09/09/1916 – 10/10/1916) which was the Depot Ship of the Flotilla and then HMS *Myngs* (11/10/1916 – 16/02/1917), before joining *HMS Torrent* (17/02/1917 – 23/12/1917).

HMS Torrent was part of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla of the Harwich Force. The *Torrent* was a brand new R Class destroyer and was the best type that the Royal Navy possessed. Leonard must have been pleased to be working in the most modern engine room.

On the 4th June 1917, the Dover Patrol had bombarded the port of Ostend and *Torrent* along with other light cruisers destroyed and damaged German torpedo boats. Leonard was made an Acting Leading Stoker on 11th November 1917.

In the summer of 1917 Leonard had married Bertha Mary Skevington from Harrold, just across the border in Bedfordshire. He then went back to HMS *Torrent* which along with sister ships *HMS Tornado* and *HMS Surprise* sailed as part of a convoy.

The Harwich Force destroyers formed part of the "Beef Run" convoys to and from the Netherlands. On this occasion they escorted the convoy to the Hook of Holland and waited near the Maas Light Buoy for it to return. At about 2pm on the morning of 23rd December they ran into a German minefield set to protect the port of Rotterdam and *Torrent* struck a mine and three other destroyers went to her aid. She struck another mine, however, and her sister ships *Surprise* and *Tornado*, trying to rescue the crew from the water also struck mines and sank. *Radiant* was undamaged and picked up men from the sea. 252 sailors died but only three men from the *Torrent* survived.

Among those lost was Leonard Ball. His body was never found and he is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial. He was twenty-four years old and had been in the Royal Navy for eight years.

Leonard's parents Thomas and Harriett had moved sometime after 1911 to 92 Queen Street in Rushden and it was there that they received the death of their son Leonard. It seems that Leonard had been living in Pratt Street in Rushden but his new wife moved back to Harrold, perhaps to be with her family after Leonard's death. They had only been married five months but had spent little of this time together.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Bertha remarried to John Drage in the summer of 1922 and moved to Bozeat and lived to be eighty-one years old.

Thomas Horace Ball (1889-1963)

I ought to add, briefly, that the oldest brother, Thomas Horace Ball, born on the 14th October1889 in Ringstead, was also a soldier in the First World War. In 1911 a Horrice [sic] Ball, aged 21, was a boarder with Jonathan and Miriam Ellis at 6 Woburn Place in Rushden. He was single and a shoemaker. I believe that later that year he married Ada Ward, who had been born in Northampton in 1893.

It seems likely that he was the T. H. Ball, a "Nailer on Army Work", who came before the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917. He was 27 years old at the time and he was probably enlisted within the next few months.

There is some uncertainty about Thomas's army career but the Medal Roll shows that he served abroad with the 5th Royal West Surrey Regiment (Regimental No. 60528) and the 9th Middlesex Regiment, sometimes known as the Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment with Regimental No.57010. Another local man, Herbert Brawn had been given the number G/60532 with the Royal West Surreys (RWS) and transferred to the Middlesex with number G/57009 so would have followed a similar path to Thomas Ball. Both may have progressed from the RWS to the Middlesex but were then "attached" back to them when the former suffered heavy casualties. According to his Medal Card, it was with the Middlesex that he ended the war but we know that Brawn was killed on the 25th May 1919 in Kurdistan while attached to the West Surreys.

With extra wartime units being demobilised after the Armistices there was often more fluidity between Regiments to maintain a fighting force. The Medal Card shows that he was entitled to the British and Victory Medals but, unusually, also the General Service Medal (1918). This had been instituted for those who had served in minor operations for which no separate medal was intended. He also received the Kurdistan Clasp which clarifies where he had fought.

The 9th Middlesex had been fighting against the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia and were in the area of Tikrit when the Turks surrendered. Demobilisation began but then some companies were ordered to join a punitive column into Kurdistan, The Kurds had rebelled

several times against the Turks and were promised a small “homeland” but this plan was later abandoned by the Allied Powers.

In the 5th Battalion Royal West Surreys’ *War Diary,* we see that, on the 13th March 1919, 5 British Officers and 194 Other Ranks arrived from the 9th Middlesex and were played into camp at Baiji and given breakfast. Other units had also arrived over the last few days. The Kurdish warlord Sheyk Mahmud Barzani had risen against the British Mandate in Kurdish Iraq He gathered together troops from different disaffected groups in the region and ambushed a British military column. The rising was eventually, temporarily defeated, and Sheyk Mahmud was sent for a year in exile in India. That was not the end of the story but conscripted men like Thomas would have only wanted demobilisation and a return home. Herbert Brawn had been denied that choice.

Thomas returned to Rushden and he and Ada were together at 14 Sartoris Road in Rushden in the 1925 *Electoral Register*. They were also there in 1939 when he was described as a “Motor Lorry Driver”. He possibly died in 1963.

Chapter 7

Sons of Henry and Rhoda Bannister

Henry Bannister (1860-1940)

Usually, when I am writing these short biographies, I look at the man's family tree to see where he came from. In the case of Henry and Sydney Bannister I first thought that it was a simple father and son relationship although I thought Henry was old to have been accepted as a recruit. It turned out that the family was more complicated than I had expected.

In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, Henry Bannister, a 50-year-old shoehand born in Northampton, was living in Carlow Road. With him was his wife Roda [sic] 47 and born in Ringstead and their children Mag [Margaret] (14) and Sydney (11) both born in Finedon, Julia (10) born in Northampton and Florence (8), Maud (7), and Kitty (5) all born in Ringstead. It also showed that Rhoda had been married 10 years and had had six children all of whom were still living. Again, it all seemed very straightforward.

Looking back, the 1901 Census complicated the family situation a little. Henry Bannister was 40-years-old and living at 13 Francis Street in Northampton. With him was Rhoda Warren (36), a boot closer who is shown as his housekeeper. With them were Margaret (4), Sydney (1), and James (1 month) and Henry's brother, James Bannister (50). Sandwiched between the two Bannister men it appears that the children are dittoed to Rhoda's surname, Warren.

The Register of Births for England and Wales records the older children: Margaret Warren in January – March 1897; Sidney Bannister Warren in July-Sept 1899 (both in Wellingborough District); James Bannister Warren in April-June 1901 in the Northampton District. The National Marriage Register also shows that Henry Bannister married Rhoda Warren in the January-March period of 1904 in the Thrapston District.

Once again this is not very complicated. Henry and Rhoda had children before their marriage, common today and far less uncommon then, than is often supposed. Once again, however, it is not that simple.

Rhoda Warren was of gypsy heritage, through her mother, Vashti Smith who was baptised on February 3rd 1839 in Corby, the daughter of Robert and Rhoda.

In late November1882 an Inquest was held at the *Black Horse Inn* in Ringstead. Vashti Warren stated that her daughter Rhoda Warren had been living in Finedon and she had not been aware until very recently that she was expecting a child. Vashti's husband, Thomas Warren had gone to the Relieving Officer in Raunds to obtain a certificate so that Rhoda could be taken into Thrapston Union Workhouse, which had a hospital wing. A midwife was called and Thomas went for a cart to take her, but the child was born before he returned. It was healthy and not premature but was said by the doctor to have never breathed. He also said that the anti-bilious pills she had taken the night before may have accelerated the birth but had not been taken to procure an abortion. They consisted of jallup ("jalap" was from

the root of a *Morning Glory* type plant and was a purgative) and rhubarb. The Inquest Jury found that the child had been stillborn.

We see that she had been living in Finedon and that there may be children earlier than the ones we already are aware of. It is another report, this time in the *Northampton Mercury*, on 19th March 1897 that shows how bad rural poverty could be at this time and also gives a further twist to the story.

> *Alfred Drage and Rhoda Warren, Finedon, were charged by Inspector W. Ward, N.S.P.C.C. with cruelty to children by neglecting the same in a manner likely to cause injury to their health between March 6th and 22nd. . . [The prosecutor] said the parties had been living together for 15 years unmarried and the children were illegitimate. . . On examining the house, the Inspector found two of the four rooms used only for lumber. The bedroom occupied two beds, one composed of straw and the other of shavings and were on the floor. They were alive with vermin and were rotten with filth. For bed clothing they had rags and old clothes. Warren said she had neglected the children and house to enable her to keep her work, boot closing, by which she could earn 10s. a week. The boy, Oliver earned 6s. . . . Drage earned on average 18s. per week. . . All the family slept in one bedroom. . . Mr. H. Burland, surgeon, next gave evidence. The youngest children, he said, were poorly nourished. The baby weighed 5 lbs instead of 8 lbs and Frances only weighed 14 lbs and ought to have weighed 20 lbs.*

A friend vouchsafed that Rhoda was hardworking and cleaned her house every week but they were both sentenced to three months imprisonment.

It was probably at this time that the children were taken into Wellingborough Union Workhouse. It seems possible that, at about this time, Alfred Drage was committed to Berrywood Lunatic Asylum in Northampton for he died there on 23rd January 1899.

Meanwhile it appears that Rhoda had met up with Henry Bannister and, as we have seen, they had further children and married. Apart, perhaps, for Margaret, born in 1897, it does not seem that any of the children from her partnership with Drage ever lived with the Bannisters.

If we now move on to the beginning of the First World War, many in government were horrified when they saw the undersized and unhealthy soldiers who now emerged from the slums to make up the New Army. This was particularly so of large cities like Glasgow but we can see it across Great Britain in the military records.

Henry was the first to enlist, on 26th July 1915. He was 5 feet 4½ inches tall with a 36-inch chest. He was in his mid-fifties but. He must have lied about his age because he said he was 39 years 5 months old. The army would only take men between 18 and 41 at this time although some did lie about their age. One may ask why he would leave his wife and 6 children to voluntarily join the army. Was it patriotism? He joined the 4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment (Regimental No. 4520) which was a Territorial force and never left England. He went to Halton Park where much of the training took place. It soon became

obvious that he was not fit to be a soldier or handle a gun ("do musketry"). He was invalided out, the reason given was that he had an old shoulder injury sustained in a fall before he joined the army, he was now said to be 56 at his next birthday.

After serving for one year and 15 days he was discharged on 9th August 1916 and, duty done, had to return to civilian life. He received a gratuity of 24 weeks from 5th June 1918 to 19th November 1918. Interestingly., the first child on the pension card is listed as James Warren *Drage* born 24th April 1901, Florence born 29th November 1902, Maud born 23rd November 1903 and Kitty born 13th July 1905. He was not entitled to any medals it appears.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Henry was living in Carlow and his birth was given as 4th May 1860. He is shown as retired and formerly a shoemaker. Rhoda is shown as being born on 20th May 1873 which I think is ten years too late and has the most usual occupation for married women in the Register, "unpaid domestic duties", beside her name. Henry died the following year aged eighty. Rhoda died four years later in 1944 aged eighty-one.

Sydney Bannister (1899-1998)

If Henry had a quiet war spent in England, as one would expect for a recruit of his age, his son Sydney Bannister (as I will call him) had a very different experience of military life. Unfortunately, apart from his Medal Card, I have not found any other of his records.

We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he joined the 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade and had served in France, Belgium and Germany. His Medal Card records that his Regimental Number was 41313. He was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star and we must assume that he was conscripted when he was eighteen years old in 1917 or 1918 and was sent for training with the 52nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade in Colchester, but probably did not get posted abroad until he was nineteen years old in 1918.

The 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) fought in 1917 at Arras, being in action at the First and Third Battles of the Scarpe. They then headed north for the Third Battle of Ypres where they fought at the Battle of Polygon Wood, the Battle of Broodseinde, the Battle of Poelacapelle and the First Battle of Passchendaele. In 1918 they were in action on the Somme before returning to Flanders where they fought in the Battle of Hinges Ridge during the Battle of Hazebrouck and in the Battle of Bethune. The Brigade then became part of the Advance on Flanders, the Second Battle of Arras, the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Picardy.

It seems that the 1st Battalion ended the war in Belgium but we see in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Sydney was part of the Army of Occupation and had served in Germany. Unfortunately, at the moment we cannot tell just how this came about and the details of Sydney's part in these operations. We do know that he was entitled to the British and Victory Medals.

After the war, Sydney returned to Ringstead and lived with his parents for a couple of years but he then moved north. It seems likely that he had become a labourer on the railway. We know this because Sydney had contracted Diphtheria while in the Army and as a result of

this disease he developed “VDH” which stood for valvular disease of the heart. He had been awarded a pension. From his Pension Cards we can see that he was not discharged until the 21st November 1919 and that the pension was first paid to him in Ringstead but then he had moved to Station Cottages in Tamworth.

This information provides us with a link that allows us to look briefly at the rest of Sydney’s life. In the Autumn of 1922, he married Jessie Brierly in Tamworth District. By 1939 the couple were living at 20 Moor Lane in Amington, which was just over a mile to the east of Tamworth. Moor Lane ran alongside the main lines and bent across a bridge over the railway. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Sidney [sic] was shown as born on the 27th July 1899 and, in the longest occupation description that I have found, he was a “Permanent Way Labourer Railway Engineering Maintenance and Repair Staff”. Jessie had the usual “Unpaid Domestic Duties”. Two daughters are shown and there are two others in the residence whose records have been officially closed, so perhaps there were four children. Gloria, the oldest child shown, was “A Textile Machinist in Relation to War Work”.

With his heart problems after the First World War one would not expect Sydney to have had a long life but I believe that he died in 1998, in his 99th year.

Chapter 8

Arthur Frank Barnard and Ronald Barnard

The Barnard Family had moved to Ringstead from Elton in Huntingdonshire in about 1896. The tracing of their ancestry is confused by the fact that, in the 1861 Census, Emmanuel, who was the father of the two brothers we are looking at in this biography, had the surname Barnett. He had also been christened Barnett on 29th April 1860 when he was two year's old, son of Hannah Barnett, a single woman. Hannah had been a servant, aged eight, at Winwick in 1851 and a housemaid aged 19 to a farmer and his wife in Elton in 1861.

In 1871, however, Hannah and her son Emmanuel were living with her parents. William and Mary Ann, who in 1861 were Barnett and are now Barnard, so the whole family has changed its name. This may be due to acceptance of a Census Collectors version of their surname because of their lack of literacy or it might be a deliberate act. It was not uncommon especially among people of gypsy heritage.

Emmanuel became a labourer on the railways and in Spring 1884, as Emmanuel Barnett, he married Margaret Hilliard in the Oundle Registrar District. They spent their early married life in Elton and had three children: two sons, Jesse and Arthur Frank (born 10th April 1889), and a daughter, Kate. In about 1890 they moved to Ringstead. In the 1891 Census for Carlow Street in Ringstead Emmanuel Barnard was a platelayer on the London and North-Western line. Visiting Emmanuel, Margaret and the three children was Arthur Hilliard, aged twelve and born in Elton, thus confirming the Barnett/Barnard transformation.

By 1901 they were living in Carlow and Emmanuel was still a platelayer. There is another child, now, called Ronald, aged four and born in Ringstead. Emmanuel was 52 years old by 1911 and appears to have a platelayer's pension which would seem to imply that he had some kind of disability. Frank, who seems to have discarded his first name, Arthur, was 22 years of age and working as a horseman on a farm. Ronald, aged 14, was a carrier's boy. The family were now living in Barritt's Yard in Ringstead.

It is Frank (as I will now call him) and Ronald who are the soldiers of the First World War that we are following here.

Arthur Frank Barnard (1889-1949)

In the year before the war started, on 5th July 1913, Frank married Sarah Elizabeth Judd at Thrapston Register Office. They had two children, Florence Mary, born on 28th August 1913 and Lily, born on 4th December 1914, both in Raunds. It was in Raunds, too, that Arthur Frank Barnard" signed the Military Attestation Form on 9th December 1915. He was 27 years 8 months old and a milkman on a farm. He was 5 feet 3 inches tall with a 35½ inch chest. Initially, he would have been on reserve but on 25th May 1916 his attestation was approved and he was mobilized. On 30th May 1916 he was posted to the 3rd Battalion of the

Northamptonshire Regiment. He remained in England, training, until 13th September 1916 but the next day he embarked at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne in France.

He would have been taken to one of the base camps before being allocated to the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshires, in the field, on 30th September 1916.

He was to remain in France for 240 days. He saw the last days of the Battle of the Somme, which was the name given to the campaign around the area of that river which, confusingly, encompassed a number of individually named battles. The *War Diary* for the 6th Battalion reveals that it had just been engaged in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge where it had lost 13 of its officers wounded or dead, and 157 Other Ranks, wounded, missing or dead.

The Diary for the 1st October reported that one hundred men had joined the Battalion at night and Frank would have been one of these new boys. The next day there was company training but on 3rd they were taken by train to Candas and then marched to Bernsail, arriving at 9 pm in the dark. The following days were spent in training, Church parades and intercompany football matches. It would have been obvious that they would soon be in action in what became known as the Battle of Ancre Heights.

They moved with the rest of the 54th Brigade on 15th October, finally ending in billets in Bouzincourt and began to practise their roles in the plan of attack. They moved again to Albert and on 25th October 1916 they relieved the 7th Bedfordshire Regiment in the trenches north of Coucelette. Immediately they were under enemy fire and had six casualties on that first night. Frank would have been quickly introduced to the reality of war.

On the 26th October the *War Diary* recorded:

> *Weather fairly fine. Light continuous shelling of REGINA and VANCOUVER trenches specially on left of REGINA which was constantly being blown in by enfilade of 5.9 guns from direction of LOUPART WOOD. About 1 a.m. two Germans came up to our parapet and gave themselves up. "A" Company H.Q. in REGINA TRENCH was twice blown in, in the early morning. Casualties 8.*

They were relieved on the 29th by the 8th Suffolk Regiment and, in misty conditions, this went well. The Diary entry, however, is scathing about the conditions in the trench and the inability of the artillery to stop the enfilade fire. It records:

> *The enemy showed no activity in front but the continuous enfilade shelling of trenches which contained few traverses and no dug-outs made this a very trying time in the trenches. Total casualties 52 including 7 missing.*

We see how the design of the trenches could be a matter of life or death. The traverses were angles or bend in the trenches and the dug-outs were small caves cut into the trench, often supported with boards or corrugated iron sheets which gave the men some respite from the weather. Both features also gave the soldiers some protection against "enfilade" fire where the enemy artillery was in a position to fire along the trenches from the side.

For most men it was the details that mattered. The ordinary soldier rarely had much of a grasp of the wider battle tactics but tried to do what was required of him in his small sector

and to survive day-to-day. The cold fogs and rain made life miserable, with long periods of boredom suddenly broken into by hellish times of gas, shells and bullets, of mayhem and fear.

The Battle of Ancre Heights finished on 12th November with some limited gains and led into the Battle of Ancre which was the last British attack of the Battle of the Somme. The rain had stopped on the night of 11th November and a full moon illuminated the landscape. Towards dawn, however, a thick mist reduced visibility to nil which masked the Allied attack but also led to units losing their way in the thick mud. The Northamptonshires did not take part in the first offensive but were moved up to the Front Line trenches on the 18th November as part of the 55th Brigade. For them the zero hour was 6.10 am but, because of lack of communications, they were "not able to carry out the consolidation allotted to them".

After Ancre, the Battalion marched from Warley through Berneuil, Demqueury, Le Plevy and Oneux to Neuf Moulin where they trained and practised attacks before once again moving to Canchy on 14th December. On 25th December they had Christmas Dinner in two relays.

The new year continued with training and the occasional bath. They also received new box respirators which gave much more protection against the gas attacks.. On 11th January they marched along bad roads arriving on the 15th at the Front. They took over duties from 2/8th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Aveluy, where there was little action. On the 15th February they again took over Front Line trenches from the 8th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. The following day a party of officers and NCOs marked out their battle stations.

By 4.50 am the next morning the whole Battalion was in position at Miramount. The ground was now wet and slippery and the overcast sky made it very dark.. The attack began following an artillery barrage but found that the barbed wire had not been cut in enough places, so the soldiers had to funnel through the available gaps. After some good forward progress, they met considerable opposition and although still moving forward they suffered many casualties. This war of attrition continued through March at St. Leger and late in the month they moved to billets at Thiennes.

On 30th April they were once more in the trenches, this time west of Cherisy. The weather was fine and there was little shelling. On 1st May they were relieved and marched back to bivouacs at Neuville Vitesse where they once more prepared for battle and on 3rd May they marched back to the trenches. They were not a first engaged but were ordered to counter attack after a "rolling barrage" of shells from the artillery. [During the war the "rolling barrage" was developed where the artillery shelled just ahead of the advancing troops. It could be effective but it did lead to casualties from "friendly fire".] There was much enemy gunfire and "B" Company suffered 50% casualties and "C" Company also suffered badly and had to withdraw to its original positions.

It was during this first engagement on 3rd May 1917 that Frank Barnard suffered a gunshot wound to his right hand. He went via the 44th Field Hospital to Le Treport from where he was taken, by the Hospital ship *St Denis,* back to England on 3rd June. Frank was to remain in

England for 159 days and would never return to the Western Front although his war was not over.

He went first to Wharncliffe War Hospital in Sheffield, arriving on the 11th May and remaining there for 56 days. He seems to have been left with numbness in his index finger but it was a wound that many of his fellow soldiers would have welcomed. In July 1917 he went to Thetford for training and was posted to the 3rd Northamptonshire Regiment on 8th September. On 18th October 1917 he embarked at Southampton and on 1st November he went ashore at Alexandria in Egypt as part of the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment which had been in Egypt since the end of 1915, having fought in Gallipoli..

He was part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) fighting against the Ottoman Empire which was an ally of Germany in the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire had been created by Turkish tribes and, at its height controlled much of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. By 1914, it was disintegrating and was sometimes called “the sick man of Europe”

The EEF was a very multicultural force with troops from the British Isles, India, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies. The original reason for its establishment was to protect the Suez Canal but its brief had been widened and a series of defensive posts had been built extending into Palestine. In March 1917 the EEF had tried to take the Ottoman garrison in Gaza but the two attempts had been disastrous failures.

When Frank arrived in Egypt he was promoted to Acting Corporal. Neither the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* not his military records show that he served in Palestine and it may be that he remained in the Suez area protecting the canal. The 1/4th, however, did take part in the Palestine campaign so it is certainly possible that he served there too. In 1917, they had fought in Battles of Gaza and then the Battle of Jaffa. Frank would have joined them late in this campaign.

In 1918 they were also involved in the fight at Ras al Ain. This was the site of one of the death camps where mainly Armenians were sent. The word “genocide” was first used about the systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottomans, mainly during the First World War. The able-bodied men were either massacred or put into forced labour camps and the women, children and the infirm were taken on death marches into the Syrian desert from which few returned.

On 1st June 1918 Frank had attended the Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun, rejoining his unit on 28th of the same month. This establishment on the outskirts of Cairo was mainly a training school for officers and non-commissioned offices. It did, however, also run courses in Stokes Mortar, Machine and Lewis Gun instruction, as well as course in Signals and Telephones, and Artillery.

The 1/4th Northamptonshires were also involved in operations at Berukin. The final offensive of the EEF, known as the Battle of Megiddo, opened on 19th September 1918 with the Battle of Sharon which was ultimately successful although the Battalion suffered many casualties including the death of the Commanding Officer.

That was their last action and the 1/4th ended the war on 31st October 1918 in Beirut, which at this time was part of Palestine. The Armistice of Mudros was signed on that same day.

He would have remained after the Armistice as part of an Army of Occupation. In early 1919 the Battalion had to suppress riots in Egypt which delayed their demobilisation.

On 16th February 1919 Frank Barnard was sent to the demobilisation camp at Kantara. The following day he was admitted to the hospital suffering from scabies. On 25th February he embarked at Port Said and was shipped home. Finally, on 12th April 1919 he was demobbed and transferred to "Class Z" which meant that he could be recalled if hostilities suddenly broke out again. His character had been assessed as "Very Good".

His Medal Card shows that his Regimental Number was 25165 and that he was entitled to the Victory and British Medals. It may be that this card was written before his time in the Middle East so he may have been entitled to at least one other medal.

The *Electoral Roll* for 1920 recorded that he was living in Bank Cottages in Ringstead and he and his family lived there for most of that decade. In 1931 he is recorded as living in the Council Houses in Denford Road. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Arthur F. Barnard was a "road man" for the N.C.C. (Northamptonshire County Council). Sarah was with him and there are four children: Lily born 4th December 1914, Arthur born 27th November 1919, Clifford born 14th October 1923 and one record officially closed.

Arthur died, aged sixty, early in 1949.

Ronald Barnard (1896-1917)

Some would have said that Frank Barnard had a good war, a small injury taking him away from the trenches. His younger brother, Ronald, born on 27th August 1896 and baptised on October 18th in Ringstead Parish Church, was not so fortunate.

Ronald Barnard
Rushden Argus With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

In the 1911 Ringstead Census Ronald was fourteen years old and a "carrier's boy" living with his parents Emmanuel and Margaret. He followed his father onto the railway, as an

employee of the *London and North Western Railway Company*, and in 1913 or possibly 1914 became a junior porter on Ringstead Station. It seems likely that he was still there when war was declared.

Details of his medals are all that now exist of his military records. They do show that he was entitled to the British and Victory medals but not the 1914 or 1914/5 Stars which probably means that he was called up in early 1916 following the introduction of conscription in January 1916.

By this time the "Old "Pals" Battalions which could take out a whole generation of young men from a community, had stopped and men were allocated to a range of regiments. Ronald was posted to the 7th Suffolk Regiment and given the Regimental Number 45027. At some point he was transferred to the 1/4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. We know that the 1/4th Battalion was, in 1916, at the Battle of the Somme, fighting in the Battle of Albert, the attacks on High Wood and the capture of Boriska and Dewdrop Trenches, In 1917 they took part in the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe which were part of the Battle of Arras, The Actions on the Hindenburg Line, Operations on the Flanders coast, the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge and the Battle of Polygon Wood.

Unfortunately, we cannot be sure when Ronald joined the Battalion in the field so we will just tell of his final days.

The names of the later 1917 battles fought in by the 1/4th Suffolk Regiment may not register with most people because they form part of the Battle of Passchendaele or the Third Battle of Ypres which are the names given to this overall campaign. This was fought in Flanders at the western end of the Front, near the coast of Belgium. Like most actions in this terrible war, it was a story of small gains and reversals, with heavy loss of life. It was the wettest August for 30 years and heavy rain and the consequential mud made movement difficult for the soldiers and almost impossible for the heavy artillery.

On 12th October 1917 the Allies tried to gain ground around the village of Passchendaele but the continual driving rain caused the High Command to abandon the planned attack. The 4th Battalion of the Suffolks were in what had been called the "Railway Dugouts" near leper (Ypres). The War Diary for the Battalion recorded:

> *October 12th. Bad weather. Parties as usual. 1 O.R killed 1 O.R. wounded. The minimum reserve under Capt. H. Pretty left at 11 a.m. for KORTEPYP Camp*
>
> *October 13th Bad Weather. Parties as usual*
>
> *October 14th " "*
>
> *October 15th Orders received from C.R.E. 1st Division at 12.10 p.m. that Bn. Would be relieved at about 12 noon that day. After numerous enquiries from the Division and the 9th Bd. Who knew nothing about it, the Bn. Was eventually relieved by the 7th Leicestershire Regiment.*

It was during this period that Ronald Barnard was wounded. It may be that he was the "Other Rank", for only officers and N.C.O.'s tended to have names, who had been wounded on October 12th.

Ronald was taken to Godewaersvelde casualty clearing station where he was put on a train to Rouen. He was admitted to hospital in Rouen on 13th October with gunshot wounds to his right arm and left thigh. The transcription of the hospital records state that he was discharged back to duty on the 14th October. This seems unlikely and he almost certainly died at the hospital of his gunshot wounds on 15th October.

No. 5 General Hospital at Rouen (posed in good weather). There were a number in Rouen. Wikipedia Commons: © Wellcome Images RAMC 738/8 Phot No. L0027212 http://welcomimages.org

His death was listed in the *Northampton Mercury* on Friday 23rd November 1917, although he is shown as coming from Thrapston. His name is on the Ringstead War Memorial in the churchyard. He has a grave at the St Sever Cemetery Extension near Rouen which was one of two burial grounds for the hospitals. He was twenty years old.

Chapter 9

Sons of John and Edith Bates

Bates was a common surname in the Ringstead area in the Nineteenth Century. They were not all related, however, and one John Bates came into the village as a Baptist Minister.

It was a Church of England Bates family who we are looking at first. Gabriel Bates married Hannah Mitchell on 24th March 1829 in Ringstead Parish Church. He became a shepherd, just over the border, at Keyston in Bedfordshire and the couple had a son, born there in 1841, who they also named Gabriel. He did not follow his father but became a shoemaker and, on 3rd July 1863, he married Hannah Ball in Denford Church.

It is this couple's son, John, born in 1871 who was the father of our two Great War soldiers. John married Edith Jackson in Woodford on 26th December 1892. Two of their children, James (or more usually, Jim) born on 9th November 1895 and William Baden Powell Bates, born on 10th (or 12th in some military records) May 1900, we will be looking at here.

James (Jim) Bates (1895-1952)

We start with something of a mystery. In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, the father, John Henry Bates, aged 39, was with his two sons, James aged 15 and already a worker in a local factory shoe room and William Baden Bates (10) still at school. John was shown as having been married for eighteen years and having had five children, four of whom were still living. This information is normally put in the wife's section but Edith and two of the children are not there. John is not shown as widowed but I have not found Edith in 1911 or later. There may be some simple explanation for this, such as a clerical or transcription error.

There are some newspaper reports of John Bates being involved in fights. Was he a violent man? On the other hand, maybe it was the dogs that drove her away! On 27th November 1908 the Northampton Mercury had reported:

> *John Bates, shoe operative, Ringstead, was summoned for keeping a greater number of dogs above the age of six months than licensed to keep, at Ringstead on November 12th. – Defendant pleaded not guilty and the Bench dismissed the case.*

Jim Bates, aged 19 years 4 days, volunteered for war service and joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was posted for duty on 31st March 1915 at Northampton. He was a shoehand when he enlisted. He was 5ft 6¾ inches tall, weighed 112 lbs (8 stone or about 50.8 kilos) with a 34½ inch chest and excellent eyesight (6/6). He was given the Regimental Number 17727. It seems that his only misconduct was when he was warned that he was due to go on active service. He was stationed in Kent and overstayed his leave by 2 days 23 hours 55 minutes on 25th June 1915.

He embarked for France on 21st July 1915 and after a brief time in one of the base camps joined the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on 23rd July 1915. Jim was to

remain in France until September 1917. The 5th Battalion took part in the Battle of Loos in 1915 and the Battles of Albert, Pozieres and Le Transloy in 1916. In 1917 they were at the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Battle of Arieux, the Third Battle of the Scarpe and the Cambrai Operations.

On 3rd July 1917 Jim went down with P.U.O.. This was an abbreviation of Pyrexia (Fever) of Unknown Origin and was usually known as Trench Fever. It accounted for about one third of all British soldiers seen by the doctors during the war. It was not considered a particularly serious but perhaps it was only in the trenches that it would be so described. The symptoms could include front headaches, dizziness, severe lumbago, a feeling of stiffness round the joints and severe pains in the legs, particularly the shins. Men felt weak and often were slow to recover. It was only towards the end of the war that it became clearer that it was a disease carried by body lice which lived in the soldiers' clothing and fed on their blood. No effective cure was found during the war and, instead, preventative measures including strip inspections and fortnightly baths were instituted and clothes were disinfected. At the end of the war all soldiers were also disinfected to stop the disease spreading to the civilian population in Britain.

Jim was found to be suffering with the fever on 3rd July and over the next weeks he moved from the front line to Rouen and on to Calais. He returned to duty in the field on 31st August 1917 but once more went down with P.U.O. on 9th September and this time, after going to one of the hospitals in Rouen, on 31st September, he was taken on *HMHS (His Majesty's Hospital Ship) Aberdonian* back to England.

While in England Jim married Ada Rose Fairey. The military records show that they then lived at 69 Harborough Road in Rushden which I think may have been Ada's parents' house. The *Rushden Echo* of 25th of January 1918 reported:

> ***Bates – Fairey*** *– The marriage was solemnized at the Park-road Baptist Church, Rushden on Monday [21st] by the Rev. R.C. Law of Miss Ada Rose Fairey, youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Fairey of Harborough-road Rushden, and Pte. Jim Bates, eldest son of Mr. J.H. Bates, of Church-street, Ringstead.*
>
> *The bride, who was given away by Pte. Harry Newland, was charmingly gowned in crepe royal, trimmed with swansdown. She wore a bridal veil and wreath of orange blossom and carried a choice bouquet of lilies and chrysanthemums, the gift of the bridegroom . . . Mr W.B. P. Bates (brother of the bridegroom) carried out the duties of best man.*

He returned to his base and embarked again for France from Folkestone on 4th February 1918. He landed at Boulogne and joined the L.I.B.D. [Light Infantry Base Depot] at Calais the next day. From there he went to the Corps Reform Camp which allocated men to the reformed battalions following the terrible losses in 1917. On 15th February 1918 he joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the field.

The 21st of March 1918 marked the start of the Germans Spring or Ludendorff Offensive which was a last desperate throw of the dice to win the war before the United States

manpower could swing the balance in the Allies favour. On that first day in the early morning fog the German Stormtroopers and artillery attacked and the British lost 7,512 men dead and some 10,000 wounded. The 5th Army was in full retreat. In *1918: A Very British Victory*, Peter Hart wrote of this time:

> *All along the British Front units were fragmenting: divisions were arbitrarily split up into brigades and rushed into action, brigades were losing track of whole battalions, the battalions were fragmenting into companies, the companies lost all cohesion and fell into their constituent platoons, the platoons became mere sections and soon all that was left were isolated groups of just a few men making their way across the battlefield as best they could.*

The *7th Battalion History* by Captain H.B. King tells of this time for Jim:

> *At the beginning of March, it became evident that the German offensive would soon commence and the 7th Northamptons were held in Corps Reserve at Hancourt . . . The battle stations allotted to the 7th Northamptons consisted of four so-called redoubts between the villages of Jeancourt and Vendelles . . .These positions situated on high ground were very exposed to artillery fire and being little more than scrapes in the ground about 3 feet deep, afforded no cover of any sort.*
>
> *At about 4.30 a.m. on March 21st the noise of a heavy bombardment could be heard at Harcourt and it was evident that the offensive had opened. At 5.40 a.m. the battalion received orders to "stand to" and move up to their battle stations. [They were later forced to withdraw.]*

The next days were ones of almost continual retreat and trying to stop it from becoming a rout. After concentrating at Harcourt (Hardecourt) the Battalion proceeded to Meraucourt (Mericourt) but were forced to withdraw again and the Northamptons had to hold, as the sole rearguard, the bridge across the Somme at Falvy, while the rest of the Division crossed. The line was forced back again to the village of Warvillers on 27th March.

It was probably in this desperate time, on the 27th March or the following day, that Jim Bates was badly hurt, possibly south of St Quentin. By 31st March the German surge was running out of steam, or more accurately, men, and the tide turned in the Allies favour.

The Casualty Form records that his wound was received on the 27th March but on the form, "Statement by a Soldier Concerning his Own Case", Jim Bates stated:

> *I have a gunshot wound in my back, right leg and right arm received in action, March 28th 1918.*

On the other hand, his Medical Report prior to discharge states that it was on 31st March 1918. The report also shows his movement through the hospital system:

> *He states that whilst in action he was wounded in the chest. He was removed to hospital at Rouen and transferred to St Mary's Hospital [possibly* St Mary's V.A.D. Hospital in a former church hall in Plaistow] *and on 16th December 1918 to the 2nd London General Hospital [set up in St Mark's College and adjoining school in*

Chelsea]. On 3rd January 1919 he was transferred to the Military Hospital, Endell Street.

The *Endell Street Military Hospital* in Covent Garden was opened in May 1915 by Suffragists Dr Flora Murray and Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson. It was the first unit to be entirely run and staffed by women. Most of these hospitals set up in church and community buildings were closed soon after the end of the war.

Jim's only consolation would have been that he had survived and that his army days were over. On 17th January 1919 he was discharged, "being no longer physically fit for war service". The report also stated:

His general condition is good. He has one healed scar over the right chest. Portions of the 6,7,8 ribs have been removed. There is collapse at the base of the right lung.

There is also the revealing question which is just ticked which reads:

18. In the case of loss of teeth. Is the loss of teeth the result of wounds, injury or disease directly attributable to active service or through service under such conditions that treatment was unobtainable?

He returned finally to Ada who would have seen his "Wounded" notice in the Northampton Mercury on Friday 12th April 1918.

Bates, Pte. J., Northants. Harborough Road, Rushden, dangerously wounded in the right arm.

He received the British and Victory Medals as well as the 1915 Star.

By 1936 we know from a minor court case that Jim was now a dairyman living in "Montrose", Newtown Road, Rushden. By the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he was still living in Montrose but was now doing heavy work in a boot factory as a yardman. It must have been hard going for a man with his disabilities.

At the end of the Second World War, on 2nd April 1945, Jim and Ada's daughter, Muriel married William E. Foose, as her parents had, at Park Road Baptist Church in Rushden. We see that the Bates family was firmly Baptist now. William Foose was an American who had served in the United States 8th Air Force and had flown 25 missions over Europe. Perhaps he had been based at the nearby Chelveston Aerodrome.

The married couple emigrated to America in March 1946 and a year later, on March 9th 1947, Jim and Ada flew from Bovingdon, an RAF and Civil Aerodrome near Hemel Hempstead, to America, probably staying with William's parents initially.

Jim died some five years later and was buried a hundred miles south-west of New York in Bridgeport, Perry County, Pennsylvania on 9th August 1952. We know that Ada travelled from America to England and back in 1954 on the *Queen Elizabeth* and her place of residence was, appropriately for a Northamptonshire woman, Tannersville in Pennsylvania. She died near her daughter at Quincy, Adams, Illinois in May 1981. There is also a memorial

to Ada at Bridgeport. Through the Foose line Jim and Ada have many descendants spread across the United States.

William Baden Powell Bates (1900-1969)

On May 17th 1900 the town of Mafeking in South Africa was relieved by a small British force after a 217-day siege by the Boers. The hero of the stubborn resistance was Robert Baden Powell, whose idea to use boys in a quasi-military role, led, later to his setting up of the Boy Scout movement. There was great rejoicing all over the country. Just before the relief, on May 10th (or 12th in some sources), Edith Bates gave birth to a son. When, over a year later, on 17th September 1901, she and her husband John, had him christened, they decided to name him William Baden Powell Bates in honour of the Mafeking hero.

In 1911, William was ten years old, living with his father and older brother Jim (Edith seems to disappear from the records). When the war started in 1914 it seemed unlikely that William would be involved and it is possible that he did just miss the fighting. Unfortunately, most of his military records have been destroyed but there is one that may shed some light on his time as a soldier. His name has been transcribed as W.P.R Bates but it seems likely that this is a transcription error. The form details how William was discharged back to duty after two days in hospital for influenza, that terrible epidemic that killed so many in the immediate post-war period.

He was a Lance-Corporal in the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment with Regimental Number 103221. He was nineteen years old and had been in service for one year three months so he would have been conscripted in early May 1918 when he had just turned eighteen. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that William was in the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and was in the Army of Occupation. He was shown as a Private in that list but it would have been prepared before he received his promotion.

In 1918 the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment had fought at the 2nd Battle of Arras, the Battle of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance in Picardy. At Armistice the infantry were in a rest period but the artillery were still in action. The Division received orders to join the British force to occupy the Rhine bridgeheads but these orders were cancelled on 21st November when they were in the area of Harveng undertaking road and railway repairs.

There is some disagreement about when the 7th demobilised but we do know that they were part of the Army of Occupation as part of the 122nd Infantry Brigade who in turn were part of the London Division. We also know from the hospital discharge form that he was attached to the 52nd Mobile Veterinary Section. Both this section and the 7th finished their tour of duty in October 1919 (In some accounts demobilisation was in May 1919).

Unfortunately, as I have been unable to find any other records - even the usual Medal Card, we cannot be sure that William ever fought in the war but he may have just been part of the army of occupation. This is one of those occasions where family knowledge is invaluable. One reason for believing that William probably only went to Germany in late 1918 or early 1919 is that in the last quarter of 1918 he married Winifred Bailey in the Thrapston District.

At some time after returning home William became a Lineman with the *Rushden & District Electricity Supply Company*. Certainly, we know that by 1933 this was his job through an article in the *Northampton Mercury* on 23rd June of that year. It tells of a serious accident that he suffered. [I transcribed this article from a British Newspaper Archive digitised original copy and some of the words are lost in the fold. I have put the guessed words in bold.]

> *Terrible burns **were suffered** by William Baden Powell Bates **of** Ringstead on Tuesday **when he was** engaged in electrical repair **work in a** kiosk at Islip which was **struck by** lightning on Tuesday evening.*
> *Bates is a lineman **employed by the** Rushden and District Electricity **Supply** Company and he was **with some** men at the junction **kiosk near** the Woolpack Inn. Bates was in the kiosk **when** there was a blinding flash **of lightning.** He was seen hanging on to the cable through which a current **of electricity** [11,000volts] was passing.*
> *Having cut off the **current** workmates pulled him **free from the** cable and it was found **that he was** alive but had been burned **badly** about the arms and face.*
> *Two doctors were hastily **called** and after they had given him **treatment** Bates was taken to **Northampton** General Hospital in a **critical state**.*

We know that William survived his ordeal and in 1937 was elected to Ringstead Parish Council. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he was shown as a lorry driver. We see that William and Winifred probably had three children, John, Winifred and one record closed. William died on 6th December 1969 and Winifred followed him on the 4th July 1972.

William Baden Powell Bates on the extreme left at the final closure of the Swan Inn in 1955
With thanks to Jon Abbott for this copy of the photograph

Chapter 10

Stuart Dimbleby Bates (1891-1971)

Stuart Bates was the son of John Bates, a well-respected Baptist Minister in Ringstead for 32 years. John had previously been the Minister at Kislingbury where Stuart had been born on 17th November 1891. He was given the middle name Dimbleby after his mother's family for she had been born Rebecca Jane (but also known as Jennie) Dimbleby.

In 1911 the Bates family were in "The Manse" in Ringstead. Living in the eight-room house with John and Rebecca were two grown up daughters, Beatrice and Ethel who were both school teachers and Stuart who was nineteen years old and working in a local butcher's shop.

When the Great War started, there was initially no conscription, although plenty of exhortation from local bigwigs. On 29th June 1915 Stuart enlisted at Thrapston. He was 23 years 7 months old, 5ft 10½ inches tall with a 36-inch chest. When we look through his military records we see that Stuart seems torn between his desire to "do his duty" and his beliefs. We see this clearly in a letter sent by the officer in charge of records for the Army Veterinary Corps, (A.V.C.) to the Recruiting Officer at Thrapston. It states briefly:

> *As this man refuses to enlist into the infantry, rather than lose his service, I will accept him for enlistment into the army veterinary corps.*

It was received at Thrapston on 28th June 1915. Some six months later, when conscription came in, he would have been seen as a conscientious objector but in June he was a volunteer and did not need to enlist in any capacity.

After joining the A.V.C. he remained on duty in England as a horsekeeper or 111 days but was then posted to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Stuart first went to Egypt where the first main task for the British troops was the protection of the Suez Canal. His Medal Card shows that the code of the initial Theatre of War that he entered was "4a", which, after January 1916, referred to Egypt. Before this date it referred to British East Africa, but I suspect this is a not an unknown mistake in writing up the cards.

In Egypt the A.V.C. would have cared for the mules and horses and there were a number of specialist hospitals for treating camels.

At some point Stuart was posted to Salonika and, in all he was in the eastern Mediterranean for 2 years 93 days.

The ailing Austro-Hungarian Empire was allied with Germany in the Great War. The Serbians had been at war with the Austro-Hungarians and had achieved some success. At the start of the war, however, the Germans decided to shore up its allies against the Serbs. It became clear that, if the Allies did not intervene, the Bulgarians would take advantage of the

situation. On 14th October Bulgaria had allied itself with the Central Powers and attacked Serbia.

The only practicable base for the Allies to use was the Greek port of Salonika, even though Greece itself tried to remain neutral. They bullied the Greeks into acceptance of this intervention. The first Allied troops had begun to disembark at Salonika on 5th October 1915. They then advanced to support Serbia but it was already too late and some 250,000 Serbian troops were rescued by the Royal Navy and evacuated to the Greek island of Corfu. The British and French fell back to a line just inside the Greek border and this "Salonika Front" became static and, despite a failed Allied attack in early 1917 the stalemate continued until the Autumn of 1918.

Army Veterinary Corps staff tying an obstinate mule before attempting to shoe the animal at a British Army Veterinary Hospital near Salonika April 1916. ©IWM (Q 31912)

Stuart's role, as part of the A.V.C. would have been the care of the horses and mules that were the main means of supplying the troops through the difficult terrain to the Front Line. We know that at some point in his army career that Stuart was stricken with malaria and it seems most likely that it was during his service in Greece. The area was full of stagnant pools and was blisteringly hot in Summer. As a result, it was one of the worst areas in Europe for malaria. Added to this, the poor sanitary arrangements led to Enteric Fever and Dysentery being almost endemic among the troops.

During the campaign the British forces lost 23,787 casualties in combat, but there were 162,517 cases of malaria and, in total, 505,024 non-battle casualties.

Despite having this illness, which was debilitating, with the symptoms often recurring at intervals, Stuart seems to have worked well and on 26th July he was appointed a Lance Corporal and then, on the 28th November 1917, a Lance Sergeant. The use of this last rank varied in the Regiments but usually meant a sergeant who could be demoted by his commanding officer and not only by court martial as was the case with a normal Sergeant.

On 18th January 1918 he embarked at Salonika and disembarked three days later at Taranto in Italy. He remained in Italy for 58 days, excluding a 16 day "Overseas Furlough" that he received from 20th March to 4th April 1918. At the start of the Great War the Italians had withdrawn from their agreed alliance with the Central Powers and fought on the Allied side.

On the 19th April 1918 there was a sudden and unexplained change in Stuart's army career. A *Statement of Service* records that he was "compulsorily transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers 1/5th Battalion", but he retained his Lance Sergeant rank and pay. His regimental number now changed to 73010. The problem is that the 5th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers were fighting on the Western Front in Belgium during all of 1918.

Stuart finally left Italy, and was in France from 15th July 1918. On 29th August 1918 he was again transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. I can only presume that he was put on the strength of the Northumberland Fusiliers but his move to France was delayed.

It is unclear just what Stuart's engagements were, but we do know that he had arrived in France just as the tide was turning in the Allies' favour. The German Spring Offensive, although it forced a large Allied retreat, so weakened the Germans that when a counter attack came their resistance finally crumbled. In what is usually known as the Hundred Days' Offensive the Allies, for the first time in the war moved forward rapidly and the static trench stalemates were broken. Nevertheless, it was often a hard progress that cost many Allied, as well as German, lives.

On the day of the Armistice, 11th November 1918, the 2nd Battalion of the South Staffs were at Amfroipret, north of the Foret de Mormal and East-North-East of Cambrai.

Stuart remained in France until 21st March 1919, when he had been there some 250 days. He arrived back in England on 22nd March and was finally demobilised on the 19th April 1919. He was declared to have a 20% disability because of the effects of the Malaria and received a pension of eight shillings a week from 13th February 1920 until 22nd March 1921. He was awarded the 1914/15 Star and the British and Victory Medals.

On returning to civilian life in Ringstead, Stuart married local girl Ivy Elizabeth Adams in 1920. At first the couple lived in Denford Road, possibly with Ivy's parents in "Fernlea". His mother died in 1924 aged 71 and his father, John died in 1928, his funeral attended by very large crowds.

In 1931 Stuart and Ivy moved to Yew Tree Farm in the High Street and, on 8th May 1932, their only child, Janet, was born. They had become farmers and, in the 3rd February 1933 edition of the Northampton Mercury, we see an advertisement for eggs and chicks of the "Noted Light and White Sussex hens" which we are told are "All Blood Tested Stock Selected

for Type and Stamina". It was the dairy herd that became the mainstay of the farm and they sold milk around the village from churns which they ladled into the customers' jugs. A few older villagers still remember that Ivy sold home-made ice-cream at the back door of Yew Tree Farm and that airmen from USAF Chelveston were appreciative customers.

In 1939 the couple were living at the farm with daughter Jane and "hirehand" Winifred Jessie Walker who had been born in 1898. They are also said to have had an evacuee living with them during the war. Stuart was shown as a farmer and Ivy has the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" but she was known in the family as a dressmaker (as well as the ice cream making). A small farmer's wife can never be lazy.

We know, from a later auction sale in 1951, after the death of William Robinson, that Stuart had rented two meadows on the east side of New Road containing 9,919 acres and an enclosure of arable land situated in Ham Lane and known as "Pit Field" containing 8.237 acres.

Stuart and ivy on the farm
With thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott

In 1943 Stuart found himself in a similar position to that of Alan Bennett and his "Lady with a Van" many years later. He had brought a case against Percy Bellamy. His solicitor stated:

> *Bates . . . gave the man permission to put a caravan on his land. He had lived in it for two or three years until it rotted and he had replaced it with an old, small eight h.p. car. He was living in it although there was barely room in it for a person to lie down.*
>
> *On October 9th Bates gave him notice to leave but although he said he would go he was still there . . .*
>
> *The Bench granted the application.*

When we see the photographs of Stuart on the farm or in a sporty car there does seems in him a little of Pop Larkin in his namesake, H.E. Bates' novels. It is type of rural life that flourished in the "Back to the Land" movement of the 1920s and 1930s and flickered again in the 1970s but has now almost entirely disappeared from the landscape.

Stuart, cigarette in mouth, with Ivy and probably daughter Jane in the 1940s
With thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott

Stuart died in late 1971 and Ivy in 1979.

Chapter 11

Sons of Arthur and Louisa Baxter

The Baxters had originally come from Tansor but by 1881 were living in Oundle where Joseph, aged 36, was a house painter. Their son, Arthur, had been born in Tansor in 1868 and in 1881 the couple had five other children.

By 1891 Arthur had become a labourer on the railways and, aged 23, was lodging near the station in Woodford. In the same 1891 Census, Louisa Braybrook was a servant in Kingsthorpe in Northampton, but, somewhere, their paths crossed and, on 30th September 1895, they were married in a church at Louisa's home village of Keyston, just over the border in Huntingdonshire.

Soon after their marriage they moved to Ringstead and, in 1901, were living at 19 Church Street with two sons, Percy William aged four and Herbert aged two. Arthur was a platelayer on the railways. By 1911 they had moved to Spencer Street in Ringstead and Arthur, aged 14, was working as a "heel fettler". Herbert was 12 and still at school and Louisa's widowed father, James Braybrook, a farm labourer, was living with them in their six-room cottage.

Percy William Baxter (1896-1917)

It must have seemed that the world was a settled place but, over the Channel, national ambitions were beginning to create turmoil. Suddenly, in 1914 war exploded in Europe and initially the Government sent the Regular Army under the title "British Expeditionary Force" to assist the French against the German invasion. The British Army was far too small in this man-eating war and were soon in rapid retreat. Then came the jingoistic slogans and rallies to raise a new volunteer army from the civilian population. This new army began in optimism but soon the fighting ground to a halt and the battles continued to use up men like shells. Finally, against much opposition, conscription was brought in, in January 1916. If the soldier was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15-Star Medals it almost certainly meant that he was a conscript.

This was the case with Percy Baxter who, probably, was posted to France some time in 1916. At first he had enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment but because most of his military records have been lost we would usually only be able to guess that he had gone to a base camp and was then transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers.

In fact, because of the clever research done by *Stebie9173* on the Great War Forum, we can be more definite. By looking at the Regimental Numbers, he was able to compare a number of soldiers, including Percy Baxter, with Horace Allen of Irthlingborough. Horace enlisted in Northampton on 16th November 1916 and was posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 30909. Percy was given the number 31925. Horace went to France on 1st February 1917 and was sent to Base Camp No. 17 at

Étaples. On arrival in France he was posted to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires but he never joined them and instead became part of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers on 16th February 1917 and renumbered 40712. Percy was given the number 40724, just twelve numbers later.

Percy Baxter
From the Rushden Argus. With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

It seems certain that the career path of Percy followed that of Horace Allen's very closely and he arrived at the front in mid-February 1917.

The 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers were part of the 96th Brigade which included the 16th Battalion of the Northumberland Regiment and the 15th Lancashires. In the fighting around Savy Wood Percy Baxter was wounded and died from his wounds on April 2nd 1917. He was twenty years old and had probably been in France for less than two months. His grave is in the Foreste Communal Cemetery in Aisne. This is a local cemetery with some ninety-five Commonwealth war graves. On Percy's grave the inscription at the bottom, chosen by his family, simply says:

"ONE OF THE DEAREST ONE OF THE BEST"

Herbert Baxter (1899-1918)

Percy's younger brother Herbert, usually known as Bert, had been working for Adam's Brothers, Boot Manufacturers of Raunds. He too was conscripted, at Kettering, and joined the 1st Battalion of the East Kent Regiment ("The Buffs") and was given the Regimental Number G/24815. Again, few of his military records remain but we do know that, like his brother, he remained a Private.

Operation Michael, which was the German offensive planned to finish the war before the American fire and manpower could tip the balance for the Allies, started with the Battle of St Quentin on 21st March 1918. It was announced by an overwhelming artillery barrage along a forty-mile front. The Germans used trench mortars, Mustard Gas, Chlorine gas and smoke canisters and three-and-a half million shells were fired in five hours. After this the

German troops broke through and the Allies were forced to withdraw. This continued on the second day among thick fog with the Allies trying to keep the integrity of the line so that the Germans could not get in behind them. This meant that small groups of soldiers had to fight delaying actions in order to allow all the troops to fall back in an orderly retreat.

Herbert (Bert) Baxter
From the Rushden Argus. With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

It was on this second day that Herbert died of wounds on 22nd March 1918. He was not to know that, although the German offensive continued to make progress, they were running out of supplies and men and eventually the tide would turn. Herbert is commemorated at Favreuil British Cemetery, north of Bapaume. The inscription reads:

"STILL OURS IN MEMORY THOUGHT AND LOVE. MOTHER & DAD"

Arthur and Louisa Baxter received the official letter telling them that Herbert had also been killed. They had lost both of their children and, when the celebrations came later in 1918, they must have left a bitter taste. To make sure there was some remembrance of their two sons, Arthur and Louisa donated a brass lectern to the Ringstead Parish Church. It now stands on the floor beside the pulpit.

Arthur and Louisa
With thanks to Jon Abbott and the Ringstead Heritage Group

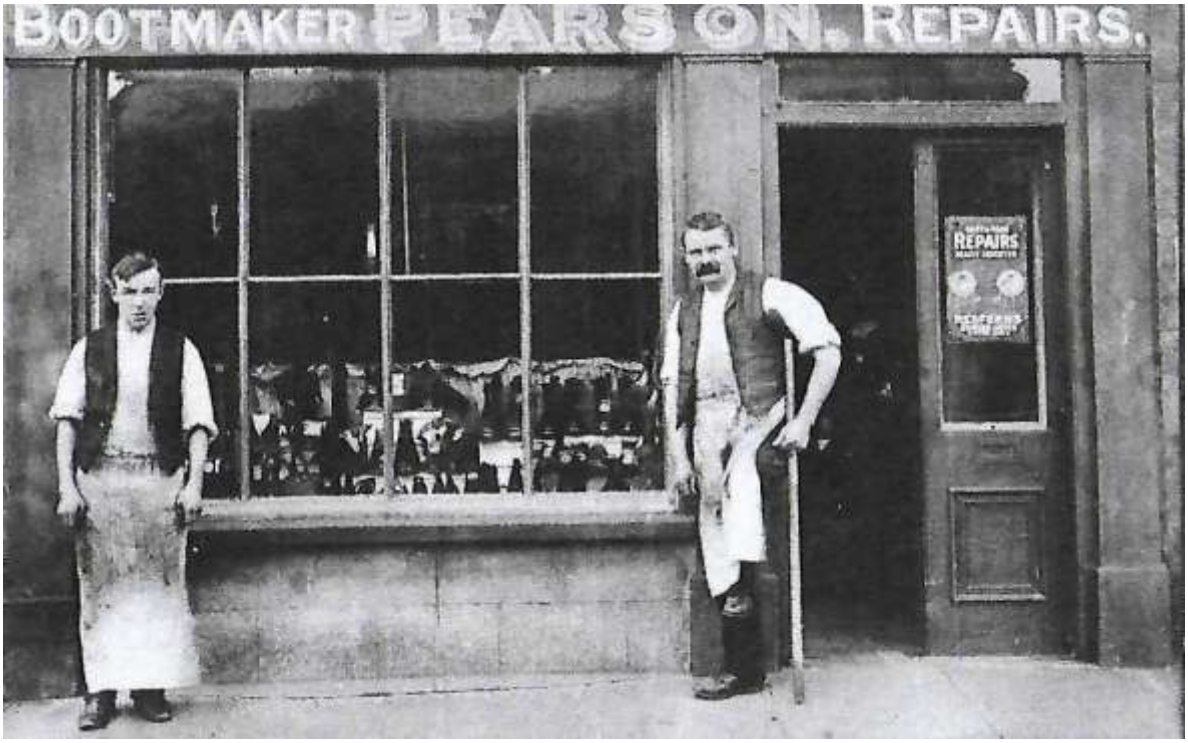
Above is a photograph of Arthur and Louisa outside their neat wood and corrugated iron bungalow some time after the deaths of their sons. It seems a place of sadness.

Chapter 12

Cecil Bellamy (1888-1968)

Cecil Bellamy was the illegitimate son of Jane Ann Bellamy. He was born on 9th January 1888 and christened in Ringstead Parish Church on January 24th1890. In the column for "Father" the name "Michael" has been written in and then crossed out. It seems possible that when the vicar asked Jane who the father was, she misunderstood the question and gave her own father's name.

In the 1891 Census, Jane was a shoe stitcher. She and three-year-old Cecil were boarding with Reuben and Lucy Shipley and their children in Church Street. On 6th August 1895 Jane married Albert Victor Smith and it may be that Cecil never lived with his mother again. In the 1901 Census, aged thirteen, he was still living with the Shipleys at 18 Church Street. He was now shown as a nephew. Living next door were Percy and Herbert Baxter.



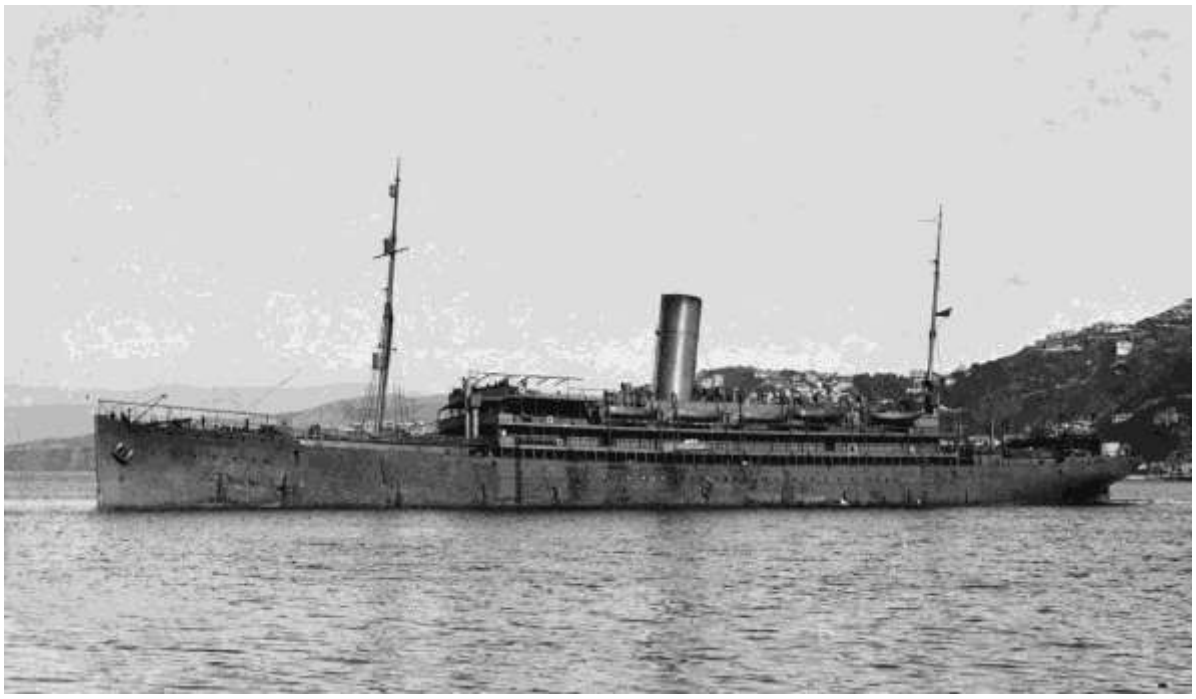
Cecil with his employer John Pearson outside the March shop
With thanks to Jon Abbott

Jane, meanwhile, was living with her husband in Wood Street in Wellingborough. With them was Jane's daughter, Bertha aged nine, and three children from their marriage. By 1911 they had moved to 57 Nelson Street in Kettering but by now Cecil had found a new home in March in the Cambridgeshire Fens. He was boarding again, this time with John Pearson, a bootmaker and dealer, at 5 Nene Parade. Cecil, now 23 years old, was working for John as a Boot Repairer. When we look more closely we see that John Pearson was the famous man

on the Raunds March in 1905. He had lost a leg to childhood tuberculosis and had walked all the way to London on crutches. He had later set up business in March and Cecil had joined him there as an assistant.

It was at March, on 11th December 1915, that Cecil enlisted in the Suffolk Regiment and was placed on the Army Reserve List. On 29th April 1916 he had his army medical at Bury St Edmunds. He was 28 years 2 months old. His height was first recorded as 5 feet 3 inches tall which was originally the minimum height for soldiers to be accepted into the army. Later, in 1915, this was relaxed and the "Bantam Battalions" were introduced. In Cecil's case his correct height of 5 feet 1 inch was later inserted. The officers, who mainly came from the affluent classes, were on average, some six inches taller than the men that they commanded. He had a 35-inch chest and weighed 99 lbs (7 stone 1 lb or just under 45 kilos). His physical development was described as "good for size". He had upper and lower dentures.

Cecil stayed in England, training with the Suffolk Regiment, from 18th May until 28th August 1916. He was then transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. On the 3rd September he was taken to Devonport and the following day he boarded the H.M.T. Tahiti. I think it was actually, His Majesty's New Zealand Transport Ship (H.M.N.Z.T.) Tahiti which on 22nd August 1916 had been part of a convoy bringing various New Zealand Brigades (including some Maori contingents) to England to be taken to the Western Front. On her voyage home she took some of the 2nd Norfolks to Basra (now in Iraq) where they disembarked on 28th September 1916.



H.M.N.Z.T. Tahiti

Cecil remained in the area, then known as Mesopotamia, for one year 280 days. He was fortunate in that he had missed the Seige of Kut. Despite attempts by the British to lift the siege and rescue the 2nd Norfolks being starved into submission, they were forced to

surrender on 29th April 1916. Most of the Battalion were taken into captivity and many died under the harsh regime. It was one of the British Army's worst defeats. For a time, the 2nd Battalion ceased to exist and Cecil was part of the draft of troops brought in, in its reformation.

One major cause of the defeat was the lack of a transport infrastructure and the British now put their efforts into improving the port of Basra, building roads, bringing in more and larger river steamers and putting new field hospitals into service. This enabled troops to be moved quickly up to the Front Line and to be better supported.

When Cecil arrived he went to Sheikh Sa'ad as part of the new 2nd Battalion and spent the next few months in training.

The British, now properly prepared, advanced up both sides of the Tigris River. They retook Kut and by early March were at the outskirts of Baghdad. On 11th March 1917 they entered Baghdad and were greeted as liberators. Unfortunately, Cecil could not have been part of this victory celebration for, a week earlier, on 4th March, he was admitted to Field Hospital A36 with diarrhoea, the scourge of European in Africa and Asia. He was fortunate not to have been in the area a year earlier. As we have seen in the biography of Henry Attley many Indian troops fought in Iraq. The Brigade Major of the 69th Punjabi, Thomas Catty, wrote in his diary on 19thJanuary 1916:

> At Amara we heard tales of the bad medical arrangements but it wasn't till we got to Sheikh Saad that it really came to our notice. On landing there the place was ankle deep in mud. The OC [Officer Commanding] told us that he had 1000 Indian sick and wounded and only one IMS [Indian Medical Service] man, who was down with dysentery, to look after them. There were no dressings or medicine and most of the wounded . . . had not had their 1st Field Dressing removed . . . all agreed that the state of affairs was disgraceful. The fellows on shore were very despondent and said the boats going down stream were awful – when you went on board the stench nearly knocked you down.

Cecil was discharged from hospital on 9th March and on the 22nd went to a rest camp in Sheikh Sa'ad.

It appears from his records that Cecil did not rejoin the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment at Baqubah, some 31 miles north-east of Baghdad, until 20th September 1917. On 1st December he travelled with the 2nds to the Ruz Canal Camp and attended a training school for the Stokes Mortar. This was a small British 3-inch trench mortar which had only recently been introduced. It was a simple weapon but, because the barrel was only three times the weight of the bomb it was delivering, it had a large recoil that could cause serious injury if it was not properly set up.

We may think of this posting as an easy option compared to the Western Front but as John Ball, writing on his website about his father who served in Mesopotamia, makes clear, it could be a draining place to serve in. He quotes from a newspaper article written by Edmund Candler.

The heat of the desert in trenches and tents is staggering. One feels as if one were standing at the edge of a huge fire in a high wind, licked by gusts of flame.

The flies were unbelievable. You could not eat without swallowing flies. You waved your spoon in the air to shake them off: you put your biscuits and bully beef in your pocket and surreptitiously conveyed them in closed fist to your mouth, but you swallowed flies all the same . . .

However, the 1917 summer was even worse and it was known in Baghdad as "the hottest season in the memory of man".

Cecil remained in Amara until 9TH March 1918 when he went to the post camp at Hinandi, near Baghdad before, once again rejoining his battalion at Mirzana on 23rd April 1918. He then left his unit for leave in India on 29th May. It was not until the 10th June that he embarked on the *A.T.* (Army Transport) *Versova* at Basra for India and returned there on 5th August 1918. On 23rd August 1918 he rejoined the 2nd Norfolks at Mirzana. He then remained in Mesopotamia until 30th October 1919 as part of the Army of Occupation.

He left Iraq finally by ship on 31st October 1919 arriving in England on 2nd December but was not finally demobilised, on Class Z, until the 31st December.

It seems that Cecil never returned to Ringstead to live. In April-June 1921 he married Emily Spencer in the North Witchford District of Cambridgeshire. Emily had been born in Wimblington and in 1911 was a servant in Wisbech. March is just ten miles from Wisbech so did she meet Cecil when taking shoes to be repaired for her employers or was she now living in March? At the time of her marriage she was residing at 5 Johnson Square in March. Both of them were in their early thirties for the war had delayed marriage for many couples.

They lived at 4 Nene Parade in March, next to the Ship Inn, where Cecil had his shoe repair shop. They had at least three children, with the oldest, Jack, becoming a boot repairer at the shop. In the *1939 Register of England & Wales* we see the family together there, and it may be that Cecil and Emily lived in March for the rest of their lives.

Certainly in 1965 the Bellamys were still there with son, Jack, still at home. Cecil died in 1968. He was eighty years old.

Chapter13

William Thomas Billing (1879-1918)

William Billing was not a local lad and was not in the village for long but he is on the Ringstead War Memorial. He had been born at the end of 1879 and baptised in Towcester Church on 4th April 1880. He was the son of William and Sarah Anne and in the 1881 Census he was living with his parents in Spring Gardens, Towcester. His father was a miller's labourer but by 1891 he was a labourer on a farm, living in 2 Farm Cottages in the High Street.

William first worked as a groom on a farm but when he was eighteen and one month old he enlisted as a soldier. He "attested" for the Northamptonshire Regiment on 23rd February 1897 and was given the Regimental Number 5116. He signed up for twelve years, seven years in service and five in the army reserve. His father, meanwhile, became the landlord of the *Plough Inn* in Towcester High Street.

Unfortunately, most of his army records have been lost but we know that he served with the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in India and the Second Boer War. Exactly when he finished and took up his next career is not clear, but probably in about 1904. Like many other old soldiers, he joined the Northamptonshire Constabulary. In later records it states that he served for fifteen years with the police after his seven years with the Northamptonshire Regiment but this cannot work if the time period is 1897 to 1915 so perhaps they are counting his police service up to 1918.

We must remember that although he might have had a small pension he was still only in his mid-twenties and had his life before him.

We find in the local papers that William was involved in a number of cases in the area. We also see in the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* on Thursday 5th July 1906 that at the Northampton Police Sports he came second in the "Throwing A Cricket Ball Competition" with 77½ yards. He is shown as being in the Kettering force. He was also shown as a Police Constable when he married Victoria Alice Payne at St. Andrew's Church in Kettering on 17th July 1907. At the time he was living at 88 Princes Drive. She was a shoe machinist and the daughter of local newsagent, Tom Payne from Leicestershire and his wife, Elizabeth, from Leeds.

He was transferred to Bulwick a dozen miles north, north-east of Kettering. From the births of his two sons we can see that this was in about 1909/10. In 1911 he was living there in the police house with Victoria, their two sons, William Tom Frederick and Harry Gordon and widowed mother-in-law, Elizabeth Payne. Meanwhile, his brother, Herbert had enlisted in the Grenadier Guards in 1906 and by the end of WW1, which he survived, had become a Company Quarter Master Sergeant.

At some point, William was transferred to Ringstead and the family moved into the police house opposite the *New Inn*. A daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1914. Again we pick up William in local news reports. One sad case was that of Ada Jane Robinson and her dog who he found drowned in the river by Ringstead Mill. This was reported in the *Northampton Mercury* on 20th May 1915. A few months later, in July 1915, he was making ready to return to the army. At Thrapston Corn Exchange on 7th July he was given a cheque for £5 10s. and praised for his work as an instructor for some fifty of the local Special Constables who would take over some to the role of the professionals during the war. Their special role was to protect the water supply against German "infiltrators".

The Police House on the left edge of the photograph opposite Raunds Road
With thanks to Peter Davies

Soon after, William Billing left his family in Ringstead and joined the Military Foot Police Corps. (There was a separate Mounted Corps.) He was given the Regimental Number P1850

The recruitment into the Military Police had been strictly overseen with a probationary period. With the large-scale trench war of the Western Front, the number of Military Police required soared from an initial 508 to 25,000 by the end of the war, so standards were lowered and civilian police officers were transferred into service en bloc. The Military Police Corps had a number of important roles. One was the manning of "straggler's posts" or "battle stops" which were collecting points behind the front lines where prisoners of war were taken to be escorted back to base camps. There were also runners and message-carriers to be checked and directed. The walking wounded were also directed to first aid posts and "stragglers" were, if necessary, re-equipped and sent on to re-join their units. In

the chaos of many battle zones individuals and small groups of men were often separated from their companies.

Of course, they also apprehended deserters and there were rumours of the military police using their own pistols to carry out summary justice. These stories were probably almost all false but it would not have been, generally, a popular post to hold.

They did not only operate behind the lines, however, and could sometimes be called upon in difficult circumstances to fight alongside the infantry. During the course of the war the Military Police Corps suffered 375 casualties and received a number of gallantry awards. William, with his past experience seems to have acquitted himself well and was appointed first to Lance Corporal and then to Acting Corporal. The Lance Corporal rank, however, was awarded as standard to give more authority to the Military Police over most ordinary soldiers.

We do not know exactly where on the Western Front that William was in action but it was in the Somme area. On 2nd August 1918, as the tide had turned after the final great German offensive, sometimes known as Operation Michael, William was killed. All we know about the circumstances is that it was as a result of an accident. Was this by his own hand or the result of "friendly fire"? He was thirty-nine years old and was buried in the Crouy British Cemetery, some 16 kilometres north-west of Amiens, to the west of the River Somme.

The inscription, chosen by his family, at the bottom of his gravestone was simply:

EVER IN MY THOUGHTS CISS

Who was Ciss? Was it his wife Victoria? His War Gratuity was £23 17s. and this went to his widow, as his sole legatee. He was entitled to the 1915 Star and the British and Victory Medals.

His youngest daughter Elizabeth became a nurse in a Mental Hospital and was living with her mother at "Kynance" Old Watford Road, St Albans in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*. Three doors away is "Vimy Ridge".

One son, William Tom Frederick, known as Fred Billing, became a mounted police constable in WW2. I think he may have spent most of his life in the London area but retired to Ringstead, at 43 Denford Road, where he died on 1st December 1987.

William's name is on the war memorial in the churchyard and on the *Ringstead and Kettering Rolls of Honour*.

Chapter 14

The Braybrook Family

Each of these stories is trying to reveal a little of the individual lives of the men of Ringstead who fought in the Great War. We see that, sometimes, a number came from one family but this is not the only connection hiding below the surface. Some men were neighbours or friends, or members of extended families masked by differing surnames. There was a tangled web of ties, bloodlines and friendships that would have involved most of the village.

James Braybrook was a farm labourer born in Keyston in Huntingdonshire in about 1837. Today, the A45 slices through between the two villages but for many years there was a well-used cart track between them starting in Denford Road. He married Frances Knighton from Tansor on 24th July 1857 and they produced at least ten children: Rebecca, Elizabeth, John, Joseph, Mary, Emma, Frederick, Charles, Louisa and Matilda.

One daughter, Louisa married Arthur Baxter and lived in Ringstead. We have seen that both their sons, Percy and William were killed in the war. Her father, James, lived in Ringstead with the Baxters after the death of his wife, Frances, in 1898.

John, the oldest son, born in about 1862, also moved to Ringstead marrying Mary Ellen Dunkley there, on 30th March 1891. He seems to have had an entrepreneurial spirit because although originally a labourer like his father, by his wedding he was a carter and, in the Census of that year, he was a coal merchant. In 1897 he wrote to George Capron about renting some vacant land and his address was *The Swan*, Ringstead. In 1901 he was described as an innkeeper and coal merchant.

In the 1901 Census the couple had three sons, Herbert (9), Frank (7) and Sydney (2) and by the following Census there were also three daughters. The 1911 Census states that they have had eight children, one of whom had died. This was Margaret Annie who had died in 1897 as a baby. Another daughter, Violet, was with her maternal grandparents. Herbert had already left home and was working as a groom in Thrapston. By 1910 John's tenure of *The Swan* had finished and his coal business also seems to have failed. He was now an ironstone labourer and the family were living in Rosebery Street.

Herbert John William Braybrook (1892-1917)

Herbert, the oldest child, began his working life as a groom in Thrapston, where he was in 1911, before moving to Leicestershire. Soon after moving, in 1913, he married Annie Sarson in the Barrow-on-Soar District. She was the daughter of Thomas and Sarah who had come from Derbyshire. In 1911, her father was working from home in School Street in Syston as a tailor. The newly-wed couple also lived in School Street, at number two, perhaps with Annie's family.

They were not to have a long married life but between 1913 and 1916 they had three children, Margaret, Herbert and Thomas. Before the birth of the youngest, Thomas, Herbert had volunteered at Leicester, for the Leicestershire Regiment. He was, initially, given the Regimental Number 16166 but later changed for 20087, and then 203181 when a new system of six-figure numbering was introduced.

Annie with baby Thomas, Margaret and Herbert
With thanks to George and Gill Braybrook

He embarked for France on 30th July 1915 and fought on the Western Front. The 6th, 7th and 8th (Service) Battalions had been formed in Leicester in September 1914. In April 1915 they all became part of the 110th Brigade, 37th Division and followed the same path in the war. They first landed in France on 29th July 1915 so it seems likely that Herbert was initially in one of these battalions.

The 7th Battalion, in 1916, were in action in the Battle of the Somme, including The Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14th-17th July) which was initially a successful Allied attack but which, as usual, descended into a continuing attritional action with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. The rain and the mud in a shell-holed landscape weighed the balance in favour of defenders over attackers. In September there followed The Battle of Flers-Courcelette and The Battle of Morval. Just before this, however, Herbert was wounded and may have missed these later actions. On 22nd August 1916 he appeared on the *War Office Casualty List*. He was entitled to wear a "Wound Stripe". These stripes had only just been introduced by an Army Order of 6th July 1916. Accidental or self-inflicted wounds were not eligible.

Wound stripe on left sleeve

Herbert John William Braybrook. *Possibly in training camp*
With thanks to George and Gill Braybrook

It was a small stripe of Gold Russian braid (or, later, sometimes brass, because it was easier to detach and clean) which was worn vertically on the left arm of the uniform between elbow and cuff. It was quite inconspicuous and not easily seen in faded old photographs.

Herbert in Rushden Argus
With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

Herbert's wound was reported on 25th August 1916 in the *Leicester Journal,* but we are not sure if he returned to England. It may be that he did, and it seems likely that it was at this time that his regimental number changed from 16166 to 20087.

We do know that in 1917 he was serving with the 1/4th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment. In May of that year the 4th Battalion were in trenches at Lievin, near Vimy, preparing for an assault against the Germans. On 8th June the day started at 5 a.m. with a heavy shell bombardment of the enemy positions. It continued until "zero hour" which was 8.30 p.m. plus three minutes. The troops began to assemble in the trenches ready to move forward. At 8 p.m. the enemy barraged the assembled troops. Had they had intelligence about the intended assault?

At zero hour the Leicesters "went over the top" and started towards the enemy trenches, with a creeping barrage of shrapnel bombs moving ahead of them. Herbert was part of "A" Company which had been specially trained for "wiring" but it was not called upon. "Wiring" was dangerous work, done at night, to repair and rebuild wire defences and cut the enemy's. On the Western Front, cutting parties tried to create breaches in the wire lines, giving a better chance of crossing no man's land. On this day some 70 "Other Ranks" in the Leicesters were killed.

Ruined principal street of Lieven 15th July 1917. ©IWM 78490

Herbert was one of these casualties of the 8th June and was buried in La Chaudiere Military Cemetery at Vimy. He was twenty-five years old. His death was recorded in the *Northampton Mercury* on 6th July 1917 (which has his death as June 9th) and in the *Leicester Journal* on the 20th July 1917. His Regimental Number was now given as 203181. He was entitled to the 1915 Star and the Victory and British Medals. He is not on the Ringstead War Memorial but he is on the large imposing one at Syston.

My thanks to Sue Blaxland for this image from a contemporary Syston Parish Magazine.

His widow, Annie, had had a very brief time together with Herbert but she never married again. In 1939 she was recorded as still living at 2 School Street in Syston with her three children, Margaret, Herbert and Thomas. She died in 1968, over fifty years after the death of her husband.

Sydney Edward Braybrook (1897-1976)

I have not found any military records for the middle son, Frank although this does not mean definitely that he did not serve in the army. He remained in the area and in 1939 he was living with his family in Raunds. The youngest son, Sydney Edward Braybrook, certainly did join the army and served on the Western Front.

In 1911, Sydney was twelve years old and in the occupation column has written “school” and “errand boy”. He was only sixteen when the war started and one suspects that his parents would have hoped that the war would be over, if not by Christmas, at least before he reached eighteen years of age. Unfortunately they were wrong and conscription was introduced. On 26th June 1916 Sydney was posted to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) just one month after his eighteenth birthday.

He was given the Regimental Number G/30153 and became part of the 8th (Service) Battalion. In the previous year, at the Battle of Loos, the Division it was part of, suffered 4178 casualties and spent the rest of the year rebuilding its numbers.

His military records are largely lost but he should not have been in France until he was nineteen years old. but it seems likely that he was there some time in 1917. The Queens were part of the 72nd Brigade, 24th Division, and fought in the Vimy area as part of the Battle of Arras. This started on 9th April 1917 but when one reads the *War Diary* for the 8th it is almost lost among the small actions and continual losses and the details of movement to and from the trenches and the days of comparative rest and training. On the Royal West Surrey website, Michael Page quotes from a letter sent on May 18th by Harry Brodie, an officer who saw action there, and who had this unique view of the battle.

> *I saw a good deal of the so-called battle of Arras – a huge operation lasting for days. One day in particular I was on a ridge a few miles in front of Arras – shells from our own heavy guns & from the German guns were [coming] in the air above – not many. A mile or two further ahead was a line of small explosions & puffs of smoke when the shells were playing on the contending front lines. Our guns were letting off not far ahead at all sorts of angles. A battalion on the right were cooking their evening meal, while waiting to go forward. An occasional shell dropped into a mined village about 100 yards to my left – aimed at the X [cross] Roads in the village – but not so far stopping a ceaseless stream of lorries & waggons. A little further to my right a game of football was proceeding. A little to the front – perhaps a quarter of a mile nearer the enemy a regimental band was playing popular airs – & right above aeroplanes – not bigger than dragon flies were flitting about [hounded] by the little white puffs which represent the shrapnel bursts from Anti-aircraft guns – in a line below the moving aeroplanes were our stationary balloons – called (and they are very like) sausages. Green rolling country dotted with tents – horse lines – several with trenches strewn with rusty barbed wire – all villages in sight in ruins – all trees cut rather neatly down & evidently in process of conversion into sleepers for light railways – & perhaps for dug out[s] – the whole gilded by an afternoon sun – with some nesting partridges calling amidst all the din & confusion.*

As Hardie says later in his letter, the ordinary soldiers in the trenches, “see practically nothing of what is going on”.

There followed the Battle of Messines in June, the Third Battle of Ypres in October before they moved south to take part in the Cambrai Operations when the Germans counter-attacked.

The campaigns of 1918 really started in March with the great German offensive often known as “Operation Michael”. This was, by World War 1 standards, a successful German attack which the Allied forces managed only to slow and make expensive, in terms of Germans killed. In this terrifying scramble to safety many acts of heroism were recorded. One was by Lance Corporal J.W. Sayer of the Queens who held the Germans back from Shepherds Copse in the defence of Le Verguier on 21st March 1918. He was awarded the V.C. but this goes unrecorded in the Regimental History written in 1925 perhaps, partly, because he was not from one of the Regular Army Battalions. For Sydney and the 8th it would have been a time of chaos with battalions separated and trying to hold the line to enable some sort of orderly retreat.

The Germans, however, had nearly exhausted their supply of men and the “100 Days” of the Allied decisive counter attack followed. The Surrey’s final engagements were The Battle of the Sambre and the Passage of the Grand Honelle. They ended the war at Bavais in France.

One wonders if Sydney celebrated too much for, three days after the Armistice, he was taken by train from Delsaux Farm to Carnieres to be treated for inflammation of the connective tissue of the right hand. He was only in hospital for a day and, on the 15th November was discharged back to duty.

He remained in the army,, but on 20th March 1919 he was deemed no longer physically fit for war service. On 16th May 1919 he was given a silver badge and was finally discharged from the army. The silver badge could only be worn on civilian clothes and was designed to stop the wearer being bothered by the white feather women, although by this time this seems less likely. He was awarded the Victory and British Medals. On his Medal Roll it has him in the 10th Battalion so perhaps he was transferred near the end of his military career.

Sydney was still only twenty years of age. He returned to Ringstead and married Ellen M. Groom in the last quarter of 1919. I have not found any children of this marriage. Ellen died early in 1939, aged forty years, and Sydney married again to local woman Evelyn Louisa Weekley in the third quarter of the same year. So, in the *Register of English & Wales*, taken on 29th September of the same year, it is Sydney and Evelyn who are together.

Sydney was now an Iron Blast Furnace labourer and must have, to some extent, recovered from his wartime injury. Evelyn died too on 19th April 1960 at the Kettering General Hospital. At the time of her death the couple were living in “Sunnyhill” in Denford Road. This may be 34 Denford Road where Sydney died too on 6th April 1976

Chapter 15

The Bull Family

Joseph Ashley Bull (1893-1982)

William Samuel Bull was born in Oundle, the son of Isaac and Eliza. His parents moved to Ringstead and in the 1861 Census Isaac was a "Tin Plate Worker and Brazier", born in Islip. His wife, however, had taken up the local craft and was a shoe finisher and son Benjamin was a shoemaker. Next door, William, now married, was also a shoemaker. His wife was Susannah, maiden name Dicks and they had married on 19th April 1859 in Ringstead. Isaac died in 1872 and William took over his father's business.

He became a grocer, brazier and tinplate worker, the grocery business almost certainly managed by Susannah. If that was not enough he successfully applied in 1877 for a licence to sell beer from the shop. William and Eliza did not have any children and aged just 45 she died and was buried in Ringstead on 13th February 1886. At the end of the following year, on 19th December 1887, William, now 49, married 23-year-old Emma Titman from Polebrook. And the children came: Anne Maria in 1888; William Isaac in 1889; Joseph Ashley in 1893, Ivy May in 1896 and Eliza in 1903. [There may have been another Eliza in 1900 who died as an infant.]

Ashley, on the horse, and his sisters with father, William.
image on horse's head appears to be George V (Coronation 1911?)
With thanks to Peter Davies.

The family were living at *The Swan* in the 1891 Census which William probably took over in 1884/5. They now had two of their children but also William's 75-year-old, widowed mother was living with them as well as five male lodgers. Emma had one 14-year-old girl to help her. It must have been a hard life for Emma and a news report in the Northampton Mercury of January 24th 1896, shows that that it was what would now be called an abusive marriage. They have Emma's first name wrong but there are enough details to show that the case involves our couple.

> *William S. Bull, Ringstead, was charged with an aggravated assault on his wife at Ringstead on January 13th. Hannah [sic] Bull said her husband went out in the morning of the 13th without speaking to her, and when he came back in the afternoon she asked him to have a cup of tea. He then kicked her. She further said, "I have been married eight years and he has ill-treated me on and off all the time. He has drawn a knife and threatened me.". . . Bull said in defence he had led a married life for 35 years and this was the first time he had been brought up for cruelty. His first wife never charged him and the present one would have no cause if it was not for her violent temper*.

William was fined £5 with 6 shillings costs but he said that he "had no money and what was he to do?" The Chairman replied that he would have to go to Northampton Gaol for a month. He also had to get two bondmen to keep the peace for 6 months.

I think that this was probably the end of his time as a landlord at *The Swan* and by the 1901 Census the family, for they were still together, lived at 5 Chapel Road, which was also the workshop and shop. It is possible that he retained ownership of these premises during the time at *The Swan*. In 1911, William, now aged 72, was a tinplate worker and Emma a grocer. Ashley, for he was always known by his second name or "Ash" for short, was now 17 years old and a tin plate worker with his father.

Ashley Bull in Ringstead football kit

William died in 1913 and the following year the Great War began. Emma had lost her husband, which may not have been altogether unwelcome, but she had also lost the main source of income for her family. She took over the beer licence and carried on the grocery business. Then the government wanted to take away her son. Ashley was probably a painter

before the war because this was given as his occupation when he was fined for "riding a bicycle without lights on 30th August 1914. Perhaps he had to go out and get a wage after the death of his father.

He had been born on 10th August 1893, so it was inevitable that he would be called up once conscription was brought in, in January 1916. Emma was a strong woman who did everything possible to keep her son out of the army. Exemption had been refused so she wrote to the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee asking what further steps she could take. She tried to lodge an appeal with the Central Tribunal but this was sent to the Thrapston Tribunal in error and was again refused. Then Ashley broke his arm and injured his nose. Was it a cycling accident? The military sent him home to await call-up. Emma again appealed but the original decision was upheld.

A 1913 Recruitment Poster
©IWM PST 0553. (From Wikipedia Commons)

The last case was heard on 3rd November 1916 and on 11th Ashley was in the army. He was 23 years 3 months old and was 5ft 7 inches tall with a 32 inch chest. It may be that he was posted straight to the Royal Flying Corps which had been established as the air arm of the British Army in 1912. But his records are rather sketchy and it appears that he only entered

the RFC on 11th December 1917 so it is possible that he was transferred from another Regiment but I have not been able to find any record of this. His official number was 108526 and he seems to have been at the School of Training at Halton Park. In 1917 a School of Technical Training was also established there for the Royal Flying Corps and Ashley transferred to that. It seems certain that he was being trained to use his tinsmithing skills in the repair of aircraft.

He was promoted to Air Mechanic 2nd Class on 11th December 1917.

On 1st April 1918 the R.F.C. and the R.N.A.S. (Royal Naval Air Services) amalgamated to form a new service the Royal Air Service (RAF). This change had been recommended by the South African, Jan Smuts, who realised the aircraft's potential for the "devastation of enemy lands and the destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale".

Ashley was transferred automatically into this new service and became an Air Mechanic 3rd Class. This seems like a demotion but it may be due to an extension of the ranks in the new RAF. The Air Mechanics' ranks included Armourers, Acetylene Welders, Blacksmiths, Tinsmiths and Sailmakers. When we look at these WW1 aircraft in museums such as the Shuttleworth Collection in Cambridgeshire we realise what flimsy, wood and sailcloth, contraptions they were. It is perhaps an indication of how little human life was worth that throughout the war the pilots were not issued with parachutes, although the military balloonists had them. It was felt that if there was trouble the men would bail out too soon rather than try to control the aircraft.

Ashley worked in No. 9 Aircraft Repair Depot which was in the former Eley Cartridge Factory in Edmonton, North London. These Repair Depots, started in 1917, but Edmonton did not come into action until April 1918, when the cartridge factory was closed. The depots were spread geographically and needed to be near good rail and road links as well as close to industrial centres.

On 25th January 1919 Ashley was sent to Purfleet to be demobilised. His Medical gave him an "A" fitness grade.

There may have been another reason for Ashley's mother's pleas, in 1916, for his exemption from military service, for in the Spring of the following year, aged 54, she died. On Tuesday 12th June 1917 the licence for the beerhouse was transferred to her eldest daughter Annie Bull.

Ashley returned to Ringstead and began a "Tinsmith and Sheet Metal Working" business in The Square in Raunds and was working there by 1924 at the latest. The tinsmith had originally been known as a tinker but this was associated with itinerant Irish workers and had become a term of mild abuse. A naughty child was often called a "little tinker". The tinsmith made and repaired light metal objects such as pots and pans. His workshop would have been a much quieter place than the roar and banging of a blacksmith's forge. By the 1920s it is likely that the shop would also have had some factory-made housewares.

Ashley Bull's shop in Raunds
With thanks to Jon Abbott

Tinsmithing was a craft which, like shoemaking, was being taken over by the cheaper factory wares but in 1939 Ashley, still single, and apparently now living in Church Street in Ringstead continued as a sheet metal worker. He never married and became increasingly reclusive.

In his youth he had been a boxer, footballer and all-round sportsman but he gradually withdrew into himself. Some say that he was unlucky in love. After the Second World War he bought a plot of wooded land down Ham Lane which had some small corrugated iron sheds on it. He began to live there, with only some chickens and perhaps the rats for company. As he grew older he became something of a person of local folklore and myth. Always a quiet man he began to live in his own solitary world. On the other hand, Jon Abbott, has told that, although the girls were a little frightened of him, he and the other boys would visit Ash in his shack in the woods. Ashley had taught himself to play the penny whistle and he would play the hymn tunes that he had sung in the Baptist Chapel.

Some of the villagers tried to look out for Ashley and left food for him. But in the winter of 1981/82 there was the severest December recorded in the 20th Century in England with a long period of snow and frost. In early January it became a little milder before once again deteriorating into blizzards and extreme cold. Jon Abbott has told how some locals became concerned and went to see if he was in trouble. Ashley was discovered, with a frostbitten leg, sitting in a chair and barely alive. An ambulance was called and he was carried, with

some difficulty, out of the shack and taken to Kettering General Hospital. The affected leg was amputated but it was to no avail.

He died on 16th and was cremated on 21st January 1982. In the *National Probate Calendar* his address is given as 1 Back Lane. Did he own this property or was it the address of a relative? He was 88 years old. He is still remembered by many in the village as a quiet proud man who retreated from the world.

William Isaac Bull (1889-1962)

Ashley Bull's older brother, William Isaac Bull, was not included in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour.* He was some five years older than Ashley, born on 29th December 1889. When he was eighteen years old he joined the newly formed Territorial Force. This had been created in 1908 and was commanded by the War Office but administered by local County Territorial Associations. It replaced the existing mixture of local voluntary and part-time groups and was originally designed to reinforce the Regular Army abroad. There was much opposition to this and its role was changed to one of wholly home defence.

William Isaac Bull joined the "Special Reserve Territorial Force" at Northampton on 4th January 1909. He was given the number 8609 and signed up for six years. He stated that he was willing to serve in the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was 5ft 5¾inches tall with a 35½inch chest and weighed 116 pounds. He had, like most recruits, grey eyes and his hair was brown.

Each year at the end of June, or early July, he attended annual training sessions which lasted about a month. During this time William moved to Peterborough and in the 1911 Census was lodging with Henry and Martha Bottom at 637 Lincoln Road. He was no longer a shoehand but was now working as a labourer on the railways. The following year, on 17th February 1912, he married Kate Searle at Peterborough Registry Office. There was perhaps some urgency in the marriage for their first child, Ivy May, was born on 2nd July 1912. Another child, William Ashley, followed on 21st June 1914.

With the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914, William, like many other territorials volunteered for overseas service and on 11th September 1914 he joined the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) in France as part of the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. His next of kin, shown in his records, was his wife Kate, living at The Grocer's Shop in Ringstead. It seems likely that she stayed with his mother initially and perhaps, on her death in 1917, with William's sister.

In the beginning the B.E.F. was made up of regular soldiers with some former part-timers like William. Ill-prepared for this new type of technological warfare much of the Regular Army was wiped out during 1914. They were replaced largely by the volunteers in the "Pals' Battalions" and then, finally, by the conscripted men, as the furnace of war consumed soldiers. On 23rd August 1914 the B.E.F. was confronted at Mons by a much larger German force. It fought with courage and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy but was greatly outnumbered. The men were forced to retreat before the German onslaught for some

fourteen days. They were on the outskirts of Paris before, with the French, they counter-attacked at the Battle of the Marne.

This battle marked the end of the German sweep through Belgium and into France and the beginning of the attrition of trench warfare which characterised the war on the Western Front. It lasted from the 6th to the 10th September 1914. William arrived in France, the following day, on 11th September 1914.

His arrival was closely followed by the Battle of the Aisne which was fought from the 12th to the 15th September, with the Allies attacking after the Battle of the Marne. The Germans, however, had dug in, and it ended in a typical stalemate with defenders almost always having the upper hand. This battle was part of the "Race to the Sea" where both sides attempted to force round the opposing army's northern (or western) flank. The North Sea was reached with no real breakthroughs. The Battle of the Yser was fought between 16th October and 2nd of November. Once again it ended in stalemate but with the loss of many more lives.

William would have perhaps been considered fortunate in that on the first day of the battle, on 16th October 1914, he suffered a gunshot wound to his left ankle. He had been in France just 36 days. He returned to England and remained there for one year 79 days.

At the end of this home service, on 3rd January 1916 (not 1915 as signed in his Medical History Form), he was discharged, perhaps surprisingly, because of the "termination of his engagement". He had served seven years (one more than he originally signed for). Before conscription was introduced, a man who had served under a Regular or Territorial engagement and had reached the end of his agreed term could, and would, be discharged from the army. As the *Long Long Trail* website explains this even applied to experienced men who were serving in the Front Line trenches at the time. William was fortunate in that Army Order 202 was brought in on 8th June 1916. This stated that, except in certain specific circumstances, mainly age and length of service, such soldiers would not be discharged.

It appears therefore that William had completed his agreed military service and would not have to do further service during the war. He was awarded the usual British and Victory Medals, but he also received the 1914 Star, because he had served on the Western Front between 5th August and 23rd November 1914. In 1919 was also awarded a clasp, with two silver roses, for the Star because he had been under fire or within range of enemy mobile artillery during this period.

His military character was stated as "very good" and he was described as a "sober, honest and reliable man". He was now 5 ft 7 inches tall with a 36inch chest.

After demobilisation he returned to Peterborough with his family. He took up again his life on the railways and, in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales,* he was living at 141 L.N.E.R. Cottages, New England, Peterborough. He was now a Railway Fitter's Assistant. Living with William and his wife Kate was their son Cyril, born on 7th March 1919 who was shown as a clerk but "incapacitated".

William Isaac Bull died, aged 73, in the April to June period of 1962 in the Peterborough District.

John Alfred Bull (1892-1977)

Benjamin Julian Bull was the son of Isaac Bull and the younger brother of William "Tinker" Bull, the father of Ashley and William. He had married Ellen Manning in Ringstead Parish church on 25th December 1881 when he was 34 years old and Ellen just 19. He was a handsewn army boot maker by trade, although he did work as an Insurance Agent for a time around the turn of the century. They had nine children, of whom seven survived infancy.: Ruth, Eliza, Joseph, Louisa, Alfred, Maggie and Evelyn.

It is Alfred, or more accurately, John Alfred, born on 14th May 1892, who became a soldier in the Great War. He was, as we have seen, the cousin of Ashley and William Bull. In 1911, his father, who seems to have preferred to use his second name, Julian was, like many in the handsewn military boot trade, unemployed. John Alfred was a leather pressman in a local boot factory. They were living in Rosebery Street in Ringstead and, what was to give the military boot trade a temporary respite, was a few years away. The Great Wat began in August 1914.

Unfortunately, almost all of John's military records have disappeared and the couple that possibly remain do not contain enough personal detail for us to be sure that they are about the correct man. The most likely soldier is a John A. Bull whose medal card shows that he first served in the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment with Regimental Number 17948. He then was transferred to the Labour Corps and given the number 55836. We know from the Ringstead Roll of Honour that our man served in the 94th Labour Corps and also that he was in Belgium and France. The Queen's Regiment number indicated that he was conscripted and so served in 1916 at the earliest. This is confirmed by his medal entitlement which was for the Victory and British Medals and not the 1914 or 14/15 Stars.

Fortunately, using the excellent *Long, Long Trail* website for guidance we can add a little more detail. Firstly, under Army Council Instruction of 1917 men from the 13th (Labour) Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) became part of the new 94th Labour Corps and were given numbers in the range from 55801 – 56400 (John was 55836). It now seems most probable that we have the correct Medal Card for our man.

The 13th (Labour) Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment was formed at Balmer in the July to September period of 1916 and it (along with the 15th) embarked for France in September 1916.

The Labour Battalions were capable of fighting as infantry but their main purpose was to do the labouring work that was needed, especially in trench warfare. Most of them would have some kind of labouring background but smiths, carpenters, bricklayers etc,. would also be included. These battalions carried out crucial tasks on the Western Front building and repairing docks, roads, railways and airfields, manning ports, stores and ammunition depots, unloading ships and trains, digging trenches and constructing camps.

John would not have been away from danger for much of the work was done within range of enemy troops and many from the Labour Corps were wounded. As the war wore on Chinese and South African Black Corps were formed to help with this work but were given little or no recognition for their contribution to the British war effort.

In 1917, Army order 85/17 authorised the formation of the new Labour Corps and as we have seen John was transferred to the 94th Labour Corps.

We know that at about this time, in the third quarter of 1917 that John was at home for he married Raunds' girl Bertha Tebbutt. Perhaps he had been injured and was on home leave. We cannot be sure. At the end of the war John was awarded the British and Victory Medals.

After his demobilisation it seems likely that he moved to Raunds and in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* he and Bertha were living there, at 39 High Street. John was a "Levelling Boots Operative" and Bertha's occupation is shown as "Housework, Hand Closer Boot Trade". John died on 13th November 1977 and Bertha, aged 94, on 7th July 1983.

Chapter 16

John Wilfred Reginald Cave (1898-1916)

The Eady family was a dynasty of millers in eastern Northamptonshire. We will start with Thomas, born in 1792, who married Ann Irons. He had North Mill in Burton Latimer. His son, Moses Irons Eady, worked this mill for some 24 years from about 1840. His father still owned the mill and, after Moses moved away, it was worked by various tenant millers, using steam as well as wind power. We know much of this from an unsuccessful action brought in 1865 by Thomas Eady against the *Kettering, Thrapston and Huntingdon Railway Company*, alleging that in building the new railway the access to the mill was made more difficult and so devalued the rental that he could charge.

His son, Moses had taken over the Woodford Mill, usually known as Willy Watt, in Woodford Parish (but nearer to Ringstead village). In 1879 he bought the mill, house and lands from the main local landowner, George Capron. Moses and his wife Harriett had a daughter Harriett Ann, born in 1847 and, in 1874 she married John Thomas Cave. In the 1881 Census they were living with Moses in the mill house with their sons, Herbert (5) and John George (2) both born in Little Addington. We see that John Thomas was working as a machinist but it is not clear exactly what this occupation implies.

Moses moved back to Burton Latimer, where he died in 1887 and by 1891 John Thomas Cave was shown as the miller at Willy Watt. In 1897, his son, John George Cave married Ada Mary Eldred. At about this time the Willy Watt was sold to the Dodson family although the semi-derelict Ringstead Mill was retained by the Cave family until 1912.

John George Cave and his wife Ada also moved back to Burton Latimer where their son John Wilfred Reginald Cave was born on 11th July 1898 and baptised in the local church on 3rd August. John George appears to have been something of a nomad probably exaggerated by the ten-year Census cycle. In 1901 he and Ada were living at Westbury House, Lindsay Street, in Kettering. He was still only 23 years old and was a “Corn Merchant”. A further son, Bernard Cyril Cave, had been born and was just one month old.

By 1911, in a sudden change of direction, John George was living in Hospital Drove, Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire. His occupation now was, “fruit growing, poultry keeping etc.,” They have had two further children and all the three younger ones were born in Kettering. Meanwhile his parents John Thomas and Harriett had retired to Denford Road in Ringstead.

It is John Wilfred Reginald Cave, whose short life we are following here. We left him in 1911 when he was just twelve years old and living in Long Sutton. Soon after that the family moved to Ringstead. They were living there in 1914 but it appears that in the next few years they moved.

What we do know is that John was eager to sample the excitement of military life. It was on 24th September 1914 that he enlisted in the Royal Marines Light Infantry. He joined in

Birmingham which perhaps implies that his parents were in process of moving there but we cannot be sure because, in his records, his parents' address is given as "The Hollies" in RIngstead.

John was 5ft 6½inches tall with blue eyes and brown hair. He was given number 17906 and appears to have been based in Portsmouth. His conduct was described as "very good" but he was discharged less than two months later. The reason was simply that he was underage, for he was only sixteen years old.

He returned to Northamptonshire and became an assistant baker in Brixworth but he had not given up on joining the military. It was at Brixworth that he joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 20272. We do not have a date for this but it must have been close to his eighteenth birthday if not before. He was transferred to the recently formed 44th Machine Gun Corps with the new number of 10536.

John Wilfred Reginald Cave
From Rushden Argus. With thanks to Rushden & District History Society

The Machine Gun Corps were set up from the various companies in October 1915 and over the next few months they were organised and in action. It was believed, by many who served in them, that the Corps was looked down on by the Regiments, with their colours and rich histories. Some ex-machine gunners felt that the fire that destroyed all their records after the Great War was suspicious. The British Army first used the outdated Maxim machine guns but in 1916 the Vickers gun replaced them. They were the weapon feared by attacking enemy troops and therefore they were specially targeted, and casualties were high.

John's eighteenth birthday was on 11th July 1916. At this point the 44th Company of the Machine Gun Corps were fighting around Pozieres as part of the campaign called the Battle of the Somme. It was the usual story of attack and counter-attack, of gain and loss, with terrible artillery bombardments. Both sides sustained great losses, with the Australian troops being most badly hit among the Allies.

On the 25th August 1916 John was killed in action. We know almost exactly where he was first buried. During the war, using reconnaissance on the ground and with tethered balloons and increasingly with aircraft, detailed and updated trench maps were produced. These were divided into ever decreasing squares like Ordnance Survey maps but with a different numbering system. John's grave was at 57.X.5.b.4.25. which places it near to the village of Pozieres. His body was later exhumed and re-buried in the Pozieres British Cemetery. The Burial Return Form for that cemetery has a final column headed "Were any effects forwarded to base?" For John, in this column, it simply and sadly has the single word "spoon."

Machine Gun Corps badge

He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. His parents had, by the end of the war, moved to 36 Henry Street, Ashted Row in Birmingham. John was described as a "native of Ringstead" and it may be that he considered himself such for the Willy Watt Mill is just in the parish and Woodford but feels part of Ringstead. His uncle Herbert Eady Cave had been ill for some time and died on 17th August 1920. There is a gravestone for him in Ringstead Cemetery and at the bottom of the stone it also remembers John Wilfred Cave. He is on the Ringstead War Memorial and is also remembered on the Brixworth Memorial which has the dedication:

THEY, WHOM THIS CROSS COMMEMORATES,
WERE NUMBERED AMONG THOSE, WHO, AT
THE CALL OF THE KING AND COUNTRY, LEFT ALL
THAT WAS DEAR TO THEM, ENDURED HARDNESS,
FACED DANGER, AND FINALLY PASSED OUT OF THE
SIGHT OF MEN BY THE PATH OF DUTY AND
SELF SACRIFICE, GIVING UP THEIR OWN LIVES,
THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM.

Chapter 17

Cyril Cottingham (1898-1981)

The Cottinghams were a family with aspirations. They were Nonconformists who originally came from Thorpe Achurch in the eighteenth century. In the family tree were men like William Frost Cottingham, a Baptist missionary who died within weeks of reaching Africa and Edwin Turner Cottingham who became a clockmaker in Thrapston and took part in an expedition to help prove Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Cyril's father, Ernest Cottingham, with a friend, cycled to London and back in 1891 to set a local record. Ernest married Sarah Daisy Braine in 1897. He was a handsewn shoemaker by trade who became the Assistant Overseer for the area.

Ernest and Sarah had two sons, Cyril and Edward, and in 1911 they were together, living at 7 Spencer Street, in Ringstead, part of the Tilcroft new estate. Cyril was aged twelve and still at school, but also earning money as a "milk boy", probably helping with the delivery of milk around the village in the early morning.

Much of Cyril's Service Record has been lost, probably in the Second World War bombing of the Record Office. When war was declared in August 1914, Cyril was only sixteen year's old. His medal card does survive and from that we know that he was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star, so it seems likely that he was part of the conscripted army which started in 1916. He only became eighteen on 24th June 1916 so it seems certain that he did not join up until the Summer of 1916 at the earliest.

When he enlisted, it was with the First Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. The Royal West Surrey was a regiment to which a number of local men were posted. The First Battalion was, at first, a Regular Army battalion made up of career soldiers, but the war had destroyed much of the professional army and it had to be made up again from the new volunteers and conscripts.

Cyril had a particularly active and distinguished army career. We know that he won the Military Medal and Bar and from this, and the Battalion's War Diaries, we can get some idea of his time at the Front. He was "gazetted" (listed in the London Gazette), on 14th December 1917. It was the norm for these to appear some months after the action for which the medal had been awarded which would place it in September 1917.

When we look at the *War Diary* for the 1st Battalion we find that the Queen's spent the whole of July 1917 in billets in Picquigny engaged in training but then received orders to march to Longpre and travelled on by train through Abbeville and along the coast through Etaples, Boulogne and Calais and finally to Dunkirk. From there they marched some eight miles, to Ghyvelde on the Belgian border.

After the Battle of Arras the Allied High Command turned their attention to the area north of Ypres in another attempt to make a conclusive break through the German Front Line. On

August 14th the 1st Battalion moved up to the front but were caught in a devastating barrage on the way there. In September it moved back to training ready to move to Dickerbesch to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres which had begun on 31st July 1917.

This campaign, often remembered by the evocative name of Passchendaele, was a series of actions, which carried on into November, to try to control the ridges south-east of Ypres. The Allies had planned a major offensive in great detail, trying to avoid the mistakes of the past. At first it was successful although at the cost of great loss of life on both sides. As was usually the case the advantage was with the defenders and the attack faltered and the Germans counter-attacked.

What really bogged down the campaign was the terrible weather in Flanders. In one of the worst summers in living memory some five inches of rain fell in August, with little sunshine to help dry the sodden ground. Writing of the Flanders front in August 1917, Lieutenant General Sir Hubert Gough stated:

> *The state of the ground was by this time frightful. The labour of bringing up supplies and ammunition, of moving or firing the guns, which often sunk up to their axles, was a fearful strain on the officers and men, even during the daily task of maintaining the battle front. When it came to the advance of the infantry for an attack across the water-logged shell holes, movement was so slow and so fatiguing that only the shortest advances could be contemplated.*
>
> *[Quoted by Peter Hart in "The Great War"]*

As usual, offensive was met by counter-offensive, and it was in one of these see-saw actions that Cyril Cottingham distinguished himself. The British had a planned attack for the 26th September but either from captured soldiers or other espionage, the Germans had gained knowledge of this. On the previous day, the 25th September, at 3.30 in the morning the enemy opened up an artillery barrage greater than anything seen before in the war. It not only targeted the Front Line trenches but also carpeted the supply area behind so that it was impossible to move transport or troops up to the forward positions.

Following the barrage, the Germans attacked in a massed formation. Parts of the 1st Battalion of the Queen's were overwhelmed. The enemy were described as:

> *". . . debouching from the village of Ghelavelt armed with flame throwers, the stream of burning oil thrown from those devilish weapons reached a length and height of 100 yards and set fire to the trees, which being as dry as tinder, immediately took fire.*

The bombardment lasted all day and the following night. The two Front Line companies of the 1st Battalion lost all their officers and most of their men. Many were never found in the deep mud-filled holes.

The British attack of the 26th was ordered to go ahead, even though the Division, (of which the 1st Battalion was a part), had suffered some 5000 casualties. The remains of the Division, reinforced by other Brigades, swept forward and made some limited progress.

In the midst of this mud and slaughter, Cyril Cottingham acted with bravery, beyond the normal resolution needed just to exist in this hell and was recommended to receive the Military Medal. This decoration had been instituted on March 25th 1916, (although made retrospective to 1914), for other ranks, including non-commissioned officers, to mirror the Military Cross for officers. There was also had a small gratuity attached to the award.

Australian soldiers near Hooge 29th October 1917 on duckboard track
© Australian War Memorial (E01220) Wikipedia Commons

It was reported in the Appendix to the October 1916 section of the 1st Battalion's *War Diary* that Cyril, along with twenty-one other men had been awarded the Military Medal for their heroism in the actions of the 25th and 26th September.

Of course, the Passchendaele Campaign lumbered on but, in early October, the 1st Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment moved to Wizernes and then by train to Bailleul and from there marched to "Aldershot Camp" near Neuve Eglise. In early November they once more moved up to the Front Line to relieve the Canadians on the Passchendaele Salient.

Conditions had worsened. The local stream, the Revibeeke had overflowed its banks and shell holes filled with water and a single, constantly shelled, duckboard track was the only pathway to the front line. The horror of men being sucked into this quagmire has been often told. It was this mire that brought the 1917 campaign to a standstill although there were still sporadic actions and artillery fire.

It was in this final phase, continuing into the new year, that Cyril won the bar to his Military Medal for his bravery under fire. He was gazetted on 12th March 1918 but the award was for his actions in early November 1917.

Cyril, now a Lance Corporal, was part of two raiding parties sent out to find out more about the Germans opposing them and also to kill as many as possible. In all the chaos, it is easy to believe that these actions were ill-prepared, but this was rarely true although it sometimes was possible that, because of all the detailed preparations, the High Command went ahead with actions, even though conditions had adversely changed. A section from the final orders for the raid attached to the *War Diary* will give some idea of the detailed planning.

1. *Zero will be 2.15 am 11th inst.*
2. *Raiding Party will be in allotted positions at 1.30 a.m.*
3. *On conclusion of raid, party will return to Bn: Reserve Trenches.*
4. *Gaps in our own wire at "P" and "Q" will be cut by 12.30 a.m. by "D" and "B" Company and will be mended by "D" and "B" Companies respectively as soon as possible after completion of the raid.*
5. *Company Sergeant Major of "A" Company will be at point "P" and Company Sergeant of "B" Company at point "Q" for the purpose of checking number of men returning by name.*
6. *Very Lights will be fired by Units on our flanks as well as by "D" "B" and "C" Companies from Zero Hour plus 3 minutes to Zero plus 15 minutes.*
7. *Stokes Mortars will fire at a medium rate of fire from Zero minus 1 minute to Zero hour on the enemy's front line trench between B and D, at zero they will fire at selected targets.*
8. *At Zero plus 20 two buglers will sound a succession of high "G's" as a signal from withdrawal. The bugler will be with O.C. "A" Company the other at point "Q".*
9. *Hot tea will be taken to all Companies, leaving BETHLEHEM FARM at 4.0 a.m. 11th inst. A half issue of rum will be mixed with the tea for Raiding party and a half issue will be served out on return to Battalion Head Quarters.*

Unfortunately, the reality often quickly turned all the careful planning to mud. There was also attached to the *War Diary* a report of the raids. The "Left Party" found the barbed wire was uncut and they could not reach the enemy trenches but gave and received fire so that four were wounded. The "Right Party" did make their target and it seems likely that Cyril was part of this raiding group. The report graphically describes their experience:

> *Right Party encountered no opposition and no machine gun fire. Found gap about 10 yards wide and first four men got into trench and a group of Germans got out behind their trench and started bombing and shooting, except one who was taken prisoner. In the trench. Of the others in this group one was shot by Sergeant HAYES, one killed by 2nd Lieutenant PARKES with a revolver, one was bayonetted and a fourth shot. The trench was waist deep in water and impossible to work along it – one man had to be pulled out, leaving his gum-boots behind. No sign of other Germans and being unable to get along this party returned. No casualties with this party. Our artillery was*

bursting well just beyond the enemy trench and barrage on right was very good, about forty yards clear of the party.
There was no artillery retaliation except for a few Trench Mortars and no rifle or Machine Gun fire on the return.
Our Very lights worked well and greatly assisted the party.
Both parties worked their way back by tapes laid out as they went, which were then pulled in.
Report on Raid of Night of 10/11th November [Some shortened names given in full]

The Battalion's *War Diary* records that Lance Corporal C. Cottingham received a bar to his military medal for his gallantry in this action and five other men received the Military Medal.

Cyril's war was far from over because the Royal West Surrey's 1st Battalion continued to see much of the action in 1918, the last year of the war. The battle season opened with a great Spring offensive by the Germans against the fragile British Front Line, designed to drive a wedge between the British and French forces and win the war before the Americans could tip the balance of power firmly in the Allies' Favour.

The "Michael Offensive" was fought over much of the wilderness left by the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The Germans started, as in 1914, by forcing the British to retreat and capturing territory. The 1st Battalion were in the Battles of Messines (10th – 11th April), Hazebrouck (12th – 13th April), Bailleul (13th – 15th April) and Kemmel Ridge (17th – 19th April).

By the 29th April the Germans had made great advances and continued to advance but also suffered heavy casualties and were running out of men and supplies. In this terrible arm wrestle, the Germans appeared to have the upper hand, but the energy slowly drained from them, and when the Allies once more applied pressure the enemy were broken. After the trench war stalemate the Hundred Days Offensive saw the Allies drive rapidly to victory. The fortified Hindenberg Line was breached and the Germans were rolled back until the signing of the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

It was a hard-won victory, however, for the soldiers on the ground. The Battle of the St. Quentin Canal ran from the 29th September to the 2nd October 1918. In this offensive the British managed to cross and secure one of the few bridges across the canal allowing the Allies to surge over and overwhelm the Germans, taking some 5,000 prisoners.

Nevertheless, there was still great loss of life on both sides and it was not an easy victory for the Royal West Surreys, because the use of various types of poison gas had become part of the armoury of both sides. It was not a great killer of men, but it created an atmosphere of constant fear. Yellow-green Chlorine Gas was the first gas used, by the Germans, on 22nd April 1915 but Phosgene followed, which was six times more deadly and being colourless could give a fatal dose without the soldier being aware. The victim's lungs would fill with fluid and they would suffocate in an agonising death. Finally, Mustard Gas, first used by the Germans in July 1917, was used more in the final years of the war. It caused painful blistering and temporary blindness.

On 1st October 1918, Cyril Cottingham was taken to Number 3 Casualty Clearing Station Hospital suffering from the effects of gas poisoning. He was immediately transferred to the Sick Convoy and spent 33 days in hospital so that it is unlikely that he would have re-joined his battalion until the time of the Armistice.

Cyril's fighting days were over after a short but distinguished army career. He had one last affliction to face, when he went down with an illness that took the lives of more people than even the Great War. The epidemic of the "Spanish Flu" found a home in the exhausted soldiers of the Western Front. Cyril reported sick with this influenza on 27th November 1918.

Eventually, he was demobbed and returned home to Ringstead. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals as well as his gallantry awards of the Military Medal and Bar. Some 80,000 Military Medals were awarded during the Great War but far fewer received the Bar which was a second medal award. It seems rather sad that his bravery does not seem to have been really appreciated in the *Northampton Mercury*.

Cyril appears to have returned quietly home and became a labourer on the Midland Railway at Thrapston. He was still living in Ringstead as he remained on the Electoral Roll until 1925, although probably leaving the area the previous year. He had joined the National Union of Railwaymen on 19th April 1919 when he was still only twenty years old. He transferred to Staveley, near Chesterfield, in Derbyshire and joined the local branch there on 16th November 1924 as a porter.

When he married Edith Annie Houghton, some three years his senior, on 14th June 1925, at the Independent Wesleyan Church in Rushden, he was living at 12 Wharf Lane in Staveley. By the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he had moved within Staveley to 10 Bond Street. Although not all the family have been "unlocked" for public viewing, it looks as if the couple have two children still at home. Cyril died on 11th July 1981, aged 83. He was living at the time at 74 Fern Avenue in Staveley. Did his second home for nearly sixty years appreciate the quiet hero that they had in their midst.

Chapter 18

The Dainty Family

The Dainty family was originally from Titchmarsh. We will begin with William, an agricultural worker, born there in about 1809, and his wife Elizabeth. They had a son, also named William, baptised there on the 8th November 1835. He was in Back Lane, Titchmarsh in the 1851 Census with his parents and brother, John.

William, the younger's, marriage arrangements were more complicated. From the records, it appears that he may have married Rebecca Plowman in Titchmarsh on the 26th July 1958. For some reason the couple parted and by 1861, aged 25, he was lodging at 196 Great King Street in Hampton, Birmingham, with tailor John Humphrey and his wife Jane, who were from Moreton Pinkney in Northamptonshire. With William was his wife "Ann", aged 30, and also born in Moreton Pinkney, and their five-month-old, baby, George.

I do not think that the couple could marry without William committing bigamy and when they returned to Titchmarsh they had to revert to their unmarried status. Their son, George Dainty aged three was buried there, on 28th December 1863. I have not been able to find them in the 1871 Census but, in 1881, William was shown as 45 and single. He was an agricultural labourer living again in Back Street, Titchmarsh. With him is Maria Wilson, single, aged 50, with her two children Jane E. (11) and Mary M. (6). If we look back we find that Maria Wilson (sometimes Willson) had been born in Moreton Pinkney on 5th April 1827 and baptised there on 1st March 1829. She was the illegitimate daughter of Comfort Wilson, who married John Prestidge a few months after Maria's birth. Comfort died in 1842.

The couple's daughter, Jane Wilson, had been born in Titchmarsh but Mary was born in Sheffield. Matching the ages and place of birth it looks likely that "Maria" was the same person as "Ann" in the 1861 Census. The movement of the Dainty family between Northamptonshire and Yorkshire also complicates the issue.

But what about the male heir that we need to move forward with this surname? George William Dainty had been baptised in Titchmarsh on Whit Sunday, 20th May 1866, the son of William Dainty and Maria. Tellingly, the surname "Dainty" has been underlined four times. In 1871 he was six years old and staying with his grandparents, William and Elizabeth in Titchmarsh. He was called by his second name, George, probably to distinguish him from his father (and perhaps to replace the George who had died in 1863). I cannot find him in the 1881 Census. Perhaps he was making his way north because on 13th June 1886 he married Sarah Ann Schofield in the church at Brightside Bierlow. In 1891 George William and Sarah Ann had a first child, Walter aged one year, and they were lodging with Sarah's father-in-law, Charles Schofield at 10 Upwell Lane in Brightside Bierlow near Sheffield.

His father William, too, had moved to the Sheffield area and aged 55 was working as a bricklayer's labourer. With him and Maria "Dainty" there was still one daughter, Mary Maria (now also Dainty) and a granddaughter, Rebecca Dainty who was just five months old. They

too are living in Brightside at 49 Woodbine Lane. By 1901 William and Maria were living at 11 Clarendon street with their daughter, Maria and her husband William Slack from Middleton in Derbyshire, and their children. They had married in 1892 in the Sheffield area. Her sister. Jane Elizabeth Dainty had married William's brother, George Slack, the previous year and he features in the second book of these biographies.

It seems possible that something had happened to William, the father's, first wife, Rebecca Plowman, for a William Dainty married Maria Wilson in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the 2nd Quarter of 1904. Is this the couple able to marry at last? It is also possible that the death of their daughter Mary Maria in the Thrapston area in the Spring of 1904 may have been the catalyst.

Meanwhile, their son George William Dainty was only two doors away at number 15, and, aged 36, was a stone quarryman. With him was wife, Sarah aged 33 and children Walter (11), Charles W., Mary M. (6), Florrie (4) and John W. (1). Now living with them was father-in-law, Charles Schofield (72) a widower and Emma Baugh (69), perhaps his partner.

By 1911 the family were back in Northamptonshire. They were living in Thrapston and George William was an ironstone miner (above ground), probably working in the quarries around Islip. With him was wife, Sarah Ann. They had been married 25 years and have had nine children, seven of whom are still living. The oldest son, aged 21, was an ironstone labourer like his father, but Charles William (19) was a shepherd on a local farm. The other children were Mary Maria (16) a domestic servant, Harriett (16) no occupation, George (8), William (6) and Violet (3). One suspects that Harriett was being kept at home to help with the housework and the younger children.

George William's father had remained in the Sheffield area. We know this from a tragic accident that had happened a few months after the 1911 Census had been taken.

William had ben blind for some ten years and he would walk around the district, guided by his twelve-year-old granddaughter (probably Lily Slack). On Saturday 6th May 1911 she was guiding him from Attercliffe Common to Newhall Street. As they were walking past, a man stepped out from behind a tramcar and was struck by a motor car. He was knocked back unconscious, but in falling he collided with William who fell violently striking his head on the ground. He was taken to Firvale Hospital but died later that day.

More heartache was to come for the family, for the Great War was soon to begin and the two oldest sons, Walter and Charles William, were called to fight for their country.

Walter Dainty (1889-1965)

Walter Dainty had been the first child of George William and Sarah to survive into adulthood. Their eldest child, George William, like his father, had been baptised at Brightside on 18th May 1887 but was buried there on 13th March of the following year.

Walter was born on 12th September 1889 and baptised at Brightside Church on 25th of the same month. In the 1891 Census he was with his parents, lodging with his grandfather Charles Schofield. Judging from the dates and places where the children were born it appears that the family moved back to Northamptonshire in about 1904. By then Walter had followed his father into the ironstone mining industry as a labourer.

Charles (seated) and Walter Dainty
We can see the two vertical wound stripes and a good conduct stripe on Charles' left sleeve. Above these there appears to be a silver badge designed to be worn by wounded soldiers but which should not be worn on a uniform. This is thought to be in early 1917.
With thanks to Jon Abbott

They were first living in Thrapston but within the next few years they moved to Rosebery Street in Ringstead. We know that they were there when Walter attested on 17th December 1914 at Rushden. He was twenty-five years old and five feet 5 inches tall.

His mother, Sarah Ann, suffered something of a shock. Ernest Edward Slack, her nephew from Sheffield, had joined the Northumberland Fusiliers. During his sick leave from his

Regiment, he stayed with the family. Ernest stole a ten-shilling money order from her and was sent to gaol for a month, with hard labour.

Walter had signed up with the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 16763 (sometimes shown as 16765). He was posted to the Northampton Depot on the 18th December 1914 and sailed to France on 22nd April of the following year. The 2nd Battalion had suffered terrible losses in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and Walter was one of the men from the New or "Kitchener's" Army who filled the gaps.

He was to remain in France for 108 days and fought in some of the terrible battles of the Western Front. He would have been in the Battle of Aubers Ridge where the 2nd Northants were one of the lead Battalions in the offensive. The "No Man's land" between the opposing trenches was less than 200 yards across. After heavy artillery fire, with the 2nd East Lancs, they moved forward. *The History of the 2nd Royal West Surreys* described what happened.

> *9th May 5.40 am. On further advance the East Lancs are hit by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire by the time they had progressed thirty yards from their own trenches; the Northants coming up ten minutes later, were similarly hit, but a party got through one of the gaps [in the barbed wire] blown by the field guns, and into the German front trench.*
>
> *6.10 am. The front and communication trenches are by now crowded and chaotic. German shelling adds to the confusion. By now the fire across No Man's land was so intense that forward movement was all but impossible. The support battalions of the 25th Brigade, the 2/1 Lincolns were ordered forward, to cross the craters; they did so losing many men on the way. Men of the Brigade were at this time seen to be retiring to their front line, having received apparently a shouted order. German prisoners making their way to the British lines were mistaken for a counterattack and there was great confusion.*

As was often the case, the attack crumbled into stalemate. There were more than 11,000 British casualties on the day, the vast majority of those who died were killed within a few yards of their own front-line trenches.

It is difficult to imagine the impact this mayhem would have had on inexperienced young soldiers like Walter Dainty. Originally a Regular Army Battalion the 2nds had lost most of their professional soldiery in the first year of the war. Nevertheless, on 18th October 1915 the 24th brigade, of which the 2nd Northamptons were a part, were transferred to the 23rd Division to show the ropes to the less experienced battalions. The casualties had been so great that experience was a rare commodity.

In March 1916 they moved to the front line again between Boyau de L'Ersatz and the Souchez River where they were exposed to heavy shelling. The 2nd Battalion of the Northamptons were in that long Summer and Autumn campaign known as the Battle of the Somme which ran from 1st July and the 18th November 1916. It was an Allied Offensive by the British and French Armies and is remembered particularly for the great losses on the first day.

On 23rd July 1916 the Battalion marched to billets at Annequin and were training and preparing for action until the 30th. It is possible that Walter was injured, along with three other men and an N.C.O. when a Mills No. 5 Grenade went off prematurely during a practice on 28th July. All the men were sent to hospital and the matter reported to the Brigade H.Q.

On 30th July they marched back to the trenches. There was no major action in their sector but the Germans were continually peppering the trenches with "moaning minnies" (minenwerfers were a type of trench mortar) and aerial darts. The latter never became an important weapon but were feared by the ordinary soldiers. Invented by the French but used by both sides, they were like thick five-inch nails, with a sharpened point. They were packed in boxes of 500 and placed in a hole in the aircraft's cockpit. The pilot pulled a string to release them and they spread over a large area, producing horrific injuries if they struck home.

It was most likely that it was during this period in the trenches that Walter was injured. He would have been sent, via the Field Ambulance, to the nearest Field Hospital and then ferried back to England in one of the Hospital Ships on 8th August 1916. He was taken to the Northumberland War Hospital where he was treated until 4th September 1916 and then, perhaps, sent to a Reserve Battalion for rehabilitation. It was only on 16th September 1916 that the *Chronicle and Echo* reported that he had been wounded.

He reported to the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot on 19th October 1916 and then was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment on 30th October and given the new Regimental Number of 37472. He joined his new Battalion in the field on 1st November but it appears that on the 10th he was "Permanently attached for fatigues" to the 256 (Tunnelling Company) of the Royal Engineers, the last to be formed.

The records are a little confusing but it seems that he remained part of the Royal Berkshires and was, in effect, "seconded" to the Royal Engineers. Fatigues were often given as a punishment but referred to any duty which does not require the use of an armament. In March 1916, many former miners had been withdrawn from the ranks to establish a Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers. It seems very probable that because of his background and strength, (unusually he had a 40-inch chest), he was thought to be most useful in the dangerous work of the tunnelling engineers. The *www.tunnellersmemorial.com* website quotes the words of E. Synton, written in 1918:

> *Everybody damns the Tunneller; GHQ because he invariably has his job finished months before the rest of the Army are ready for the 'Great Push'; Army troops because he invariably upsets all their preconceived notions as to the safety of trenches and dugouts; Divisional troops damn him because he is outside their sphere of influence; Brigade troops because he refuses to move when they do and because he knows by heart that part of the line to which they come as strangers; Brass hats because they dislike his underground habits; Regimental officers because he refuses to allow them to use his deep and snug dugouts; Subalterns because of his superior knowledge; Tommy because he is the direct cause of numerous extra fatigues and – alas that it should be so – because of his extra pay; and last and loudest, the Boche damn him because of his earnest and unceasing attempts at uplifting and converting*

them into surprised angels. It is also owing to his success in this noble work of the missionary that the Tunneller is highly respected by all branches of the forces.

The only blot on his record seems to have been when he left "works without permission whilst on active service", He was sentenced to four days No. 2 Field Punishment. Field Punishment No.1 was quite a common sentence where a soldier was placed in fetters and handcuffs (or similar) and attached to a fixed object. In the early part of the war this was often done with arms outstretched and the legs tied together, as in a crucifixion. There were stories that men had been placed in view of the enemy or with their feet not touching the ground. No. 2 Field Punishment was less onerous, for the man was fettered and handcuffed but not attached to a fixed object, so he was able to march with his unit. Nevertheless, he still had to endure hard labour and usually loss of pay.

Walter seems to have finally been transferred to the Royal Engineers 254 (not 256) Tunnelling Company on 3rd April 1918, with Regimental Number 359899 and it was as a Sapper that he finished the war. His service abroad finished on 15th December 1918 and he returned to England the following day. He was finally demobilised on 21st January 1919 and put on the "Z" Reserve which meant that he could be recalled if hostilities erupted again. He was entitled to the 1915 Star as well as the British War and Victory Medals.

He returned to Ringstead and probably took up again his pre-war job as a railway labourer. Early in 1926 he married Audrey May Liddington, some fourteen years his junior, in the Wellingborough District, possibly in Finedon where Audrey was living with her family, at least until 1916. Her father's brother, John Francis Liddington was killed right at the end of the war in October 1918.

In 1939 his father, George William, now retired, and mother Sarah Ann, together with Walter's brother William Charles who was a stockman and shepherd, were still living in Rosebery Street. Walter, a railway labourer, was living with wife Audrey in Agutter's Cottages, set in the bend of Denford Road. It does not appear that they had any children

Walter died, aged 75, on the 30th July 1965 in the Thrapston District and Audrey died ten years later.

Charles William Dainty (1891-1932)

Charles William Dainty was born in the Sheffield area on 19th December 1891 and baptised at Brightside Parish Church on January 16th 1892. He was the son of George William Dainty and Maria Wilson. He moved with his family back down to Northamptonshire, first to Thrapston and then to Rosebery Street in Ringstead, shortly before the First World War.

He was a stockman on a local farm, although it appears that he had previously been an ironstone labourer like his brother. Charles attested on 23rd November 1915, aged 23 years 11 months and was put on the Army Reserve. He was mobilized on 8th February 1916 and became a soldier in the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 22985. He was much slighter than his older brother being 5ft 5½ inches tall with a 35inch chest but was

deemed “fit for general service”. The war was to put a great strain on his mental and physical health.

He was first posted to the Northamptonshire Regimental Depot and joined the 8th Battalion on the 10th February 1916. He was appointed Lance Corporal on 5th June 1916. In a reorganisation of the Reserve Battalions following conscription, the 8th became the 28th Reserve Battalion. Increasingly, after conscription, soldiers were allocated to a Regiment and Battalion, partly to prevent the wholesale slaughter of the young men from a particular village or town who had signed up together.

On 6th September 1916 Charles sailed to France and joined the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the Front Line on 23rd of the same month. Just three days later, on 26th, he was shown to have been wounded and in brackets beside the entry it has the words “Shock Shell”. As he progressed through the hospital system the words become transposed to “Shell Shock”. It seems likely that it was the mental effect of action rather than a purely physical condition that Charles was suffering from.

His brother, Walter, was also serving in the 2nd Battalion although at this time he was returning to England after being wounded. Physical wounds were treated with respect but mental trauma was often looked on by fellow soldiers as weakness and even cowardice. By the end of the war 80,000 men had been treated for “Shellshock” and many suffered from it after the war had finished. Treatment did improve but the main purpose was to get the men back to the Front as quickly as possible.

In 1917, Siegfried Sassoon, who was treated for “war neuroses”, wrote with bitter irony:

No doubt they’ll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they’re ‘longing to go out again,’—
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
They’ll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,—
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they’ll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter’d all their pride.
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.

Charles was finally sent back to England for treatment on 2nd November 1916 and remained there for 171 days. He first went to Birmingham War Hospital where he was described as still being in a very nervous state. He remained there until 14th November before being transferred to Woodcote Park Convalescent Hospital which was used mainly by the Canadian and troops from the Empire, especially after the carnage of Gallipoli. He recuperated until 28th January 1917. It is likely that the main “cure” was exercise and fresh air. His report stated that he was, “Still out of breath and cannot march far. Improving”.

He returned to the Depot of the 3rd Northants on 30th January 1917 but was deprived of his Lance Corporal stripe because he was “Absent off sick leave on 2nd/3rd April 1917 by twenty-

three hours 55 minutes. It may be that he had been deemed as not suitable for this role and one would guess, pride apart, that he would have been glad to lose it.

On 23rd April 1917 he sailed from Folkestone to Boulogne and joined the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot at Calais. It was not until 4th June 1917 that he re-joined the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the field. 31st July 1917 marked the beginning of a new phase of the war usually known as the 3rd Battle of Ypres This started with a planned assault by the Allies. It was also the day when Edgar Mobbs the charismatic leader of the Northamptonshires' 7th battalion, was killed.

For Charles, it would have been a day, once again of panic and fear for his military record shows that he was "Buried by Shell" blast with, in brackets, "Concussion". On August 3rd he once more returned to England, this time on the Hospital Ship *St Patrick,* a converted ferry from the Fishguard-Rosslare route, requisitioned for the duration of the war. There is some confusion here because the Register for the No. 2 Military Hospital at Old Park, Canterbury has Charles admitted to hospital on the 2nd July 1917 but I think perhaps this should be 2nd *August* and he was in hospital for 15 days until 16th August. He was once again diagnosed as having shellshock. One could hardly be surprised in the circumstances.

He remained in England until 30th September 1917, before returning to Boulogne on the following day. On 3rd October 1917 he was posted to the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot in Calais before joining the 7th Battalion of the Northants in the field on 9th October. Just three days later on 12th October he was sent to the Field Hospital. Again, he proceeded through the system to Rouen. He had been diagnosed as suffering from Myalgia (acute muscle pain). Once more he returned home and finally was sent to the Red Cross Hospital in Gloucester to recover until 16th January 1918 when he was granted a furlough until the 25th.

I think he must have then been posted to a Reserve Battalion although I have not found any evidence for this. He embarked for France on 4th April 1918 and joined the 7th Battalion on 18th April. Six days later, on the 24th April, he was once wounded, in the leg by a bomb (probably a shrapnel shell). Again, he went through the casualty system from Carrieres to Étaples and on to Trouville.

This time he did not return to England but re-joined the 7th Battalion of the Northants in the field on 16th June 1918. On the 19th June he was treated for Pyrexia (Fever) or P.U.O. (Pyrexia of Unknown Origin). This was more usually known as Trench fever and was an unpleasant and sometimes very painful condition caused by the excretions of lice entering a wound. He was at Trouville, also suffering a "mild" attack of influenza, until 21st September. On 5th November he was sent to the 24th Division's Reception Camp and an 10th November he re-joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. The Armistice was signed on the following day.

Charles remained in France until 28th January 1919, returning to England on the following day. On 24th February 1919 he was demobilised. Perhaps surprisingly, he was placed on the "Z" Register which was for soldiers who could be recalled if hostilities began again.

Charles retuned to Ringstead and in the 1920s was living with his parents in Rosebery Street. We have seen that throughout the war he had suffered from mental and physical “wounds”. It is difficult to believe that these problems did not stay with him in his civilian life. He died in 1932 aged 39 years of age. He was a casualty of the war as much as those who appeared on the Ringstead War Memorial.

Chapter 19

William Davis (1897-?)

The life of William Davis, including his army service, is more difficult to uncover than for most of the men we have written about. We know that he finished the war in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, which is generally not so well documented as the Regimental Battalions. There also happens to be a number of men called William Davis in the Ordnance Corps, and in the Northamptonshire area, of about the right age. His military records have been destroyed but further research and the publication of the 1921 Census may solve some of these problems.

We do know that William was the son of Silas Davis who had been born in North Crawley in Buckinghamshire. Silas's father had been a sawyer there but, at some point, he moved up to Northamptonshire for in 1895 he married Edith Emma Ellen Bradshaw, the daughter of Frederick, the Ringstead village blacksmith. Silas became the village blacksmith like his father-in-law.

The couple had a daughter, Mahala, born on the 11th May 1896, and William followed a year later. In the 1911 Census, we see the family were living in Chapel Road in Ringstead. William was thirteen years old and still in school.

We do not know when William enlisted or even if he went first to another Regiment before joining the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC). There are a number of men named William Davis who were in the AOC, (the "Royal" was added in 1918) but from the *Absent Voters' Lists* for Ringstead we know that his Service Number was 8145.

The *Western Front Association* on its website describes the Calais A.O.C. Base:

> *The AOC issued immense quantities of ammunition for anything from a rifle to a monster siege gun. Some idea of the range and scale of other items supplied can be gained from the following issues made by the Calais Base Ordnance Depot . . . during the first ten months of 1916: 11,000 compasses, 7000 watches, 40,000 miles of cable, 40,000 torches, 3,5000,000 yards of flannelette, 1,250,000 yards of rot-proof canvas, 26,000 tents, 1,500,000 waterproof sheets, 12,8000 cycles, 20,000 wheels, 5,000,000 ant-gas helmets, 4,000,000 pairs of horse and mule shoes, 447,000 Lewis gun magazines and 2,250,000 bars of soap. There was, of course, much else besides including weapons, clothing, footwear and blankets.*

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that William served in both France and Italy. The AOC had to store and supply the Front Line with weapons, armoured vehicles, ammunition but also it was given responsibility for other supplies such as clothing and mobile baths. During the course of the war it had to become a much larger and more complex organisation to keep pace with the new industrialised warfare. One of the major home bases was Weedon Bec in Northamptonshire. The march tune of the RAOC was "The Village Blacksmith".

Interior of hanger, Case Goods Depot of the base Supply Depot, Vendroux (near Calais). ©IWM (Q10019)

It was not an easy posting and the AOC soldiers were often a target for enemy artillery fire. William would have first served in France and then moved on to Italy. The Italian Campaign is one of the most neglected aspects of the hostilities. The Italians had been allied with the Germans and Austrians but never fought with them and changed sides in 1915. In October 1917 French and British troops were sent to Italy after the German-Austrian Army had broken through the Italian Front at Caporetto. They began to close in on Venice but the Allies first defended against and then, finally, defeated the Austrian Army, although it was the Italians, against expectations, who rallied and were the major force in the action.

We know that William was in Italy in September 1918 for, on the 25th, he was admitted to No, 39 Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) when he had suffered a sprained right thumb. At this time 39 CCS was in a village school building at Dueville, a few miles north of Vicenza. William was discharged back to duty five days later.

William was still serving when the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was published in mid-1919 but we see from the Electoral Register that he was back in Ringstead by 1920 and was recorded there until the mid-1920s. In 1939, his father, Silas, was still a “Master Blacksmith”, living with his wife Edith, in Chapel Lane Ringstead.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find William, with any confidence, after that. I had thought that he might be the William Davis who married Raunds girl, Emily Maud Stringer, in 1917 and, after she died in 1924, married her youngest sister, Rose in 1927. The Marriage Certificates show, however, that his father was George and the *1939 Register of England & Wales* shows that he was a younger man. There are many other possibilities but we must leave his story there for the present.

Chapter 20

The Dicks Family

A Simplified Family Tree

William Dicks (Dix) 1762 – 1846 ----------Sarah Wyman 1787 – 1871

I

I I

Korah Dicks ----------Sarah Attley Henry Dicks -------- Mary Bates

1812 -1873 I 1815 -1871 1813 – 1890 I 1817-1859

I ---

I I I I

Sarah A. Harris - Hod Dicks Joseph Dicks --- Sarah A Major Wm Dicks --- Mary A Manning

1851-1915 1851-1886 1851-1911 1851-1915 1853-1913 1857-1907

I I I

Frederick A Dicks **Albert Dicks** -Elizabeth Mullett **Fred Dicks**--Margery Allen

1893 – 1913 1888 - ? 1894 – 1977

The wrong Fred!

Albert Dicks (1885-?)

Joseph Dicks was a local man who, in the 1881 Census was living with his wife Sarah Ann in Church Street in Ringstead. He was an army shoemaker, born in about 1851. Living with the couple are their children Mary J. (9). Emily (8), Thomas H. (5), Ellen (3) and Charles E. (1), all born in the village. By 1891 Sarah and Albert had been added to the family which was now living in Carlow Street.

Albert, who had been born on 27th October 1885 was, in 1911, staying at 84 King Street, Ramsgate, in Kent. The house belonged to Harold Hughes who was a hairdresser. Albert was one of three hairdressers classified as “visitors” and there were also three other young men who were apprenticed to the trade.

It is not clear if Albert was working in Ramsgate but, if so, he moved back initially to 13 Orchard Place, Rushden and then to 60 Irthlingborough Road in Finedon. This information comes from his military records for he had volunteered and attested with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) on 13th September 1915 at Rushden. He was given the Regimental Number 65718. At the time of enlistment he had been working as a hairdresser with Arthur Smith at 130 High Street in Rushden.

He would have first undergone basic training. Before the war this would have been at Aldershot but, between 1914 and 1918, the number of men in the ranks of the RAMC rose from 9000 to 154,000. It had been necessary to open up many other training centres with

Blackpool being the headquarters. The training would have been part medical and part military but would have been of a basic standard: First Aid together with instruction in the correct carrying and loading of stretchers etc. He seems to have been awarded a 5th Rate C.P. on 23rd October 1915. A C.P. was a Collecting Post in a war zone and although I have not found a definition of this award, it seems likely that it was a basic training qualification for attending to, and carrying, casualties.

On 11th January 1916 Albert went with the British Expeditionary Force to France. He was not to return to England until 24th April 1918.

The new mechanized warfare was producing casualties on a huge scale week after week, month after month. The RAMC evolved a system for dealing with this carnage called the "Chain of Evacuation". Lt/Col. T.B. Nicholls of the RAMC wrote:

> *All through the chain of Medical Units from the Front to the Base the wounded man is kept the very minimum of time to attend to his wounds, and then he is moved on, and kept on moving, until he reached either the Base or Home. . . The reason for rapid evacuation is twofold. Firstly, it is very bad for morale if troops see wounded men lying about in large numbers; and secondly, unless Medical Units are cleared they lose their mobility, and also cannot deal with a fresh influx of wounded that might come in quite unexpectedly – e.g. from a surprise counter attack.*

As the soldier was moved further from the Front Line, the more sophisticated the facilities for treatment became. A casualty would be looked at first at a Regimental Aid Post (RAP) within the trench area by a Battalion Medical Officer and his orderlies and stretcher bearers. If necessary, he was then moved to an Advanced Dressing Station, still close to the Front Line manned by members of the RAMC Field Ambulance. If further treatment was required, he would have been taken to a Casualty Clearing Station, usually a tented camp behind the lines. From there he was moved to a Base Hospital, mostly situated near a railway station and the coast. If further treatment was then needed, he would be taken by one of the converted hospital ships to Britain. Here, hospitals began to specialise in certain types of injuries which is why some men seem to have been taken to a more distant hospital than expected. Finally, he might end up in a convalescent hospital run by voluntary organisations.

At each stage along the way, those deemed "cured" were returned to duty because one aim of the system was to put men back into service as quickly as possible.

It seems most likely that Albert was one of the RAMC men working near the Front Line. He was wounded on 19th March 1918 when, during an attack, he was struck by a bullet (or shrapnel – records vary). The track of the bullet passed through his triceps but seems to have lodged because he was said later to also have an "extraction wound". The 19th of March was just two days before the massive bombardment heralding the German "Michael Offensive" which, for a time, seemed might win them the war.

So, Albert himself had to pass through the system from the Casualty Clearing Station to the Base Hospital. In Albert's case he was taken to 54 General Hospital, known as "London General", in Wimereux, on the coast just a few miles north of Boulogne. From Calais a

hospital ship took him back to England and on to the East General Hospital in Cambridge. This was on a huge eight-acre site, now occupied by Cambridge University Library and part of Clare College Memorial Court. At one point it had 1,700 beds and treated some 70,000 casualties during the war.

East General Hospital Cambridge
With thanks to Addenbrookes Arts

He was at Cambridge for just a week before being transferred to the V.A.D. Hospital in Abbots Ripton. This was one of the hundreds of convalescent hospitals set up in large houses, halls and chapels which were run by voluntary organisations. This one was set up in Abbots Ripton Hall, now the home of Lord de Ramsey. Albert would have worn a blue uniform and red tie to show that he was being treated and to prevent him being abused as a "shirker". It was not until 5th June 1918 that it was published that he was entitled to wear a "Wound Stripe" above the left cuff of his uniform.

He was diagnosed with, or developed, anaemia in July 1918 and, at his later Disability Board, it was reported that "Mucous membranes of the face, pale" and that he "always feels run down". It did add that he "may improve". It is possible that the poor diet of the soldiers' life, or intestinal parasites such as hookworms, or even the continual exposure to mild doses of mustard gas may have been the cause.

Albert never returned to France and was demobilised on 23rd July 1919. He was later assessed as having a 20% disablement and was granted a small pension. At first it was eight shillings a week from 24th January 1921 for a year and then seven shillings and sixpence for a further seventy weeks. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

During his convalescence he probably met Elizabeth Mullett (an interesting name for a barber's partner) and married her on the 1st March 1919 at St George Hanover Square, in

London. He was still in the RAMC and his address was given as 43 Yorkshire Street in Blackpool.

Albert took up his trade again and at some point he moved to St Ives (now in Cambridgeshire) where he had a barber's shop at 42 The Broadway. St Ives is only some seven miles away from Abbots Ripton so perhaps he had decided that he liked the place during his convalescence. In the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* we find Albert and Elizabeth living there with their two children Joseph L., born on 7th March 1920, and Joan, born of 8th February 1923. It is at the start of another World War and Albert is in the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) who supervised the observance of the blackouts and he was also a First Aider.

Albert's son, Joseph, remained in the St Ives area until his death in 1983 but I have not yet found Albert or Elizabeth's deaths so it may be that they moved elsewhere for their retirement.

Fred Dicks (1894 -1977)

The life story of Fred Dicks was one that was difficult to trace, partly because most of his military records have been lost but also because it took some time to work out which, of two possible Fred Dicks, he actually was.

Looking back to the early Nineteenth Century, William Dicks (or Dix) and his much younger wife, Sarah (née Wyman), produced a large family including Korah born in Leicester St. Margaret's, possibly in the Workhouse, in 1812 and, a year later, Henry, born in Ringstead. Korah was an unpleasant, rascally man who I have written about elsewhere. He married Sarah Attley and they too had a large family in Ringstead including one son called Hod (or sometimes Odd) in about 1851.

Hod, who seems to have inherited some of his father's characteristics, married Sarah Harris on 25th December 1873, the year his father died. Hod, too, died young, at the beginning of 1886, when he was only thirty-five years old, leaving Sarah a young widow. In the 1891 Census she, and her three children, were living in Church Street with Hod's older brother, John Dicks. By the 1901 census Sarah had had another son, Fred, born in about 1894, some eight years after her husband's death. Was bachelor, John Dicks, the father?

The Civil Birth Registration was in the 2nd Quarter of 1893 with the mother's maiden name given as Harris. It is the *Ringstead Baptismal Register*, however, which reveals that Fred was actually christened Frederick Arthur, the son of Sarah Dicks on 5th February 1894. It is the full name plus the birth date which allows us to identify this Fred and to say that he is the Frederick Arthur Dicks who died, aged twenty, in the Thrapston District, in the third quarter of 1913.

This Fred was a second cousin of Albert whose story is given above. There was another cousin however, the son of William, a brother of Joseph (the father of Albert). In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses for Ringstead there are two children called Fred Dicks. who were seven and seventeen respectively. We have just looked at one, son of Sarah (widow of Hod). The other Fred was also a great grandson of William and Sarah Dicks (nee Wyman).

William and Mary Ann's son, Henry had a son also called William, baptised on 8th February 1853. William junior married Mary Ann Manning and had a son on 26th April 1894 who appears to have been given the shortened name, "Fred". It was this Fred who was in the First World War.

His mother, Mary Ann (née Manning) had died in 1907 and in the 1911 Census, his widowed father, William was an army boot maker living with his two sons, Archie and Fred in Carlow Street. Fred, aged sixteen, was working as a boot riveter but his father and older brother were both unemployed. His father died in 1913 and a year later, the temporary saviour of the army boot trade, the Great War, began.

Unfortunately, as we have indicated earlier, there are few military records for Fred, and none tie them to a home address, so there is a lack of certainty about any of them.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows Frederick Dicks in the 17th Mountain Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery and, in late 1918, he was part of the Army of Occupation there. The 1918 and 1919 *Absent Voters' Lists* for Ringstead also reveal that his Service Number was 168710. His few military records put him in the 11th Mountain Battery. Could this be a simple clerical error? It is possible he was posted to a different unit but as both the 11th and 17th were in Egypt at this time it does not alter our account.

It is possible, however, that he had served in another Regiment or Corps prior to this. He would have been in a protected trade as army boots needed to be made in increasing numbers. He was, however, a single man of the right age so it is almost certain that this protection would not save him from conscription for the whole war.

The Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) had been formed in 1899 as an arm of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, alongside the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA). Its main role had been seen as the manning of the guns of the forts and coastal batteries of the Empire but it also it also became responsible for the heavy gun batteries attached to each Infantry Division.

The Mountain Batteries were the part of the Royal Garrison Artillery tasked with working in mountainous areas and places with difficult terrain, even behind the Western Front. There were seventeen Mountain Batteries, including some manned almost exclusively by Indian troops. There were also a number of Territorial Units.

Mountain Batteries 10 to 17 were sent to be part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) in 1917. The war against the Ottoman Empire, allies of the Germans, and by this time known as the "Sick Man of Europe" was around the Eastern Mediterranean. The EEF had been sent to Egypt initially to protect the Suez Canal but by 1917 operations had extended into southern Palestine. In April 1917 the British lost the 2nd Battle of Gaza, with 6,444 casualties in a humiliating defeat. The Commander of the Force was replaced and after extensive reinforcing and re-fitting the next campaign pushed the Turks back to Jerusalem. In 1918 the Ottomans were forced back further, to Damascus and Northern Palestine, and on 31st October 1918 an Armistice was signed which signalled the end of the once great Ottoman Empire.

Members of the 11th Mountain Battery in action using a light field 3.7-inch mountain howitzer. August 1918 Palestine West Bank Abu Tellul.
Glass stereo negative Accession Number A02969. www.awm.gov.au. Public Domain

After the Armistice the EEF had to remain in Egypt and Palestine as an unpopular Army of Occupation. In March and April 1919 it had to suppress with force an Egyptian Rising. The occupation was also unpopular with the conscripted and volunteer soldiers because it delayed their demobilisation, long after most of their fellow soldiers were home with their families.

The men were finally demobilised and Fred was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals. He returned to Ringstead and in 1919 was in the Electoral Register, living in London End in Denford Road. He married Margery Gwendoline Allen from Woodford in 1926. In the 1911 Census she had been living with her sister and widowed mother in Denford and it appears that all three were working for *Wallis and Linnell,* clothiers, who had a factory there.

At some point the couple, who do not appear to have had any children, moved to 10 Church Street in Hatfield in Hertfordshire and were there in the *1939 Register of England and Wales.* Fred was still a boot and shoe maker and Margery was doing, as was the norm, "unpaid domestic duties".

I believe that the couple did move back to Northamptonshire, living at 4 Grove Road in Thrapston. Fred died on 29th October 1977 aged 83 and Margery followed him on 20th January 1982.

Archibald William Dicks (1889-1917)

After posting the stories of Fred and Albert Dicks on my website I received an e-mail from Brenda Hazel telling of an older brother of Fred called Archibald William Dicks. He had been born in Ringstead in 1890, the son of William and Mary Ann. The 1891 and 1901 Censuses show him living with his family in Carlow Street. His mother, Mary Ann, died in 1907 and in 1911 "Archie" was living with his widowed father, William, and brother Fred.

His father died too in 1913 and it may have been at this time that he left Ringstead for factory work in Irthlingborough. Both he and his father had been out of work in the 1911 Census so it is possible that he had left the Ringstead handsewn men even earlier.

Certainly, he was living in Addington Road, Irthlingborough and working as a Shoe Machine Operator when he married Florence Andrews Botterell (various spellings) in Wellingborough Register Office on 13th November 1915. Florence (or Florrie) had been living with her widowed mother in Hudson's Cottages in Irthlingborough. Her mother had been forced to work as a laundress after the early death of her postman husband.

The couple set up home in Hudson Cottages, probably in Florence's family home. Archibald was working for boot manufacturer John Spencer in Station Road in Irthlingborough. Florence gave birth to their first child, William Reginald Dicks, on 22nd May 1916, so Archie would have seen his son before he enlisted in the following July. The army boot trade was one which could give some exemption from conscription but this carried less weight as the war progressed, and increasingly men had to enlist.

It appears that he was first enlisted with the Suffolk Regiment and given the Regimental Number 35092, but it likely that when he was sent to France in November 1916, he was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Essex Regiment with new number 32961 (sometimes 32931). Unfortunately, few of Archie's military records survive so we can only assume some of his service. At the end of November the 1st Battalion were in the Trones Wood bivouacs, resting between tours of duties in the Front Line. The, now desultory, warfare following the long campaign known as the Battle of the Somme was drawing to a close.

With the new year the German High Command were planning to withdraw their troops to the strong defensive positions they had constructed known as the Hindenburg Line. This withdrawal began on 21st February 1917. The new French Commander-in-Chief of the Allies, General Nivelle, planned to make a grand assault on the enemy, hoping to bring the war to a swift end. The French assembled a million troops to launch an attack in the Second Battle of the Aisne. The British were to launch a diversionary attack a week before to draw German troops away. This campaign was called the Battle of Arras.

The British offensive began with the First Battle of the Scarpe which ran from the 9th to the 14th April. The Essex Regiment's part in this battle was focussed around the village of Monchy-le-Preux. The battle is remembered partly for the terrible losses sustained by the

cavalry of the Essex Yeomanry in holding the village after its capture. They were ordered to advance from the village against the enemy but were forced back by machine gun and artillery fire. The men had to dismount and seek cover in the cellars, but the horses could not escape and the streets were soon littered with the bodies of dead animals, and it was said that the gutters ran with their blood.

The weather was very cold with sleet and snow but the 1st Battalion was directed to carry out a follow up attack, together with the Canadian Newfoundland Regiment, to take the strategically important, but vulnerable, *Infantry Hill*. The terrible weather and the blocked streets delayed the attack for a couple of days giving the Germans time to reorganise. The attack had also been planned to be by the 87th and 88th Brigades but, when it was realised that the 87th would not be ready in time, it was hurriedly decided to attack with only the Essex 1st Battalion and the Newfoundland Regiment.

Simplified map showing attack on Infantry Hill

At 5.30 am on April 14th the two Regiments started this ill-conceived attack, uphill, against a partially surrounded position. The two Regiments had captured Infantry Hill by 7.30 am but before they had time to dig in the Germans counter-attacked. They were on a salient surrounded on three sides by the enemy. The tide rapidly turned and many soldiers were quickly either casualties, or captured, or both. Jeremy Banning, on his website, quotes from the press release given out when a memorial to the Essex Yeomanry and 1st Battalion, (among others), was unveiled in Monchy-le-Preux on 21st May 2016.

> *On 14th April, the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment attacked east of Monchy into a wooded area aiming for their objective, some high ground known as Infantry Hill. Initial success, with ground captured and prisoners taken was reversed by a heavy German artillery barrage plus a simultaneous counter attack by the 3rd Bavarian*

Regiment, one of the enemy's finest fighting units. The battalion suffered 661 casualties, so many that a temporary battalion formed with the Newfoundland Battalion named the 1st Newfoundessex comprising only 400 men.

The Essex 1st Battalion's War Diary has two brief entries for the day:

14. 4. 17 Attacked German line at 5.30 am. Casualties 17 officers 644 other ranks.

14. 4. 17 Remainder of 1st went into Caves in Arras at 8 pm.

Archibald Dicks was one of the men in this ill-fated attack. It was not until 25th May that the *Wellingborough News* reported that Archibald's mother had received official confirmation that he had been missing since April 14th. Again, on the 6th June 1917, the *Chronicle and Echo* reported:

Dicks, Pte. A. (27) Essex R. of 8 Hudson's Cottages, Irthlingborough, missing since April 14th is now reported badly wounded and a prisoner, enlisted July 1916, going to the Front in November.

It must have been an agonising time for Florence but she would now have had some hope of better news, after thinking Archie was probably dead. Jean Rowland has said that, in May, Florence had received a letter from Archie in his prison-of-war camp saying that he was seriously wounded in the leg and was a prisoner in Germany. It was again reported in the *Northampton Mercury* of 31st August 1917 that he was a POW.

In fact, the death of Archie on 7th May 1917 had been published in the *Daily Casualty Lists* on 22nd August. His death certificate records that he died, aged 26, in Hamborn-en-Rhein, now a district of Duisburg. There was a prison camp at Hamborn and I think he was in a hospital there, or nearby, when he died. It is thought that he may have died of the virulent "Spanish Flu" but, if so, his injuries were probably a contributory cause. He would have been buried locally but in 1922 it was decided that the graves of Commonwealth serviceman, who had died all over Germany, should be brought together in four permanent cemeteries, one of which was Cologne. This was done in 1923 (when there was still an army of occupation) and more than 1000 Allied soldiers were buried there as well as some German servicemen. His grave was in Cologne Southern Cemetery (Plot XI. G. 12.).

He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

Florence and son, Reginald, as he was usually called, had to carry on life without Archie. She received a small war pension and did not re-marry. She died in 1933, just 43 years old, and Reginald, aged 16 and now an orphan, had to go and live with his aunt.

Archibald's Grave in Cologne (I think he was 26)
With thanks to Brenda Hazel

Charles Dicks ?

There is a Charles Dicks on the *Kettering Roll of Honour* website, who was born in Ringstead (possibly in 1897), and died at home. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate this man although there is a Charles Edward Dicks born in about 1880. I have contacted the compiler of the website but there is no longer contact with the local person who researched this Roll of Honour so no further information is possible.

Chapter 21

The Dickens Family

George Thomas Dickens was originally from Finedon but he was living in Ringstead when he married local girl, Mary Ellen Bates, on 22nd June 1897 in the Parish Church. They went on to have a large family but fortunately it seems that only the oldest two sons had to fight in the Great War. The event that would bring work to their bootmaker father , George, would also put the two boys, Horace George and Arthur in danger of their lives. The following sons, Bert, William and Ernest were lucky enough to be too young to be conscripted.

George & Mary Ellen Dickens with their family
From left: Ernest, Bert, Ivy Arthur & Horace. (c 1908/09)
With thanks to Caroline Dickens

Horace George Dickens (1898-1966)

The oldest son, Horace George, was born on 27th September 1898 and baptised in Ringstead Church on 19th July of the following year. We see, in the 1901 Census, that the couple had first lived in Wellingborough, where Horace had been born, prior to moving on to Rushden before the birth of Arthur. It was in 21 Robert Street in Rushden that the family were living in 1901. George was working as a bootmaker in a local factory.

By the 1911 Census there were eight children, the youngest being just five months old. They were now living in a five-room house in Chapel Street, Ringstead and George was a handsewn army bootmaker. Horace (12) and Arthur (11) were still at the local school although Horace was also described as an "errand boy" which could be for a local shop. Certainly George, his father, was not shown as working at home but perhaps Horace was collecting boot and shoe parts from the factories in Raunds for some of the Ringstead homeworkers.

Unfortunately, once again, most of Horace's military records have been lost. As a result we can only give some idea of his wartime service. We do know that he would have been eighteen years old on 27th September 1916 so would have been conscripted after that date. He was posted to the 15th Battalion of the Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment, known as the "Sherwood Foresters", and given the Regimental Number 73524.

The 15th had been formed in February 1915, by the Mayor of Nottingham and a Committee, as a "Bantam Battalion". This was in the days of volunteer "Pals Battalions". The Bantam Battalions were formed because it was discovered that many men were under the minimum height needed to become a soldier. Poor diet and living conditions had seen the stature of many working-class men diminish compared with earlier ages. The "Bantams" were for men between five foot and five foot three inches in height with an expanded chest of at least 34 inches. As the war progressed, and men were killed and transferred, the Bantams began to lose their unique status. On the *Wartime Memories Project* website it quotes that in 1916:

> *The division received new drafts of men to replace losses suffered on the Somme, but the CO [commanding officer]. soon discovered that these new recruits were not of the same physical standard as the original Bantams, being men of small stature from the towns, rather than the miners and farm workers who had joined up in 1915.*

We know that, when the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was published, Horace Dickens had been wounded and demobilised. We also know that the 15th Battalion had taken part in 1917 in the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the fighting at Houthulst Forest and the Second Battle of Passchendaele. We cannot be sure that Horace was with the Sherwood Foresters during this time but it seems certain that he had joined them by 1918.

In this year the 15th fought at the Battle of Bapaume, the Battle of Ypres, the Battle of Courtrai, the action of Tieghem (near Oudenaarde In Belgium) and ended the war north-east of Renaix in Belgium.

Horace did not see this year out with the 15th Battalion. *The War Office Weekly List* for May 28th 1918 records in the May 23rd Casualty List that H.G. Dickens (Ringstead) of the

Sherwood Foresters had been wounded. This appears to be after the great German Offensive of March and was in the "comparatively" quiet May period. Perhaps he was one of the three casualties when a Battalion working party was helping to dig a new line of reserve trenches on the 11th May or was he hit when German aeroplanes dropped bombs near the billets? We may never know but it seems likely that he came back to England and, after treatment, he was demobilised.

He returned to Ringstead and married Dorothy Lilian Hodson, daughter of a Raunds' shoemaker, at the end of 1924. They did not stay long in the area and the 1928 *Kelly's Directory* records Newsagents, *Hodson and Dickens* at 65 Canterbury Street in Coventry. I am not sure if the "Hodson" was because of Dorothy or if Horace was in partnership with a member of her family.

Horace outside the Hodson & Dickens Newsagents in Coventry
With thanks to Caroline Dickens

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Horace and Dorothy were living in Colchester Street. Their newsagent' business was on a corner, with the shop address being in Canterbury Street and their house door in Colchester Street. In the 1940's edition of *Kelly's Directory* the shop was in the name of Horace Dickens only.

It seems likely that they retired to Northamptonshire, thought to be in Stanwick by the family. Horace died on 16th August 1966, aged 67, and Dorothy in 1990 in the Wellingborough District.

Arthur Dickens (1899-1928)

The second son of George and Mary Ellen Dickens also saw action in the Great War. Unlike his older brother, many of his military records still exist but they do give a confusing picture.

Before he was conscripted under the M.S.A. (Military Service Act 1916) he was a “pressman” in a local Boot and Shoe Factory. The pressman operated presses to cut boot or shoe pieces out of the leather. My understanding is that he would have cut the “rough stuff”, the soles, insoles, heel lifts, etc., and the “clicker” would do the more skilled cutting of the uppers to make best use of the hide and ensure that the pairs of boots or shoes matched. He was only eighteen years one month when he signed up so he had quickly learnt his trade.

He enlisted on 14th March 1918 at Northampton and was 5 feet 4 inches tall with a 34-inch chest. Perhaps, surprisingly, he was deemed to have a good physical development. With unusual care, he was stated to have auburn hair and hazel eyes, with a fair complexion and first-rate eyesight. He weighed 124 pounds (56.25 kilos.).

Arthur Dickens with his Lance Corporal stripe
With thanks to David Dickens for use of the photograph and Jon Abbott for copying it.

His records have survived but they are often smudged and faint and difficult to decipher. He was first posted to the 53rd Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment With the destruction of much of the Regular and Volunteer Battalions there was continuous reorganisation to cope with new recruits, many of them eighteen years old. It appears that he was first allocated to the 27th (Training Reserve) Battalion but this may have been a clerical error as it had been reorganised as the 53rd (Young Soldiers) Battalion.

The idea of the 53rd was to provide three months of basic training for new recruits. It was based at Brocton Camp in Cannock Chase, Staffordshire from January 1918. Brocton was one of two camps built from scratch on the estate of Lord Lichfield at the beginning of the war.

After this training he was transferred to the 52nd (Graduated) Battalion of the Bedfordshires where he would remain until he was considered ready for active service. The 52nds were based in Taversham in May 1918 but returned to its previous home base in Norwich soon after and remained there until after the Armistice. It was then sent to be part of the Army of Occupation, allowing the war-weary and increasingly disgruntled troops from the Western Front to return home and demobilise.

Arthur seems to have progressed well because he was appointed Acting Lance Corporal on 31st May 1918 which was about the time when he would have joined the 52nds. Unfortunately, on the 30th July 1918 he overstayed his draft leave from 11 pm to 12.30 am at Taversham and was "deprived of his stripe" on 3rd August. The Conduct Sheet shows the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry rubber stamp so it may be that he transferred to them just before he sailed to France

The page of his records detailing his various moves has almost faded into oblivion. It appears, however, that he was first posted to the Infantry Brigade Depot in France as part of the 52nd Battalion of the Bedfordshires, presumably in August 1918. He was soon after transferred to the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Regiment (possibly the 2/4th Battalion). He was given a new Regimental Number 47695. Whichever is correct, it was at about this time that the transfer happened.

Again we have no dates but it seems that he was quickly transferred again, this time to the 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment, and gained another number, 51319. As he was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals it would seem that he was in France before the Armistice was signed and was in a war zone. Without some idea of dates it is difficult to be clear about where and with which regiment Arthur saw action. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* compiled in late 1918 or early 1919 shows that he was with the Gloucesters and part of the Army of Occupation. He was, therefore, with them after the war finished on November 11th 1918.

We know that Arthur was transferred one last time and became a Sapper in the 2nd CCC of the Royal Engineers. As battalions left France and demobilised, recent recruits were transferred into units still in service in France and Belgium. I believe that "CCC" stands for Canal Control Committee. This was established to operate the inland waterways in France and Belgium. The Royal Engineers during the war had, among other tasks, maintained the railways, road, water supply, bridges and transport as well as telephones, wireless and other signalling equipment. The Engineers also built the front-line fortifications and maintained the artillery and specialist units had dug the mines to allow the blowing up of enemy positions. They were also involved in the destroying of infrastructure where necessary. After the war they used their varied skills to help put the countries back together again.

We know that Arthur was in the Royal Engineers in September 1919 because he once more overstayed his leave from 6.30 a.m. on the 20th September until 6.30 am on the 23rd. For this he was put on open arrest (not locked up), given seven days Field Punishment number 2, and docked three days' pay. At the side of the entry it appears to say, "L. Signs" and I wonder if this means he was in one of the Signals Companies of the Royal Engineers. After the war they became a separate Corps.

In spite of his run-ins with authority, he elected to extend his service until 15th February 1920. On that date he was examined at Wimereux, just north of Boulogne. This had been a large hospital complex and became the British Army headquarters in France. He returned to England on 17th March 1920 and was finally demobbed on 7th April. I am not sure if they were still being stripped and de-loused by this time.

He returned to Ringstead soon after. Also living in in Ringstead, in the Sivers Building, were Oliver John and Bertha Ellen, (or sometimes Helen), Pothecary. Oliver, who was from Woodford, had served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the war. He had married Bertha Bates, daughter of William and Maude, in 1917. Sadly, he had contracted Pulmonary Tuberculosis (T.B.), probably during his war service, and died on 19th October 1923 aged about 26, he was one of the many unseen casualties of the war [See later biography.]. Bertha was granted a small army pension for herself and her three children, one of whom had been born a few months after her husband's death.

In 1926 Arthur Dickens married widow, Bertha Pothecary, and they had two sons, Eric and Roy. Sadly, Arthur too did not live long. The Northampton Mercury of Friday 19th October 1928 reported:

> *DEATH. – Mr A. Dickens of Ringstead, died on Saturday morning in Northampton Hospital following an operation for appendicitis. He was only 26 years of age, and an employee of Mr. Child's heel factory at Rushden.*

The age is wrong but the Death Index of England and Wales confirms that he was actually 28 years old. The removing of the appendix was an operation that had been around since the Eighteenth Century but the one performed on Edward VII, that had delayed his coronation in 1902, made it an increasingly popular practice. The maxim seemed to become – if in doubt whip it out. But all surgery carries risks and it seems far less common today. It may be, however, that he had peritonitis caused by a burst appendix and this was the cause of death

Bertha, a widow twice before she was thirty and with five children married for a third time, to Percy Mayes, in 1936. The couple with their large family of mixed surnames are together, in the Sivers Buildings. in the 1939 Register of England and Wales. There are two closed records so it may be that there were two further children. Bertha E Mayes died in 1950 aged 51.

Chapter 22

Hubert Archibald Edwards (1889-1931)

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* could miss men who were born of local families and spent their childhoods in the village. It could also include soldiers whose time in the village was brief.

The grandparents of Hubert Edwards, William and Hepzibah (née Smith) Edwards were from Irchester and moved to Raunds soon after their marriage in 1857. Their son, John Henry, was baptised there on 28th February 1864 and he married local girl, Mary Ellen Coles, on 19th November 1885.

John was a shoe riveter in a local factory and Mary Ellen, a dressmaker. Their children were all born in Raunds. Hubert Archibald Edwards, their third child was born in 1889 and baptised in Raunds Church on the 18th August of the same year. In 1901 he was living with his parents in Grove Street. By 1911 Hubert and his older brother, James William, had followed their father into the shoe trade. His parents had been married 25 years and had had six children, all of them still living. The family were living in Highfield Cottages, next to the Coggins factory in Marshalls Road.

They would have been unaware that the Great War was only a few years away. Hubert's older brother, James, enlisted with the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment as a very early volunteer, on 24th November 1914. He survived the war and rose to become an Acting Lance Sergeant. Hubert enlisted a year later on 26th November 1915, a few months before conscription was introduced.

He enlisted at Raunds and was put on the Army Reserve List. He was 26 years 4 months old, 5 foot 8 inches in height with a 35 inch chest. He was working as a pressman in a local boot and shoe factory. Just a few months before, on 12th June 1915, he had married Florence Mary Hodson and they had set up home in Church Street in Ringstead.

His records are a little confusing but it appears that he was posted to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. The confusion is that written around the top of the Attestation Form are a number of notes, including Norfolk County T.F.[Territorial Force] Association 387, Kettering and Group 32. Just what connection these notes have to Hubert's enlistment is unclear. He was not mobilized until the 1st March 1917 and possibly joined the 1st Norfolks with Regimental Number 203705, on 23rd May 1917 and travelled with them to Infantry Base Depot (IBD) 17 in France.

The IBDs were holding camps, situated in Europe, within easy distance of one the Channel ports They received men on arrival from England and kept them in training while they were awaiting posting to a unit. Depot 17, like many others, was based at Étaples, south of Boulogne. These Depots were hubs where both supplies and soldiers were kept and then transported to the Front as needed. Later in the year, in September and October a number

of mutinies took place there, fuelled by the harsh regime which the New Zealand troops especially took exception to.

It was from here that Hubert would have been posted to the 10th Battalion of the Essex Regiment on the 14th June and given the Regimental Number 203038. The 10th had been fighting in the Battle of the Scarpe as part of the British Offensive known as the 2nd Battle of Arras. They had then been moved to the Flanders region and it seems likely that Hubert joined them there.

Cinema Queue Étaples 1916. At the YMCA Hut. (pastel and gouache)
By Iso Ray an Australian artist who was a V.A.D Nurse at the camp. Public Domain.
www.awm.gov.au/collection/C173377.

The first significant engagement was the Battle of Pilckem Ridge which started on 31st July 1917, a French and British attack. On the 31st rain began to fall and the shell blasted ground became a quagmire for which the campaign, often known as the Battle of Passchendaele is now remembered.

It appears that, on 10th November 1917, Hubert returned home. It may be that the army found Hubert a less than sturdy soldier but if this was the case we begin to see a possible reason. On 20th November he was admitted to the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital and from there to the Military Hospital at Purfleet. He was granted a furlough from there from

24th January to 2nd February 1918 at which time he was still part of the 10th Battalion of the Essex Regiment. His medical category was B2. This was defined as, able to walk 5 miles and to see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes.

He was again transferred, on the 3rd February 1918, to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Essex Regiment The furlough entry also has a Labour Corps stamp so perhaps this was the point at which he was immediately transferred to them. The note on his records states, "Re-transferred having been retired as unsuitable for duties with above unit".

His transfer to the Labour Corps was "permanent and compulsory". He joined the 576 Home Employment Company of the Corps and I think that it is unlikely that he saw any further action. He was absent without leave from 10.30 pm on 10th March 1918 until 12 pm on the 11th March for which he forfeited two days' pay.

There is some confusion here, for the Essex Territorial Force Association wrote to the 4th Essex on the 5th September 1918, to inform them that Hubert's wife had moved to Strood Lodge in Buxted, Sussex. Could it be with his continued absence she had been forced to take a job in service? This Memorandum also has the Labour Corps stamp so it may be that the local man had not been aware of Hubert's transfer and it was forwarded on to them.

Hubert was not finally demobilised until 25th February 1919 (although still six months before his brother James). He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals. We see that he was also due for an Army Pension because of a 40% disablement, becoming 30%. He was to receive eleven shillings for 26 weeks and then eight shillings and threepence for a further 26 weeks. After that it was conditional. We now see that the diagnosis for his illness was V.H.D.. These initials stood for Valvular Disease of the Heart and this indicated a serious organic disease or heart malfunction. It was stated that this had been "aggravated" by his army service. It was no surprise that Hubert may have struggled as a soldier.

After the war Hubert lived first in Rotton Row and then in North Street in Raunds. Florence had returned home and the couple had two children, John in 1920 and Mary in 1922. Perhaps surprisingly, Florence died first, aged 40, in 1930 but Hubert soon followed her, aged 42, in 1931. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, on the eve of another World War, daughter Mary, a coat machinist at a clothiers was living with her grandparents John and Mary Ellen Edwards at 46 Marshalls Road in Raunds.

Hubert Edwards was a man who survived the war but his army service probably hastened his death. Really a Raunds man, his brief time in Ringstead during the war has written him into the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*.

Chapter 23

The Farr Family

Christopher John Farr (1886-1968)

The Farr family had originally come from Haynes in Bedfordshire. Thomas Farr, son of William and Martha, had been born there in 1865. He had married Eliza Randall in Haynes on 18th October 1884. The couple had a daughter, Elizabeth Jane, first, who seems to have lived with her grandparents and died aged just 20 in 1905. Their second child was a boy, Christopher John, born on 2nd September 1886, (1887 according to the 1939 Register, but I think this may be wrong).

Christopher John was only known by his first name in the official records at the beginning and end of his life. This causes some problems because Farr was not an uncommon name and there was a John Farr born in Haynes in 1888. I had come across some very unflattering reports on a John Farr's scholastic achievements at the Haynes Charity School, which I first thought were about our man but I now think are about a younger John Farr.

The family moved to Souldrop and then to Covington and John started work as a labourer. At some point, while still living at Covington with his parents, John met Mary Ann Dicks from Ringstead. She was shown on the marriage certificate to be still living there, when they married at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel at Nether (or Lower) Dean in Huntingdonshire, on 25th December 1909. This is only a couple of miles from Covington and six miles from Ringstead.

In the 1911 Census John and Mary Ann, ("Polly"), were living in the Doddington Road Cottage in Wellingborough. He was working on a farm as a shepherd and the couple had one daughter, Elizabeth Mary, who was just nine months old. Further children followed, Gladys on 22nd July 1912 and John Thomas William on 7th June 1915.

The military records of his namesake, John Farr from Haynes (born about 1888), have survived but for our John they have been largely destroyed. We see in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he had been in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, had served in France and Belgium, and had been "Released for Munitions" before demobilisation.

Fortunately, the *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* also show that at some point, our John Farr was with the Royal Fusiliers and gives his Regimental Number as 51907. This allows us to be certain that the *Medal and Award Roll* and *Medal Card* for a John Farr who was first with the 20th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment is our man.

The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) had, at the outbreak of the First World War, four regular battalions but then went on to raise 43 more reserve, service, labour and garrison battalions. The 20th Battalion had originally been formed in Epsom by the *Public Schools and University Men's Forces* on the 11th September 1914 but this volunteer force

was taken over by the Government on the 1st July 1915 and the public school element had largely been dissipated by casualties and commissions.

There still remains difficulty in working out how his time with the 4th and 8th Battalions fit together. The 8th Battalion disbanded in France on 6th February 1918 as part of the general reorganisation of the Regiments. It is possible, however, that the "8th Battalion" entry in the *Roll of Honour* may be a mistake or a very temporary posting.

What we have been able to deduce, with help from Craig (ss002d6252) on the *Great War Forum* website, is that using his Regimental Number as a guide, John Farr was first called up around the 29th May 1916. We also know from Medal Roll that he arrived in France on the 2nd December 1916, where he joined the 10th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. The Battalion had been in and out of the Front line throughout 1916 and, in September, had suffered heavy casualties, losing some 375 men killed, wounded or missing at the notorious Battle of High Wood.

The Battalion had moved west to the coastal area around Bray, near Dunkerque but once more moved east to take part in the campaign known as the Battle of Arras. John would have taken part in the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe. As usual, it was a period of gain and loss with the defenders almost always having the advantage. The main purpose of the British offensive was to draw German troops from the French offensive further east but they had suffered terrible losses and were in some disarray.

The British Commander-in-Chief, General Haigh, had been long planning a Flanders Offensive and the Third Battle of Ypres was launched on the 31st July 1917. As part of this, the 10th were in the Battles of the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood. The Allied tactics had now changed to one of "bite and hold" where a concerted attack was made on a comparatively small front with an agreed objective. When taken, this was to be consolidated against counter attack, before the next "bite". The Battle was a comparative success but at the cost to the Australian, who led the attacks on Polygon Wood, of 5,700 lives.

After that, although not out of the fighting line, the 10th was being prepared for disbandment, as part of the reduction in the number of Battalions in each Brigade. During February 1918, men were posted to the 2nd, 4th and 13th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers and by the end of the month the 10th ceased to exist.

John moved to the 4th Battalion on the 5th February 1918. They were in the Cherisy to Fontaine Sector and on the 19th March the *War Diary* records that they were in Shaft Trench and it was a "quiet day". On the 21st, a massive enemy bombardment signalled the start of the German, Michael Offensive. As with many other Allied units on the Western Front the 4th Royal Fusiliers had to try to make as orderly a retreat as possible. The Germans had also evolved a new tactic where elite troops punched holes in the Allied lines and then the isolated troops were encircled and cut off. This offensive continued to make progress for weeks but eventually the Germans became exhausted of men and supplies and the decisive Allied counter-attack followed, although not without resistance and casualties, until the Armistice on the 11th November.

As we have seen, the Ringstead *Roll of Honour* states that he had been "released for munitions" and this appears to have happened on the 13th July 1918. We do not know the reasons but perhaps it was decided that, either mentally or physically, John was no longer fit for active service. He would not have had specialist skills for munition work but was probably part of a "bulk release" to work in the munitions factories and supply chain which was struggling to keep pace with the huge demand for ammunition for the Western Front.

After demobilisation John and Mary Ann set up house in Pearce's Yard in Ringstead. They had two further children, Ivy in 1920, and Cyril Archibald on 24th August 1923. The 1924 Electoral Register shows the couple in the Council Houses in Denford Road during the 1920s.

The Council Houses in Denford Road. With thanks to Peter Davies.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* shows John and Mary Ann still living in Denford Road. John was a labourer in a quarry and their five children were still living with them. Elizabeth and Gladys were tailoresses and [John Thomas] William was a "Tip Heeler" in Adams Brothers' factory in Raunds. The younger two children's records have not been "unblocked".

There is a link between the Farrs and Ringstead's most infamous death for, on Wednesday 31st May 1939, the *Mercury and Herald* reported that:

> *Digging a hole in their garden for a clothes-post, tenants in a house in Denford-road, Ringstead Northants, unearthed a skeleton – and they have probably solved an 89-year-old mystery. They are hoping that the remains can be identified as those of Lydia Attley, a girl who disappeared from the village after a love affair with a married man.*

If that hope is realised the tenants Mr. John Farr and his son Cyril, will claim from the Home Office a £200 reward. [The newspaper thought it very unlikely that the Home Office would pay out.]

When Lydia vanished, suspicion fell on her lover, a butcher named Weekly Ball. Mr Farr's home was built on the site of the field where Ball kept his cattle.

Christopher John Farr, aged 81 years, and still residing at 61 Denford Road in Ringstead, died on 22nd July 1968 and was cremated on 25th July at Kettering Crematorium. Mary Ann lived to be 96 years old and died on 15th June 1983.

David Farr (1894-1968)

John's Farr's brother, David, was born on 13th September 1894 in Haynes, Bedfordshire, the son of Thomas and Eliza. Thomas was a "horsekeeper" on a farm and it appears that he had to keep moving to find work as his family grew.

In the 1901 Census the family were living in Souldrop. There were five children now with the eldest, John (14) already working as a farm labourer and bringing in a small wage. By 1911 the family had moved again, this time to Covington, seven miles south-east of Ringstead. John, the eldest, had moved away with his wife and child but still at home were Bert (sometimes Burt - or it seems likely - Archibald), David and Persey (Percy), all farm labourers.

David may have had to go in search of work for on 14th September 1914 he married Dora Ann Robinson at Brafield-on-the-Green, some five miles south-east of Northampton and 16 miles west of Souldrop. There was a Dora Robinson, born and living in Ringstead, but she was Dora M. This Dora was from a Brafield family, daughter of George and Mary Elizabeth. Ages seem to slide a little in the Robinson and Farr Families. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Dora's birth date is shown as 26th October 1897, which has been later amended to 1894 and which I think was actually 1893 for she was baptised on December 3rd of that year. David's birth year was shown as 1896 but I think was really 1894.

The First World War had begun on the 28th July 1914. At this point in time it probably seemed unlikely that it would touch David, or were they getting married, as many did, in case he was called up at some stage. At the beginning of the war, it was mainly Regular soldiers who were involved, soon to be joined by the volunteer battalions.

Unfortunately, most of David's military records have not survived but the few that remain give a few, sometimes confusing, clues into his time in service. We must try to sew these together without stretching the fabric too far.

As usual, we will start with the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which was published in Thrapston in June 1919 and so we would expect it to be accurate. It shows that David had been wounded and was, at the time of the compilation, (late 1918 or early 1919) a Private and had been in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. He was now in the Army of Occupation. Using these facts as a basis we can search the Medal Cards and there only

seems one David Farr who fits these facts. He was a Private in the Suffolk Regiment and had two Regimental Numbers 4515 and 201520.

If we then look at the three Casualty Forms for D. Farr we can deduce that he enlisted around March 1916 (after conscription was introduced) and was with the 4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. The two records for 1916 give the Regimental Number as 6515 but no medal card exists for this number in the Suffolks and we must assume that it is a clerical error. From these forms it seems that he was sent to the Western Front in June or July 1916.

It seems likely that David fought in the campaign of 1916 known by the overall name of the Battle of the Somme. At this time the 4th Battalion were in the 98th Brigade of the 33rd Division. David may have missed the opening battles of this campaign including the infamous first day of the battle of Albert, on 1st July, when the British suffered 58,000 casualties of which more than 19,000 had been killed.

Other battles followed for the Suffolks but it was not a war injury that carried David into the casualty hospital system. On the 8th December 1916 he was transferred from the 99th Field Ambulance to Number 39 Casualty Clearing Hospital which at this time was at Allonville near Amiens. He was suffering from German Measles. In the crowded quarters of army life at the Front contagious and infectious diseases spread rapidly. He was in the Hospital for 19 days but on the day of his release, on 26th December, he was re-admitted with Myalgia. This was chronic and severe muscle pain which had a number of causes and it may be that the Rubella was the main cause.

A Red Cross Train, France by H. Septimus Power 1918: Australian War Artist.
©IWMART 1031

He was only in hospital for a further three days before, on 28th December 1916, being transferred to the Sick Convoy. The transcription also states that he was sent to No 3 Ambulance Train. It is not clear but this may mean that he was sent by ambulance train to the main hospital centre at Rouen for further treatment. On the *Discovering Anzacs* website it tells the story of Gunner Maurice Chambers who was wounded and taken to No. 38 Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly and was then transported by No. 3 Ambulance Train to Rouen on 1st January 1917. Heilly was ten miles from Allonville where David was being treated.

We know that David returned to active service but probably he was transferred to the 8th Suffolks and given a new Regimental number 201520. In early 1917 all the Territorial forces were given six-figure numbers. The *Medal and Award Roll* has David serving in the 4th, 8th and 9th Battalions of the Suffolk Regiment as well as the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment. On top of this we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was later in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolks and was finally in the Army of Occupation, possibly with this battalion. As we have no dates for these changes, it makes tracing his service almost impossible.

What we do know is that he was wounded while still serving with the Suffolk Regiment. The "Incident Date" is given as 14th December 1917. This would usually mean that the actual date of his wounding would have possibly been some six weeks previous to this date, perhaps in late October or early November so it was probably in the last throes of the terrible Battle of Passchendaele. David was allowed a wound stripe above his left cuff to show that he had been a casualty.

The 8th Battalion was disbanded in France on 7th February 1918 and the 9th on the 16th February. This may explain the two battalion in his records, with his time in the 9th being a brief time before a more permanent transfer. On 24th May 1918 more than 400 men from the **7th** Battalion of the Suffolks were transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment with Regimental Number 210520. The great losses of Passchendaele in 1917 and in the German offensive of April 1918, had led to battalions having to be amalgamated and reformed and it seems that David was caught up in this confusion and change.

The Great War had finally ended on 11th November 1918 and David then served with the Army of Occupation. He returned home, probably with the 1st Cambridgeshires and by now would have been beginning to believe that he had done his bit and wanted to return to his family. It seems that he took matters into his own hands. The *Northampton Mercury* reported on 16th May 1919:

> David Farr, of Raunds, D Co., 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment was charged with being a deserter since March 5th – Remanded to await an escort.

I have not discovered what punishment was imposed. David was finally demobilised and returned to his family. He was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals.

He continued as a farmworker. The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* has David born 13th September 1896 (but I think 1894) and working as a general farm labourer. Dora was

performing the usual “Unpaid Domestic Duties” and there are two children Hilda, born on 18th November 1919, who was a machinist in a boot factory and Daisy, born 13th August 1926, who was still at school. They were living in Joy Cottages next to Mapleton Lodge in Raunds.

The couple later moved to 25 Hill Street in Raunds and it was there that David died, aged 73, on 16th May 1968. He was cremated on the 21st May at Kettering and his ashes scattered in the Garden of Remembrance. Just a few months later, on 23rd August 1968 Dora, aged 74, died too, and was cremated like her husband and her ashes scattered.

Percy Thomas Farr (1898-1969)

Percy Thomas Farr was the fifth child of Thomas and Eliza, born in Haynes in Bedfordshire on 23rd November 1897. He was with the family in 1901 in Souldrop and in 1911 in Covington. He was fourteen years of age and, like his two older brothers, a farm labourer. The family moved soon after to Chapel Street in Ringstead. By 1914 Percy had changed career and was working in a factory as a shoehand.

When war was declared in August 1914, he would have hoped that it “would all be over by Christmas” but it was not to be. In November 1915 Percy turned eighteen years of age and on the 5th February 1916, aged eighteen years three months he attested for the army.

He first joined the 8th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment at Thrapston and was given the Regimental Number 19668. He was 5ft 2½inches tall with a thirty-five-inch chest and grey eyes (as almost all new recruits seemed to have).

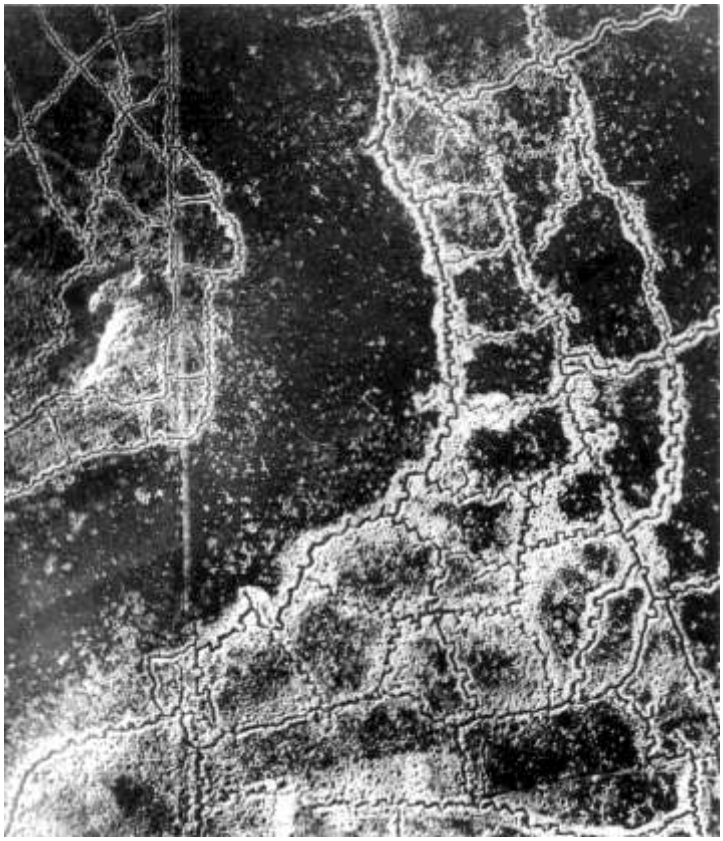
The 8th Battalion never left England but acted as a reserve battalion, training the new recruits and then feeding them into the fighting units. On 1st September 1916 it became the 28th Training Reserve of the 6th Reserve Brigade. After he had completed his initial training and reached nineteen years of age, he was posted to the 9th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment and given the new Regimental Number of 50272. He embarked for France on 6th December 1916 and joined the 9th Battalion in the field on 15th December.

The 9th (Reserve) Battalion had been formed in Bury St Edmunds in September 1914. It had been sent to France and, on the 30th August 1915, it landed in Boulogne. On 11th October 1915 it transferred, with the 71st Brigade, to the 6th Division.

On 25th November the 6th Division had taken over the La Bassée sector which included the Givenchy Ridge and the Cuinchy Brickstacks. After a month it moved to the Cambrin-Hohenzollern Front of about 5,500 yards. The 192nd Machine Gun Company joined the Division on 13th December. It was at about this time that Percy joined the Battalion in the field. Because of the terrible fighting of the earlier Somme battles this would have been a feared posting but the troops of both sided were by then so exhausted that it proved a comparatively quiet four months. It was only the raids that were ordered that caused any great casualties.

On 1st March 1917 the 6th Division took over a 11,000-yard Front from the Double Crassier at Loos, (two, hundred-foot high slag heaps), to Hulluch and Hohenzollern. Through March and into April there were raids and counter-raids and considerable trench mortar and artillery bombardments.

The role of the 9th Battalion of the Suffolks within the 6th Division is a little more difficult to establish. As we have seen, in November 1916, the Battalion had gone into army reserve at Noeux-les-Mines, south of Bethune, where they had spent Christmas. By early January 1917 it had moved to the Quarries Sector around Hulluch. From then on, they followed the usual routine of time in the Front Line, interspersed with time in Support and in Reserve, at either Philosphe, Mazingarbe or Labourse throughout the rest of the summer. Then they were ordered south to take part in the Cambrai operations.



Aerial view of Loos-Hulluch trench system 22nd July 1917. German trenches right and bottom showing complexity of the systems that had built up by this time. (IWM Q 45786)

Percy did not make it to Cambrai. On 1st June 1917 he was badly injured. He received gunshot wounds to his right eye (omitted from some records), hand, shoulder and thigh. Although recorded as "GSW" it seems most likely that his wounds were caused by a shrapnel artillery shell. These were anti-personnel shells which carried a large number of bullets close to the target which they then ejected, the velocity of the shell carrying them forward. Even when not formally titled as a "battle" there was almost always some moral-sapping enemy artillery fire.

Percy would have gone through the field hospital system probably ending up at Boulogne. He was ferried across the Channel by the Hospital Ship *St Patrick* on 8th June 1917. Percy did not return to the Front.

We do not have any details of his time in the British hospitals but on 28th March 1918 he was posted to Felixstowe, one of the bases of the Suffolk Regiment. He would have been trained and assessed here and it was obviously decided that he was still not fit for active service.

Percy was transferred on 25th April to the 436th Agricultural Company of the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) which, it appears, was based at Northampton. He was given a new Regimental Number, R/452130. He would have been allocated to a farm to work, possibly living there. The war ended but he continued with the Company

On 3rd June 1919 he was posted to the Eastern Command Labour Centre at Sutton in Surrey. This was the headquarters and training centre of the Labour Corps. From there he was briefly transferred to the Remount Depot of the RAMC at Romsey. The RAMC Remounts were responsible for the provision of horses and mules to all other army units. Some 120,000 passed through Romsey during the war and up to 5,000 horses, looked after by some 2,100 men, were at this hilltop camp at any one time. Soldiers who served in the Remounts usually had the letter "R" as a prefix to their number and we see this in Percy's case. The horses and mules would have been sent to Southampton for shipment to France but this traffic was coming to an end and Romsey closed in November 1919.

On 27th September 1919 Percy was finally demobilised. His parents had moved to Raunds and during his military service, Percy had changed his next of kin from his father to his mother. I had thought, at first, that he had died but I do not think that that was the case. Percy seems to have first lived with his parents at 28 North Street in Raunds. He had been given medical category B1 and a 30% Disability Pension. Despite this he was put in Class Z which meant that he could be recalled in an emergency. [At some point he seems to have been given another Regimental Number 333200.]

In 1922 Percy married Elsie May Copperwheat. From the Electoral Rolls, it appears that he may have lived for a time with his brother John and his wife, but this is not clear. We do know that by 1931 Percy and Elsie had moved to North Street in Raunds, possibly in the house of his parents, as his mother had died in 1923. He still kept an allotment in Ringstead.

The couple had two children, Kenneth, born on 12th April 1924, who in 1939 was working in the clicking department of a local shoe factory and Lily, born on 15th March 1927. According to the *1939 Register*, Percy was working on a "Brushing-Up Machine" in the Finishing Department of a Boot Factory.

Elsie died first, aged 67 on 12th April 1968 and Percy followed her, aged 71, on the 23rd January 1969. At the time of his death he was living in 20 Clare Street in Raunds.

Chapter 24

George Robert Feary (1884-1969)

The Feary family had originally come from across the meadows to Ringstead, in the Addingtons. James Feary had been born in 1834 in Great Addington. His first wife May Chapman, who he had married on 13th April 1857, died in 1863. He had married again, less than a year later, to Hannah Sharpe from Little Addington. She was some ten years his junior.

James spent much of his early working life in Burton Latimer working as a foreman on a farm. He returned with his wife and family to Great Addington in about 1882 where he worked as a miller and farm labourer. In all, he had had at least ten children, but it is the youngest child of James and Hannah whose story we are telling here.

George Robert Feary (and the surname has many variations) was born on 11th April 1884, although put as 1885 in the *1939 Register*, and baptised at Great Addington on 17th August 1884. By 1901 James was 67 years old and his occupation was now "Ordinary Agricultural Labourer". Hannah was 56, and only Mary (26), an "Army Boot and Shoe Top Closer" and George (17), a shoemaker, were still at home.

James died in 1906, aged 72, and in 1909 George Robert Feary married Gertrude Sophia Taylor, originally from Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, but living with her family in Raunds. Her father Frederick had died too on 10th June 1907. He had moved to the area to become the Manager of one of the Raunds Distributive Co-operative shops when it first opened in the 1890s.

In the 1911 Census for Great Addington George Feary, aged 26, was with Gertrude and their daughter, Hannah, who was one year old. George was working as a farm labourer and he had described his house as a "2 up 2 down", although the Census officer had crossed this out and substituted "4" [rooms].

The couple had two further daughters, Maud in 1912, and Ada in 1914. But war was threatening to break up the young family.

At some point after 1911 George had moved to Ringstead, probably in order to change his occupation. He found work as an edge setter at C.E. Nicholls' Boot and Shoe Factory in Raunds. Edge-setting was basically the neatening of the sole around the front of the boot. This could be done with a special knife but there were, from the late Eighteenth Century, simple edge cutting machines in the factories which is probably what George used.

The workers in the boot and shoe industry had some exemption from conscription because, despite what Napoleon may have said, an army marched on its feet. The army did use trains and motor vehicles to move troops about but marching was still a vital part of getting battalions from A to B. But, as the casualties mounted, and more and more men were

needed the Military Tribunals began to turn down more appeals from shoemakers and their bosses for exemption.

On 1st April 1917, George was 32 with a young family but the local Military Tribunal decided that he could not resist conscription any longer and the appeal by the Nicholls' Factory was dismissed. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour,* compiled at the end of the war, tells us that George served with the 1st Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment in Italy. France and Belgium. The Medal Roll and Card add that he remained a Private and was given the Regimental Number 205451.

Unfortunately, few of George's military records survive so we do not have any dates for his call-up, or dates of service abroad. We do have, however, a later Hospital Admission Form for the 5th October 1918 which states that he had been one year six months in service and ten months with the field force. This would indicate that he was first enlisted in April 1917 and joined the 1st Battalion of the Norfolks in December 1917.

This ties in with the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which gives Italy as the first country in which he served. George joined the Norfolks when they had been posted from the Western Front to Italy. In the First World War the Italians, after first being part of the Axis Powers decided to join the Allies and fought against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Italians were gaining the upper hand but the Emperor of the Austro-Hungarians appealed for help from the Germans. At the Battle of Caporetto on 21st November 1917, near the town of Kobarid (now in Slovenia), the enemy onslaught used everything, including poison gas, mines, artillery and machine guns. The Italians, who were trying to fight uphill, were badly defeated and forced to retreat. They fell back, finally to the Piave River, and their position looked precarious.

In December 1917 the British sent five and the French six divisions to reinforce the Italians. The 1st Norfolks, probably including John Feary, were part of the 5th Division and travelled by train from Versailles through Lyon, Avignon, Marseilles, Nice, Savona and Mantua to Montagnana near Padua, where they were billeted in a church. They did not move to the Front at St Andrea until January 25th 1918 and remained there until February 2nd with only an occasional bomb dropped by enemy aircraft to show that they were in a war zone. It seemed almost a holiday to many of the soldiers after the Western Front, despite the many casualties.

The 1st Norfolks finally moved to a position on the River Piave near the destroyed bridges of Ponte Priula. There was little enemy activity and the weather was generally sunny. On 17th March there was some heavy shelling from the enemy but at about this time the Norfolks were relieved by an Italian Regiment and they went back to near Padua. Their Italian campaign was over. The Italians had proved more resolute and capable than had been thought by the other Allies and it was its troops who led the defeat of the Austrians.

The 1st Norfolks returned to France in early April 1918, travelling in two "half battalions" and after another long journey arrived in Doullens in the Somme battle area on April 8th. On the way the *War Diary* records that at Mordane, just over the border from Italy:

> . . . all watches were put back one hour to agree with French time.

The Germans, following the withdrawal of Russia from the war after the 1917 Revolution, brought all their troops together for one great assault and against the British lines near Ypres and Hazebrouck. The first phase of the German "Operation Michael on the Somme had started on March 21st had ended as the Norfolks arrived back. The second phase was against the British in the low-lying Lys River area. The Germans were steamrolling forward and had driven the Portuguese back to near Neuve Chapelle. It was her, as part of the 5th Division that the Battalion was sent on 11th April. They first occupied the Forest of Nieppe and were ordered to retake the nearby village of Merville. In fact, the artillery had not had time to move up, so the attack was aborted. From April and right into August the Front around Nieppe remained stationary.

The Norfolks suffered badly from enemy mustard gas attacks which were odourless and often soldiers only became aware of them when, inhaled, it blistered the lungs and throat. Unfortunately the gas mask was little protection because it would soak into the soldiers' woollen uniforms and produced terrible, painful blisters all over the body. Contaminated uniforms had to be stripped off as fast as possible and man and uniform washed. Imagine this when under fire.

The Germans began to run out of men and supplies and their morale started to wane. From August 21st the Norfolks, as part of the 5th Division, began to drive the enemy back and by the 3rd September had moved some 14 miles although with the loss of 4,300 casualties. We see a pattern of almost continuous advance , slowed by the need of the artillery to keep pace, but still, sometimes, met by enemy bombardments of high explosive and gas shells.

On November 5th , the Battalion led the attack at Jolimetz which met little resistance. it was here, while resting after a further Allied attack that, on November 11th they learnt that hostilities were to cease at 11 am that day. The 1st Norfolks, like most Battalions, received the news with relief rather than wild rejoicing. The Battalion's *War Diary* records:

Puissance Farm	*10/11/18*	*11.00. The battalion moved via AULNOYE – LA GRAND CARRIERE to JOLIMETZ where the battalion was accommodated in billets.*
		17.00. Battalion reported in billets
Jolimetz	*11/11/18*	*09.00. Reorganisation and general cleaning of billets and surroundings.*
		10.05 [minutes not clear]. Notice received of ~~termination~~ suspension of hostilities
	12/11/18	*Reorganisation and cleaning continues*
	13/11/18	*The battalion moved to LE QUESNOY where billets were taken over from MG Corps*
Le Quesnoy	*14/11/18*	*Delousing started.*

It is possible that George missed these last few weeks for, on the 5th October 1918, he was admitted to the 14th Field Ambulance with "Pyrexia of unknown origin" which was usually known as Trench Fever, caused by lice droppings infecting a wound or graze. He was moved up the chain to the 43rd Casualty Clearing Station. We do not know if he was discharged back to service from there. Trench Fever, like Covid 19, was a very variable disease in its effects on people.

The rest of November was spent by the Norfolks at Le Quesnoy and then the Battalion moved gradually into Belgium to arrive at Grand Leez on 23rd December where they remained until the end of the year.

We do not have the date of George's return to England but it is possible that he was unlucky in that the 1st Norfolks were a Regular Army Battalion, although the personnel were much changed. They would not have been quickly demobilised and would have contained soldiers who would continue to serve after the war. From the *War Diary* it appears that the Battalion spent most of the next three months at Grand Leez, a village now part of the city of Gembloux, in Belgium. Here, every day was filled with route marches, P.T., parades, bathing and de-lousing. It was not until April 1919 that they proceeded to embarkation camp at Antwerp. The *War Diary* ends on 20th April 1919 and it is likely that this was about the time that they embarked for England

George Feary finally returned to England and was demobilised. We know from the *Register of England and Wales* that by the Spring of 1920 he was with wife, Gertrude, in Church Street in Ringstead. The *Registers* show us that they remained there until 1929 and that they then moved to Carlow Street. They were there in 1931 when daughter Hannah was also shown as being entitled to vote.

It is often overlooked that, for many working-class couples, the woman and the man both gained the right to vote in the *Representation of the People Act* of 1918. This gave 5.2 million men and 8.5 million women the right to vote. Previously the property requirement had excluded most working-class men.

The couple had at least two further children, Ivy, born on 28th February 1920 and Harold who was born in 1923 but died the following year.

Jon Abbott has written, on the *Ringstead Heritage Group* website, that electricity came to Ringstead in 1927, with the first substation built in Church Street, opposite the Carlow Road junction. He also reports that George Feary was one of those people who refused have it in his house and preferred instead to rely on oil lamps.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales,* George was working as a bricklayer's labourer and Gertrude carried out the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties".

Gertrude died in 1965 and George Robert Feary died, aged 84 in 1969. For him, his time in the 1st Norfolks had been less than two years in a long family life.

George and Gertrude with daughters Annie (Hannah), Maud, Ada and Ivy
With thanks to Lorraine Piper

Chapter 25

Albert Ambrose Fensome (1883-1969)

The tragedy of a young man's violent death is not confined to warzones. In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, widowed Charlotte Fensome, now living with her son, had mistakenly put down that she had been married 50 years and had had 12 children, 4 of whom had died. As she was not the wife of the "Head" or the Head herself, this information was not required and has been crossed out. Nevertheless, it gives us a picture of many couple's family lives. One of these four children had been Albert who had died with other young men in his own parish.

On January 27th 1858, Charlotte Ann Saddington had married Stephen Fensom, (the "e" seems to have come later) in Denford, where they both lived. Stephen worked as a shoemaker, probably at home, and his wife and older children would have helped him produce his handsewn boots and shoes. By 1871 the family had moved to Spring Gardens in Ringstead and there are five children shown: Thomas (12); Albert (8); Herbert (5); Amelia (3) and Joseph just four months old. More children followed by 1881 but Albert is missing.

On the morning of 30th January 1877 Albert, aged just 14 was working with other boys and men in one of the fields in Ringstead when the wind and rain increased in intensity. All the workers hurried for shelter and huddled together in a small hovel. Some of the boys decided that this was unsafe and dashed for a thatched stone-built barn nearby. It looked more solid, but when a whirlwind hit it, the roof was ripped off and the gable ends and walls fell in burying some of the boys. Three died, and Albert Fensome was one of these. Their gravestone still stands to the left of the short path to the north door of the church.

Another son was born later and, as was often the custom, he was also called Albert, in remembrance of his dead brother. He was christened Albert Ambrose Fensom, with his sister Kate, on 5th February 1894 in Ringstead Church although he had been born on 21st May 1883. By the time of the christening there had been further tragedy for Charlotte for, on 5th May 1887, her husband Stephen had been buried in the churchyard, aged 47 years.

By 1891, living in Carlow Street, Charlotte was working as a shoehand with son Joseph (30) also in the trade. Albert was still at school and there was also a female lodger. In the 1911 Census the family were still living in Leveratt's Row as Spring Rise or Gardens was later known. It became derelict and was demolished in the 1970s. "Ambrose" Fensome aged 27, was now given as the head of the family. He was still single and was working, doing "Army Welt Sewing". His mother, Charlotte, 72 years old, was living with him and there was a young boarder, Maggie Horsford, from Stowe in Huntingdonshire (probably Stow Longa 11 miles east of Ringstead), who was a lift (heel) maker.

Charlotte died in the third quarter of 1914 and it may be that she lived long enough to see the marriage of her youngest son, Albert, who had married Minnie Jane Hobbes in the second quarter of that same year. Minnie had been born in Woodford on 13th January 1884

and in the 1911 Census for Woodford had been living with her family in Pigs Lane there and working as a "Sewing Machinist, Tailoring". Bride and groom would both have been about thirty years old. At about the same time the Great War began and on 4th August 1914 Great Britain entered that war.

The belief by many, that the Germans would be quickly defeated, was soon shattered when the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), consisting of Regular Army Battalions, was knocked back and nearly destroyed by the well-organised and planned German offensive. At first local bigwigs, cajoled and hectored young men, to join up to fill the gaps in the old Battalions or the the new Pals' Battalions. At first these were volunteer units were like private armies but they became a part of the War Office's responsibility. It was soon clear that this would not be enough and, despite opposition from many MPs, conscription began in early 1916. The 1914 and 1914/15 Star Medals were for men who had entered the war before conscription and we know that Albert was not awarded either medal so he must have entered the Western Front, in 1916 or after, as a conscript.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, Albert's military records have largely been destroyed. The *Medal and Awards Roll* show that he served in four battalions. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour states* that he served in France, had been wounded, and probably ended his military career in 1918 in the 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment as part of the Army of Occupation. Finally, from the *Absent Voters List of 1918,* prepared for the December 1918 General Election, when newly enfranchised men and women would vote for the first time, we can see that he was with the 7th Bedfordshires near or at the end of the war in November 1918.

There is one further record, for the *Northamptonshire Military Tribunals 1916-18*, which adjudicated on whether a conscripted soldier should be exempted from service because of his work or other circumstances. On 1st April 1917 an A. A. Fensome who worked for *Eaton and Company* of Rushden on a Pounding Machine came up before a tribunal. Eaton and Company were a well-known boot and shoe maker and a pounding machine forced the uppers down on the last as flat to the insole as possible. We know that at in 1911 Albert had been in the shoe trade but on a different process. Unfortunately there is no further information on A. A. Fensome to be certain he is our man and no decision is reported. Rushden is only some six miles from Ringstead and it seems likely, although not certain, that he is our Albert and that he had to accept conscription at this or a future tribunal.

We know, thanks to the knowledge, of the Northamptonshire Regiment and its Regimental Numbers, of Steve (Stebie173) on the Great War Forum, that Albert would have enlisted with the 5th Battalion in mid-July 1917. He was given Regimental Number 39554. This Battalion had been formed as part of the Kitchener's first New Army made up of volunteers. At first these had been for home defence but quickly they were needed on the Western Front and almost all of the men volunteered. The 5th had first seen service on the Western Front at the end of May 1915 and it remained there until the end of the war.

After training, however, Albert Fensome was sent to the 17th Infantry Base Depot at Étaples in France. On arrival there, in early November, he was part of a batch of men from the

Northamptonshires who were transferred to the 4th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment and was given the number 41257.

At first, the 4th Bedfordshires had also provided Home defence as a "Reserve Battalion" but were sent to France in July 1916 and spent the rest of the war on the Western Front.

Albert, however, made a further transfer to the 7th Battalion which also served on the Western Front until May 1918. At this point, Other Ranks were transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Bedfordshires and some Officers and NCOs were given the task of training the newly arrived American troops.

We know that Albert was not in the 2nd Battalion but we also know that the May 9th *Daily List of Casualties* had a long list of wounded men in the Bedfordshires, and among them was Pte. A. Fensome (41257) of Thrapston. These lists could be published upto six weeks after the actual event so it was probably in March or April 1918 that Albert was wounded, possibly in the German "Michael" Offensive. We can only surmise that he was wounded while in the 7th Battalion and was hospitalised for some time. When he was fit again the 7th had disappeared and he joined the 2/5th Gloucestershires and stayed with them into the Army of Occupation.

Finally, he was demobilised, probably in early 1919, and returned to his life in Ringstead. The *Electoral Registers of England and Wales* for 1920 to 1932 show that Albert and his family lived in the Sivers Buildings in Ringstead. In 1939 they are still there. By now Albert was working as a Slag Filler in an iron furnace, probably at Islip. Living with them was daughter Gladys, born on 2nd November 1916.

The Islip Parish Council website reports that:

> During the war [WW2] it was essential to keep the [furnace] site hidden from the eyes of the German bomber pilots, and the escaping burning gas was a problem, as it lit up the night sky. This surplus gas was allowed to lift an escape valve at the top of a small chimney on the working platform and burn off. It was decided the best way to hide this was to erect corrugated roofing over the working platform and `pig' bays. The result of this was many of the men suffered the effects of gassing and extreme heat.

It would have been a sad fate for someone who had survived the poison gas of the Western Front to be gassed so close to home. Luckily he survived into old age and in 1942 the production of pig iron finally ended at Islip.

Minnie died on 1st August 1955 and Albert on 13th February 1969. He was 85 years old and was living at 66 High Street at the time of his death.

Chapter 26

Arthur James Fox (1900-1970)

In writing these brief biographies, I have sometimes discovered interconnections between families which were not at first obvious. When we consider all the men, we see that there was a web of family and friendship ties, leaving few in the village untouched.

One man in this network was Arthur James Fox, who was born on 14th May 1900, the son of Frederick and Mary Elizabeth. Mary Elizabeth, (often just Elizabeth), was the older sister of Charlotte Gray who had married Herman Baker, another Great War soldier. The Grays were a Yorkshire family, who lived for a time in Northamptonshire. In 1901 Frederick and Elizabeth Fox were living at 5 Carlow Road in Ringstead. With them was their first child, Arthur who was just 10 months old. The couple had four more children, Albert, Agnes, Walter and Elsie.

It was not a happy marriage, however, and in April 1907 Frederick was summoned for persistent cruelty to Mary. She said that he had abused her and threatened her with a carving knife. The court adjourned the case to see if the "parties could come to terms". Mary Elizabeth refused to be reconciled and in May the Bench ordered Frederick to pay her eleven shillings a week. She had been staying with her parents who only lived a few doors away in Carlow Street. It seems that she went north with them when they moved back to Hull. She died there in 1908.

In the 1911 Census, widower Frederick was 32 years old, and an unemployed handsewn bootmaker with children, (Arthur) James 10, Albert, 8, and Agnes 5 years old. Walter was with his grandparents in Hull. The last daughter, Elsie Clorinda, was not with the family and I cannot find her elsewhere in the Census. In 1926 she emigrated to Canada on the *SS Canada.* She was 18 years old and was described as a "Vaudeville Artist". As we have seen, in the Herman Baker biography, Charlotte Baker (her mother's sister) was a talented musician. Her former address was given as Division Street in Hull where her grandparents had lived. On the same ship was Harry Mobley who she married in Canada that same year..

Despite his violent attitude to his wife, we must acknowledge that Frederick seems to have prospered by dint of hard work and imagination. Jon Abbott has written that he was said to have designed and patented removable spikes for running shoes. He also built up a successful boot making business employing several men. His family would take the orders to Ringstead Station for delivery to his clients. By 1939 he could describe himself as a "Boot Manufacturer".

Arthur James Fox would only have been fourteen when war was declared in 1914. He could not have imagined that he would have to play a part in it. He would not have been eighteen until May 14th 1918 and we cannot be certain just what his service record was. We know

from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was serving with the Army of Occupation at the end of the war. It also gives his unit as the 52nd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

Arthur would have been too young to vote so was not included in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead. The *Representation of the People's Act* of 1918 tripled the number entitled to vote from 7.7 million to 21.4 million by the ned of the year. There was a proviso in the Act that men, who had turned 19 while doing war service, were also entitled to vote. This explains why Arthur is on the Autumn 1919 Absent Voters' List. It also confirms that he was also in the 52nd Royal Sussex Regiment and gives his Regimental Number as 28273.

The 52nd Battalion served in northern Germany as part of the Army of Occupation from March to August 1919. Previously to this it had been a training unit and had been based from April 1918 in Thetford. We must presume that Arthur joined the Battalion in Thetford and went with it to Germany in March 1919. This would explain why he does not have a Medal Card, as his service was after the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

After he was demobilised, he returned to Ringstead and lived with his father, Frederick, in Carlow Street. In the third quarter of 1922 he married Florence Doris Pentelow. Florence was a Raunds' girl, the daughter of Ralph and Polly (née Skinner) Pentelow. They lived in Rotten (or Rotton) Row and Ralph had been a riveter in a local shoe factory when Florence was christened on July 16th 1899.

We have shown that Arthur's father, Frederick, was something of an entrepreneur. Is it possible that he helped set up his eldest son in business? Certainly by 1939 Arthur was living at 26 Linden Avenue in Kettering and was now a "General Shop Keeper". At the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Herman and Lotte (Charlotte) Baker were staying with the Foxes. As we have said, in Herman Baker's biography, Charlotte was the sister of Arthur's late mother. The couple now lived near Hull but obviously had kept their links with their Northamptonshire relatives.

In the same year, on 19th July 1939, Arthur advertised in the *Evening Telegraph*:

> *CARAVANS for hire at Skegness. – Apply Fox General Stores, Linden Avenue, Kettering. Booked August week.*

It must have seemed that the world was more settled after the traumas of the Great War and the Depression Years but, of course, another World War was about to start which would be even longer than the first and shook civilisation by the terrible toll of civilians across the World.

Florence died on 21st February 1966 and Arthur followed her on the 25th May 1970.

Chapter 27

The Hackney Family

The Hackneys originally, like others, came from across the Nene in Great Addington. The men from the family who we are looking at here were descended from the sons of John and Ann Hackney. They had five sons, William (1788), Robert (1790), Thomas (1791), John (1792) and Samuel (1798). The names William, Robert, John and Samuel reverberate down the various family branches. It is the lines starting from Robert and Samuel that we will be following here. Robert's line led to Cyril Arthur, although as we shall see there is some confusion about his birth.

The other three Hackney men descended from Samuel, the youngest son of John and Ann.

SIMPLIFIED HACKNEY FAMILY TREE FOR WW1 SOLDIERS

John Hackney 1766 GA ----------Ann (Née Collier possibly)

I I

Sarah Riddle ----- Robert 1790 Samuel 1798 GA ----- -Susannah

I I

Rhoda Knight ------ William 1838 R William 1821 GA ------ Sarah Lett

I I

Kate E. Allen ------- Arthur 1878 R Samuel 1841 GA ----- Mary A Gunn

I I

Cyril Arthur Hackney Allen John W. 1865 R ------- Ellen Ball

1899 Titchmarsh I I I

Edward Samuel G Ernest

1891 R 1893 R 1895 R

Approximate birth years given. GA – Great Addington R - Ringstead

Unfortunately the military records of the Hackney men have largely been lost. The Second World War German bomb that fell on the building containing the records seems to have hit some parts of the alphabet harder than others. Nevertheless we can give some idea of the service of these men during the Great War.

We will begin with Cyril Arthur Hackney.

Cyril Arthur Hackney (1898-1985)

Cyril Arthur Hackney Allen was born on 13th July 1898 in Titchmarsh. He was the son of single woman, Kate Elizabeth Allen. Kate was the daughter of William Allen a pedlar or hawker from Polebrook and his wife Jane from Washingley in Huntingdonshire. In view of Cyril's second and third names it seems likely that Cyril was the son of "shoe finisher" Arthur Hackney, who Kate married on the 18th December 1899 in Titchmarsh. Arthur was the son of William Hackney, a labourer from Ringstead and his wife Rhoda (née Knight)

In 1901 Arthur (23) and Kate (22) Hackney were living at 11 Carlow in Ringstead. Cyril was with them and was two years old. By 1911 Arthur and Kate were in the Bank Cottages in Denford Road, Ringstead, and had been married eleven years. They have had four children, all of them still living. The younger children, Lilian, Earnest [sic] and Bernard had all been born in Ringstead. Cyril was twelve years old and still at school.

We know, as they did not, that the Great War that just waiting for a shot to start it. In 1911 many handsewn military boot makers were out of work but in 1914 the war would give them work and take away their sons.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that Cyril served with the 3rd Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment and was still serving after the war had finished. He does not appear in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead but he was not 21, nor had he turned 19 while in service, so was not yet able to vote. He was also missing from the Spring 1919 *Absent Voters' List* but was in the Autumn edition. His home address was shown as High Street and he was serving in the 19th Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment with Regimental Number 31592.

In the military records Cyril was recorded as A.C. Hackney but with the correct Regimental Number (31592). From the *Silver Badge Register* we can see that he enlisted on 29th June 1918 and had never served overseas. He was discharged on 26th September 1919 because he was deemed no longer physically fit for service. The reason for his discharge was a "weak bladder" which was "not attributable" to his army service. He did receive a small pension from 27th September 1919 which ended on 1st July of the following year. So it seems that Cyril joined the 3rd Battalion of the Queens and was transferred to the 19th from which he was finally discharged. His was not a glorious war but, like most of the men, his main hope when he enlisted would have been to survive.

The Pension Card for Cyril Arthur Hackney has his address as c/o Mrs. Gunn (mistranscribed Garn), Church Green, Woodford. In the fourth quarter of 1919, which must have been soon after he had been discharged, he married Kathleen E. Gunn. He gave his name as Cyril A[rthur] Hackney Allen. At first the couple lived in the High Street in Ringstead, possibly with his parents. Kathleen would not yet have had the vote as the couple did not have any property qualification and she was not yet thirty. By 1925 they had moved to Spendlove's Yard in Ringstead. By 1929 they were both enfranchised.

During this time, Cyril was probably a furnace worker. Certainly this was his job when he was a witness in a court case reported in the *Chronicle & Echo* on Thursday 19th March 1925. A Raunds' cyclist had been knocked off his bike by a hit-and-run driver. The report tells that Robinson had been cycling home from Thrapston when he was knocked down on the Ringstead side of the hill from Denford. He was found there by Cyril Arthur Hackney and Reginald Weekley who came to his aid and he was taken home in a buggy, presumably horse-drawn.

Before the 1930 Register of Voters' List had been drawn up, Cyril and Kathleen moved to Church Green in Woodford, her home village. Now he is shown as Cyril Arthur Hackney Allen and she is Kathleen Annie Allen. Could this be related to the death of his mother who had died in 1930 or was he just being accurate for the official records? To add to the confusion in the 1931 Electoral Register for Woodford our Cyril is living in Church Green and Cyril Arthur Allen is living in The Green in Woodford.

By the 1939 *Register for England and Wales* Cyril's father Arthur Hackney was living in Denford Road in Ringstead but Cyril and Kathleen were living near the *White Horse* public house in Woodford. Cyril was still a Blast Furnace worker.

Kathleen Emma Annie Elizabeth Allen died on 2nd October 1957 at Allege Brook in Woodford and Cyril Arthur H. Allen died on 30th January 1985, aged 86. He was living in Whittlesey Terrace in Woodford at the time of his death.

Edward Hackney (1891-1966)

We now look at the other line of the family which led to three brothers who became soldiers in the First World War. Edward was the oldest child of John William and Ellen Hackney although Ellen (née Ball) had had two children before her marriage. He had been born on 20th December 1891 in Ringstead. In 1901 he was living with his family at 3 The Terrace, High Street. His father, John William, was a bricklayer, originally from Great Addington.

By 1911 Ted (Edward) was working as a farm labourer and the family were now living in Gladstone Street which was part of the Tilcraft estate. Was his father drawn across the Nene by work on this new housing area?

The excitement of the Raunds' March in 1905, in which Ringstead men took part, was over and many of the handsewn men were out of work by 1911. This recession in trade may partly explain why some of the proposed Tilcroft estate was never built. As we have seen before, 1914 would bring salvation to the army bootmakers but at a terrible price for some.

It seems likely that Edward and his younger brother Samuel George went to enlist together. They both joined the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) and were given consecutive Regimental Numbers. Edward was 50875 and he was first posted to the 10th Battalion.

We do not have a record of when Edward enlisted but the Medal Roll for his brother Samuel shows that he was in France from 10th October 1916. It seems likely that Edward would have had a similar start date, although as he was first in the 10th, unlike Samuel who remained in

the 8th Battalion all through the war, there could be some differences. But on the same page of the Medal Roll there are soldiers in the 10th so it may be that some of them travelled together.

10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers marching to the trenches St Pol, November 1916
Photograph by Ernest Brooks ©IWM Q 1607

We know that at some point he was transferred to the 8th Battalion, his brother's Battalion, although Reg Hackney was told that they were kept apart in the Front Line. The lesson of the "Pal's Battalions" had been hard learned. It seems likely that he remained with the 8th until the Battalion was disbanded, in an Army reorganisation, on 6th February 1918. Edward was transferred to the Royal Sussex Regiment and given a new Regimental Number GS/36411. I am not sure which Battalion he joined but the 7th Sussex were in the vicinity of the 8th Royal Fusiliers in the latter's War Diary.

While with the Sussex he suffered a gunshot wound to the left hand. As a result he was taken back to England and, when he had recovered, he was transferred to the 612 Home Service Employment Company (HSEC) which was based in the Eastern Command region. He was given a new number 459764. The HSEC would only take the lowest medically graded soldiers who were unable to serve in a warzone. It kept lists of the men under such categories as: Batman, Cook, Storeman or Caretaker, Sanitary Duty, Orderly, Clerk, Shoemaker, Salvage, Loader and Brakesman, Bath and Drying Room. They would be used to do the work once done by the ordinary soldiers, in order to keep the fighting units up to

their highest possible strength,. It was a branch of the Labour Corps but the men in those units would often do dangerous work in or near the Front Line.

We have no records for these transfers but in the Ringstead *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 he was shown as already being in the HSEC so it seems likely that he was not long in the Royal Sussex. He was finally discharged on 3rd October 1919.

Edward returned to Ringstead and seems to have lived with his brothers in Gladstone Street for the next few years. He married widow, Violet May Robinson, in the Spring of 1927. Violet had been born a "Lowe" and had married Harry Robinson in Woodford on 6th December 1911. Harry had been an engine driver at the Blast Furnaces and he had enlisted in the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He died of wounds on the 6th July 1916 in France. Harry and Violet had had three children, Arthur in 1912, Frederick in 1913 and Bessie (sometimes Betty) in 1915.

At some point Edward moved to Woodford and became friendly with the young widow. In a case reported in the *Northampton Mercury* of 26th March 1926 Edward was said to have been a shepherd but I think this may be a case of mistaken identity by the reporter. He and Violet were drinking after hours in the *Baker's Arms* with the landlord and the travelling actor, Arthur Persse and his wife. They were all fined.

There were two Edward Hackneys born in Ringstead who moved across the river. Our Edward, and an Edward John Hackney, son of Robert who worked as a stockman although he lived in a cottage next to Islip Furnace House. He had married Violet E. Fleming. It seems that the Hackneys connived to make life difficult for future genealogists.

We see from the 1928 and 1929 Electoral Registers that our Edward and Violet were living in Church Street in Woodford but by 1930 they had moved to Pig's Lane. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Edward was a platelayer in an ironstone quarry and Violet May, besides the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties", was an "Ironer and Finisher at a Clothing Factory". Living with them was Betty, who was a booking clerk at the same factory. There is another record but it at the moment it is officially closed. Living with the family was an eleven-year-old girl, Vera D. Doble, who may be an evacuee from the London area.

Edward died on 2nd April 1966 and was cremated at Kettering Crematorium. Violet followed him almost twenty years later, on 2nd June 1985.

Samuel George Hackney (1893-1961)

Samuel was the middle of the three brothers who went to war. He was born on 3rd December 1893. In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses he was living with his parents, bricklayer John, and his wife, Ellen. In the 1911 Census, which was the first one completed by an increasingly literate population, the two boys are shown as Ted and Sam which was obviously how they were known in the family. Sam was already working as a farm labourer.

When war came it was fought first by the Regular Army and then, when this was decimated, by the new volunteer battalions. It soon became clear that, although opposed by many in Parliament, conscription would be necessary. It was introduced in early 1916 for some men,

and gradually the age and other exemptions were stopped, and more and more men were drawn into the military according to their age and marital status.

Samuel was a young man of about 21 years old with no wife or children so he was an early conscript and was enlisted on 15th February 1916. It seems that, unlike his brother he was posted directly into the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). He was given the Regimental Number GS/50876 (GS just stands for General Service). The Medal Roll shows that he went to France on 10th October 1916 with the 8th Battalion.

Ted (left) and Samuel in their Royal Fusiliers uniform
With thanks to Reg Hackney

During the long series of battles that summer and autumn, collectively known at the Battle of the Somme, the 8th had lost many men, with the terrible weather being the only winner. By the time that Samuel reached the Western Front the rain and mud was bringing the campaign to an inconclusive conclusion.

Samuel soon experienced the squalor of trench life. he told his grandson, Reg Hackney, that he had been asleep in the trenches and was shocked awake when a rat bit his ear. He then struggled to staunch the blood.

The Germans had been planning and building a heavily fortified series of defences during the autumn and winter of 1916-1917. This became known as the Hindenburg Line and from February 1917 the Germans carried out a retreat to this line, destroying anything useful to the Allies as they retreated. In the Spring of 1917 the Allies carried out a planned assault, with the British troops' attack being a diversion to assist the main thrust from the French further south. This opened with the First Battle of the Scarpe.

The 8th Battalion were billeted under Arras. There were many large old cellars beneath Arras and, under the suburbs of St Sauveur and Ronville, were caves, many very large, which had been discovered by accident in October 1916. Together they were able to house over 15,000 men. This underground world had piped water, electricity, a telephone system and gas-proof doors. Long tunnels were excavated to enable troops to travel to the Front Line in comparative safety. The Germans knew of the tunnel system and counter-mined it, causing many casualties in the New Zealand Tunnelling Company.

The 8th Royal Fusiliers were now part of the VI Corps and were given the task of capturing the enemy "Black Line" and then to try to move onto the further "Brown Line". *The Wartime Memories* Project quotes from this uncredited account of the battle.

> *The artillery bombardment opened on 4th April 1917 and the infantry – many of whom had been able to approach the front line in the long tunnels and subways reaching out from Arras itself- advanced behind a creeping barrage on 9th April. Resistance was rapidly overcome; fine counter-battery work had stifled the German guns. The leading troops quickly captured the Black Line but German fire increased as successive waves came through to advance on the Feuchy Switch trench, notably from Observation Ridge. In places the German troops were seen retreating at a run and by noon 37th Division had pushed through with orders to capture Monchy le Preux. The 12th Division remained in position as snow and sleet fell.*
>
> *On the night of 11-12 April, 36th and 37th Brigades moved up and relieved units of 8th Cavalry Brigade east of Monchy. Next day, 29th Division relieved 12th Division, whereupon the units moved back to the area between Arras and Doullens. The attack had been highly successful making an advance on the Divisional Front of some 4000 yards for a total of 2018 casualties.*

We see how success had come to be measured in casualties per yard. It seems likely that it was in this attack that Samuel was first wounded. The *Chronicle and Echo* of 25th April 1917 briefly reported that he had been wounded on April 11th. The *Medal Rolls* shows two periods of service in a warzone for Samuel, the first ending on 27th April 1917 and the second starting on 24th July of the same year. This gap probably indicates the time spent by Samuel in England recovering from his wounds.

If Samuel returned to the Royal Fusiliers 8th Battalion at the end of July 1917 he would have found it in the Monchy area with little enemy action. In September, however, they moved to Wancourt in the Feuchy Line but after billeting at Achicourt the Battalion relieved the 9th Essex near Monchy again. The Battalion now followed the usual pattern of periods in the trenches followed by periods in reserve, training and having some relaxation. The weather in October was very wet and cold and windy. The 8th then marched and entrained during early December to Moulin le Comte. It seems most likely that Samuel had been wounded again before the December moves so, probably, in the Monchy area.

On 22nd December 1917 the War Office Daily List No. 5449, reported that Samuel had been wounded and was entitled to wear a "wound stripe". There was usually a gap of at least a month between the wounding event and its report in the *Daily Casualty List* so we cannot be sure of the action in which Samuel sustained his second injury. It seems that he was only back at the Front for a few months before being wounded again. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he had been wounded twice. His second injury was a gunshot wound to his right leg which had fractured his femur.

From his grandson, Reg Hackney, we heard that the two wounds were in the same leg and he had difficulty in walking for the rest of his life. Reg also remembers his grandfather telling of being stretchered away from the Front Line when the enemy began shelling again. In the panic he was tipped into a ditch, in even greater pain.

From his Silver Badge record we know that he was discharged on 18th July 1918 because of his wounds. The Medal Roll gives a discharge date of 18th January. There may be error in the month, as "1" and "7" can look very similar, or the January date was when he left France and the July date was his final discharge date. He was given a pension from 18th July 1918 to 15th July 1924, which was longer than many, and indicates the seriousness of his disablement.

Samuel George Hackney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918, shown with his two (absent) soldier brothers in Gladstone Street but he was in the *Register of Electors* for 1919. He remained in Gladstone Street with his father, John William and Edward and Ernest until his marriage in the Summer of 1926 to Margery Mabel Wilson. Margery had been born on 4th February 1900, the daughter of Herbert and Emilia Wilson. Herbert was a wheelwright by trade but by 1911 the family had moved to Pearce's Yard in Ringstead and he had become a millwright.

Samuel and Margery had two children, Wilson born in 1927 and Jean in 1929. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were living in High Street, some five doors from the Post Office. Samuel was working as a plumber and painter and Margery as a heel cutter and the two children were living with them.

Samuel George Hackney died on 24th December 1961 in St. Mary's Hospital in Kettering. Administration was granted to his widow, Margery. The "Effects" were given as £840. He was living at the time of his death at 17 Gladstone Street, which may have been his old family home. Margery died on 13th March 1963, with Administration granted to her married daughter, Jean.

Ernest Hackney (1895-1978)

Ernest Hackney was the youngest of the three brothers who fought in the Great War. He was born on 21st October 1895 (19th on his death registration) and by 1911 he was 16 years old and working as a farm labourer like his two older brothers.

We do not know exactly when Ernest enlisted but, as he did not receive an 1914/15 Star, he must have been a conscript in 1916 or later. Unlike his brothers he was posted to the Machine Gun Corps and given the Regimental Number 65877.

The Machine Gun Corps (MGC) had been formed in October 1915 when it had become clear that this weapon would play a decisive role in trench warfare. Unfortunately, without the organisation and history of the old Regimental system, few of its records survive. Its members, however, looked back on their service with pride. George Coppard, a former machine gunner, wrote in his autobiography:

> *No military pomp attended its birth or decease. It was not a famous regiment with glamour and whatnot, but a great fighting corps, born for war only and not for parades.*

The devastating firepower of the machine gun was, of course, recognised by both sides and so it was an important target for the enemy. Some 170,500 officers and men served in the MGC and there were 62,049 casualties, including 12,498 deaths. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Ernest was wounded twice, like his brother, Samuel.

The lack of MGC records make his army service more difficult to trace than most but we do know a little about his wartime experiences. Ernest was reported as wounded in the *War Office Daily List No. 5415* on 13th November 1917 and was entitled to wear a wound stripe.

Machine Gun Corps Badge

We also know that Ernest became a member of the 30th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. This had been formed, following a reorganisation, from the Machine Gun Companies of the 30th Division. In 1918 the 30th were on the Somme Front and took part in the Battle of Lys. They were also in the Advance on Flanders and, at the time of the Armistice, had crossed the River Scheldt with the most advanced units reaching north-west of Lessines.

Ernest was "Gazetted" on 19th August 1919 (issue 31512). He had been awarded the Military Medal which was given "for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire". His great nephew, Reg Hackney, believed that it was for his action, in destroying a machine gun nest, that Ernest received the award.

Although it is a very long time after the event, it seems most likely that it was awarded for his actions in the final advance prior to the signing of the Armistice on 11th November 1918. Certainly in the *Roll of Individuals Entitled to the Victory and War Medals*, Ernest is shown as being put into "Class Z" on 13th February 1919 and this would have been a part of his demobilisation.

Ernest in his Machine Gun Corps Uniform
With thanks to Reg Hackney

Further, we know that in January 1919 the 30th Division returned to the bases in Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne and Étaples and began to demobilise. In the chaos at the end of the war,

with the return to the United Kingdom of soldiers from Britain and the Commonwealth, the bureaucracy struggled to deal with the required records. It may be, therefore, that so long after the event, Ernest's award slipped by almost unnoticed, and I have found no mention of it in the local newspapers.

Ernest returned to Ringstead. He was shown in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in 1918 and, like his brothers, was shown in Gladstone Street in the *Register of Electors* for 1919.

In the last quarter of 1930 he married Florence Bannister. Florence was the daughter of Henry Bannister, a shoehand originally from Northampton, and his wife Rhoda, a local girl. In 1911 the Bannister family had been living in Carlow Road in Ringstead.

In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Ernest was a general labourer to a bricklayer. His wife Florence was hand-cutting heels. Two doors away was his brother Samuel and his wife Margery with their family. They were all living near the Post Office in Ringstead High Street.

Ernest died, aged 82, on 13th May 1978 and Florence, who lived to be 95, died in 1998.

Chapter 28

James Hathaway (1863-1940)

Not all those who served away from home were in the military. Some performed important duties in this country to help the war effort.

James Hathaway had been born in Wolverhampton on the 15th March 1863. His father, an Iron Worker, had married Lydia Brant on the 25th October 1857 but the family moved to Ashton in Lancashire (probably Ashton-on-Ribble, now part of Preston) where James senior was working as a "Puddler" at an Iron Works. This was a skilled trade, turning brittle pig iron into wrought iron using a furnace. It was extremely hot, hard work in a toxic atmosphere and men usually died in their thirties.

It was Lydia who died, in 1872, in her early thirties and James remarried and moved to Aspull, near Wigan. He was there in the 1881 Census with his new wife, Margaret, and two new children. His eighteen-year-old son James, however, had moved out and was boarding in Aspull and had become an iron worker. He was lodging with widow, Elizabeth Robinson and her children.

The family seems to have stayed in Lancashire and his father continued in the ironworks. At some point in the 1880s he decided that this life was not for him and he moved south to London. On the 24th February 1890 he joined the Metropolitan Police Force at Old Scotland Yard. This was to be his career for the next twenty-five years. On April 13th 1890 he married Elizabeth Bigg at St Martin in the Fields in Trafalgar Square. He was living in Leicester Square at the time.

There may have been some urgency to the marriage for the 1891 Census, taken on the 5th April, has the couple with their young son Thomas who was nine months old. They were now sharing 26 Bidborough Street, south of the Euston Road, near Kings Cross Station. By 1901 they had moved to Marcellus Road in Islington which had been built in 1882 and was demolished ninety years later. In 1897 Charles Booth and the Salvation Army produced a Poverty Map of London. His assistant, George H. Duckworth, met Inspector William Dyball in the Police Station, next to Hornsey Road Baths and Laundry, and walked him round the local area. Marcellus Road was coloured light blue on the map indicating it was a "Poor" area.

In the years following the Census Elizabeth died, although I have not found the death. James married again to Eliza Ann Martin at St Barnabas Church in Hornsey Road, Islington on the 25th July 1909. We see from the 1911 Census that Eliza had been born in St Ives in Huntingdonshire and that the couple were living at 251 Hornsey Road in Holloway in London. Eliza was 38 and would have been considered old to start a family, but the children came. Agnes Martin was born on the 24th February 1913 and Walter Ernest on the 26th November 1914, both baptised at St Marks in Tollington Park in Islington.

Meanwhile. Thomas James Hathaway, the only child from James's first marriage had emigrated to America and in 1917 was living in San Francisco and working as a Hotel Clerk. He was married with a four-month-old baby.

The war came, and James continued working as a Constable, but on the 8th March 1915 he retired from the Metropolitan Police Force. At the time he was in the Highgate Division and had served 25 years and 6 days. He was entitled to a pension of £64. 14s. 1d. a year.

What happened next? How did the family end up in Leveratt's Yard in Ringstead in 1918 with James an "absent voter"? When we look back at His wife's family we see how it may have happened. He parents, in 1911, were living in Leveratt's Yard (or Row) in Ringstead. Edward was born in Hilton and Edith in Toseland which matches the earlier records. He was working on a local farm and we see from the 1901 Census that they have been in the village at least ten years, along with their children. The couple were now living on their own and perhaps Eliza hoped for some help and support with her young family, from her family, while her husband was away.

We do not know if James had a part-time job to supplement his pension but at some point in the war he was called to use his old skills for the war effort. The 1918 *Absent Voter's List* for Ringstead shows that he was in the "Police, Vickers Ltd".

Vickers Limited had started out in Sheffield as a steel foundry and became famous for making church bells. This led on to work on shafts and propellers for ships, armour plating and then artillery such as machine guns. It expanded into ships, tanks, torpedoes and airships and aircraft. The various products were produced in factories and shipyards all over the United Kingdom so we cannot be sure where he was based.

After the war he would have returned home and we see the family in Leveratt's Yard through the 1920s and early 30s. Eliza's father, Edward Martin, died in 1926 and Edith followed in 1933. Sadly, Eliza died in 1935 and in the *1939 Register of England and Wales* we see the widowed James, a "Retired Police Officer" living in the Council Houses in Denford Road. Living with him is daughter Agnes, a "Garment Stitcher" and son Walter a "Piece Sole Parer and Grip Clicker"

James died the following year aged seventy-six.

Chapter 29

Arthur Haxley (1892-1974)

The Haxleys were a well-known Raunds family although originally from neighbouring counties. George Haxley had been born in Melchbourne in Bedfordshire and married Elizabeth Mason from Catworth in Huntingdonshire in 1863. The places are all less than ten miles apart and George, who was a shoemaker, was probably drawn to Raunds for the chance of making a decent living in the military boot trade. Judging by the ages and birthplaces of the children, the family first lived in Great Catworth before trying life in Ringstead in about 1866. They returned to Catworth before finally settling in Raunds in 1878/9. Of course, this may not always reflect the movement of the whole family. Perhaps Elizabeth went back to her family for the births of her children.

Harry Mason Haxley was the oldest child, born in Great Catworth on 14th January 1864. Other children followed, there were nine in total, and the youngest son was John Herbert Haxley born in 1886.

John married Florence Beatrice Mayes on the 24th October 1910 but just over three months later she died and was buried on the 9th February 1911, aged 23. John, or Jack as he was usually called, was a well-known local footballer and captain of Raunds Town. He was also, like the family, a committed Baptist.

When war came he was conscripted in January 1917 and was enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment for his initial training and given the Regimental Number 202986. After training he was posted on the 14th May 1917 to the Machine Gun Corps' Base at Camiers with service number 89380. The Machine Gun Corps (MGC) could be sent to any company on the Western Front when they arrived in Camiers and we know that John was with the 105th Company in the field.

The Machine Gun Corps was known as a dangerous unit to be in. The machine gun was the most lethal weapon of the Great War and this made the men who fired them a prime target for the enemy. John was with the 35th Division in the Action of the 22nd October 1917 which was a British attack as part of the Third Battle of Ypres by the 5th Army. As part of this offensive the 35th attacked into Houthulst Forest. It was across sodden ground churned up by constant bombardments. They struggled to cross this quagmire and it developed into a stalemate. It was during this battle, on the 22nd October, that John went missing and he was later declared killed.

Meanwhile his oldest brother, Harry, had married Mary Annie Groome on the 4th January 1890 in Rushden and by 1911 was living in Raunds High Street with his wife and family. The couple had had five children, all still living. The oldest son still at home, Arthur, was eighteen years old. Harry was a "Hand Boot Sewer", in a factory but keeping the old skills alive.

Arthur, however, was a "Boot Operator – Tacker" and daughter, Ann, at fourteen, was a "Boot Factory Bench Girl".

Arthur had been born on the 28th July 1894. War came in 1914 and later that year he married Martha Elizabeth Shaw. She was born in Ringstead, the daughter of Thomas and Martha. In 1911 she had been living at home in Spendlove's Yard, which was off Cherry Hill, in Ringstead and working as a heel builder in the local factory. It was a three-room cottage so it seems unlikely that the young couple set up home with the Shaws but they did move to Ringstead at some point.

We have few of Arthur's military records remaining but he had a Machine Gun Corps' number, 89382, which was only two later than his uncle. We cannot be certain but it seems very probable that the two men enlisted together with the Northamptonshire Regiment in January 1917 and, after training, went to the Machine Gun Corps' Base at Camiers in May 1917. After that it seems most likely that they went their separate ways.

The movement of men would not always follow a numerically logical pattern but we know that at the 1918 *Absent Voters; List* that he was in the 25th Battalion of the MGC. This was formed in February/March 1918 when the Corps was reorganised and the Machine Gun Companies of a Division were formed into Battalions with the same number. The Companies in the 25th Division were merged into the 25th Battalion. This probably means that he had been in one of the Machine Gun Companies of the 25th Division.

The 25th Division had fought at the Battles of Messines from the 7th to the 14th June 1917. As we have seen in previous biographies it was a British offensive designed partly to give some relief to the French who were in temporary disarray. It was also a very well-planned assault remembered chiefly for the huge detonation of mines that had been laid under the German positions by the Royal Engineers. The Machine Gun Companies fired a barrage over the top of the advancing British troops. It was one of the most successful Allied assaults in the war but many casualties were inflicted by German artillery on the new positions that had been gained. The Allies were also not yet able to follow up on this success.

Later in the year, in the Third Battle of Ypres, the Division was in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge (31st July – 2nd August 1917).

The following year, the *War Diary* for the new 25th Battalion reported for 1st March 1918:

> *Achiet le Petit. Fine bright morning followed by wind working northwards with some snow and cold night. The 4 Companies of the 25th Division having been assembled together in BUCHANAN CAMP ACHIET LE PETIT as and from the 14th February and moves completed by the 18th the formal formation under the new Establishment took place . . .*

Training continued with no casualties and "glorious" weather but then the German "Michael Offensive" forced the Allies back and the 25th Division suffered badly during this terrifying time for the army. It lost men in the first German surge and moved north to refit so that, by

the end of March the Battalion were at Wulverghem, some seventy miles north, in Belgium. They received reinforcements on the 1st April of 11 Officers and 260 Other Ranks which gives some idea of their losses. They moved to Ploegstreet where, on the 9th and 10th April, they suffered a heavy shelling, including gas. On the 11th April the Germans attacked again driving the British back and inflicting many casualties but the line held. By the 16th April the Battalion had been forced to withdraw to Boeschepe and on to Nonne Bosch where they bivouacked in a field . It began to snow heavily.

At Grabbo Camp a roll call showed that in this period they had lost 3 Officers and 20 other Ranks killed, 12 Officers and 136 Other Ranks wounded, and 9 Officers and 149 Other Ranks were missing. They moved back into the line and launched some attacks but lacked support and by the end of April, when they were at Le Clytte, they had suffered a further 14 Other Ranks killed, 3 officers and 70 Other Ranks wounded and 12 Other Ranks missing.

They moved back from the Front and trained and reorganised but, on the 27th May, they once more had to withstand another ferocious enemy attack and had to withdraw as the line was breached and they were in danger of being surrounded. This was part of the Third Battle of the Aisne which lasted until the 6th June 1918 where they once again suffered very heavy losses with 5 Officers and 10 Other Ranks killed, 10 Officers and 120 Other Ranks wounded and 5 Officers and 108 Other Ranks missing. The large number of men missing reflects the actions of the enemy breaking through the lines and capturing the cut-off units.

On the 9th June the Battalion retired into bivouacs at Allemant and then, by marching and train, moved south to Connantray-Vaurefroy and then north-west to Crequy, just outside Boulogne. They were transferred to the 59th Division (there appears to be no *War Diary* for the July-September period) and then, on the 9th October 1918, to the 66th Division.

This was not the end of their war, however, and on the 8th October they were part of an attack at Bony. From now on we see the line advancing but still meeting opposition with men killed and wounded. By the end of October, they were at Fontaine and the *War Diary* records:

> *Quiet day. Usual shelling of villages in forward area. Preliminary instructions issued for further operations on a large scale.*

On the 4th November at 6.15 am the preliminary barrage opened up and the attack began. There was some limited opposition and it may be that it was at this time that Arthur was wounded. On the 11th November the Battalion was at Bousies, 20 miles east of Cambrai. The *War Diary* hardly mentions the important event of that day.

> Cleaning guns, kit etc and checking stores. News received on the morning of the 11th that an Armistice had been signed.

Now it was mainly training, cleaning and salvage work with occasional football and rugby matches. On the 4th December 1918, the King and Prince of Wales came and the Battalion marched to Quiévy and lined both sides of the road to welcome them. Then it was back to

the cleaning, training and salvage work with a break for Christmas. And so it continued until the 9th April when the Battalion embarked on the *USS Nopatin* for England.

We know that Arthur had been wounded and was entitled to wear a wound stripe, This Casualty Report was published on the 30th December 1918 but could refer to an event many weeks earlier. Nor do we know the extent of his wound. It may be that it was a "Blighty" and he missed the final few weeks of the war. He was not finally discharged to Class Z until the 26th June 1919 so perhaps this was after his time in hospital. We cannot be sure.

Returning to Ringstead, he and Martha first lived in Leveratt's Row. I believe that they had three children, Jack Alfred in 1921, Philip in 1925 and Ivan in in 1930. Arthur continued in the boot and shoe trade. They moved to the Sivers Buildings, opposite the Swan Inn in the High Street. By the middle of the 1920s Martha Elizabeth had reached 30 years old and so could vote for the first time.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Arthur and family were still shown in Sivers Buildings and was a "Nailer in a Shoe Factory". Two of the children were still at home. Earlier that same year, Arthur's parents celebrated their Golden Wedding. The event was reported in the Rushden Echo on the 6th February 1939. Harry claimed to be one of the oldest hand-sewn boot makers and repairers in the district.

Martha died on the 27th September 1965 and probate was granted to her eldest son, Jack, who was a painter and decorator. It may seem surprising that she did not name her husband as trustee of her Will. There may be some answer in the death of Arthur who died on the 3rd February 1974 aged 81. At the time he Was an inmate in St Crispin's Hospital in Duston. This was a large psychiatric hospital near Northampton. We do not know how long he had been there or the cause of his committal.

Chapter 30

Sidney William Hunt (1893-1962)

Arthur James Hunt had been born in Brington in Huntingdonshire, the son of Joseph, an agricultural labourer, and his wife, Elizabeth. Arthur married Charlotte Furnell in 1890 and in the 1891 Census the couple were living next to the *White Hart* in Bythorn, another village a few miles away. During the second half of the Nineteenth Century these villages lost population; Brington from 172 in 1851 to 86 in 1901 and Bythorn from 294 to 108.

There was a general drift from the land to the towns and cities as mechanisation and foreign imports led to agricultural depression and men and women left the countryside in the hope of better lives. Ringstead was different to many in that it had the shoe-making industry and also, later, the ironstone pits and blast furnaces within walking (or cycling) distance. These took men away from the land and Arthur was one of the men who came in. The family moved to Ringstead in about 1892/3. Their eldest son, Ernest Arthur was nine years old in 1901 and born in Bythorn, but Sidney William was seven and born on 18th December 1893 in Ringstead.

Arthur was working as a horsekeeper on a local farm and they were living at No. 1 Station Road Lodges. By 1911 the address was given as Agutter's Farm Cottages but may have been the same house. The couple had been married twenty years and had had four children, three of whom were still living. Emily Mabel Hyacinth had been born in 1896 and buried early the following year. Their youngest living child, [Violet] Mildred May, had been born in 1904. Both sons had followed their father into agriculture: Ernest, aged 19 was a shepherd and Sidney a horseman on a farm.

Northamptonshire Yeomanry Cap Badge

When war came, Sidney's work was to define his army career. He joined "C" Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and was given the Regimental Number 1932. The

Headquarters of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry was in Northampton but "C" Squadron was based in Kettering. Chris (CLK) on the *Great War Forum* has compared Sidney's number with other soldiers in the Yeomanry whose records have survived which show that Sidney enlisted between the 24th and 31st May 1915.

We now associate the "Squadron" with the RAF but originally it was a subunit of the cavalry and is still used to refer to units in the Royal Armoured Corps. The Yeomanry were volunteer cavalry regiments and the Northamptonshire Yeomanry originated in 1794 but, because of its voluntary nature, it had been formed and disbanded over the years as conflicts came and went. The *Territorial and Reserve Forces Act* of 1907 established the part-time Territorial Force which initially was only for home defence in the case of war. When war did come in 1914 so many members of the force volunteered to serve abroad that a 2nd line had to be instituted for home defence for those unwilling or unable to serve overseas. Finally a third, reserve line was established to provide trained replacements to the other two lines.

As we would expect, there is no sign of eligibility for a 14/15 Star on Sidney's medal records. It may be that he joined the 2nd Battalion and, after training was later sent to France to join the "C" Squadron of the 1st line. We cannot be sure. We do know, however, that he fought in France and Italy with the "C" Squadron.

Northamptonshire Yeomanry in WW1

The Northamptonshire Yeomanry had first landed in France on 4th November 1914 and in May 1916 it had become the VI Corps Cavalry Regiment. Fred Lawrence, a London-born man living in Wellingborough joined the Yeomanry in May 1915, like Sidney, and was given Regimental Number 1965. His records do still exist and he sailed from Southampton on the

4th July 1916 and arrived in Rouen on the 5th. He did not join the Yeomanry in the field until 11th December 1916. It may be that that Sidney's service followed a similar pattern.

At this time, the Northamptonshire Yeomanry were stationed in the Arras area of the Western Front. The troopers usually acted as a mounted infantry rather than the traditional cavalry. It was clear, although still sometimes ignored, that the cavalry charge was suicidal in the face of modern weaponry and trench warfare. Often the Yeomanry were used as a relief for the infantry in the line.

All the Territorial soldiers were renumbered from April 1st 1917, mainly with six-figures (and some five-figure numbers). The Northamptonshire Yeomanry were allocated the number range 145001-150000 and Sidney was given the new Regimental Number 145994.

Steve (Stebie 9173) on the *Great War Forum* website has researched the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and tells how, in May 1916, the three Squadrons of the Yeomanry had come together after being support cavalry in different Divisions (C Squadron in the 5th). They were then attached to the army at Corps level.

On 11th April 1917 they were involved in the infamous battle of Monchy le Preux which we have covered in the story of Archibald Dicks. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, who followed the Essex Yeomanry and the 10th Hussars, were trying to reach the village of Monchy le Preux and occupy the village to save it falling into German hands. As the support cavalry, the Northamptonshire Yeomanry are sometimes missed out of accounts of this action but they were under intense fire and lost a dozen men and had about 50 wounded or shell shocked. Sixty-five horses were either killed or wounded. You get a real sense of the troopers' view of the battle from a report from "a gentleman serving in the Yeomanry" that appeared in the *Northampton Independent* on the 28th April 1917. For once I think it is worth quoting at length.

> *We passed behind a ridge for the night with no cover save the sky and it snowed like the deuce. We kept our saddles on all night and in the morning you couldn't distinguish the saddle from the horse, the snow was so thick. At (the next) night we had to perch again and believe me, the snow and the cold were far harder to stick than the shells which came pretty often. At daybreak next morning we dug our saddles out of the mud and saddled up, thinking that we were going back owing to the weather being unfit for cavalry work. But we were mistaken and not a trifle disappointed. Not one of us could hold a limb still, we were so cold and we only had biscuits and bully.*
>
> *Then the colonel told us that we were going to take Monchy le Preux, which the Germans were still holding. About 10.30 the Brigadier General came up and said that the village was clear, but that the infantry were weakened by losses, the cavalry were to charge and hold it. We lined up across a huge field, with 2000 brigade cavalry on the left flank, my regiment in the centre and about 2000 cavalry on the left flank. From right to left was only half a mile.*

The left flank went over first and they had such a reception. They cantered along in massed formation and before they had gone 200 yards the Bosche artillery opened fire. There were soon 200 empty saddles. Horses were hopping back over the ridge wounded, another galloping with the trooper hanging in the stirrup. We were standing on the ridge . We were getting men knocked out right and left. Then the Colonel said, "Mount!" and we were off. "A" Squadron leading.
As we galloped down Orange Hill to the village, the infantry in support who had dug themselves in, jumped up and cheered, shouting, "Give em hell boys."

I have never seen such a bombardment. As we galloped down the hill men and horses were blown up by high explosives. I should say 400 cavalrymen and horses lay dead or dying on that field. There was not a piece of ground 10 feet square without a shell hole. When we entered the village, what a sight met our eyes. All the way up the main street were dead horses and men, fellows groaning, horses whinnying and kicking, one licking his dead master's face; and infantry galore all dead. We had to ride over our own dead to get through and when we were there we were subjected to a heavier shelling than before and had to stand in Monchy for an hour and a half and hold the village until the division came up.

In November 1917 the Northamptonshire Yeomanry left the Western Front and moved to Italy and became the 14th Corps Cavalry. They arrived on 5th November.

Italy had, eventually, joined the Allied side in the First World War and had declared war on Austria on 23rd May 1915. At first, the Italians had made good progress in the mountainous area of northern Italy where it bordered Austria. In 1917, however, the tide seemed to have turned and, at Caporetto, on 24th October 1917 the Italians were badly defeated and forced to rapidly retreat. British and French troops were rushed to Italy but, in the event, largely acted in a reserve capacity. The Italians, contrary to some accounts, managed to turn the tide by the efforts of their own troops. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, however, as a last hurrah to the past, did fight as cavalry, pursuing the retreating Austrians in the closing actions of the war in October 1918.

The British lost 2,000 men but the Italians lost 460,000 and had a further 960,000 wounded, including some half a million who were disabled for the rest of their lives.

It may also be, that Sidney like many of the British soldiers, unused to wine, suffered by their first encounter with it.

Sidney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 but was shown as demobilised by the time that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was compiled and by Spring 1919 was in the *Register of Electors*. It seems likely therefore that he was demobbed in late 1918 or early 1919. He was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals.

In the summer of 1920 he married Ellen Ann Furnell. Ellen,like Sidney's mother, was a Furnell from the Bythorn area so it seems likely that husband and wife were distantly

related. At first the couple lived with his parents in Carlow. Ellen would not have been qualified to vote but in 1928, ten years after her husband, she was enfranchised.

We do not know if Sidney ever returned to farm work but at some point he became a blast furnaceman, probably at Islip. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* this was his trade. They were now living in Carlow Street and had had two children, Benjamin born in 1921 and Kathleen in 1923.

Ellen died in 1951, aged 56, and Sidney, aged 68, in April-June 1962.

Chapter 31

William Henry Jackson (1891-1919)

Two young people, John Henry Jackson and Susan Roberts, married in Ringstead Parish Church on 14th September 1891. On the 4th of the following month their son, William Henry was baptised in the same church. At the time, the family was living across the river in Woodford. He had been born on 15th September just one day after the marriage.

John Henry was originally from Brigstock, although the family had moved to Woodford, but Susan was a local Ringstead girl. By 1901 the family were living at No. 3 Barritt's Yard, (a yard beside the present Post Office), and William, now nine, had a sister Gertrude Mary who was just four years old. John was a shoe finisher in a local factory. By 1911 John and Susan and daughter Gertrude were still living in Ringstead High Street. John had continued as a shoe finisher and Gertrude was a "lift packer", making leather heels. Shoe finishing was usually done by men and, as the name implies, was a series of operations to make the boots or shoes ready for sale. In *the Art of Boot and Shoemaking, A Practical Guide*, published in 1885, John Bedford Leno explains one process:

> *With a little spittle applied to a piece of rag clean the upper and wipe dry, pull out the tack from the block and remove the last, and scrape away the pegs from the inside.*

Good preparation for the spit and polish of army life. But where was William? He was staying with his father's youngest brother, Charles Jackson, born in Woodford, and his wife Lillian. The couple were only 29 years old so were only nine years older than their nephew. Charles and William were also both working as shoe finishers. They were living at Lilley Terrace in Irthlingborough.

Unfortunately, once again, like many others, William Jackson's records were destroyed in the Second World War. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and *1918 Absent Voters' List* that he was in the 5th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and had been given the Regimental Number 30048. The *Roll of Honour* also noted that he had fought in Salonika and France.

When we look at William's entry in the *Roll of Awards and Medals* we find six other soldiers of the 5th and 6th Battalions of the Inniskillings. Further research shows that Henry Kennell (30050) from Rushden who had died in Egypt on 6th March 1918 and Archibald Hollingsworth (30047) from Thaxted in Essex who had been killed in France on 17th October 1918 had been in the Northamptonshire Regiment prior to being transferred to the 5th (Service) Battalion. It seems likely that William followed a similar path. He would have enlisted with the Northamptonshires and, after training, been transferred to the Inniskillings.

The 5th Battalion had been formed from volunteers, in August 1914, as part of Kitchener's First New Army. In April 1915 it moved to Basingstoke for final training. In August 1915 it

was part of the Gallipoli Campaign against the Turks (Ottoman Empire), allies of the Germans. In late September 1915 they then moved on to Salonika (or Salonica).

Before he was posted abroad William married Edith Neville from Irthlingborough in the third quarter of 1916. It seems likely, therefore, as Salonika was the first warzone mentioned on the Roll of Honour, that it was late in 1916 that he joined the 5th Inniskillings in Salonica.

The 5th saw service on the Macedonian Front (the area north of Greece, part of the troublesome Balkans). An officer of the 5th at this time was Henry Lamb who was a doctor and artist (and became part of the Bloomsbury Set). His story is told by "Inniskilling" on the Inniskilling Museum website. It tells how the 5th were in the Stuma Valley, a marshy area, where there was little action but where malaria was endemic. This debilitating disease quickly reduced a soldier's fighting capability.

In September 1917 the 5th were posted to Egypt. They were based near Rafa where they trained for the campaign in Palestine. The Battalion joined the Expeditionary Force led by General Edmond Allenby. There had been major setbacks previously but this time progress was swift and Jerusalem was captured in December 1917.

Irish Troops in the Judaean Hills Surprised by a Turkish Bombardment. Henry Lamb ©IWM (Art.IWM ART 2746)

The campaign against the Turks (Ottoman Empire) was far from over. We have seen that Henry Kennell, of the 5th, from Rushden was killed in March and in early May 1918 they were caught by a surprise Turkish bombardment. Four soldiers were killed and eight wounded. When Henry Lamb was asked to do a large commemorative painting of the war for the Irish Hall of Remembrance, it was this incident at Jiljila in the Judaean Hills that he chose as his subject. Was William one of the figures desperately running for shelter?

Between April and June 1918 Indian units replaced the British in the area, and the 5th Battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers were posted to France. The German offensive of Spring 1918 was threatening to win the war before the American forces could bolster the Allied cause. The Battalion was part of these troops brought back to the Western Front to help resist this onslaught. They joined the 198th Brigade, 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division on 19th July 1918.

The following months were part of the final phase of the war as the Allies pushed the Germans back but the progress was still hard won and there were many casualties. The 5th Battalion fought in the Second Battle of Cambrai (8th to 10th October 1918), The Pursuit of the Selle and the Battle of the Selle (17th to 26th October).

On 31st October 1918 the Division was withdrawn from the Front Line and moved to the Serain area, south-east of Cambrai, but, on the 2nd November, they quickly returned to the action and were part of the advance through Le Cateau and fought up to the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

We get some idea of the intensity of the fighting the 5th endured from the local casualties in this period. On 10th October Charles Henry Spriggs from Wellingborough was killed, and Frederick Bridgement from Chelveston on the 8th November.

For these men to die so close to the end of the war seems even sadder and, when we look at the family around William Jackson, we see the heartaches felt by many back home. William's uncle, Samuel Jackson, had been killed on 23rd March 1918 and the May 3rd edition of the Northampton Mercury reported that Charles Jackson, the uncle, who William had been staying with, was reported missing. Fortunately, although I have not discovered any later report, Charles did return to his family in Irthlingborough.

William also returned to his family and he was in the *Electoral Registers* for 1918 and 1919, living in the Ringstead High Street. On 11th August 1921 the couple had a daughter, Dorothy Jackson. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, William and Edith, with daughter Dorothy, were living at 20 Cherry Street in Irthlingborough. It was part of a row of semi-detached Council Houses. William was still a boot and shoe finisher and Dorothy worked in a boot and shoe packing department.

Edith died in the third quarter of 1972 and William, aged 81, in the April to June quarter of the following year. Their daughter Dorothy, who had married George Hingle, had predeceased them in 1968.

Chapter 32

The Major Family

The Parish Registers of Ringstead are littered with the Major surname. In looking for the young men who fought in the First World War, we can trace their descent from two sons of John and Mary (née Knowles) Major. Charles had been baptised on April 13th 1819, following the death of an earlier Charles, and his line leads through Lot Major and Susannah Ball to Charlie and Charles Arthur. Another son of John and Mary was baptised Morris on September 14th 1843 and his line leads through James and Mary Ann (née Medlow) to James Henry Major.

Charles Major (1896-1982)

Lot and Susan Major had ten children, six of whom survived into adulthood. Lot had married Susan Ball on 25th December 1878. Their family started with early tragedies when daughter Eliza May was buried, aged 13 months, on the 20th February 1880 and another Eliza was also buried on March 29th 1883, aged just six weeks. Polly who was born between the two Elizas did survive although, certainly in later life, she was disabled. Then followed Harry, John, Ernest, Charlie and Charles Arthur.

As we can see, rather strangely, the couple named one son, born on 12th March 1896, Charles, but always known as Charlie. Another son, born the following year, was named Charles Arthur, although sometimes known as Arthur. The family had moved to Raunds for a few years and the two "Charles" sons were born there. By 1901 they had returned to Ringstead and were living in 15 Carlow. By 1911 Lot was 59 and Susan 53. They were now living in Rosebery Street in the new Tilcroft Estate.

Lot had always been a handsewn army bootmaker but in 1911 he was "out of employment". The oldest daughter, Polly, now 30 years old, was a boot closer but she too was out of work. Harry (28) was a laster in a local factory, Ernest (18) was a heel builder, Charlie (16) a shoe hand in the Lasting Department and Charles Arthur (14) was a "heel feeder for a heeling machine". The only child who was not in the boot and shoe trade was John Thomas (22) who was a horsekeeper. Living with them were also grandchildren Willie and Florence Major.

As we have seen before in these biographies, the terrible irony for the handsewn men working on military boots and shoes, was that they needed wars to bring in the orders but they also knew that those same wars might take away their sons. None would have predicted the scale of losses that were suffered by the community and the nation.

Few of Charlie's military records have survived but his Medal Card shows that he was in The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) with Regimental Number 25818 and the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) with number 79303. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* has him in the 16th Battalion of the Buffs and demobilised but I think that this is a mistake. The *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 has him in the 3rd Buffs but this may refer to the old name for the Buffs which

was the 3rd Regiment of Foot. The Medal Roll, however, has him in the 10th Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment), transferring to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) and we will assume that this the correct record of his service.

Charlie's Regimental Number, 25818, indicates that he probably enlisted with the 10th in late May 1918. The 10th Battalion of the Buffs had been formed from the Royal East Kent and West Kent Yeomanry in Egypt on 1st February 1917. They had been sent to France and landed in Marseilles on the 7th May 1918 on board the *HMT Malwa.* They moved to the Western Front and took part in the Second Battle of the Somme, the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Artois and Flanders, ending the war in Tournai in Belgium.

They were now under the command of the 74th (Yeomanry) Division and the 23rd Infantry Brigade. At first it remained at GHQ Reserve as it built up numbers and the soldiers were trained and re-equipped for trench warfare. We cannot be sure but is likely that Charlie joined the Regiment in the field in the July to September 1918 period.

On 11th July the 10th moved into Front Line billets at La Miquellerie but it was not until 4th August that they took over positions in the right section of the Front line near St Floris. Their first real action was on 5th August when they were part of a concerted attack by the Allies along a wide front. In some areas there was little opposition and good progress was made but the 10th, apart from B Company, met determined opposition.

The story of the next two months was one of almost continual forward movement as the Germans retreated, destroying bridges and anything they thought might be useful to the Allies as they went. But it must not be thought that this was an easy process and many lives were lost. If we look at an advance on 21st September by the 10th we can see the dangers that Charlie and his fellow soldiers had to face. Chris (Drew-1918) writing on the *Great War Forum* in 2013 recounted the events of that day.

> *The advance was made behind a barrage which was successful enough to get them among the thick belts of wire near Zoo Trench. The infantry had to wait here while the barrage went on. A few men got through the wire and then the enemy came out of his dugouts and commenced a huge fire of shells and machine gun bullets. C and D Companies in front could do nothing but try to hold on in shell holes. A Company was just as badly off as they could not move forward and had to fall back from an enemy counterattack. C and D were now in danger from the rear. The telephone was disconnected and though two runners got back, nobody could return a message. When darkness fell the Buffs managed to get back having lost Captain Hatfield MC, 2nd Lt Oxley and 12 men killed, 2 officers and 28 Other Ranks "wounded or missing". Also 20 more missing.*
>
> *After this action the 10th Buffs were relieved by the 15th Suffolks and remained in reserve under intermittent shell fire until the 25th.*

At first the progress was quite slow, often moving in and out of enemy trenches, and the Germans often launched counterattacks, using gas shells. Also the Royal Engineers were kept busy trying to construct temporary bridges across the rivers. The tide had turned but ground

was still hard-won. At the end of September the Battalion was taken out of the Front Line and entrained to Lillers and from there to billets in Aubigny

October saw the enemy retreating at a faster rate as the resolve of the, often very young, troops began to break. In *Historical Records of the Buffs*, Colonel R.S.H. Rooney wrote:

> *The country had been for four years in the possession of the Germans and it is impossible to describe the joy manifested by the French inhabitants at their release at last from their horrible servitude. The Buffs never experienced, nor are they likely to again, such exuberant tokens of welcome and gratitude as they met in the neighbourhood of Lille.*

The Buffs reached Marquin (or Marquain), three miles west of Tournai, and the gas and high explosive shelling by the Germans became very severe as they made a last stand. The 10th were at Tournai when the Armistice was finally declared on 11th November 1918.

At some point after the end of the war, Charlie, with many soldiers from the 10th (and 7th) Buffs, were transferred to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment). Chris (clk) on the *Great War Forum,* whose research has greatly helped in establishing Charlie's war service dates, has shown that he almost certainly would have been transferred to the Queens in February or early March 1919.

Another post by ken48 on the *Great War Forum* confirmed this by quoting from the 1st Queens War Diary which had noted on March 8th 1919 that two officers and 110 Other Ranks had joined from the 10th East Kents on instructions from GHQ. The Queens had been tasked with setting up and administering No.2 Reception Camp (Demobilisation) at Harfleur. It seems certain that Charlie was transferred to the Queens as part of a structured demobilisation process. This would explain why he was included in the *Ringstead Register of Electors* for Spring 1919.

Charlie returned to Ringstead and in 1920 was living with his parents, Lot and Susan, and older brother Harry in Rosebery Street. They were still all there in 1925 but the following year Charlie married Florrie Dainty. Florrie was the sister of Walter and Charles Dainty, Great War soldiers, whose stories we have already told. She had been born in Sheffield but her father was a Northamptonshire man and the family were living back in Ringstead. Her mother had died in 1920 and she probably had had to look after her father. She was 29 when she married Charlie Major who was just nine months her senior.

Before the war Charlie had been in the boot and shoe industry but by 1939 he was working as a horseman on a farm and Florrie was heel-cutting in a local factory. Living with them was Polly Major, Charlie's disabled sister and a niece, Florence who was also a heel-cutter.

Florrie died on 11th May 1981 and, just under a year later, Charlie died, aged 86 on 4th April 1982. They had still been living at 12 Rosebery Street.

Charles Arthur Major (1897-1917)

As we have seen in the story of his older brother, Charles Arthur was the second Charles in quick succession for Lot and Susan Major. Both had been born in Raund,s in a short stay up the road from Ringstead, before the family returned to its home village. Aged fourteen, he had been a "heel-feeder" for a heeling machine in a local factory in the 1911 Ringstead Census. It seems, as we shall see, that he joined up before his older brother and enlisted in the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 30917.

Few military records now exist for Charles but we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was in the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire and from his Medal Card that he had not been entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star so had not seen service abroad until 1916 at the earliest.

Following links for two soldiers suggested by "Acknown" on the *Great War Forum* we find that a William Andrews of Raunds had Regimental Number 30913, just four digits before Charles, and he attested on 12th December 1915, was put on the Army Reserve and was mobilized on 17th November 1916. He was posted to the 3rd Northamptonshires two days later. He was not posted to France until the following year and was ferried from Folkestone to Boulogne on 9th February 1917. He joined the 6th Battalion on that day but did not join them "In the Field" until the 5th March 1917. Another soldier, Charles Templar had Regimental Number 30922 and was sent to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires on 3rd March 1917.

We can, cautiously, deduce that William Andrews is the "best fit" and it seems likely that Charles too, sailed from Folkestone to Boulogne on 9th February 1917 and then, probably by rail, was taken to the 17th Infantry Base Camp at Étaples. These Camps received men from England and "toughened them up" ready to be posted to the Front Line. As a result Étaples was seen as having a harsh regime. The poet, Wilfred Owen, described the camp as a "bull ring" because of the brutality of some of the instructors. This caused unrest, particularly among the New Zealand troops and eventually led to a mutiny in September 1917.

It seems likely that Charles, like William Andrews, joined the 6th Battalion at the Front in the Arras area some time shortly after the 5th March 1917. In terrible conditions, the 6th had just taken part in a, finally inconclusive, attack, around a notorious area known as the Boom Ravine. At the beginning of March they had moved into dugouts and tents in Thiepval Wood. The *War Diary* for the 6th records that, on the 8th March, drafts of 50 and 92 men had joined them, helping to bring the Battalion back up to strength. This must have been when Charles Major and William Andrews arrived.

On the 12th March the 6th moved back up to the Achiet to Loupart Front Line although it was the following day that they moved into the trenches. What was happening, although the Allies did not at first realise it, was a planned withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, a heavily fortified line from Arras to the Aisne. This had been decided at the end of 1916 when the Germaans realised that they did not have the manpower or resources to defend the long front line that they were struggling to hold. This withdrawal took some five weeks from 21st February. They destroyed everything behind them, damaging wells and watercourses as well

as buildings and railways. Nevertheless they also fought a fierce rearguard action in places, the Allied scouts then discovering that the enemy trenches had been vacated.

The 6th were fighting alongside the 12th Middlesex and the 7th Bedfordshires and as they pushed forward they were sometimes accompanied by a Squadron of cavalry and a one of cyclists. On the 21st March 1917 they left the Front Line and carried out a series of marches, linking bus and train journeys from Miraumont, via Warley (Warloy Baillon), Villers Bocage (north of Amiens), Dury, Bacouel (sur Selle), south of Amiens, and then north to Berguette and on to billets in Thiennes by the end of the month. This was a journey of about 100 miles going first south-west and then north.

On 1st April 1917 the *War Diary* noted that:

> *The blankets of 2 Company and transport men were sterilized during the day*.

For the following fortnight the 6th were in camp undergoing general training together with various gun and bomb practices. The weather, however, was still very wet and sometimes the instruction took the form of lectures in the billets, which probably did not generate much enthusiasm, even if the men were glad to be out of the rain. On 21st April the Battalion moved to Manqueville and continued with the routine of training, and the occasional bath.

On 27th April the Battalion marched to entrain at Pernes for Arras. It was a long arduous journey made worse by an accident on the railway at Pernes which necessitated another march to the next station at Bryas with further delays along the way. They had originally arrived at Pernes station at 9.20 am and finally had to march to bivouacs at Neuville Vitasse, arriving there at 1.45 the following morning. This was a total journey of some 50 or 60 miles

On 29th April, A and D Companies were in the Front Line with C and B Companies in support. The War Diary reports:

> *A little shelling by the enemy of our trenches during the day. Lt. F.D.S. Walker and 4 Other Ranks wounded (1 remained on duty). Weather fine.*

Yet it was on that day that Charles Arthur Major was reported to have been killed. The War Diary continues telling of the shelling and the digging of trenches. But the war for Charles was over. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 8th June, some five weeks later, had in the "Killed" column:

> *Major 30917, Private C.A. Northants. Ringstead.*

I have found no further reference to him in the newspapers. He was twenty years old and is remembered on the Arras Memorial at Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery Bay 7. He does not have a grave. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website records:

> *At the entrance to the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery in France stands the Arras Memorial. The memorial commemorates nearly 35,000 soldiers of the British, South African and New Zealand forces with no known grave. Most of those commemorated were killed in the Battle of Arras, fought between 9 April and 16 May 1917.*

James Henry Major (1884-1951)

As we have seen in the brief introduction to the Major family, James Henry had descended from Morrice another son of John and Mary. According to his entry in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* he had been born on 5th September 1883 but most records suggest that it was a year later.

His father, also James, had married Frances Medlow from Spaldwick in 1872 and in 1881 they were living in Butchers Lane in Ringstead with children Mary Ann (7), Louisa (6), Martha (4) and Elizabeth (2). By 1891 they had moved to London Road (now Denford Road) and there were four further children: Samuel (8), James Henry (6), Frances (4) and Priscilla (2). James is shown as an Ironstone Labourer now and still married but there is no wife shown. Frances had died the previous year and one suspects that eldest daughter, Mary Ann, would have acted as his housekeeper. James married again, at the end of 1899, to local woman Emma Jane Abbott who was a middle-aged spinster. In the 1901 Census James and Emma were living in Carlow Road but only Samuel (18), [James] Henry (16), and Emily [Priscilla?] were still at home.

Emma Jane Major died too in 1909 but by then James Henry, her stepson, had already left home. He had married, on 17th August 1907 in Thrapston, to Mary Ann Sawford, who was also from a Ringstead family. Her older brother, John William, had volunteered as part of the St John Ambulance to serve in the Boer War. Unfortunately, like many others, he had died of Enteric Fever not long after arriving in South Africa.

In the 1911 Census the couple were living in Carlow Street with children Maurice James (3) and Eileen Mary (2). James was an "Army Boot Sewer" working in a local factory. Another daughter, Frances Joan, was born on the eve of the Great War.

We know that James was enlisted in the army on 24th June 1916 but was placed on reserve as part of the 26th Training Reserve Battalion. In November a tragedy hit the family unconnected with the war. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 1st December 1916 reported:

A RINGSTEAD TRAGEDY

> *An eight-year-old lad named Maurice Major, son of Mr Henry Major, Carlow Street, Ringstead, met with his death in a shocking manner on Monday morning. A motor petroleum wagon was going slowly along the street when the little boy tried to get on the side step. He slipped and the wheels of the motor went over him, killing him instantly.*

We know that James, or Henry as we can see he was usually known, quite naturally, tried to keep from being posted abroad. To be more exact, his employer, Walter Lawrence had applied on his behalf. The records of the Military Tribunal show that James worked at the Walter Lawrence factory as a heel scourer. The workers in the military boot industry had initially been granted exemption from call-up as boots were vital to the war effort. As the war dragged on, however, the need for men outweighed this other need and the tribunals

set up to hear these cases increasingly dismissed appeals against conscription. On the 15th June 1917, this is what happened to James Henry Major.

We get some idea of James's appearance from his enlistment form. He was 5ft 7¾ inches tall with a 37½ inch chest when fully expanded. He was only categorised as B1 by the medical officer. What this meant varied throughout the war but probably excluded him from General Service in the Front Line.

After his appeal failed he was called up to the Depot in Northampton, then posted to the 26th Territorial Reserve Battalion and given the Regimental Number TR9/77355. On 6th December 1917 he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) at Canterbury with new number 535513. The 3rd Battalion remained in England throughout the war, at first based at Canterbury, later moving to Dover. Like many others, his records have faded badly and are mainly illegible so these "facts" must be treated as probabilities.

Near, or after, the end of, the war James was released from the Buffs and was posted first to 438 Agricultural Company which was based at Northampton. It then appears that he was posted again, this time to Western Command of the Labour Corps based at Sutton. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was assisting at a Remount Depot. The Army Service Corps Remounts Service was set up to find and train horses and mules for service abroad. Animals were obtained from the United Kingdom by compulsory purchase (as illustrated in "War Horse" by Michael Morpurgo) but were also bought from all over the world.

By the time that James joined the service it was mainly about bringing fit horses home and the depots were beginning to close down.

James was diagnosed as suffering with heart trouble "aggravated" by his war service. He was "disembodied" (term for "discharged" for a territorial soldier) on 22nd November 1919 with a 20% Disability Pension, to be reviewed after a year. This gave him eight shilling for himself plus four shillings and eightpence for his wife and two children, giving him twelve shillings and eightpence a week. He was thirty-six years old. He returned to his family in Ringstead and in the 1920 *England & Wales Electoral Register* both James and his wife, Mary Ann, are listed. By the *Representation of the People Act* of 1918 women over 30 years old received the vote, but only if they were registered property occupiers (or married to a registered property occupier) of land or premises with a rateable value greater than £5 or of a dwelling-house. As a man, James only had to be 21, with no other qualification although before this Act he too would have had to have had a property qualification so it is possible that they both gained the vote in 1918.

Life returned to normal. Their girls joined the "Merry Comrades" and wrote letters to Auntie Dick at the *Northampton Mercury* telling of their pet bantams, chickens and rabbits. The Sawfords and the Majors were Nonconformists and involved in village and political life. In August 1926 the Labour Fete was held at Ringstead and both [James] Henry and Mary Ann were there as part of the organisation. The main speaker was Miss Ishbel MacDonald, daughter of Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister. She spoke of it being "more especially a women's day". She continued:

> *The men had not made the world a fit world for the children; and the women were coming in to work with the men to secure that end. They wanted to work for peace. They did not want another war. They wanted the children to grow up to live for their country, and not to die for their country; to work for their country and not to fight for their country. [Applause].*

Many of the families there had reason to wish for that. There would be another war at the end of the next decade but it would be a very different one from the last.

We do not know if James returned to the shoe industry but by 1939 he had become a "fettler" in an Iron Foundry. He would have cleaned the sand and any loose iron from a casting with a file, wire brush or abrasive wheel. Mary Ann had for an occupation, the standard "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Their two daughters Frances and Ellen had married and left home, Ellen just before the 1939 Register was compiled.

James died in 1951 aged 66 and Mary Ann in 1965.

Chapter 33

Ernest Robert Manley (1896-1946)

John Manley, son of Rebecca, was baptised on March 21st 1858 in Stoke Doyle, some nine miles north-north-east of Ringstead. The previous christening in the church, a few months earlier, had been for Frederick Hugh, son of clergyman, George Hallilеy Capron and his wife, Henrietta. The Caprons were lords of the manor of Stoke Doyle and in 1840 had bought Southwick Hall and also much of Ringstead at the time of the Enclosure in 1839-41. George's father had made a fortune as a lawyer at the time of the railway boom of the early 19th century, in which he acted for railway companies in acquisitions of land. Later, George moved back to Southwick Hall.

I think that it was possibly in Stoke Doyle in 1869 that Rebecca married William H. Taylor, an agricultural labourer, originally from Thurleigh in Huntingdonshire. Was there any Capron connection with Rebecca's move to Denford after her marriage? Certainly, she was there in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses before moving to Spring Gardens in Woodford by 1891. William was now an Ironstone Labourer.

John had by this time left home for, in 1884, he had married Ringstead girl Mary Ann Warren. The couple were to have twelve children, nine of whom survived infancy. The children had been born in Finedon, Ringstead and Woodford. One of them was Ernest Robert Manley who had been born in Woodford and baptised there on November 15th 1896. In 1901 his father, John, was an ironstone worker like his stepfather before him and, in 1911, was described as a "Blast Furnace Man".

In 1911 Ernest was 14 years old and working as an errand boy for a local carrier. Three years later the Great War began. Ernest had become a furnaceman like his father. It does not appear that he was called up when he became 18 years old. A furnaceman was a protected profession for iron was essential for the armaments industry but it was not an absolute exemption and, like the military boot makers, the country began to need them more as soldiers than craftsmen.

On 15th December 1917 Ernest married Dorothy Emma Marguerite Walker. Dorothy had been born in Ringstead, although her father, Thomas, came from Raunds and mother, Mary Ann, was from Peterborough. Thomas worked as an army bootmaker and in 1917 the couple and five of their six children were living in Leveratt's Row. Dorothy was a domestic servant which was not a particularly common occupation for Ringstead girls.

Early the following year, on 5th January 1918 their first child, Olive May, was born. Nevertheless, Ernest was called up to the Medical Board in Northampton and given an "A" Category. He was then conscripted on 13th May 1918 and on the 16th posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and given Regimental Number 38590.

We do get a general idea of Ernest's looks from his attestation form. He was quite short, even by the standards of the time, being only 5ft 4½ inches tall with a sallow complexion

and blue eyes. He was said to have a good physical development but had varicose veins at the back of his right leg.

On 30th August 1918 he was finally to cross from Dover to Calais and was taken to "L" Infantry Base Depot, which had been at Rouen but from May 1918 was at Calais. He was immediately posted to the 1st Battalion of the Norfolks. On 2nd September he went to the Divisional Refit Camp and on the 8th he joined the 1st Norfolks in the Field.

The Battalion had just moved back from the Front Line, south-east of Arras, at Lebucquiere to billets near Biefvillers Les Bapaume. The *War Diary* for the Norfolks reported on the 5th September 1918 that a draft of 125 Other Ranks had joined the Battalion and Ernest would have been one of these men. He, along with the rest of the Battalion, was trained, route marched and carried out practice attacks. After years of trench stalemate the German lines had crumbled and the Allied lines were moving forward, although not without opposition. The army was having to devise new tactics to meet this mobile warfare.

After weeks away from the warzone, on 20th September 1918, the 1st Norfolks moved south-east to Metz en Couture. The *War Diary* simply states, "This day was Z [Zero] day". At 5.20 am the barrage from the artillery began for an attack by the New Zealand Division, on the Norfolk's left. At 7.52 am the barrage then began for the attack by the 5th Division, and the Battalion moved forward to Flag Ravine near Gouzeaucourt. They paused there for a day before pressing on with the attack in conjunction with the 1st Cheshire Regiment. Having reached the agreed front line they were relieved by the 10th Fusiliers and returned to billets. By the terrible standards of the great WW1 campaigns the losses were not huge but in September 1918 the Battalion still lost 37 Other Ranks killed and 185 wounded with eight officers killed or wounded.

Again the Battalion moved back to the Metz-en-Couture area and camped a few miles west of Ytres where training once more continued although there were also football matches to pass the time and use up any excess energy. Then they were on the move, bivouacking or being billeted along the way, finally arriving near the Front Line at Caudry, some twenty-two miles further east. Here they trained in attacks on specific targets such as sunken roads.

It was becoming clear that this really was the endgame but the Germans were still managing their retreat with brave rearguard actions so that there were continuing casualties on both sides. In October only two Other Ranks were killed and three wounded and Captain R.W Dugdale was killed in action. It was usually only officers who had names in the War Diaries.

November continued with training before a move to Louvignies. The Battle of the Sambre began on 4th November with the Germans defending the line of the Sambre-Oise Canal. More troops went into battle than in the First battle of the Somme although this time with comparatively minimal losses. But, it was on this first day, that the poet Wilfred Owen was killed. He had written

My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.

The Norfolks were attacking along with the 1st Bedfordshires. On the 5th November the Battalion moved forward to engage the enemy but were met with no opposition and the 1st

Bedfords "passed through" them to continue with the attack. The Norfolks re-formed at a crossroads at Le Godelot but they were not needed and proceeded to billets at La Haute Rue, ready to continue the attack the next day. This was to be across the Sambre River. They had believed that a bridge was still passable but found that the Germans had mined it and work was started on constructing a temporary crossing. The Devons now led an attack but were resisted by the Germans, and sustained casualties. The Norfolks' *War Diary*, however, shows that on 8th November there had been no enemy shelling since the previous day.

On 11th November the Battalion was in Jolimetz "cleaning up the billets and surroundings". The entry below this, states:

Notice received of ~~termination~~ suspension of hostilities.

Fortunately, the original word proved correct and the war was finally over. The *War Diary's* entries were now brief and full of route marches, physical training and parades and, latterly, "educational classes". It must have been difficult to keep bored young men, wanting to go home and lacking the discipline of fear, out of trouble and in order.

During this time they were billeted at the fortress town of Le Quesnoy before moving to Grand Leez north of Naumur in Belgium. At the end of January 1919, Ernest was treated for P.U.O. and spent a few days receiving treatment from the 15th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps. P.U.O. stood for Pyrexia (Fever) of Unknown Origin although by this time in the war its cause was known. It was usually known as Trench Fever and was caused by a bacterium present in the droppings of human lice which the men would scratch into a small wound. It was an unpleasant and debilitating disease which could cause rashes, headaches, dizziness and loss of energy. It could also sometimes cause extreme pain in the shins and in some men could lead to depression. Baths at least once a fortnight and stripping and killing lice in the seams of the men's clothing helped and, late in the war the "Russian Pit", a large hot air delouser for clothes, was introduced.

The Norfolks proceeded to demobilisation but, at Calais, on 18th March 1919, Ernest was transferred to the 15th Battalion of the Essex Regiment and given new number 48141. The 15th had only been in France from May 1918. After the Armistice, the Battalion was in charge of the demobilisation at Calais, so its members were denied early demobilisation themselves. Ernest was granted leave in the United Kingdom from 27th April to 11th May 1919. Unfortunately, he arrived back in Calais "2 days 14 hours late" and was sentenced to 21 days Field Punishment No.2 and also forfeited three days' pay.

Field Punishment No. 1 was when a soldier could be handcuffed and/or fettered to a fixed object for part of the day and would also be subject to hard labour at other times. Field punishment No.2 was for a lesser offence and the soldier would not be fixed to an object. The army rules for punishment, however, emphasised that it should not cause injury or leave any permanent mark. Incapacitated soldiers were of no use to the army.

Ernest remained with the Essex Regiment as part of the Army of Occupation but was once more granted leave in England from 24th September to 8th October 1919. Finally, on 27th November 1919 he sailed from Boulogne to Dover for demobilisation.

Ernest returned to his family in Ringstead and he and Dorothy had a further four children: Freda in 1920, Norah in 1924, Laurence in 1926 and Ernest in 1930. But all was not right for Ernest, the father. In the *1939 Register of England & Wales* Dorothy was living in the Council Houses in Denford Road with her children and her older brother, Percy Walker.

Ernest was not with his family. He was in Berrywood Hospital in Northampton. In 1939 there were some 1400 patients and over 100 "Mental Nurses" for Berrywood was what had previously been called a "lunatic asylum". Attitudes and treatment had improved over the years. The hospital had its own farm, market garden, shoemakers, tailors, carpenter and upholsterer. Ernest is shown as a furnaceman and he was there among the shoemakers and leather workers, the farm and general labourers. Berrywood later became St Crispins and was a leading institution in abandoning the straitjacket approach and trying to generate a more "homely", caring atmosphere.

It seems possible that Ernest never returned home, for he died in 1946, and his death was registered in the Brixworth District which included the hospital. He was 49 years old. Dorothy lived to be 77 and died in 1974. Had the war claimed another victim?

Chapter 34

Albert James Manning (1892-1919)

We have seen in this series of biographies that, from the late Nineteenth Century, many Ringstead men had left the farm or the shoe factory to work in the local quarries and blast furnaces at Islip. James Manning was one of these Ringstead men, whose father had been a farm labourer but had become an industrial worker.. He had married Emma Maria Warr from Little Addington in 1887 and by the 1901 Census they had five children: Emily (13), Gertrude (11), Albert (9), Florence (6) and Alec (4).

By 1911 Emily was an Army Boot Closer, Gertrude was a School Teacher, Florence a Monitress (in a school) and Alec a Baker's Assistant. It would have been seen as an "upwardly mobile" family. Only Albert James, aged 17, whose story we are following here, had become an Ironstone Labourer like his father.

When war came in 1914 Albert did not enlist with the usual infantry regiments but joined the Royal Engineers. In his work at the Islip Iron Company he had become a shunter on the ironworks site. His employers had applied for him to be exempted from service because of his work but the appeal was rejected.

Albert Manning in the Rushden Argus 14th February 1919
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society.

On 13th December 1915 Albert enlisted with the Royal Engineers whose work was an essential support to the fighting units. It maintained the railways, roads, bridges and water supply. It often had to improvise new structures quickly, to replace ones destroyed by the enemy. It also had specialist tunnelling companies and built frontline fortifications. The list could go on.

Albert joined another branch of the Engineers which dealt with the communication systems in the warzones and the chain of command. At the beginning of the war the telegraph was the most important means of military communication. Brian Hall in a paper for the University of Salford, explained what this entailed in terms of engineering work.

The army utilised two types of line: "Airline" and "Cable." The former referred to bare wire fixed to poles, buildings or trees, while the latter consisted of gutta-percha or rubber-insulated wire laid along the ground. Airline was the prominent feature of the telegraph and telephone system to the rear of divisional headquarters, beyond the range of enemy artillery fire. Lines forward of divisional headquarters were laid on short poles or stakes, along the sides or the bottom of trenches, or simply along the ground. However, the closer to the frontline the more susceptible to faults and breakages from enemy shellfire these lines became, not to mention their vulnerability to enemy interception. Throughout the war, the British Army implemented numerous measures to combat these problems, including twisting the cable to reduce "leakage," duplicating the number of lines laid and burying them to ever-greater depths to protect them from shellfire. By the summer of 1915, the standardised depth of lines forward of divisional headquarters was 2 feet 6 inches. By the end of the year this had been deepened to 5 feet and by the start of the Somme offensive in July 1916, all lines up to battalion headquarters were laid to a depth of 6 feet.

It is clear that this was often difficult, dangerous work and an obvious target for snipers and artillery.

The telephone became the main system of communication as the war progressed but, like the telegraph, the lines were very vulnerable to shellfire and were difficult to maintain in a moving situation. The early systems were also unreliable over distance and vulnerable to interception. Wireless technology (radio) was in its infancy and its range was very limited. It is therefore not surprising that human runners and carrier pigeons still had an important place in the army's communications.

Albert Manning joined the 24th Airline Company GY Cable Section (the Sections were numbered alphabetically, usually with two letters) and given the Regimental No. 32672. He went with the 24th to Salonika in April 1916. The Macedonian Campaign had begun in October 1915 and initially the Greek government, which was trying to remain neutral, was very ambivalent about the British presence. As a result, the army was not allowed to use the existing civil telecommunication network and had to try to create their own with very limited skilled manpower and resources. A couple of months after Albert arrived, the Allies formally took control of the civil telegraph offices and things improved. There was also more skilled labour and supplies of cable sent to the region.

In the Medal Rolls, Albert was described as a "driver" but he was also described as a "Pioneer" which was a term for a Private who was allocated to general duties in the Royal Engineers. Without his service record we cannot see the chronology of these descriptions.

We have seen in the story of Stuart Dimbleby Bates, who left the Salonika area at about the time that Albert arrived there, that much of the fighting was in a region of marshes and stagnant pools where malaria was endemic. Albert was treated twice for the disease in his time in Macedonia. Malaria was rarely fatal but it caused extreme fatigue and vomiting and would often recur. We know now that "Plasmodium", the parasite responsible for malaria, also impairs the ability of key cells of the immune system to trigger an efficient immune

response. As a result the men who had contracted malaria were susceptible to a wide range of other infections.

Certainly, this was the case for Albert and he was to suffer illnesses from this point on. In September 1917 he crossed the Mediterranean as part of XX Corps of the British Egyptian Force. The army had originally been sent to Egypt to defend the Suez Canal but it later also moved north into the Palestine area. Albert was with this force but contracted diphtheria there and had to return to Egypt for treatment before returning again to Palestine in September 1918.

With the end of the war the Royal Engineers began to move back through Europe for demobilisation. Albert had been away from home for three years and must have been looking forward to home and good health. Unfortunately "Spanish Flu" and Pneumonia were rife in Europe at the time. We know that he was taken to the 1st Rest Camp Hospital at Tourlaville, just outside Cherbourg, suffering from Lobar Pneumonia. He died there on 3rd February 1919. An amount of £20 19s 10d was authorised to be paid to Albert's father. He was also entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He was buried near the hospital in the Tourlaville Communal Cemetery Grave C.6. He was twenty-seven years old. The text his parents selected for his gravestone was the refrain from a popular hymn, *Now the labourer's task is o'er*, by John Ellerton:

Father in thy Gracious Keeping

Leave we now our loved one sleeping.

Chapter 35

William Edward Mason (1887-1964)

A farmer, called Amos Mason, living in Molesworth in Huntingdonshire, had 99 acres of land. He had been born in 1814 and had married Jane Howell from nearby Catsworth. For some reason the couple, who had seven children, decided to move west across the county line to Ringstead in the 1860s. He became the landlord of the Swan Inn which stood in Carlow and faced down the High Street. There were also some nine acres of land for Amos to run a smallholding.

Amos died, aged 65, and was buried in the churchyard on January 12th 1879. His widow, Jane, took over the licence but by the mid-1880s had moved to London End, in the poorer cottages at the other end of the main village.

One of Jane Mason's children was Frederick, who had been born in Molesworth in about 1859, and moved to Ringsted with his parents. In 1881 he was living at The Swan but, aged 21, was working as an army shoemaker. On 26th February 1886 he married Denford girl, Anne Elizabeth Horne. By 1891 they were living next to Anne's parents, Fortescue and Emilia Horne. Fortescue was 66 years old and a "cottager" or smallholder. Frederick and Anne now had two children, Amos Fortescue (5) and William Edward (4). Amos had been born on 12th April 1885 and William's as 25th March 1887. By 1901 Amos (15) and William (14) were both shoemakers, working at home with their father at 15 Carlow Road. Frederick died in 1908, aged just 49, and in 1911 Amos (25) was shown as the head of the household and widow Annie (53) and brother William (24) were living with him.

The following year, William married Coral Lucretia Cope, just a year his junior, in Ringstead Parish Church. The Cope family was one which had, and was to have, more than its fair share of troubles. James Cope, Coral's grandfather, had been born in Wilden in Bedfordshire. In 1861, aged 17, he had moved to Keysoe, just a few miles from Ringstead, working as a shoemaker, with his uncle, Thomas Cope. James married Jane Hillson in Ringstead on 24th December 1862.

The couple had at least six children, among them Louisa and Henry. James seems to have supplemented his income by a bit of poaching, shooting partridges. He was caught, along with nephew George and other local men on 11th February, and, as the perceived ringleader, was fined £2 with 10 shillings costs. His wife, Jane, was buried on 1st July 1881, aged 36 years. It may be that it was as the result of infection following childbirth for on February 11th 1882 Ruby Jane Cope was also buried aged just eight months.

James remarried, in early 1886, to Hannah Elizabeth Austin and had two further daughters, Maggie and Maud. At about the time of his second marriage, daughter, Louisa, left home and moved to Peckham in London. We know this from later Censuses which show that her daughter, Coral Lucretia, was born there on 7th March 1888. Was hers the fate of many young women who went into service? We do know that soon after, on 8th May 1889, she

was taken into Berrywood Mental Hospital (sometimes Asylum). There were instances of women being taken into asylums because they were giving birth to illegitimate children but in Ringstead it was a far from unusual predicament and the women continued to live in the community, so it seems unlikely that this was not the cause. Whatever the reason, her time there was not long for a year later, on 19th May 1890 Louisa died of Enteric Fever, usually called Typhoid. Typhoid is caused by a type of Salmonella, often contracted from a contaminated water supply. I have not found any news item on there being an outbreak at the hospital but it was around at this time in some of the local towns such as Raunds and Burton Latimer.

Louisa's daughter, Coral Lucretia was baptised, after Louisa's death, in Ringstead on 1st May 1892. In the 1891 she was seen to be living with her grandfather, James, and his second wife, Hannah. Hannah too died in 1910 and, in 1911, aged 23, Coral was living alone with James in Wymans Road in Ringstead. He was still an army bootmaker and Coral was now a shoe stitcher.

On May 25th 1912 Coral, aged 24, married William Edward Mason in Ringstead. We can see on the marriage certificate that she had no known father. The young couple's life together was short for, on 7th October of that same year, she died. She was 24, the same age as her mother when she had died. The cause of death given on her death certificate was "Acute Bright's Uraemia, Cardiac Arrest". Bright's Disease was a name given to a disease of the kidneys which caused waste materials to build up in the body rather than being excreted. It could lead to further complications in the body's organs and, as in this case, cardiac arrest. It was an unpleasant way to die with, among other symptoms, extreme fatigue, itching sensations and twitching, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. William was present at her death and it was to be one of many that he would witness.

Two years later, on 6th November 1916 William was with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) and had been given the Regimental Number GS/42550. His military records have largely disappeared and it is likely that this date was when he first landed in France. He was with the 2nd Battalion for only a few weeks, possibly at an Infantry Base such as Étaples, on the French coast. On the 26th he was posted to the 20th Battalion "in the Field".

The 20th Royal Fusiliers was one of its three "Public School Battalions" which in 1914, at a time of romantic patriotic enthusiasm, had been formed entirely from men from the British Public Schools and Universities. It was assimilated into the British Army and gradually became similar to other units with drafts of conscripts coming mainly from the working classes.

The Battle of the Somme earlier in 1916 had weakened the German Army and Sir Douglas Haig wanted to maintain this advantage so, throughout that winter of 1916-17, there were repeated raids and small actions along the Western Front. At the time that William arrived with the 20th they were in rest billets at Merlessart but, on 1st December, they moved by train and by foot into the Front Line, South-East of Grancourt, opposite St Pierre Vast Wood. In this sector the 20th saw no major offensives by either side but there was sporadic infantry

and artillery fire. This was to be the pattern over the winter months with short periods in the Front Line interspersed with time in reserve or in rest billets behind the lines. It was not a pleasant time in the trenches foreshadowing the terrible conditions later in 1917. The War Diary of the Battalion reports on the period between 18th and 22nd December 1916:

> *. . . a hard frost was succeeded by a thaw when tracks had been [laid] became impassable in places. As a consequence movement was very slow and the relief of companies in the front line carried out nightly, occupied the greater part of each night.*

Lack of sleep had to be added to the long list of privations suffered by the soldiers.

The German High Command had decided on a planned withdrawal to a fortified line which had been constructed from August 1916 and was known by the Allies as the Hindenburg Line. The withdrawal started on 21st February 1917 and as they left they destroyed buildings, bridges, road, railways and anything that might be of use to the Allies.

The first significant engagements fought by the 20th were the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe which were part of a campaign around Arras that began in April 1917. The British attacks had very limited success but, further south, the French offensive was a complete failure with 187,000 casualties leading to widespread mutinies. In the Second Battle of the Scarpe the 20th were in Divisional Reserve at first but moved up into the Front Line trenches facing Fontaine-les-Croisilles. The following day they moved back into billets. The *War Diary* gives little indication of the ferocity of the fighting but it does record that in April the Battalion lost 71 men killed, 111 wounded and 18 missing.

The period from May to mid-June was spent around Arras, moving for short periods into the Front line with times in reserve or training behind the lines. On 30th June, however, they received orders to entrain to Dunkerque, where they boarded a barge up the Canal de Dunkerque to Bray Dunes, and camped opposite the Parish Church.

This area of the Western Front, in the Nieuport area in Belgium, was next to the North Sea coast and was important because the ports of Dunkerque, Calais and Boulogne were essential to the Allies for the movement of troops and equipment.

On 16th August 1917 the 20th took over trenches in the marshy Lombartzyde sector of the Front. The British had planned to make amphibious landings in this area when they had achieved a breakthrough in the Ypres area but the Germans were aware of the plan and set up their own attack, using mustard gas for the first time and causing very heavy casualties. Operation Hush was abandoned.

When the 20th were in the Front Line it was still very active but once again they were on the move, 25 miles south, to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres. On 25th September they were near Polygon Wood and under the orders of the 98th Brigade. Here, they were bombed by enemy aircraft, with mustard gas becoming a common occurrence. In September 1917 the 20th lost 2 men killed, 70 gassed and one missing with 9 officers wounded.

From this point on you get an impression of a Battalion being not a Front Line force. In October they were attached to the 3rd Australian Division and spent most of their time in working parties and this continued when they moved to Ypres, reporting to the 2nd Canadian Railway Troops. We see in the Diary a hint of the old traditions that continued among all the mayhem. On 29th October 1917 it records:

> *3 p.m. Drums and Fifes left camp for Penzance Lines. 2nd Lt. Worley proceeded there to take command of all Bands, Drums and Pipes of the Brigade.*

This campaign of the war is usually called the Third Battle of Ypres, with the final phases from mid-October to the 10th November often known as the Battle of Passchendaele, a name associated with terrible mud, and slaughter on both sides. We see the diminishing role of the 20th in the list of their casualties for October; Officers nil; other Ranks 1 killed and 10 wounded.

On 3rd November the Battalion moved up into the Front Line and three days later were relieved and marched, "via STINKING FARM – WULVERGHEM – NEUVE EGLISE – to KORTEPYP A Camp". Passchendaele continued on its terrible progress but the 20th were mainly in carrying or supplying roles and, during the whole of November, the only casualty was one man wounded. This pattern continued into the new year and from 14th January they were billeted in the cellars of Ypres. On 1st February 1918 the War Diary records:

> *Orders received for disbandment of the Battalion. Personnel to be posted to the 2nd, 4th and 13th Battalions.*

According to the Medal Rolls, William had already been posted to the 13th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers on 30th January but this probably records when the order was sent, rather than acted upon. The 13th Battalion were one of Kitchener's New Army units formed in 1914. They had landed in Boulogne on 30th July 1915. The War Diary for the Battalion records on 9th February 1918:

> *Draft of 8 officers and 213 Other Ranks from disbanded 20th R. Fusiliers joined Bttn.*

It seems likely that this is when William joined them. In February, the 13th were in the Dickebusch area, south-west of Ypres, and then moved up into the Front Line where, initially, there was only "slight" shelling. On the 25th, however, the enemy opened up a heavy bombardment of gas shells. A captured German stated that they were about to attack.

In early March 1918 there was snow with cold winds, but it turned to rain and the 13th moved up to the Front Line astride the Menin Road. At 1 a.m. on the 8th a message was received that an enemy attack was expected and, at 6.30 a.m., heavy shelling began. A desperate message was received from No.3 Company:

> *Please send as many stretcher bearers as possible – only a few men left to carry on and no officers fit to carry on. 2 officers killed 2 wounded. Please send reinforcements as soon as possible. A CLARK Sergt. No 3 Company.*

Reinforcements were sent and the situation saved. This seems to have been a precursor to the German, "Michael Offensive". The 13th were in billets or on the march for the rest of March, finishing at the end of the month in billets at Rossignol Farm.

In April the German offensive gathered force, with infantry attacks and heavy bombardments. The 13th did not receive the main thrust of the attack and were able to hold their line but elsewhere the enemy were breaking through and so the Battalion was forced to retire to prevent becoming surrounded. The Allies generally had to give ground and the Germans seemed to be in the ascendancy but they too had suffered heavy losses of men and resources. The offensive dwindled to a halt and, for the 13th, much of May was taken up with training at Louvencourt and Vauchelles, south-west of Arras.

On 7th May 1918 there was an important note in the War Diary:

Capt. Cooke, American E. [Expeditionary] F. [Force] attached for instruction.

The Americans had arrived and the impetus of their troops and armaments would tip the balance for the Allies.

The Battalion was still in and out of the Front Line from Noyon to Montdidier, south-east of Amiens. It was from this point that despite setbacks and losses the move forward gained momentum and they began to find empty but booby-trapped enemy positions as on 29th July near Bucquoy Cemetery where one man was killed and four wounded in this way. There was still stiff opposition, however, as the enemy covered their retreat.

The 13th were part of the Battle of the Canal du Nord. This canal had been started just before the war and when hostilities broke out it was only partly finished. Much of the canal was empty but it was still a formidable obstruction because it was approximately 40 yd (37 m) wide, with a western bank that was between 10 and 15 ft (3.0 and 4.6 m) high and an eastern bank about 5 ft (1.5 m) high so temporary bridges were needed. In early September 1918, the 13th took part in the preparatory skirmishes but were not involved in the main attack at the end of September but were in relief in Bertincourt and then, ten miles west, in a tented camp at Warlencourt-Eaucourt.

On 8th October the Battalion, as part of the Battle of Cambrai, took part in an attack but met fierce enemy gunfire. A second attack on the 10th was successful, however, and was "without difficulty except for the supporting tanks which persistently fired at our own troops and from our own barrage which was late and short". This included the relief of the town of Caudry and on the 27th a letter was received from the Maire, thanking the Battalion for liberating the town Over 200 prisoners were captured but the Battalion suffered many casualties. After time in billets at Caudry, on the 23rd October, in part of the Battle of the Selle, the Battalion moved to Salesches and attacked the enemy in a fierce battle around Ghissignies, leading to 102 Other Ranks casualties.

On 1st November the Battalion was at Beaurain and then moved into support as part of the Second Battle of the Sambre but were not to be tested again and on 11th November the *War Diary* had two entries:

Bttn formed Guard of Honour for Prince Yorahito at Berthincourt. . .*
Armistice took effect from 11.00 hours.

**Japan was on the Allies side in WW1. Possibly Hirohito who later became Emperor..*

On 16th December 1918 the War Diary had a rare entry for a woman

> *The Military Medal was also awarded the Mme. MARGUERITE LESNE who rendered considerable assistance to the wounded of the Battalion at GHISSIGNIES during the action of 24/10/18. This lady assisted wounded in the open under artillery fire.*

During December 1918 and January 1919 the Battalion were in the Naumur area and demobilisation began in earnest, although not without problems. The *War Diary* records:

> *There is a certain amount of very natural discontent, chiefly arising out of the mistakes of the Home Labour Ministry.*

While William was in France seeing death as a daily occasion, another tragedy was unfolding back home in Ringstead as a result of the war. There was a postal service maintained to the soldiers at the Front and it seems likely that he would have heard of the events involving his late wife's uncle. The *Northampton Daily Echo* of Wednesday February 27th 1918 reported:

> *A terrible tragedy was discovered at Ringstead shortly before seven o'clock on Tuesday, when Harry William James Cope, s shoe operative living in London End, was found dead in a bedroom in his house.*
>
> *His throat was cut, and in the same room were found the dead bodies of his two children, whose throats were cut also.*

Harry Cope's wife had died some five weeks earlier, leaving him with three young children. He had been granted an exemption from war service but this had expired in December 1917 and he had received a call-up notice. He had appealed but had been late in returning his form which meant that the Tribunal could not deal with his case. They did, however, write to the military to ask them to reconsider their decision and it seems likely that this plea would have been successful. Unfortunately, Harry Cope was suffering from some sort of breakdown and he killed his two sons and himself. His daughter was staying with another family and so remained the sole survivor. His sister, Louisa, had died in Berrywood Mental Hospital so could there have been a genetic illness? We may never know.

William returned to his own family but the deaths in his late wife's would have haunted him. The village had many houses where sons, husbands, fathers, brothers and lovers had been killed, or injured and returned home with physical and mental disabilities. We know that many old soldiers never talked of their war experiences, wanting it to be left in the past. As William's army records have largely been destroyed, we do not know when he was promoted to Lance-Corporal or, more importantly, when he was awarded the Military Medal. The London Gazette of 13th May 1919 (No. 31338) listed his award for "bravery in the field". There was no mention of this award in the *Northampton Mercury*. Did other villagers know of his courage?

In 1920 William was living in Carlow Road with his widowed mother, Annie Elizabeth, and brother Amos and his wife Annie Jane. It does not appear that Amos Fortescue Mason had been called up. In 1912 he had married Ann Jane Swingler from Little Addington and had sons Frederick John on 29th March 1914 and another son William Frank on 22nd May 1920. Does the gap indicate that Amos was away serving his country in some capacity elsewhere?

William Edward (Ted) Mason in 1921
From a photograph Of Ringstead F.C. With thanks to Jon Abbott

It appears that Amos and his wife were the first to leave Ringstead and move to Heckington in Lincolnshire to set up business as a boot and shoe repairer and seller. The *Kelly's Directory* of 1926 list him as a boot and shoemaker with a shop in St Andrews Street in Heckington. Oddly he is in Ringstead's Electoral Register for 1923 and in Banks Lane in Heckington in 1922. I think this is probably just an oversight in not taking him off the Roll.

By 1924, brother William had joined him in Heckington in Banks Lane. Also living in Banks Lane were Samuel and Jane Mowberry and in 1926 William married their daughter, Edith. In 1928 there was another tragedy for William for their first child, William Edward Mason, was buried in Heckington Cemetery on 10th April 1928. He was just ten hours old.

By 1930 William and Edith had moved to 118 Harrowby Road in Grantham and in the 1931 Register he is shown as having a shoe repair shop on the East side of London Road in the town. They were still in Harrowby Road in 1939 where William was a "Boot Repairer and Retail Dealer. Edith had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" and living with them is son Brian, born on 29th April 1930. Brother Amos was still a boot dealer and repairer living in Banks Lane.

William and Edith moved, perhaps in retirement, to Rose Cottage in Wilsthorpe near Stamford. On 15th June 1964, that was their home when he died in the *Stamford and Rutland Hospital* in Stamford. He left £682 to his widow. He would have been about 77 years old. Edith followed him some seventeen years later in 1981.

Chapter 36

Ralph Mayes (1881-1918)

In writing of William Mason, I told a little of the troubled story of the Cope family. In the 1901 Ringstead Census, Charles and Charlotte Mayes and their family were living at 3 Rosebery Street, next door to the family of James and Hannah Cope. Charles Mayes was born in Ringstead but he had married Peterborough girl, Charlotte Hawkins. The ceremony had been in St Mark's Church in Peterborough on 6th December 1875. St Mark's was built in 1856 in the Victorian Gothic style to cater for the growth in population following the coming of the railway. It is not far from the rail lines and sidings and would have numbered railwaymen and their families in the congregation.

Charles Mayes' father, Daniel, had also been born in Ringstead and had become a railway labourer. He married Charlotte Cuthbert in 1852 in Ringstead but it may be that his work took him to Peterborough for a time where Charles met his future wife. If this was the case it happened between Censuses. Charles had been born in 1855 and in 1861 his mother, Charlotte, was with the family in Ringstead but father, Daniel, was in Northampton Infirmary. Was it an accident at work? In 1871 he was back in Shop Street, Ringstead and we know that he spent his working life on the railways and in 1911 aged 80 was a Railway Pensioner living with his daughter Eliza and her husband Joseph Cobley in Barritt's Yard.

Charles meanwhile had become a shoemaker and after his marriage he was living with his wife, Charlotte in Oak Cottage on the west side of Lincoln Road in Peterborough. They now had two daughters, Florence (3) and Lavinia (1). By 1891 they had moved back to Ringstead and had had two further children, Ralph (8) born in Peterborough and Miriam (4), born in Ringstead. It seems that they moved back around 1885.

By 1901 they were living in the new houses of the Tilcroft Estate in Rosebery Street (named after Liberal politician and, briefly, Prime Minister, the Earl of Rosebery). Charles was a shoemaker and Charlotte a boot closer (sewing together the leather pieces or uppers before they were attached to the sole). Their son, Ralph was 19 years old, and also working as a shoemaker. As we have seen, another shoemaker, James Cope, and his wife Hannah and their family were living next door. With them were son, Harry (23), and daughter Maggie (16) with granddaughter, Coral Lucretia(13) who in 1912 briefly married William Mason before her sudden death.

Ralph Mayes (21) married Maggie Cope (18) on March 21st 1903. Both bride and groom were shown as shoemakers. Over the next decade, in the period between the Boer and First World Wars, the military boot and shoe industry around Raunds and Ringstead, went through a very difficult period. The War Office reneged on an agreement made with the union on the statemented piecework rates for the various types of military footwear. The lower rates being paid meant families were struggling to survive.

Mass meetings were held in Raunds and Ringstead and a strike was organised by the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives. Most of the handsewn men worked at home and kept their own hours. This had brought them into dispute with men in other areas who felt that they were being undercut by the homeworkers. Nevertheless the strike went ahead and trouble began to ferment against the strike breakers who were not in the union and continued to work. Money was raised for the non-union men's families but the working men were followed home and threatened with rotten eggs and tin cans. It finally escalated and on 21st March 1905 the blacklegs, including Margaret Thatcher's uncle, George Henry Roberts, were followed by a crowd beating pots and pans and their houses were stoned, breaking the windows.

Ralph Mayes was one of the men charged with harassing George Roberts and was fined 2s. 6d (12.5 pence). The strike seemed to be faltering so "General" Gribble decided, on his own initiative, to have a march to London to present the men's grievances to the Government. He organised it on military lines, choosing the men to go, with a Billetmaster and a Paymaster. Cycle outriders went ahead to find food and accommodation, and a band (many from Ringstead) led the column.

He also had five "Sergeants" each in charge of a group of men. Ralph was one of the "sergeants" which indicates that Gribble thought that he had standing in the community. On May 8th 1905 some 115 men left Raunds for London.

The march made the national newspapers and did gain some concessions but by the 1911 Census many handsewn men were out of work. The lack of any largescale military action was compounded by the War Office increasingly using the cheaper "inferior" factory made boots. The 1911 Census also shows Ralph, aged 29, with Maggie and their children, Hilda, Louise, Edwin and Kenneth. They were living in the Bank Cottages in Ringstead. In 1913 they had a final child, Coral, named after Maggie's niece who had died at the end of the previous year. Ralph was in work and shown as a shoemaker, but not at home. This means he was employed in a local factory.

When war came in 1914, Ralph, as a worker in the military boot industry, had some protection Also he was married with a young family. As we have seen in other biographies, however, men who had exemption at the beginning of the war, found their position was being eroded and by 1917 many had been called up in an order governed by age and marital status.

On 1st April 1917 Ralph's appeal against his call-up was held at a local Military Tribunal and he was given a temporary exemption. We know that, at this time, he was working in the large Raunds' factory of Adams Brothers on the corner of Spencer Street. He was a "Hand Welt Worker" there. His case was heard again on 8th May 1917 and this time his appeal was dismissed. It appears that Adams Brothers may have appealed further because of the nature of his work, for a final decision was deferred to the 25th June. At this hearing he was granted a final period of exemption until 10th July 1917.

Ralph Mayes
With thanks to Alan Mayes

Ralph was conscripted and became a Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery with Regimental Number 178299. The Garrison Artillery was originally designed for home defence and many did guard the shores and important sites against enemy attack by sea or air. Increasingly, however, they became part of the heavy artillery of trench warfare. He would have undergone a period of training and may have served some time in a home-based unit. Most of his military records have been destroyed but it seems likely that he did not join the 164th Siege Battery until April 1918. At about the time that Ralph joined the Battery in the Front Line, the 164th had been made up from four to six six-inch, 26 hundredweight howitzers. It had also been attached to the 52nd Canadian Heavy Artillery Group in the Second Army and remained with it until the end of the war.

This was a critical phase of the war. The Germans had launched Kaiserschlacht, usually known as the Michael Offensive, which started on the 21st March 1918 and went through several phases over the next few months. The Allies had to give ground rapidly as the Germans broke through some sectors and threatened to surround them. It seemed for a time this could be the decisive action of the war but, as they raced forward, the German

troops became exhausted and the food and armament supply chains became impossible to maintain. The tide then turned.

6-inch howitzer battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery in action at a farm near Strazeele 13th April 1918 at the Battle of Hazebrouck during German Spring Offensive.
From Wikipedia Commons. © IWM Q8723

Although we cannot be certain, it seems likely that the 164th were located in the Flanders area of the battlegrounds in Northern France and Southern Belgium. Gas was increasingly being used by both sides to kill and debilitate the enemy with shells now delivering it more effectively. Ralph was gassed on 9th May 1918. Another Gunner in the 164th Siege Battery, Thomas Chillmaid, was gassed at the same time as Ralph. Both were taken to No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station by No. 16 Ambulance Train. Chillmaid died on May 12th and, three days later, at 1.30 am on 15th May 1918 Ralph Mayes died too.

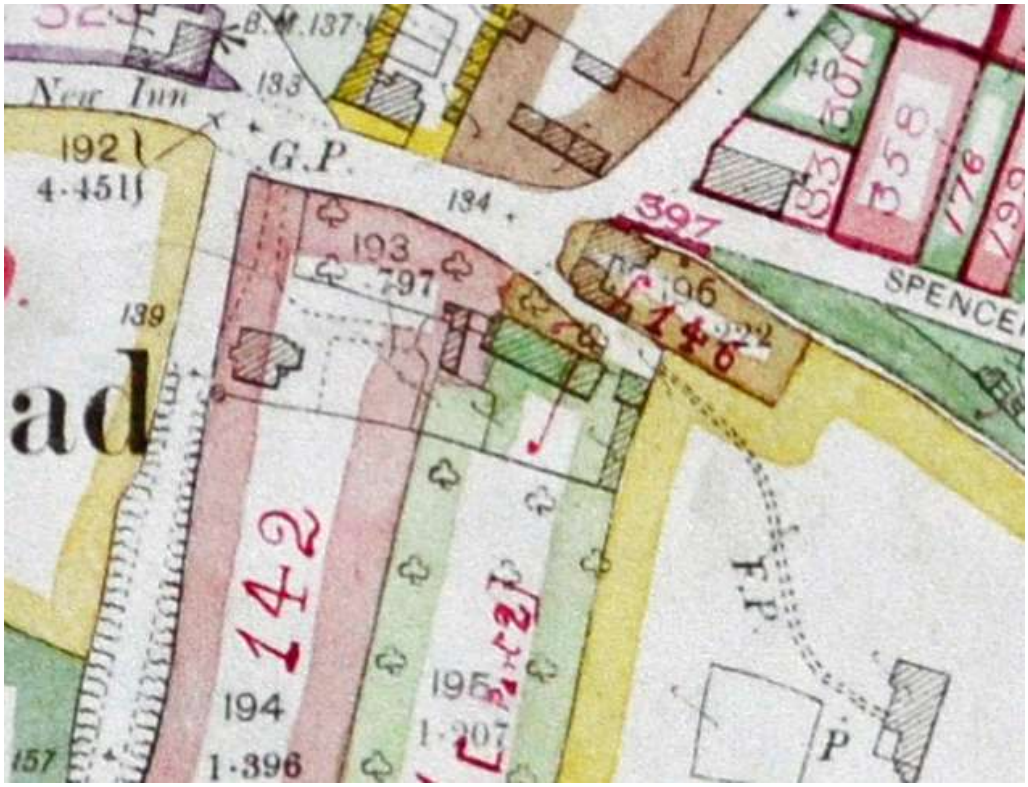
He was buried at Étaples Military Cemetery, near Boulogne, which is the largest Cemetery of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. He was 36 years old and had been at the Front for a month. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals and his widow Maggie, to a small pension. She would also have been sent a memorial death plaque. Over one million were issued in total.

Maggie had already endured the horrific tragedy of her brother Harry's killing of his sons and of his own suicide. Her sister, Maud had married Raunds man, Evelyn Wood, and he too died on the Western Front on 3rd September 1918. In 1919 Maggie was still living in Bank Cottages but she moved to Gladstone Street on the Tilcroft Estate and at some point before 1939 she moved in with her widowed sister Maud Wood in a cottage in Whymans Road.

Maggie taken by Alan Mayes near the end of her life

Maggie was to live for a further fifty-three years after Ralph's death and died in 1971 aged 87. Her grandson, Alan Mayes, who served his "National Service" in the RAF, represented Ralph at the Ringstead War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday each year. He also told how on these occasions he always wore a pair of gold cufflinks given to Maggie for him, for "being a good boy" by Mr and Mrs Baxter who lost both their sons in the Great War.

The cufflinks originally given to one of the Baxter boys killed in WW1
With thanks to Alan Mayes



1900 OS Map showing Whymans Road.
This was the road that becomes a footpath leading to Slade Farm.
*Maggie's house was part of the hatched area before the **146** lettering*

Chapter 37

The Other Mayes Family

Hubert Stanley Augustus Mayes (1894-1986)

Stanley, as he was usually known, was born in Ringstead on 26 May 1894, the eldest child of Harry Abbott Mayes and Edith Ellen Mayes. His father, Harry, was a shoemaker, born in Ringstead in 1872, the fifth of the ten known children of William Farey Mayes and Mary Elizabeth Mayes (née Abbott). William, also a boot and shoe maker in the village, was the son of another Ringstead shoemaker, William Pariss Mayes.

Stanley's mother, Edith Ellen Mayes, had been born in Ringstead in 1873, the illegitimate daughter of Phoebe Mayes, a shoe stitcher. Phoebe was the daughter of Ringstead labourer, George Mayes and his wife Ann (née Ball). Phoebe later married Joseph Rowlatt in Ringstead on the 25th December 1875 and went on to have a further ten children from this marriage.

Stanley had three younger siblings: Harry Irving Mayes, born in 1897 at Ringstead, Arthur Edward Mayes, born in 1903 at Ringstead, and Hilda Phyllis Mayes, born in 1908 at Raunds.

He was a pupil at Ringstead village school and was very proud of his time there. As a five-year-old, he was awarded a Certificate of Merit for Proficiency in Religious Knowledge, dated 31 July 1899, and signed by Thomas W. Johnson, the headmaster. He always treasured this and his two school photographs, one of which also featured the father and aunt of the first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

His musical talents were apparent from early childhood. The *Northampton Mercury* reported, in November 1902, an evening of entertainment by the children of Ringstead Baptist Chapel at the Temperance Hall. Stanley, aged eight, sang and played a piano solo.

In the 1901 Census, young Stanley was with his parents and brother, Irving, at 9 Gladstone Street in Ringstead. One son, Arthur was born there in 1903 but by 1906, at the latest, the family had moved to Raunds. We know that, because the father, Harry, had been a Baptist, he may have had a minor crisis of faith and was baptised in Stanwick Parish Church on the 4th March 1906. The Register shows that he was living in Raunds at the time. The next month, on the 29th April, his three sons, were also baptised in Stanwick. It is in the Baptismal Register that we see that Stanley had an impressive list of names, Hubert Stanley Augustus Mayes, although, as we have said, he was usually known by his second name only.

Stanley's enthusiasm for music continued to develop and in 1908, at the early age of 14, he had become the organist at St. Laurence's Church in Stanwick,. This was a position he held for many years, until well after the First World War. His very first organ recital took place there in 1911. In his youth, he also achieved success at various Northamptonshire vocal and instrumental competitions - for example, at Oundle in 1909.

In the 1911 Census, the family were living at 24, Wellington Road in Raunds and Stanley, aged 16, was described as a “Clicker” and his father as a “Boot Maker”. The clickers, who cut out the pieces from the hide, were considered the most important and skilled of the shoemakers so he was very young to have this responsibility. Stanley’s work in the shoe trade and as church organist continued after the outbreak of war. However, he was soon to witness the tragic repercussions of war, in December 1914. The *Northampton Mercury* reported on the funeral at Stanwick of the Rector’s son, Private Frank Leonard Richards of the 12th Royal Fusiliers. Aged 20, he died of pneumonia on 11 December, following a chill contracted while in camp at Shoreham. Stanley was the organist at the funeral service.

On 24 May 1915, two days before his 21st birthday, Stanley married Pauline Farey at St. Mary’s Church, Rushden. There is a very detailed report on this “very pretty motor wedding” in the *Rushden Echo* on 28 May 1915. The article noted that “the happy couple left by the 2.49 train en route for Bournemouth, where the honeymoon is being spent.”

Pauline also had family ties with Ringstead. She was born in Rushden on 22 July 1892, the only child of George Farey and Jessie Mary (née Tyrer). George Farey had been born in Rushden in 1866. He was a Boot Clicker by profession, but also a very talented and well-known musician. He gave public performances from an early age, singing, piano and organ being his specialities. He was the church organist at the Baptist Church in Rushden for 20 years. In 1911, when Pauline was aged 18, her father left for Canada, to find work in Toronto, but sadly, only two years later he died there of pneumonia. George’s father, Ebenezer Joseph Farey, born into a family of Ringstead shoemakers, had moved to Rushden with his parents as a small child. On her father’s side, Pauline Farey was a direct descendant of Leonard Joseph Abington, the Baptist Minister in Ringstead from 1830 to 1842.

Pauline with baby Hubert. With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

Pauline's mother, Jessie Mary Tyrer, was born in the Liverpool area in 1863. She trained to be a teacher at Warrington Training College and her career took her to Northamptonshire, where she was Headmistress at Rushden South End National Infant School from 1886 until 1892. After her marriage and the birth of Pauline, Jessie set up her own Private School and Kindergarten in Rushden. She was only 48 when she died in 1912.

As a child, Pauline lived with her parents in Rushden, initially at 11, Griffith Street, and then by the 1901 Census at 39, Grove Street. After the deaths of her parents she lived with her paternal grandfather, Ebenezer Joseph Farey, at 14, Park Road in the town.

Following their marriage, Stanley and Pauline moved to Brookside in Stanwick, within a stone's throw of the church where he was organist. However, the happiness of their early married life was to be interrupted by World War One.

Royal Naval Division Recruiting Poster
Wikipedia Commons

On 16 February 1917, Stanley enlisted in the Royal Naval Division. This unit had been advertising widely in the area from 1915 with a football match against "The Cobblers" and an event in the New Theatre in Northampton. An advertisement in the Northampton

Mercury on 12th May 1915 also told of a list of "Separation Allowances available to the family of men who "allot at least 20s [£1] a month to their family". His Service Record describes him as over 5 ft 7 ins in height, with a 34 inch chest, a fresh complexion, brown hair and blue eyes. Two scars were noted on the left knee and one on the right knee.

Stanley's civil occupation was given as the "Boot Trade", his religion was Church of England, and, importantly, he could swim. His next of kin was his wife, Pauline Mayes, and their address was Brookside, Stanwick, Northants.

Stanley in uniform (about 1917)
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

Stanley's initial rank was Ordinary Seaman, with Service Number R/762. He was mobilised on the 20th February 1917 and attached to 3rd Reserve Battalion which was at Blandford Forum in Dorset. The British Naval Division was a strange land fighting unit made up initially from Royal Navy and Royal Marine reservists who were not needed for service at sea. In 1914 two Naval Brigades and a Brigade of Marines were hastily formed.

The first men did not have khaki uniforms and lacked basic equipment like mess tins and water bottles. They also had very old charger-loading rifles and had no artillery or field ambulances. Their first engagement was the defence of Antwerp which, not surprisingly did not go well. They did manage to withdraw successfully, but with many men captured and interned in Holland. After a proper refit and reorganisation they were sent to Egypt and took part in the Gallipoli Offensive, a terrible campaign that cost many lives. In April 1916 they were redesignated as the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division and moved to France the following month. By this time very few of the men remained who had seen sea service.

The rest of the war the Division served on the Western Front as a normal infantry unit and took part in the Battle of Ancre towards the end of the Somme Campaign. They continued in the Ancre area into 1917 and then fought in the Battle of Arras.

It was not until the 9th July 1917 that Stanley was drafted into the Hood Battalion of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. The following day, having been now rated Able Seaman, he embarked at Folkestone for Boulogne. On 11 July, he joined Base Depot at Calais, finally joining the Hood Battalion on the 29 July. The campaign known as the Third Battle of Ypres was about to begin.

According to his service record, Stanley very soon was given leave to the UK between 30 August and 9 September 1917. His wife Pauline had given birth to the couple's first child, Hubert, in early 1917, but the baby later died. Stanley wrote on the reverse of Hubert's photograph: "Hubert. Died September 1917 whilst I was in France". Presumably, the leave to the UK was on compassionate grounds.

On his return to France, Stanley received a gunshot wound to his face and was sent to the 149th Field Ambulance on the 18th September. Luckily it was only "slight" and he was patched up, given 500 units of Anti-Tetanus Serum, and sent back to his unit the following day.

He was soon back in the Front Line and was injured again, on the 23rd October 1917, during the final phases of the Third Battle of Ypres often known as the Battle of Passchendaele. This time he was sent to the 148th Field Hospital and, after treatment, was first posted to the Depot Battalion, on the 30th October, before returning to his Battalion on the 10th November 1917, a date which is usually recorded as the end of the Battles of Passchendaele. .

In the first half of 1918, Stanley's record shows that he was moved around several times. On 1st January 1918 he was posted to the 63rd Royal Naval Divisional Wing as an Office Orderly but rejoined Hood on 29th March. Then, on 6th April, he was transferred to Hawke Battalion. His service record states that he was cross-posted (which was an exchange of personnel) to Hawke Battalion on the 14th June.

Between 21st August and 4 September 1918, Stanley was given 14 days leave to the UK, via Boulogne, missing the Battles of Albert and Drocourt-Queant. On 21st September, he joined the 63rd Royal Naval Divisional Headquarters.

After the war ended, he remained in France until 11 February 1919. During that time, his musical talents were put to full use, when he became conductor of the 63rd Divisional Orchestra. He sent his parents a postcard embroidered "From Your Loving Son", and wrote the following:

> *Am getting on well with the orchestra and are going to perform before the general tomorrow. I hope we get on well as it's the job of a lifetime. Send me some good uptodate waltzes and ragtime as soon as possible.*

The embroidered postcard sent by Stanley. With thanks to Vivienne Marshall.

He was finally demobbed on 13th February at Fovant which was a camp on Salisbury Plain. M.A. McKenzie of the *Fovant History Interest Group* has written:

> *When the fighting finished Fovant was one of three camps in the South West designated as demobilisation centres for returning soldiers. Soon trainloads were arriving to hand in their uniforms and weapons, receive civilian clothes a small amount of money and train ticket home. Some days as many as 40,000 were processed in a day. Unfortunately, more than train tickets were needed for the Australian soldiers who stayed in Hurdcott for many months. Lacking the motivation of training and the structure of army discipline, boredom quickly became a problem. Unlike the fatal rioting on the Plain there was a little "rowdyism" at Hurdcott. One farmer tells of being stopped by a barricade at the camp entrance and made to drink a pint of beer with the 'guard' before being allowed to continue to his home at Fovant.*

Stanley received his £10 10s and, like the men in the quotation above, he returned home. He had survived the war, but the horrific memories were always with him. In 1964 he visited Ypres for the 50th anniversary of the start of the Great War, to honour his fallen comrades.

On his safe return from the Western Front, Stanley resumed his role as organist and music teacher at Stanwick for a short time. However, by 1920, his musical career had taken him in another direction. Pauline and Stanley left their beloved Northamptonshire for him to become organist, choirmaster and music teacher at Worksop Priory in Nottinghamshire.

Around 1926, the couple and their two small children moved to Derby and in 1929 they were living there, at 4 Queen Street, before moving to 46 Kedleston Road by 1931. Initially, Stanley was employed in the leather trade, although his musical interests were still a huge part of his life. Indeed, he was very proud of the fact that he was invited to participate as choral conductor in two Royal Command Concerts at the Albert Hall in 1934 and 1938. By 1938 the family were living in 53 Stafford Street and in the 1939 *Register of England and*

Wales the couple were there and Stanley's occupation was shown as, "Leather Warehouse Tanner – Unemployed".

Stanley playing the organ at St Werburgh's Church in Derby
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

During this time Stanley held an astonishing list of musical posts in the Derby area. Besides being a private music teacher, he was Conductor of the Derby Orpheus Choir; of the Derby Co-operative Society Choir and Orchestra; of the Melbourne Male Voice Choir (eight miles south of Derby) and of the L.M.S. Choral Union and of the Operatic Society. He was also Organist and Choirmaster of the King Street Methodist Church.

Outside music, he was adopted as a Labour candidate for the local elections and was elected a Councillor in 1938. Music, however, was always his first love and, in 1942, he returned to it as his full-time occupation. He was appointed organist and choirmaster at St. Werburgh's Church in Derby - a position he held until his retirement in 1960. In his later years he acted as an adjudicator at various festivals and competitions. He was honoured to be elected in 1956 to the Honorary Fellowship of Trinity College of Music, London, in recognition of his service to music.

The couple returned to Rushden for a brief period after Stanley's retirement, but then moved back to Derby to be near their family. Pauline died in 1979, but Stanley lived for

another 7 years. In his final years he was living in a nursing home in Louth in Lincolnshire to be near his daughter and her husband who had retired there. He died on the 29th April 1986 in his 92nd year and was cremated at Grimsby Crematorium. He was one of the lucky ones who survived the First World War and had afterwards been able to lead a long and rewarding life.

Harry Irving Mayes (1897-1970)

Harry Irving Mayes, the younger brother of Stanley Mayes, was born on the 27th July 1897 (wrongly put as 1898 in the Death Index) and christened with his younger brother, Arthur on the 29th April 1906 at Stanwick Parish Church. He had moved, with his parents, Harry and Edith from Ringstead to Wellington Road in Raunds around the year 1905. In 1911 Harry Irving, usually known by his middle name, was aged thirteen and working as a baker's assistant.

On the 24th May 1915, he was the best man at the wedding of his brother, Stanley, in Rushden Parish Church. The terrible nature of the war was now known to everyone and the early optimism of a quick victory was dissipating. Conscription came, in early 1916, and Irving was enlisted in the Royal Sussex Regiment in the mid-May to mid-June period of that year. The 1918 and 1919 *Absent Voters' Lists* for Raunds show Harry Irving Mayes home base as Wellington Road and his unit as the 1st Sussex (11788).

Harry Irving Mayes (probably 1916). Note the Royal Sussex cap badge
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

It seems that Irving was fortunate, because the 1st Battalion was the one of the few infantry battalions that remained in India throughout the war. Almost all the Regular Army Battalions stationed there, were posted to the Western Front and their places taken by the various Territorial, Volunteer and conscripted units that were raised after the beginning of the war. It is said that the 1st Battalion asked to fight alongside the other Regular Battalions but to no avail. For the few replacement conscripts, it hugely boosted their chances of survival. During the war, the 1st Battalion lost 44 men whereas the 2nd Battalion lost 1723.

The 1st Sussex was part of the 1st (Peshawar) Division of the Indian Army, moving to the 2nd Rawalpindi) Division in December 1917. There is however a problem because it shows on the Medal Roll that, although retaining the same Regimental Number, Irving was posted to the 40th Division Signal Company and then the Signal Service Company and finally the "A" Company of the Signal Company. As he retained his Regimental Number this would have been an attachment rather than a transfer. It is known in his family that he served in India, so it seems certain that he did travel there initially. He would not have been 19 years old until the 27th July 1916 so probably did not arrive there until after that date.

Looking at the Medal Roll for the Royal Sussex Regiment, the thirty-page batch of Sussex Numbers around Harry Irving Mayes show only one other man who was in the 1st Battalion and he was Sergeant, William John Herbert Black. He had been born in Burma and baptised in India in 1886, so was probably from an army family. No other of the men from this group had been attached to the Signals from the Royal Sussex. On the *Brighton Roll of Honour* website, there is listed a William Baker who was with the 1st Royal Sussex in the Indian Army. He was attached to the Signals Section and was captured in the Siege of Kut. He died in captivity near Baghdad. Another soldier from the 1st Battalion, Private A. Dearing, had been transferred to the 14th Indian Divisional Signal Company in March 1917 and sent to Mesopotamia. We see a pattern of men moving from the Sussex in India to the Indian Signal Corps and then seeing service in Mesopotamia and it may be that path that Irving followed.

Amanda Swain, a granddaughter of Irving has given me a copy of his Certificate of Employment During the War and this shows that he was a G.D. [General Duties] Pioneer from the 10th May 1916 to the 30th October 1919. He was in the Royal Sussex 1st Battalion as part of the 31st Indian Signal Company. This would indicate that he was attached to the Signals from the start of his time in India. Was Irving also at Kut? He later told his son that he had seen things too awful to talk about. This description would certainly apply to this siege, but the war was littered with other terrible events. It is perhaps more likely, as Vivienne Marshall has suggested, that he was part of the force that finally retook Kut.

In 1914, the Royal Engineers' Signal Service had 12 Regular Companies and 29 in the Territorial Force. By the end of the war there were 589 companies. Add to this that the numbering and organization of these companies was fluid, responding to changing need, and we can see why it is difficult to be clear about Irving's service.

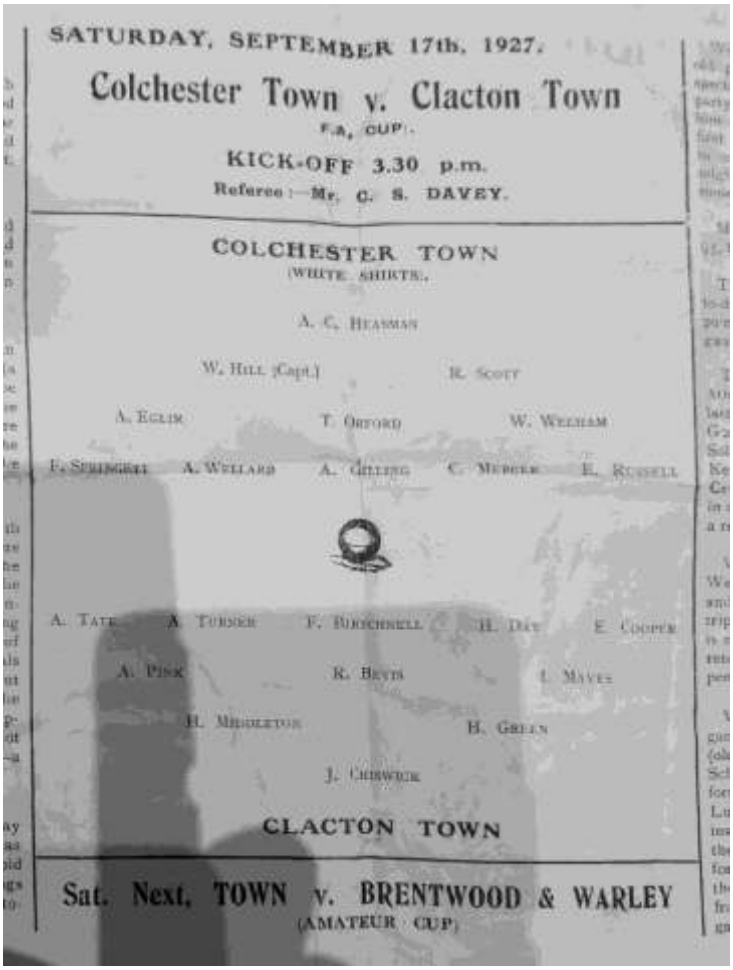
The 40th Divisional Signal Company served on the Western Front so it is possible that he was attached to the 40th Division of the Signals in France near the end of the war, or

perhaps after it. Could he have been part of the reparation of the battlefields after the Armistice?

Summing this up, it may be that Irving first went to India with the Sussex but was attached to an Indian Signals Company soon after his arrival there. He may have continued in India for some time but he then was sent to the Mesopotamian war zone. Finally, he was posted to the Western Front, near the end or after the war. We must, however, accept that some or almost all of this may be wrong. Irving was demobilized on the 30th October 1919 and returned home. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

At first, I also struggled to find him after the war but an old newspaper cutting from his granddaughter, Amanda, revealed that he had played football for Clacton Town in the 1927 Amateur Cup. A search through the newspapers shows that he was playing with them, at least from 1922 to 1930. In the traditional team formation, he would have been called a right half, or defensive midfield in today's jargon. He also was played for Norfolk.

We can then find that, in the 1931 Electoral Register for Clacton, Harry was staying with Sidney and Elizabeth Bruce at 4a Pallister Road. Some of the Bruce family were in the grocery business and Irving worked in this trade during this period. Was it the work or the football that took him to Clacton? It was probably the work, for even though he was playing at a good standard, he was still an amateur.


SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17th, 1927.

Colchester Town v. Clacton Town

F.A. CUP.

KICK-OFF 3.30 p.m.

Referee:—Mr. C. S. DAVEY.

COLCHESTER TOWN

(WHITE SHIRTS.)

A. C. HEASMAN

W. HILL (Capt.) R. SCOTT

A. EGLIN T. ORFORD W. WELHAM

F. SPRINGALL A. WELLARD A. GILLING C. MERCER E. RUSSELL

A. TATE A. TURNER F. BURCHNELL H. DAY E. COOPER

A. PISK R. BEVIS L. MAYES

H. MIDDLETON H. GREEN

J. CHERWICK

CLACTON TOWN

Sat. Next, TOWN v. BRENTWOOD & WARLEY

(AMATEUR CUP)

With thanks to Amanda Swain

His career was ended by a serious knee injury. He then had to have a full-length caliper to keep his leg in alignment.

In late 1933 he married Eugenie Lillie Arthur and they set up home in Higham Ferrers. Eugenie, who was usually been known as Lillie, was the daughter of, carpenter and joiner Samuel, and Gertrude Arthur. Samuel had been in the Royal Air Force at the end of the Great War with the trade of "Joiner". Lillie had been born in Rushden but in 1911 the family had been living in Thrift Street in Irchester. I had thought at first that Irving had met Lillie after he had moved back to Northamptonshire, but Amanda knows that they had met before he went to Clacton for they exchanged love letters through these years.

Lillie was something of a pioneer for Amanda was told that she was the first woman trained by Wellingborough firm, Saxby's, as a pork butcher. It is also likely that she had the background knowledge from her mother Gertrude whose father, David Darnell, born in Irchester, was shown as a "Pie maker and Bread Maker's Assistant" in the town in the 1901 Census. Her grandfather too, William Darnell, was a "Baker and Grocer" in the 1871 Irchester Census in a Grocer's Shop (Co-operative's). Grocery, and especially pies, ran in the family. Amanda believes that Lillie and her brothers received substantial legacies from a relative and she had bought a shop premises with her portion.

Lillie's Stores was at 3 Market Square in Higham Ferrers. It was a grocery shop, but she specialised in pork pies which she made herself, buying pork from the abattoir and preparing and baking the pies in-house. Granddaughter Amanda remembers with affection, how she and her brother later helped Lillie prepare the pies. Great niece Vivienne Marshall also stayed with them during her school holidays and served in the shop.

The wedding of Irving and Lillie
With thanks to Amanda Swain

On the 23rd February 1936 the couple had a son, Paul Arthur Darnell Mayes. In the 1939 Register of England and Wales they were still living in 3, Market Square in Higham and Irving was working as a lorry driver. Lillie was shown as a "Shopkeeper-Pork and General". Amanda has added that she was told by her father that he also worked as a coal man in the Higham area. As a boy, her father accompanied Irving into the coal yard to collect the coal on one of the horse-drawn carts that still delivered coal up to the 1950s. He would get off, however, before they left the yard. The amount taken was calculated by a weighbridge, in and out, and the boy's weight in coal would have been free.

Despite the knee injury, Irving had continued with his sporting interest after his football career was over, for he became a keen bowls player. Harry Irving Mayes died on the 14th January 1970. After his death Lillie's Alzheimer worsened and she struggled to run the business and it was sold to the Woolwich Building Society. She died in 1981.

Albert Edward Mayes (1896-1963)

Leonard Eustace Mayes was born in Ringstead on the 15th December 1873, the third child of William Fairey (or Farey) Mayes and his wife Mary Elizabeth (nee Abbott). In the 1891 Census, he was 17 years old and a shoemaker, like all the children above school age. It seems that Leonard wanted a little more adventure in his life. On the 29th June 1892 he attested with the North Staffordshire Regiment at Northampton. He was 5ft 5 inches tall with grey eyes, a fresh complexion and light brown hair. His Regimental Number was 3754. After his initial training he was posted to Portsmouth but on the 5th December1892 he was in hospital there for five days with "inflammation of the connective tissue". This could point to several disorders of varying seriousness, but symptoms could include numbness and pain in the joints.

It seems that Leonard found army life was not as he had hoped, or perhaps his joint problems made it unbearable. He bought himself out for a payment of £18 on the 22nd March 1893. He had been a soldier for 237 days. Did his father have to find the money? The comparison of money values with today can vary greatly but £18 could have a buying power of over £2000 today and would be at least a month's wages.

Leonard returned to Ringstead and became a shoehand again. On the 25th May 1895 he married local girl, Sarah Ball. The had four children, three of whom survived into adulthood. In 1901 the family were living in Abbott's Yard in Ringstead. In 1905, Leonard was part of the Ringstead Band selected to go with the men who marched from Raunds and Ringstead to London to put the army shoemakers' case to Parliament. This march brought some concessions to the handsewn men but the demand fell and, by 1911, many were out of work.

By 1911 Leonard and the family had moved to 18 Mill Street in Luton in Bedfordshire. Leonard was still working as a bootmaker but Albert Edward, the oldest child, born on the 12th December 1896, was now an assistant in a straw hat warehouse. Luton had become the global centre of the straw hat industry and by the 1930s it was producing some seventy million.

Albert on right with his cousin Stanley Mayes. Ringstead School photograph c1900
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

War came and Albert enlisted with the Bedfordshire Regiment. He was with the 1/5th Battalion which was a volunteer Territorial force. The 5th Battalion had moved from Bury to Norwich and on to St Albans by May 1915. On the 25th July they were issued with "hot climate uniforms", stores and equipment were hurriedly collected and, cheered by the crowds in St Albans, they entrained for the south coast. The men were in good spirits and there were songs and cheers. They were bound for "somewhere out east" and many soon succumbed to sea sickness. They called at Malta on the 3rd August and by the afternoon of the 6th had landed at Alexandria, in Egypt. The following day they sailed for the Greek island of Lemnos, arriving at its main port of Mudros on the morning of the 9th.

The next day they sailed east to another Greek island, Imbros (now Turkish). They were bound for the isthmus at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara and disembarked in Suvla Bay on the western coast. The Medal Roll shows the 10th of August as the first day of his service in a war zone. They were now on the infamous Gallipoli Peninsular and the enemy was the army of the, once great, Ottoman Empire, who were allies of the Germans. They moved first into a rest camp and then into reserve.

Albert wrote home and the *Bedfordshire Advertiser and Luton* Times printed extracts from these letters on the 3rd September 1915. He is described in the article as a "Signaller", which would usually indicate that he was in the Royal Engineers, but the Battalion had its own group of Signallers. Albert would have undergone training in signals but would have retained the rank of Private in the Regiment. "Signaller" was a description of his role.

The 5th Battalion Bedfordshire Signallers in their hot climate uniforms (St Albans 1915)
From www.bedfordregiment.org.uk (with thanks to Mark Stuart)

The letter that Albert Mayes sent was some five days after they had landed at Suvla, so would have been about the 15th August 1915. It is full of the gung-ho bravado of a young man trying to face up to his first confrontation with the enemy and trying to hide his fear. He wrote:

> *They are good lads, and all we think about is doing the enemy in. They are a lot of l------ and squeal like women at the point of a bayonet. They are getting a rough time from the guns, which are just against us. Big things are going to happen. It almost makes me wish I was going up in the trenches with the Company's chaps but we shall have a hot time from the shells. I had a bathe in the sea last night and another this morning. It's just as hot in the morning but we feel a treat. Our chaps may go up any time. They are all looking forward to it. I am on Headquarters duty at present. I had a dixie full of Oxo and some biscuits in it for breakfast and it was just good. We are being well looked after and living well. I don't mind a bit. We are all getting used to the noise. The guns did not wake me once in the night. We are not troubled with a lot of flies yet, but perhaps they have not found us yet. It is a desolate place, with lots of big hills all the way.*

This was the start of the Assault against the Kiretch Sirt. When they moved forward under heavy fire, the metal flashes on their uniforms glinted yellow in the sunlight. This was seen by an observing Staff Officer through his binoculars and he is said to have exclaimed:

"By Jove! If only we had one or two more battalions of those yellow devils we should be across the peninsular by tomorrow".

The 5th has proudly retained the nickname "Yellow Devils". Disease claimed many of the troops but, during the campaign, the Battalion was awarded 120 gallantry medals including one Victoria Cross.

Another letter, a day or two later, was more subdued in tone after some of the company had moved up to near the firing line. He wrote:

We were shelled yesterday for nearly an hour, but they did not do any harm, only one being wounded. Their ammunition is no good. Half the shells did not explode at all, and so, if we meet nothing worse than their shells we shan't hurt. But the boys tell us it is jolly rough up in the line. We are fighting snipers and thousands is of them at that: - mostly girls and women they seem. They are all in green: painted legs and everything green. We get on fairly well. You can't expect a lot of fine food on a job like this. It is all biscuits and no meat – no bread – but we get Oxo and things like that to make a soup and beef tea. There is Stan, Jim and his brother George, all of us under a shelter we have rigged up, and Jim is grumbling all the while because they won't send him up to the firing line. Nine of us are going up tonight. I don't know whether I am going up or not. We are beginning to be worried by flies now. I think we shall be as brown as berries before another month is up. We have four or five men and an officer hurt but not badly except one. The warships, which are only a mile away, keep letting the enemy have it on the hills.

We do not know exactly what happened to Albert next. He was at some point promoted to Acting Corporal, a rank he seems to have retained throughout the war. The Gallipoli campaign which had started out with such optimism soon became a disaster and despite great bravery by the troops the Allies had to retreat from the peninsular before they were annihilated.

Descendants of Albert understood that he had suffered from gas poisoning and the *Medal Roll* shows that from the 27th October 1915 to the 10th February 1916, he was in Malta. Malta did not see any fighting in the First World War but was a British base for military hospitals. These took in many of the casualties, particularly from the Dardanelles Campaign. It is generally believed, however, that no poison gas was used in Gallipoli, although gas masks were issued for fear of its use by the Turks. On the other hand, the poet John Masefield, who worked in a military hospital for the French soldiers wrote in "Gallipoli":

The trenches curved and zigzagged in the earth; the men in one section could neither see nor hear what the men in the nearest sections were doing. What went on under the ground there in the making good of those trenches will never be known. From half-past five till midnight every section of the line was searched by bombs and bullets, by stink pots, and sticks of dynamite, by ***gas-bombs*** *and a falling tumult of shell and shrapnel, which only ceased to let some rush of Turks attack, with knives, grenades and bayonets, hand to hand and body to body in a blackness like the darkness of a mine. At midnight the wounded were lying all over the trenches, the*

enemy dead were so thick that our men had to walk on them, and bombs were falling in such numbers that every foot in those galleries was stuck with human flesh. No man slept that night. At half-past seven next morning (the 7th) a small quantity of bread and tea was rushed across the plateau to the fighters, who had more than earned their breakfast. Turk shell had by this time blown up some of the head-cover and some of the new communication trenches were still only a few feet deep.

It seems certain that Albert had been gassed, wounded, or otherwise incapacitated, so that he had to be evacuated to Malta. By December 1915, the 5th, like other battalions, had lost most of their men to disease and enemy action and had retired to Egypt to be rebuilt back to strength in the early months of 1916.

As we see in the accounts of other Ringstead soldiers, this was a posting which had its own difficult challenges, both on the battlefield and particularly because of the climate and disease. *The History of the 5th Battalion of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment* by F.A.M. Webster records that 26 Officers and 750 Other Ranks left England in 1915 but reinforcements during the war numbered 231 Officers and 4939 Other Ranks. This huge number of replacements was due to 660 ranks wounded in action, but mainly because of the 4,125 men who went down with sickness.

They 5th had been brought up to strength by March 1916 and then had a year-long posting guarding the Suez Canal. Albert rejoined the Battalion in Egypt on the 18th February 1916 and remained with them until the 31st July 1918. In March 1917 they were part of the advance through Gaza and Palestine. At the time of the Armistice with the Turks in October 1918 they were stationed in Beirut.

Before this, however, on the 1st August 1918, Albert had been transferred to the 19th Rifle Brigade and given the new Regimental Number 212316. [There is some confusion here because the Medal Roll has Albert finishing with the Bedfordshires on the 31st July 1918 and starting with the Rifle Brigade on the 1st January 1918. Looking at other men on the Medal Roll, it is obvious that it should be the 1st August 1918.] The Battalion *War Diary* records that two Officers and four Other ranks left the Battalion at and went to Egypt on a short leave on the 28th July. Could it be that it was decided that they were no longer required in Palestine? *The War Diary* does record some enemy action, but most days were labelled “Quiet”.

The 19th Rifle Brigade had been formed on the 29th November 1915 from the unused Territorials and were deployed initially to guard vulnerable places in Great Britain. In 1916 they were sent abroad to perform similar duties. The 19th were on garrison duty in Egypt and it may be that Albert were sent on leave from Palestine to Egypt and it was decided that they were more need in Egypt as the war in the Middle-East was almost over. The *Medal Roll* shows his service finished on the 11th November 1918 but, perhaps, this is indicating when the war ended. Albert was entitled to the 1915 Star and the Victory and British War Medals.

Albert returned to Luton and, in the summer of 1920, married Cassy Maude Heley. Her father, Joseph Heley, was a straw hat dyer from Totternhoe in Bedfordshire and her mother, also Cassy, was from Chalk Hill (now part of Houghton Regis). Her four older siblings were all

involved in the straw hat trade. Like the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry it moved from the villages into the towns as it became industrialised, before being finally overtaken by fashion and overseas producers.

At first the couple lived with Frederick Thrussell at 48 Pondwicks Road before moving to 65 Biscot Road in Luton and then 25 Hermitage Road in Hitchin. They also had a shop and commercial premises at 88 Inkerman Street in Luton.

We know from the *London Gazette* of the 27th March 1936 that it was hat manufacturing and millinery business that the couple ran in Inkerman Street. Unfortunately, the entry in the *Gazette* was because of his bankruptcy. His grandson, Tim Farr, had revealed that Albert was angry about this, because it had been enforced when the amount owed was small. He had ordered felt for hat making and because of changes in fashion had been unable to pay the account. After the loss of his business, he became depressed and worked as a bookie's runner for a time. The Second World War changed his fortunes. The *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows that Albert's occupation, although it is difficult to decipher, appears to be "Commission Agent's Clerk and Food Control Clerk". I think Commission Agent here, is another name for an unlicensed Bookmaker.

Tim has confirmed that he became a local Food Officer during the Second World War, part of the rationing regime, trying to keep people fed through difficult times. Apparently, he would have been given a medal but, as an undischarged bankrupt, he was unable to receive the award.

The couple had two children, Derek Leonard had a successful acting career, under the stage name of Richard Mayes, and became a Shakespearean theatre actor. He also worked in film and television, including a part in *Dr Who*. A daughter, Audrey, was born on the 24th July 1928. In the 1939 *Register* they also had an elderly piano teacher, Florence Fitzgerald, living with them. Was she a lodger to help with the finances? Albert's father, Leonard, had provided funds to enable Cassy to set up a Draper's Shop and this was an important source of income.

Albert suffered from increasingly poor health. He had been a heavy smoker and perhaps this, more than his possible wartime gassing, led to his early death. He died in 1963 aged 67 but Cassy lived into her nineties and died in 1993

Chapter 38

William Meadows (1888-1976)

More than most, the life of William Meadows had many surprising twists. His early life was touched with tragedy and this caused him to look for a life outside Ringstead and gain a measure of fortune and fame.

We will start his story with another William Meadows, born about 1826 in Slipton, a few miles north of Ringstead. On 19th December 1850 in Ringstead, he married Emily Tilley, a local woman, daughter of glazier, Jonathan and his wife Elizabeth. She had been born in 1818 but tended to underestimate her age. She was about 32 when they married and it appears that the couple did not have any children. By 1871, their niece, Rebekah (or more usually Rebecca), aged 14, was living with them. She was the daughter of Joseph Tilley, the younger brother of Emily.

In September 1878 Rebecca, aged twenty, was walking home to Ringstead from Raunds when she was attacked and sexually assaulted by Thomas Baker, an eighteen-year-old labourer. She struggled and managed to get away and told some men on the road what had happened and urged them to catch Baker. A Hargrave coal agent and news vendor, called Walter Yorke, pursued him in his horse and cart and spied Baker on the Hargrave Road. He fetched a policeman from Raunds and Baker was caught and identified by Rebecca. At the Quarter Sessions in Northampton, Thomas Baker was sentenced to twelve months hard labour.

In the 1881 Census, taken on the 3rd April, Rebecca (23) was still living with William (56) and Emily (60). Also living with them was Emily's unmarried sister Rebecca (73), a lacemaker, one of the few women in the village still practising that craft. On 1st August of the following year, Emily was buried in the local churchyard. Her age was given as 64 years so she had aged four years in five months. William then married his niece, although not a blood relative, the young Rebecca, the following year. They quickly had three children, Emily, Elizabeth and William. William, the father died, aged 63, and was buried on 20th December 1889, leaving Rebecca with three young children.

William, who is the main subject of our story, had been born on 23rd October and baptised on 23rd December 1888, just a year before his father's death. In the 1891 Census, the widowed Rebecca, aged 34, was working as a shoe hand. The three children, Emily (8), Elizabeth (4), and William (2), were with her and she had two lodgers to help with the finances, Isaac Tilley, 34, a farm labourer and probably her brother and James Worsley (45), a house painter, born in Douglas, capital of the Isle of Man.

The following year Rebecca married John James Worsley (now 48) who was a widower, on 11th September 1892. By the 1901 Census the couple were living in Barritt's Yard in Ringstead. Rebecca's eldest daughter Emily was now 19 and a dressmaker, Elizabeth,15, a boot closer, and William (13) for whom no occupation was shown. The couple also have two

more children, John James (8) and Eleanor (4). There were also two new lodgers, Samuel French (33) and Joseph Drew (34).

Any temporary stability for William and the other children was soon to be shattered because, early in 1904 Rebecca too died. Her eldest daughter, Emily, married Thomas Hallam, an older man with children, and went to live at 52 Station Road in Ilkeston, Derbyshire. She seems to have become the surrogate mother for the younger children and Nellie (Eleanor) was visiting her in the 1911 Census. She was also the person who William gives as his next of kin on military forms, as did his stepbrother John James Worsley.

By 1911, William's stepfather, John James Worsley, aged 67, was in Thrapston Workhouse and may have died there, aged 85, in 1920

Soon after the death of his mother, on 9th April 1906, William Meadows had filled in the Military Attestation Form to join the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was 5ft 5¾ inches tall with a 34-inch chest and had brown eyes and hair. He was only 17 years 6 months old (but his age sometimes has a year added). He was given the Regimental Number 7512. The 3rd Northamptonshires was a reserve battalion for training new recruits and on 29th June 1906 he was transferred to the 15th (Kings) Royal Hussars, possibly after some basic training at a camp at Little Brington. As we shall see, there is some confusion about his new Regimental Number which was probably 6021.

In 1909 the 15th Hussars were posted to South Africa from India, where there would still have been tensions following the Boer Wars. It is therefore probable that William had served in India. In the 1911 Census there is one for the 15th Hussars and we see William Meadows in the list of Officers and Other Ranks. He is shown as 23 years old and formerly a shoemaker born in Ringstead. As to where he was, the Census states Egypt, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan for the 15th Hussars which is not very helpful.

On January 17th1913 the Battalion arrived in Southampton from South Africa after an absence from Great Britain of thirteen years, though nearer to seven for William. They docked and entrained for Longmoor Military Camp in Hampshire which had accommodation for men and horses. It is not clear if at this point, having completed his seven years, William decided to return to civilian life for William Meadows with number 6021, who we know to be the correct man did not enter the warzone until January 1915.

Meanwhile the officers of the 15th spent time competing in various polo competitions and possibly, like Siegfried Sassoon, some went fox hunting. But very soon war loomed and, on 18th August 1914, the Battalion arrived in Rouen in France and their world changed. The Battalion was split up into three separate squadrons and each was attached to a different Army Division. At first, the terrible stupidity of the cavalry charge against modern weapons was ignored. It was a lesson that should have been learnt at the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War in 1854, some sixty years earlier. Policing duties in South Africa were one thing, charging against machine guns was quite another. In the *Rushden Echo* of 20th November 1914, local man Private Sharpe reported to the parents of another local trooper:

. . . Harry was the only one who returned after a glorious charge of the 15th Hussars, and he was on foot when he reached the British lines, his horse having been shot from under him.

If, as seems likely, he did miss these naive early encounters, he was very fortunate. The main task of the Hussars, however, was as reconnaissance units, trying to report on enemy positions and movements. When William arrived in France in late January 1915 trench warfare was already establishing itself as the major fighting regime. The three squadrons of the 15th were still in separate Divisions with A Squadron billeted in a farm near Mont Noir, B Squadron near Locon and C Squadron in Bethune. The Regimental History records:

The town of Bethune, which was still almost untouched by gun-fire, became quite gay, the streets were crowded, the shops all did a roaring trade and the cafes were always full. The mining country where both B and C Squadrons now found themselves, the prominent pilons and fosses [pitheads] and the acres of mining cottages, seemed at first very strange after the Aisne and Ypres country but this area became later on very familiar to everyone in the Regiment, as it did indeed to the whole British Army.

Bethune after the German Offensive in August 1918
©IWM (Q11257)

The Regimental History continues by describing the role that the 15th and the other Divisional Cavalry units played at the time.

> *During the ordinary period of trench warfare the squadrons of divisional cavalry did not as a rule have very much fighting to do, but they were by no means idle, as there were many different duties upon which they were employed. There were examining posts to be found on bridges and cross roads, guards over headquarters and important buildings. The various brigade and divisional headquarters had to be supplied with mounted orderlies. The Provost Marshal also required his share of men for traffic control and various other duties. The remainder of the men had to be ready at a moment's notice, for they acted as a mobile reserve in the event of anything serious taking place.*

On 10th March the Battle of Neuve Chapelle was fought but the 15th were not called into action. You feel that, without the "charge", the army was not quite sure what to do with the Hussars, to use their mobility to best advantage, in the increasingly static warfare.

It is not a surprise, therefore that on 9th April 1915 the three squadrons were ordered to leave their respective divisions and were once more re-united as a Regiment and became part of the 9th Brigade with the 19th Hussars, the Warwickshire Royal Heavy Artillery and, later, the Bedfordshire Yeomanry.

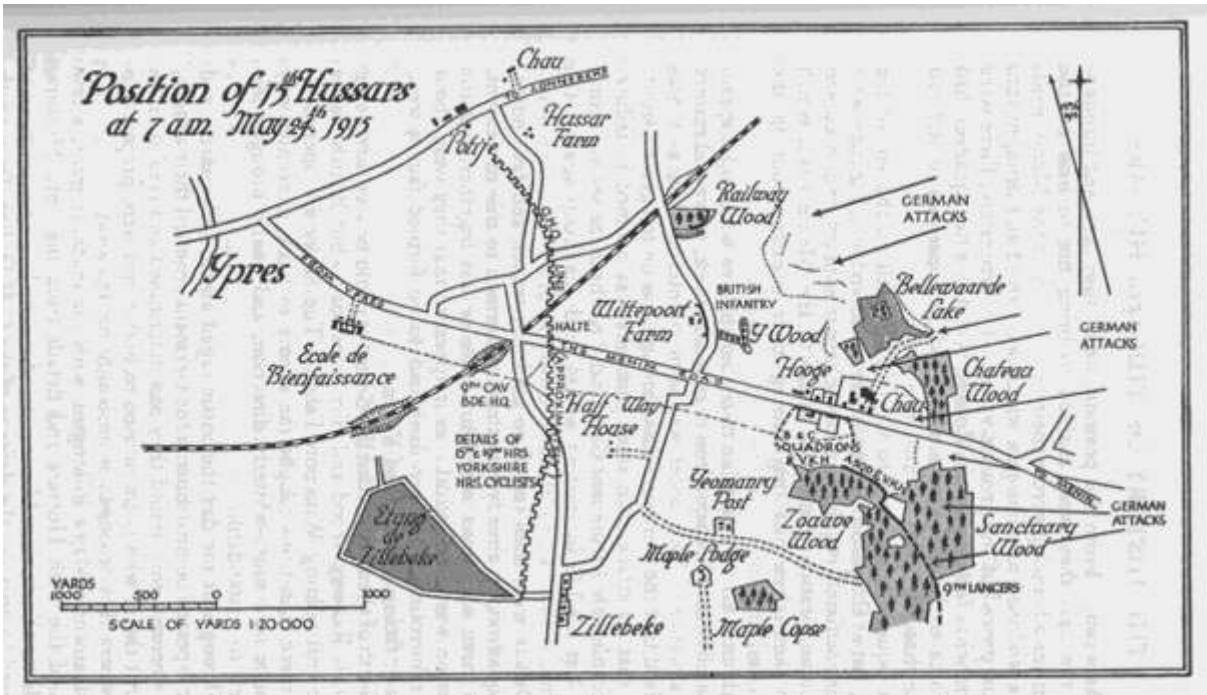
They began training as a unit again but, at 7.45 am on 23rd April, without prior warning they were ordered to saddle up. The panic was caused by the Germans using poison gas shells. On the 24th the 15th moved to a wood and spent the whole night and the following day there in the pouring rain. On the 28th, however, William and the rest of the Battalion had to proceed to a farm a mile west of Ypres as a digging party. Under the direction of the Royal Engineers they dug new trenches next to a canal north of the city. But the Germans were forcing an Allied retreat and new trenches had to be dug anew as the Front Line gave ground. At this time there was a severe shortage of ammunition so often the troops had to huddle in the trenches as the German bombardment went unanswered.

On 13th May 1915 the Germans launched the heaviest bombardment of the war so far. Following this German assault, the 15th were part of an attempted counter attack. The History records:

> *At midnight, in pitch darkness and in pouring rain, the 15th Hussars formed up, and with fixed bayonets advanced to the assault of the German trenches, the position of which was only vaguely known. The reader can well imagine how very difficult and hazardous was this task. Luckily an officer who had been through the First Battle of Ypres remembered a track which led to the ruins of a farm near which the German trenches were supposed to run. The Regiment was thus enabled to keep its direction*, and to the relief of everybody the trenches were found abandoned by the enemy. They were, however, badly knocked about, and almost untenable, consisting for the most part of shell holes filled with liquid mud. Our dead, our dying and our wounded were lying in all directions, mostly from the 8th Cavalry Brigade and the first thing to be done was to evacuate the wounded.

It was decided, however that these trenches were not defensible and a new line further back was dug by the Hussars. The men were tired and wet but from 3 am they worked feverishly in the rain to provide some cover from the enemy. Fortunately, the next morning dawned with heavy mist and they were able to make some reasonable trenches. The Hussars had originally been based on the colourful Hungarian Hussars and had prided themselves on their glamorous uniforms. Now they were in khaki and there was little glamour.

On the 18th May 1915 at 6.45 pm the 15th Hussars left their huts at Vlamertinghe and marched one and a half miles to Ypres where they occupied some five hundred yards of Front Line from the stables at Hooge Chateau to Sanctuary Wood. These trenches were in a terrible condition with mud and water over two feet deep in some sections, there was little defensive wire and there were no communication trenches behind the line. At night the men worked to improve the trenches, put up wire and dug communication trenches. All the time they were under the threat of sniper fire and occasional machine-gun bursts.



Map by Captain C Shaw (15th Hussars) from The History of The Kings Hussars 1914-1922

On 23rd/24th May the 15th were relieved by the 9th Lancers. Fortunately for the 15th, it was only now that the Germans released clouds of poison gas and attacked behind it. The 9th Lancers suffered badly but the gas thinned further back, and in spite of the inadequate gas masks, the 15th had only light casualties. Captain Stanhope of C Company realising that the Lancers were in trouble moved forward to assist. The other two companies also moved into the Front Line and there was heavy fighting. Despite lost ground by the Allies, the Germans failed to break through. It was probably during this turbulent period that William Meadows was wounded.

I have put "probably" because we do not have detailed records of William for this period and the man recorded as wounded had Regimental Number 1045 (not 6021). There is,

however, no trace of another William Meadows with this number in the 15th and it seems very likely that it is our man and some mistake has been made in the ambulance train. As Peter (PRC), on the *Great War Forum* has pointed out.

> *Don't put all the blame on sloppy record keeping by the RAMC medical clerks - you may have a badly injured GSW victim, doped out of his mind on pain relief and speaking in a regional accent, it may be dark, his injuries may have made his ID disc unreadable or lost, none of his mates are with him, the tag from any earlier medical assessment has been lost or disfigured and it's fairly clear this guy needs to be moved on asap once stabilised and there are more coming in. The clerk isn't likely to get a second chance.*

On the 25th May William was taken first to No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station, where he would have been assessed and then, because of the severity of his "gunshot wounds" caused by a shrapnel shell he was loaded on No. 5 Ambulance Train and taken back to England on a hospital ship.

Luckily, later records do seem to confirm that he was our man. They state that he was in France between 26th January 1915 and 27th May 1915 when he was brought back to England dangerously ill from shrapnel wounds and was treated at the Military Hospital in Aldershot. I think that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that has him wounded and demobilised was based on information from this period and William had disappeared from local view.

He did return to France, however, but over a year later, on 19th July 1916 and it seems likely that this was when he joined the Royal Engineers. Had his injuries made horse-riding difficult or was there now less demand for cavalry? He was given the Regimental Number 357555. We have no detailed records of his service with the Engineers except that he was promoted to Corporal. In view of his later career, he also picked up what we would now call "transferable skills". He probably served with the RE until the 2nd May 1918

The Royal Flying Corps had been formed as a unit within the Royal Engineers but on 1st April, it, together with the Royal Naval Air Service, became an autonomous body, the Royal Air Force. The RFC had worked hard to slow the German advance during the Michael Offensive ensuring that the controlled retreat of the Allied Armies did not turn into a rout. The battle reached its peak on 12 April, when the newly formed RAF dropped more bombs, and flew more missions than on any other day during the war. The cost to halting the German advance was high however, with over 400 aircrew killed and 1000 aircraft lost to enemy action. It may be that William was part of an urgent drive to recruit replacement pilots

On 4th May 1918 William Meadows joined the new organisation and was given another Regimental Number 319080. He seems initially to have remained as a Corporal, the RAF only introducing its own ranking system in 1919. He would have returned to England on the 2nd May and undergone the training to become a pilot which by this time was an 11-month structured course. He first went to the Cadet Distribution Depot (CDD), was deemed "Fit as Pilot" on the 17th May and was posted to the 16TTW (Transition to War?) on the 25th. On the 2nd June he was sent to the 10th Cadet Wing where he would have had a two-month course which included drill, physical training, military law, map reading and signalling using

Morse code. His record shows that he moved to the 5th Squadron of the RAF but the RAF Museum website states that he would have moved to a Training Depot Station (TDS) where he would have completed a minimum of 25 hours elementary flying training, both dual and solo, on Avro 504 aircraft logged over three months followed by a second phase of 35 hours flying time with five hours on a modern front-line type of aircraft. Students also had to demonstrate proficiency in cross-country and formation flying, reconnaissance work and gunnery. Finally, the men completed the training in the skills they would need to survive in combat.

By the time that he had completed his training the war was over and it may be that William did not complete this final phase until later. On the 18th December 1918 he was posted to a Rest Camp near Bedford and then, on the 3rd March 1919, to Crystal Place which was used by the RAF as a Ground School and balloon observation station. Perhaps it was here that he finished his training and was permitted to wear his Pilot's Wings. His records show that he was "Discharged to Commission" on 5th April 1919. He was now an officer.

The periods of training outlined by the RAF Museum website do not seem to fit exactly to the records of William's movements but I think that it is approximately correct. It also seems likely that soon after gaining his wings that William left the RAF. When we look at the brief record of his RAF career there is a surprising entry that decided his future career. His permanent home residence is shown as c/o Sir Charles Walpole, Broadford, Chobham, Woking, Surrey. In 1926 Walpole was found dead in his London home in Kensington Court, having committed suicide with a shotgun. He was said to have been suffering with sunstroke. Charles Walpole's gardener at his Broadford estate had also been diagnosed with sunstroke when he threw himself under a train on his wedding day in 1899. Was there any connection?

One of Charles's sons, John Robsart Walpole, had been a regular soldier who re-joined in WW1 and was killed on 1st July 1916. More relevantly, another son, Charles Archibald, was the Manager of the *Anglo-Persian Oil Company.* When William married on August 2nd 1924 his occupation was "Engineer" and it seems certain that he had already joined the Anglo-Persian (or later Anglo-Iranian) Oil Company. His new wife was Marianne (or Marianna) Alice Stokes, of Paris Farm, Lingfield, Surrey. At the time of the marriage William was living in Powis Square in Bayswater, about one-and-a-half miles from Kensington Court, Charles Walpole's London home. We can see William's direction of travel by the profession he had given for his father, which was "Gentleman". The Electoral Rolls show that William Meadows senior did have the right to vote which meant that he had some land interest but his fellow shoemakers would have been surprised by this description of him.

The 1911 Census for Wisbech in Cambridgeshire shows Marianne Stokes staying with her older sister and her husband. It shows her as 28 years old and a hospital nurse. It also describes her as a "British Subject by Parentage" born in Coney Hall in West Wickham in Kent. Her father, William was a farmer at Coney Hall Farm. The whole estate was later sold and became an area of the London Borough of Bromley.

Marianne was living in a bungalow on Paris Farm and through the 1920s the Electoral Rolls show her there but not William. On the 26th September, only weeks after his marriage, William Meadows, a "Driller" was on the British Tanker Company's *British Mariner* bound for Abadan in Iran. The tanker company was part of *Anglo-Persian Oil Company* It seems likely that most of William's life was spent working on the oilfields in Persia. He was at home sometimes, however, and on 10th August 1926 Marianne gave birth to a son, William and she travelled with him and her husband to Abadan from Swansea on the *British Viscount*, on 27th November 1927. They were not together long for in 1930 Marianne died and was buried in the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul in Lingfield. Within the next few years William married Olga Mary Oldham, some twenty years his junior, in the British Consulate in the inland port town of Mohammersh [Khorramshahr]in Persia. Olga had been born in the Goldstone District of Surrey.

As we have seen, William had become a driller, which was a team leader in charge of oil well drilling. The driller also led the crew and the running of the rig, monitoring and dealing with any emergencies. It was an important role and as we have seen, meant that most of his life would have been on the oilfields. We see again that he left Falmouth on 12th October 1932 for Abadan. This time the tanker ship was the *British Commodore* and William's occupation was given as "Petroleum Engineer". His intended country of permanent future residence was given as Persia.

In the *London Gazette* of 12th June 1947, under "Foreign Services" in the Civilian Division, William Meadows, Driller, Anglo Iranian Oil Company Ltd [The title changed in 1935 and later became British Petroleum]. was awarded the British Empire Medal for "Meritorious Service". Was it for service during the Second World War? With reason, the Iran government had always believed that it was not receiving as large a share of the oil profits as it was entitled to and there were always tensions. In 1941, the British and Russians occupied Iran to safeguard the oilfields and secure a safe supply route to the USSR, although a number of the tankers were sunk by the Germans during the war. A continuing supply of oil was vital to the Allies' war effort.

On 10th June 1948 William Meadows, engineer, aged 58, sailed with Olga (38) and their 4½ year-old daughter, Dawn. The port of departure was Banare E Mahshahr [Bandar-e Mahshahr] and was heading for Grangemouth in Scotland. The intended future country of residence was still given as Iran. Their residence in England was now Woodglade in Lingfield.

There appears to have been one last voyage, when William, now 60, with Olga, 49, and six-year-old daughter Sylvia (Dawn was Sylvia's second name) who had been born in Ahwaz in Iran. William was now shown as retired. The arrival date was the 17th June 1949 and they were heading for Wood Glade in New Chapel Road, Lingfield. I believe that, at about this time, the couple bought a large Georgian house in Wells-next-the-Sea called Marsh House. When we look for William's death, there is one last surprise. The entry reads:

> *MEADOWS, William de Warrenne, otherwise William of Marsh House, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk. Died 5th April 1976. Probate Ipswich 18 June. £16,487.*

At 87, William's gentrification seems complete. Olga lived to be 81 and died on 22nd January 1990, leaving £251,276. She had continued to live in Marsh House.

We have seen a remarkable journey for William Meadows from a poor childhood marred by tragedy. He had been badly injured in the First World War but it also gave him access to a successful career. Did he ever go back to Ringstead to visit those who stayed behind? All these brief biographies only give a glimpse of lives now gone but with William, more than most, you need the personal accounts of family or friends to join the public record dots together.

Chapter 39

Victor Marshall Moon (1896-1916)

Victor Marshall Moon was not listed in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. The Moon family were constantly on the move and Ringstead was just a port of call in their travels. When war came they were living elsewhere. His father, George Thomas Moon was born in Finedon in 1873, son of furnace labourer, John Moon and wife Louisa. George did not follow his father's trade but became a finisher in a shoe factory and on 17th September 1894 he married Esther Judge.

Esther was the daughter of Thomas Judge, a painter and glazier from Brackley and wife Martha who had been born in Radstone. In the 1881 Census the Judges were living in Kettering Road, Northampton. We see that it was another family that was always on the move. The children had been born in Waddington and Stone in Buckinghamshire and Brackley and Northampton in Northamptonshire.

Were the family of gypsy stock? Certainly the wandering life was to continue for the young couple. In the 1901 Census they are living in Westfields, Raunds and we can see from the birthplaces of the children that they had lived in Finedon, Ringstead, and Irthlingborough before Raunds. It was in Raunds that Esther lost her nine-month-old son, Ernest William, who died of "Convulsions" on 4th January 1905. The family were living in Francis Terrace at the time which is in the Westfields area. They were soon on the move again. The *National School Admissions Register* for Old in Northamptonshire show that thee children, Victor, Annie and Raymond, had been admitted to the local school on 1st March and Lewis on 26th April 1909. Previous to this, they had been at Walgrave School, just a few miles away. It also shows that they all left the school and the area on 7th June 1909, just three months later. The parent's name was shown as Thomas Moon but the use of a second name was a common practice.

The family moved on again and in the 1911 Census were living in Wymington, just south of Rushden. We see that a new child, Rhoda Alice, had been born in Old in 1910 so the move to Wymington cannot have been long before the Census. There has been a major change in the family, however, because George Thomas Moon has disappeared and the head of the household is shown as Stanley Underwood, aged 46, and also born in Finedon like George.

The children attended the South End School in Rushden and the *Admissions Register* shows that a son, Lewis Arthur Moon, had started at the school on 6th November 1911. The person in the Guardian/Parent column is Esther Moon who was now living at 48 Crabb Street in Rushden. Surprisingly, for Elsie Rhoda Moon, who entered on 13th May 1912 the parent/guardian was shown as George Thomas Moon. Finally, there is another son called Herbert Stanley Underwood Moon, on 9th November 1914, and his parent/guardian was shown as Joseph Stanley Underwood of 48 Crabb Street.

It seems certain that [Joseph] Stanley Underwood was Esther's new partner. Strangely, George Thomas Moon seems to disappear from the official records. Did he die, change his name, emigrate or take to the road where he went unrecorded. There are many George Moons in the records but none seem to match our man.

It is George and Esther's son, Victor Marshall Moon, born on 9th September 1896, who we are concerned with in this biography. He probably finished his education at Old School in 1909 and, in 1911, was at Wymington with his mother and her new partner. In the period soon after the Census he probably moved with his family to 48 Crabb Street in Rushden and started work at Knights, a large Rushden boot manufacturer.

Whether it was the upheaval in his family, or a need to find a more exciting career, he joined the army before the war. In March 1913 he, along with a few shoe workers, had been summoned for gaming with cards at Rushden. Card playing in all forms was extremely popular with the shoemakers, and gambling was also prevalent. He was fined 10s. 6d. including costs. Was his enlistment a way of getting away from bad company? Whatever the reason he enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment at Northampton, probably later that year and was given Regimental Number 9745

Although most of Victor's military records have been destroyed we do have a great insight into his time in the trenches from articles in the Rushden and Wellingborough newspapers. These have been transcribed by Nicky Bates and posted on the Rushden Heritage website and I would recommend that anyone interested should read the full account.

Victor Moon in uniform
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society

The 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, at the beginning of the war, was stationed at Dettingen Barracks at Blackdown, a "suburb" of the large Aldershot Camp. The *Regimental History* describes it as a "collection of huts erected at the South African War". It was after this war that the British Army had been re-organised and an "Expeditionary Force" had been formed. This had some 160,000 men divided into six Divisions with a Cavalry

Division and "line of communication" troops. Every Division consisted of three Infantry Brigades, each of four Battalions and had 76 guns and a quota of cavalry, engineers etc. The 1st Northamptonshire Regiment was in the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division. It all seemed a great improvement, and it was far better than the mass of individual units with their own organisation that had gone before. Unfortunately, the Great War was also different to anything that had gone before and the army nearly cracked under the strain.

There were delays between Victor's letters to his mother, and their publication so it is sometimes difficult to be sure of dates or even months. As we have seen the 1st Northamptonshires were in Aldershot but, in a letter home, Victor wrote in late September or early October 1914 that he was billeted with E Company in Weymouth and was having "a fine time by the sea". Now the 8th (Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment was formed in Weymouth in October 1914. It may be that he was in training with the 8th when the 1St Battalion embarked for France on 12th August and so missed the chaotic retreat after the Battle of Mons and also the Battle of the Marne.

The minimum age for joining the Regular Army was eighteen, although, theoretically you needed to be nineteen before being sent abroad for foreign service. Many recruits did not have birth certificates and usually their age was taken as told to the recruiting officer. The youngest soldier known to have fought in the First World War was twelve years old.

Soon after he had written home, he had been ordered to the Western Front and joined the 1st Battalion in a position a few miles from Le Bassee on 12th November 1914. He later told a Rushden Echo "representative" in the bullish language of a new recruit.

> *This was my first experiences of war in any shape. . . It was night when we got to the firing line, and you could hardly realise what all the confused noises meant. A burning haystack near to us showed the enemies our movements. Bullets kept coming 'ping, ping' all around us. A few yards at a time we progressed, one lot laying down firing while the others ran a short distance with bayonets ready to stick any German that came near enough. In this way we eventually got to the trenches we were aiming at. . .*
>
> *. . . The following morning, the trenches we had won were lost to the Germans, who stormed them too hotly for us. Some of the trenches were so full of water that it came up nearly to your neck!*

He told how he had seen a body badly mutilated and how it had affected him badly. He continued:

> *But since then I have seen thousands of bodies similarly mutilated, and they do not affect me quite so much. One can get used to sights even as bad as that in time. I have known bodies to lie for three weeks before it was possible to bury them.*

It seems that the interview with Victor took place when he was in hospital or recuperating in England after he had been wounded in the head. The report date was 3rd February 1915 although the actual wound may have happened earlier. It seems now, perhaps from his

mother, that it had been discovered that he was not yet nineteen years old. He would have reached the necessary age on 9th September 1915 but did not return to France until November.

The 1st Northamptonshires had fought in the inconclusive Battle of Loos which took place from 25th September to 8th October 1915 on the Western Front. It was the biggest British attack of 1915 and the first time that the British used poison gas and also the first mass engagement of the "New Army" units.

It was not a success and no breakthrough was achieved. The 1st lost ten 0fficers and 362 Other Ranks during the action. The Battalion was then not in any major battle until the summer of 1916. Victor was not to see the summer because, on 8th or 9th April 1916, he was seriously wounded in the abdomen, back, head and arm. After the battle the Northamptonshires were in billets in Les Brebis, a mining village, about eight miles south-east of Bethune, before moving up as a Reserve Battalion behind the Front Line at Loos. The War Diary tells of the 8th April:

> *Quiet day – Relieved 2/KRRC in front line. Signallers Adv[ance] Parties, Lewis Gunners, and Crater Parties at 3 P.M. C1 move 7.15 pm. Relief completed about 10 p.m. 2/Lt G.H. Crawford was killed in front of HART's CRATER by a fragment of shell.*

No sign of anyone else being injured, but Other Ranks rarely reached the *War Diaries,* except as occasional statistics.

There was, however, more activity the following day so I think that the 8th is a typing error and he probably died on the 9th as the official records show. The War Diary for the 9th April records:

> *Enemy active with rifle grenades. Capt. MARTIN of the right company wounded in the head by a fragment of one. We retaliate with Trench Mortars. . .*
>
> *. . . About 10.30 am a small party of Bombers went into SEAFORTH SAP beyond our barrier and got under the near lip of Rifleman's Crater. From there they threw bombs into the crater. Then Pte. Neville crawled up the lip and looked into the crater. He saw 6 dead Germans but no live ones. No defensive works but three holes supported by wooden frames. Possibly entrances to dug-outs. The party then returned to our barrier in the Sap.*

It seems likely that somewhere in this activity that Victor was badly wounded. He was taken to the *33rd Casualty Clearing Station,* which would probably have been a tented area behind the line with a basic operating theatre. It was from there that the Chaplain wrote to Victor's mother that his condition was critical. It was probably obvious that he was not going to survive. According to another Northamptonshire soldier, H.J. Partridge, Victor had been wounded in the morning and died that same night and he did not think "that he suffered much". The Chaplain gave the time of death as 8pm and told Esther that:

> He sent you his love and said you were not to fret over him.

It may have been so, but if it was otherwise, who would tell a grieving mother?

We see in the photograph and in his interview and letters that he was an optimistic, cheerful young man, much loved by his mother. Many thousands like him were buried in the cemeteries of France or still lie strewn under the fields of France and Belgium. He was buried the day after his death at the Bethune Town Cemetery, Pas de Calais, Grave III. G.47. He was entitled to the 1914 Star and British War and Victory Medals.

In Rushden, as we see today by roadsides after traffic deaths, shrines were erected to the dead in various streets. Crabb Street had its own, with flowers and Union Jacks, which, in March 1917, had the names of six young men including Victor Moon.

After her early travels, Esther had now settled and, in 1939, she was still living at 48 Crabb Street. She died in July 1956.

THE GREAT WAR

1914 - 18

Ringstead Men
Who Served
N to Z

David Ball

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1914 -18

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Acknowledgements

I have been helped by so many people that I cannot acknowledge them all here. I have tried to thank those who have assisted this work either in the text or in the *Reference Section* at the back of the second book.

There are a number of people, however, who have given me consistent and vital support. I must first mention Jon Abbott of the Ringstead Heritage Group who has freely shared photographs, stories and introductions to descendants of the men. He also provided a copy of the original *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and helped with the map of *Rows and Yards*. I must also thank Kay Collins, Project Coordinator of Rushden Research, and the Rushden Heritage Group, for the use of the photographs and articles in Rushden newspapers on the Ringstead WW1 men.

The other major source for the stories has been the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 which were held by the Northamptonshire Record Office. I have missed my visits there during the *Covid 19* Lockdown.

The members of the *Great War Forum* website have been invaluable in providing doorways out of blind alleys time after time. Without their help these books would have been very much shorter and lacking many men's service details. I have tried to thank each one of the members in the text and the references.

David Ball

Introduction

We tend to remember the dead of the First World War by neat white headstones and memorials. We can forget that they were ordinary young men, many of whom would not have travelled outside Northamptonshire. Like us, they would have been a mixture of good and bad in varying proportions. We also can forget the many who came back were changed mentally or physically, or both.

In these short biographies I have tried to sketch in a little of their lives before and, for many, after the Great War. Official documents only give the skeleton of the men's lives and we see in the accounts which include family pictures and reminiscences, how much more of the person we see.

There is some repetition in the stories because I have tried to make each chapter stand as a separate piece. If a reader does follow through them all, I hope that they will gain a broader view of the war and the conditions that the men endured. These young men, many of whom would not be granted the right to vote until 1918, should be remembered by us all.

We should see ordinary men asked to undergo conditions that no human being should be asked to suffer.

I have written of these men, knowing that for most it is far from the final word. I hope that other records will come to light and families will add their own stories to help this process of gratitude and remembrance.

David Ball

October 2020.

Chapter 1

George Herbert Newell (1888-1970)

In the life story of William Meadows, we saw how his early life was chaotic but how it seemed to produce in him a desire to seek his fortune elsewhere, with the war being the catalyst for these changes. George Herbert Newell also had a childhood, separated from his parents, but he remained in Ringstead and became an asset to his home village.

George was born on 9th June 1888 in Ringstead and baptised on January 24th 1892, the son of John and Sarah Ann Newell. John Burrows (sometimes Burris) Newell had married Sarah Ann Coleman on 25th October 1886. John was the son of shoemaker Zephaniah and Hannah, a shoe closer, and had been born in Chelveston.

In 1891, Sarah Ann Newell was living in Church Street in Ringstead with her three children. Frank, the eldest, had the surname Coleman and was six years old so born before his mother's marriage. The other two children were Kate (3) and George (2) and he is the subject of this story. We can also see that the father, John Newell is missing. Have the couple split up so quickly?

When we look for John, we find him lodging at South Lodge in Edgeware in Middlesex with gardener William Berry and his wife. He was a poultryman and servant, perhaps at the Elstree Hill School, or one of the large houses nearby. We see that he had been looking for work so that he could bring his family down to the big city. By 1901 the family had come together again and were living at 13 Plough Road in Battersea. John now works as a Railway Carman and oldest son Frank also worked on the railway as a "Carman Vanguard". Carmen were employed by the rail companies to make local deliveries from the stations and goods yards and to bring parcels to the station. Frank was probably working with his father keeping an eye on the delivery items while his father delivered and was away from the cart. Kate was also at home and there were new children Arthur (9), Mabel (6) Elsie (3) and John (1). The three younger children were born in Battersea so Arthur was the last child born in Ringstead. It seems that the family moved to London in the mid-1890s.

But where was George? If we look back at Ringstead in 1901 we see him there, aged 13, living with his widowed grandmother Ann Major, a boot closer. We know from a later newspaper article that George had returned to Ringstead when he was nine years old, so some four years before the Census. What we do not know is why George, of all the children returned to his home village.

His family settled down to big city life. Plough Road was close to Clapham Junction, an important railway hub. By 1911 they had moved to Shakespeare Avenue in Harlesden, near Willesden another large Railway area. John aged 49 was still a carter for the railway as was his son, Arthur while Mable (Mabel) was an electric globe maker and the younger children, including a new daughter, Clara (5) were all still at school.

But George never joined them and seems to have settled well into village life. In about 1905 he had joined the Juvenile section and had become a "Junior Warden" in the National United Order of Free Gardeners whose origins were in Scotland in the Seventeenth Century. This was one of the many Friendly Societies which, rather like the Freemasons, provided comradeship, and an early form of "National Insurance" held together by strange symbols and rites and talk of ancient secrets. For many working families the "Gardeners" helped them in times of financial stress and saved them from destitution. The Ringstead branch was known as Clove Lodge and George continued with this association for much of his life. He was also a keen footballer and played into the 1920s, for Ringstead, Raunds and Thrapston. Like others who met on the playing fields of Ringstead, his career was to be interrupted by the coming of a terrible war.

George as the goalkeeper for Ringstead Reserves 1922/23
With thanks to Jon Abbott

In 1910 George had married local woman, Eliza Jane Giddings, some seven years his senior. She too, had a complicated family background. She had been born in Peterborough but in 1891 was living with her unmarried grandmother, Dinah Giddings, who in the 1881 Census was, unusually, described as the "Mistress" of Daniel Major, her one-time lodger. It seems that Eliza Jane was the daughter of one of Dinah's children but I have not found the birth. By 1901 Dinah was in Thrapston Workhouse, now morphing into an old people's home for the poor working class. She died there, on 3rd July 1908 but her body was "collected by friends" and she was buried in Ringstead Cemetery.

By 1911 the couple were living in High Street in Ringstead with six-month old daughter, Lorna, born on 8th October 1910. Another child, Kenneth, followed on 5th June 1912. George was a married man with a young family but eventually the war machine came calling. We know that he served for three years and was demobilised in 1919 so it seems likely that he did not volunteer but was conscripted in early 1916.

Like a number of local men, he joined the "Suicide Club", the nickname given to the Machine Gun Corps and was given the Regimental Number 59100. Of the 170,500 officers and men who served in the Corps in the Great War, 62,049 men were killed, wounded or missing. He would have been sent to Belton Park, near Grantham in Lincolnshire. In 1915, the owner, Lord Brownlow, agreed to his land being used as a training base for the Machine Gunners. His estate was covered with one thousand huts, a railway, chapel, hospitals and stable. George would have been trained to use the Vickers machine gun and to be one of a

team. The carrying, setting-up and firing of the gun was heavy work and only the physically fit and intelligent were accepted.

The training period reduced as the need for casualty replacements became critical and may have been as short as six weeks. George was posted to the 62nd Machine Gun Company which was formed at Belton Park and sent to join the 21st Division on 4th March 1916 in France. It seems likely that George was with them. To get some idea how the men reached the Front during WW1 we will follow George on his journey from the *War Diary*.

The 62nd marched out of camp at 1 am on 24th February 1916 and arrived at Southampton at 10.30 am next morning. They embarked on a ship of the Australind Steam Ship Company in the afternoon but remained in Southampton Water until 3rd March waiting for favourable conditions. Eventually they arrived in Le Havre at 3 am on 2nd March. The Company disembarked, drew their winter clothing at 6.30 pm and marched to the train which left at 10.30 pm. At 8.30 am the next day they arrived at the railhead at Steinwerck. They detrained and marched some five or six miles to billets at Armentieres near the Belgian border, arriving there at 1 am, on the 4th March.

The life of the soldiers was full of fear, hardship, illness, tiredness but there were also long periods of boredom. The simple statement of a journey does not show how wearisome it would have been. The 62nd, however, did not have long to be bored after they arrived for, that same afternoon, they moved up twelve guns to the "subsidiary line and support points". Fortunately, there was no action by either side in this first session of three days in the trenches and they were relieved and returned to the billets in Armentieres.

This was the normal pattern of trench life on the Western Front from reserve to front line and rest. On 23rd they marched to La Crèche billets where they trained and were inspected. They then had a period of transit by train and marching between billets, finally reaching Mèaute, some sixty miles to the south, on 22nd April.

The War in 1916 was dominated by two major campaigns, the Battle of Verdun that lasted from February to December, which largely involved the French, and the Battle of the Somme which started on 1st July following an Allied bombardment greater than anything the war had seen up to that point. This first day is now remembered as the day when the British Army suffered more casualties than on any other single day in its history. On the 1st July the 62nd were moved up to Sunken Road in front of Crucifix Trench in a 21st Division attack to capture the village of Fricourt. The various battles along the Somme continued until November 1916 and we see the 62nd moving to where they were posted. In August they were in the Arras area but did not seem to have seen much action. Certainly the Captain, G.G.N. Hodge, the commander of the 62nd had time to issue minutely detailed instructions as to when and how the men should salute the officers.

By early 1917, the 62nd were in the Bethune and Vermelles area and by May were based at St Leger. By 1st July they were at the Hindenburg Line. It was in the following six months that they had a fierce challenge in the Third Battle of Ypres and then at Cambrai. In *Machine Gunner 1914-18*, C.E. Crutchley records the memories of a 62nd "front line runner":

My company was in the Bullecourt Sector during the summer months of 1917.

It was an area of devastation. The countryside was pitted with shell holes and only the stumps of once beautiful trees remained.

Our machine guns were set up amid the ruins on the outskirts of Bullecourt. It had been the scene of a big battle and when we took over there, bodies of dead soldiers still lay unburied. There was much strafing by day and night. Gunners not on duty rested in an old cellar of a house at the far end of the village. We had to share our rest billet with a team of trench-mortar men who had their gun fixed above us in the ruined house.

This soldier was appointed a messenger for the 62nd and we get some idea of the daily horror of trench life from his account.

Almost every day I had to pass along a deep trench which had been dug through the graves of soldiers.

Protruding from the sides of the trenches were portions of stockinged feet, and various parts of the human body. Although this spot was disinfected regularly by the pioneer squad, the stench was unbearable, and this was summertime and very hot weather.

Later in the year the 62nd were involved in the First Battle of Cambrai where tanks were an important part of the battle plan. Their task was to break through the German lines so that the infantry could follow in their wake. The machine gunners found it heavy work to keep up with this forward movement. They managed to get to the Hindenburg Line through the barbed wire and sniper fire and the next day reached a concrete dug-out which had been a German staff billet with beds and a wooden floor. They spent four nights around this area but as usual attack was followed by reaction. The "Gunner" wrote later:

On the morning of November 25th, 1917, the Germans launched a counter-attack, and I was once more a gunner with 62nd Machine Gun Company. The attack began in broad daylight, and looking across the valley on the opposite slope about half a mile away, I saw lines of field-grey figures steadily advancing, German artillery, supporting their infantry, sent over many gas shells, mixed up with shrapnel and H.E.'s. We quickly donned gas masks, sighted our machine-guns and opened fire on the grey figures, who rapidly withdrew to a distance our guns were unable to reach, and eventually disappeared in the valley below.

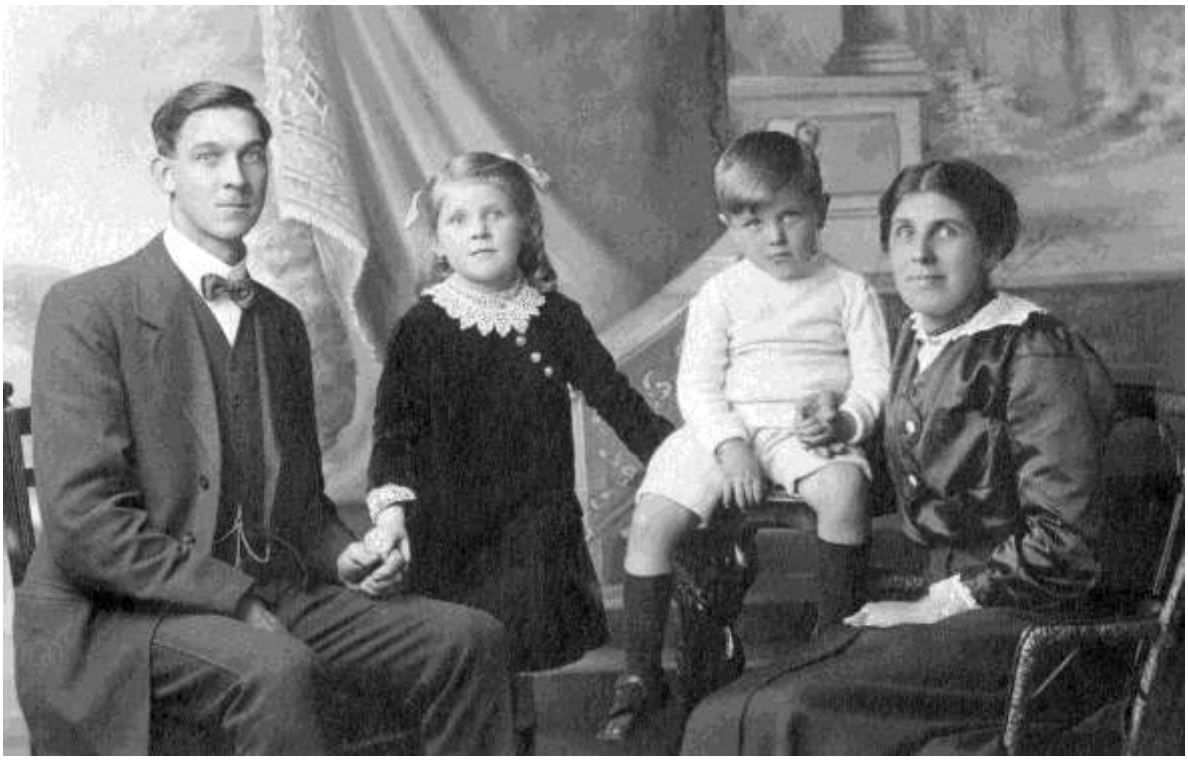
The 62nd and 51st Divisions held on all that day to the furthermost advanced positions reached in the initial attacks, but eventually the German counter-attack outflanked the British positions and forced a withdrawal. It was another nightmare experience.

By November the 28th we were back to where we had started. Many lessons were learnt at Cambrai regarding the use of tanks in open warfare, but the price in human lives was ghastly.

The Spring 1918 campaign was marked by the great German offensive which began in March. The 62nd Brigade Machine Gun Company had become part of the 21st Machine Gun Battalion on 24th February. On 19th March the Battalion's War Diary reported that the "enemy artillery ominously inactive". On 21st the Germans launched what they hoped would be the decisive offensive of the war. They attacked the British Third and Fifth Armies on the Somme in huge numbers. The 21st Machine Gunners were at the forefront of the battles that followed as they tried to stall the German assaults, and give the British troops covering fire, so that they could retreat in some order. As a result they were a prime target for the enemy and suffered many casualties. There was much ground lost by the Allies but the attrition of the machine gunners and the other troops gradually slowed the German onslaught to an exhausted halt.

As we have seen with the accounts of other soldiers, the tide slowly turned and the 21st Battalion of the Machine Gunners was part of the final advance into Picardy. At the Armistice on 11th November the Division was around Berlamont and on the 12th moved to Beaufort and then west to Amiens. Demobilisation began in January 1919 but it seems that George had to wait until 16th October 1919 for his release. We can see in the *Absent Voters List* for Ringstead that George may have become a V/L/Cpl which I take to mean that he acted as a Lance Corporal but was not paid for his promotion and was thus "Voluntary". He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

It would have been difficult time for his wife Eliza Jane (who seems to have been usually know as Janey) at home with her two children Lorna and Kenneth.



George with Eliza Jane and children Lorna and Kenneth
With thanks to Stephen Kett

At some time, probably before the war, George had become a handsewn bootmaker and he also continued with his interest in the National United Order of Free Gardeners. We can see in the local newspapers, his involvement. The 31st January 1930 issue of the *Northampton Mercury* celebrated George's appointment as District Manager and contained a short account of his part in the local area.

> *For 25 years he has been a member of the Clove Lodge, in which he has filled the offices successively of Junior Warden, Senior Warden, Deputy Master and Lodge Master. He was elected to the District Board in 1927 and has held various offices which lead up to the position he has now attained. He was in France for three years during the war with the Machine Gun Corps, and after demobilisation resumed his active interest in Friendly Society work generally and in that of the Free Gardeners particularly.*

It seems likely that it was at this time that he had his photograph taken in a local studio wearing his District Manager's collar of office.

George with his collar of office
With thanks to Stephen Kett

The same newspaper article also reported that he was the local secretary of the British Legion. We get a picture of a man who was willing to put time into helping his former comrades and the local community. He also seems to have had a wider interest in the

politics of the time and a clear view of his own beliefs. The reforming Labour Government, which had been elected by a landslide in 1945, at the end of another World War, introduced a National Insurance Bill in 1946 which would bring in a series of benefits to provide working people with some financial security in times of hardship and old age. This was seen by many in the movement as a threat to the Friendly Societies who had, for many years, struggled to help those in need. The members felt side-lined in the consultations for the new national scheme. I think George had a broader view [in the article it refers to *R* Newell but I think that this may be a mistake] which the *Mercury and Herald* reported in an article on a meeting of the "Gardeners".

> *The only voice of support for the Government came from Mr. R. Newell (Clove Lodge), Ringstead, who pleaded that politics should be left out of the discussion.*
>
> *"What would have been the position under a Conservative Government?" he asked. "Would the position have been the same? I have expressed the opinion that friendly societies would disappear, and now that time is at hand. Let us put our pettifogging ideas on one side and march towards the future".*

In fact, although the Friendly Societies lost many members, the Free Gardeners and others did survive. They were forced, however, to increase their charges and limit benefits in order to stay viable. The *Mercury and Herald* of 2nd February 1951 reported on a meeting of the Free Gardeners when an increase in charges had been proposed. George told the meeting that:

> *. . . his lodge, a small one, had lost some 50 members during the last two or three years. He was afraid an increase for the management fund of even 1d. might mean the loss of more members.*
>
> *Instead of building up capital he thought more should be used for benefits.*

Reading between the lines, we see that George felt that the time of the Friendly Societies was near its end. In 2000 the only lodge remaining in England was in Bristol but there are still some throughout the world and in 2002 a few lodges were re-opened in Scotland. Perhaps a sign of returning hard times.

Eliza Jane died in 1969 and George followed her in 1970, aged 81. He was one who stayed in the village of his birth but this did not stop him from leading a full and interesting life. Also, his descendant, Steven Kett, has written that he stayed close to his mother and father and the rest of the family throughout their lives. This bond was strengthened by the death of his youngest siblings, John in the First World War, and Clara on Armistice Day.

Chapter 2

Joseph Arthur Norris (1889-1931)

Like many of the young men who I have written about in these life stories, Joseph Arthur Norris's military records have been largely destroyed. He is different, however, in that I have not managed to find any evidence that he ever lived in Ringstead. However, he was put on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*, so it seems that he was for a time in the village and it may just be the lack of public records that have hidden his residence, perhaps in his early married life. We will assume that he was entitled to have been included on the *Roll of Honour* and try to write his story.

Joseph, who sometimes used his second name, was born in Irchester in 1889, the son of George and Lillie Norris. George had married Lillie Goddard in 1887. I have not found a christening for Joseph but the couple's later children were christened in the Irchester Parish Church. I mention this because at some point the family became stalwarts of the Salvation Army. This had been formed in 1865 in the East End of London so was still a young organisation in the 1880s and 1890s. It was an inclusive organisation and, although it thought baptisms and other rites unnecessary, it did not denounce them.

In the 1901 Census the family were living in London End in Irchester and there were seven children Fanny, Thomas, Joseph, Edith, George, Elsie and Doris. George was still a shoe finisher and all the children, including Doris who was less than a year old, had been born in Irchester. The oldest child, Fanny, has the surname Goddard, so was born before the marriage but is shown as George's daughter.

By 1911 the family had moved to Highfield Cottages in Raunds. These were a terrace of houses at the top of Marshalls Road, built beside the Coggin's Shoe factory for its workers. In the same Census we see two women living together in 7 Primrose Hill in Raunds. Louise Harrison was 25 years old and from Staffordshire and Edith Clifton was 25 and from Buxted in Sussex. They were both Salvation Army Officers. In 1901 Edith had been an under housemaid in Tunbridge Wells. The Salvation Army had not been welcomed there at first, and the Salvationists had been met with sticks and stones when they marched to the Common for outdoor preaching. They became accepted and a Salvation Army Citadel had been built in 1886. Was it here that Edith was converted and joined the "Army"?

The First World War came in 1914 but, at first, Joseph was not called to fight. He was working in a local factory as a shoehand which may have given him some exemption. He had also been a Salvationist since 1906, along with at least some of his family. It was in his involvement with the Army that he would have met the two young female officers and it was Edith Clifton who became his wife early in 1915. They had a child, Ivy, who was born in the second quarter of 1917.

We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Joseph was called up to the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was given Regimental Number 43673. The 5th was one of the new "Pioneer" Battalions which were created in 1914 to provide skilled labour for the Royal Engineers and to relieve the infantry from tasks other than combat. The 5th Northamptonshires had been formed in August 1914 but did not land in France until 30th May 1915 and took part in the Battle of Loos.

Unfortunately we do not know when Joseph joined the army or when he was posted to the Western Front except that, because he was not entitled to the 1914/15 Star, it was not until 1916 at the earliest. I have tried to find a similar Northamptonshire Regimental Number but have not managed to find a soldier whose entry date is known. By checking many soldiers of whom we have some idea of the time that they went to France I believe that it would probably have been at least late 1917 before he reached the Western Front. We do have evidence that shows that he was in Rouen on 9th July 1918.

Northamptonshire Regiment Badge (Regular Army badge would have battle honours).

It seems likely that Joseph was there when the German "Michael Offensive" took place and threatened to win the war. Although the Battalion was set up to help the infantry by doing non-combatant tasks they were often called upon to also join their fellow soldiers in the trenches.

We know that Joseph, if indeed he was in France, survived this attack. His brother, just a little older than Joseph, Thomas James Frederick Norris, had emigrated to Australia but returned and enlisted on October 23rd 1915. He was serving with the 7th Northamptonshires and had been promoted to Lance Corporal. On March 22nd 1918 he was killed in action. The *Rushden Heritage* website has a report from the *Rushden Echo* of 26th April 1918 from a comrade of Frederick, as he was usually known:

> *. . . two of their company were wounded, one could walk and the other could not. Lance-Corporal Norris, with three others, rushed out to fetch them in, and a shell came and killed them all.*

When and how did Joseph hear of his brother's death? Was he told by an officer in his regiment or was it a letter from home? He would probably have received another letter from home some two months later, telling him of the death of his younger sister, Doris. She was only seventeen years old and had been ill for some time. The local newspapers reported:

> *A full Salvation funeral was conducted at the Citadel by Captain Cecil Chapman; a band attended, made up by Wellingborough, Rushden and Raunds bandsman, also a number of small girls, dressed in white and each carrying a bunch of white flowers,*

represented the Sunday School. The procession marched to the cemetery, where Captain Chapman oversaw the interment watched by a gathering of nearly 200, many from the Regulation Boot Company and Messrs Adams Bros as well as family and other friends.

Had his time at the Front made him hardened to death? It is more likely that it added to the sorrow for the deaths of his comrades in arms. The *Wartime Memories Project* records that the 5th were in action at the Battle of Bapaume and spent the Spring engaged in heavy fighting as the enemy advanced across the old Somme battlefields. From then they were in constant action in the Battle of Amiens and then the final forcing of the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line and beyond. We can see Joseph's war in more details from the War Diary of the 5th Battalion

This was very different to the usual Infantry records. If we look at the entries from early February 1918 when the Battalion was at Sailly Sur La Lys we see:

Strength of Battalion on 1st February 1918.

Officers	*W.O. Class ll*	*Sgts*	*Cpls*	*Ptes*	*Total*	*Total all ranks*
34	*3*	*41*	*42*	*946*	*1029*	*1066*

Feb 1st 1917 [should be 1918] 'A' Company work on CHARRED POST, WINDY POST and Strong Point 'K' at M.6. Central, trench boarding, revetting and banking and repairing parados [banks at the rear of a trench]. 'B' Coy commenced work on a strong point at H.18. C. 3.3. [from a detailed trench map]. 'C' Coy continued work on strong point at M. 5. B. 1. 9. This is now almost completed. 'D' Coy continued work on FLEURIE SWITCH and BOIS GRENIER constructing new fire bays.

When the great German Offensive began in late March 1918, they had to put down their tools and pick up their rifles. The official history of the Northamptonshires records that:

The men of the 5th were rushed up by motor-buses to Albert and succeeded in holding up heavy attacks at a cost of 34 killed and 45 wounded.

On the 24th March they were sent to Bouzincourt to reinforce the 7th Norfolks and 7th Suffolks who were being overrun. They suffered 11 Other Ranks killed and 40 wounded with 23 missing and 5 shell shocked. The line could not hold and there were retreats to new Front Lines. Now the men were trying desperately to construct new defences but they also had to serve their time in the Front Line trenches.

By May we see the tide has turned and despite counter-attacks by the Germans, the Pioneers were now trying to repair and improve captured German trench systems. By July the War Diary entries are brief and although there is some trench work we see increased training and resting. It was during this period, unrecorded in the Diary, that the deadly "Spanish Flu" reached the Battalion. On 9th July 1918 Joseph, with some of his fellow 5th Northamptonshires soldiers, was struck down by the influenza. He was admitted to No. 1 Australian Hospital at Rouen but it is not recorded how long he was there before returning to duty.

The tented wards at 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen (E03422).

There was still determined opposition from the Germans but there was also a continual Allied advance and by September the men of the 5th were repairing and constructing bridges, tracks and crossings and craters around Manancourt as well as still putting out wire to protect positions.

Now the Battalion were enjoying, "Training, rest and recreation at Aniche" They were trying to repair roads and bring back into use some of the infrastructure destroyed in the war. There was also time for practising the "March Past" ready for inspection on the 20th. From February 2nd to 4th 1919:

> *All companies employed on roads and making Divisional Racecourse and grandstands on Divisional Football Ground.*

The work had become mainly the repairing of roads, and other fatigues. We see the Battalion strength reducing as demobilisation increased. Also on 30th March 1919, at Aniche, the Diary records:

> *A draft of 1 Captain, w Subalterns, 1 C.S.M., 5 Sergts, 12 Corporals and 62 Privates were ordered to be despatched to 351 Prisoners of War Coy. BETHUNE. Only 1 Subaltern, I Sergt and 56 ORs can be found at present. . .*
>
> *31st March. Draft standing by for entrainment orders.*

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he was with the 351 Company but I have not managed to find where the camp that they were guarding was situated. It is most likely that it was at Bethune and was only there until all the Germany prisoners gathered at the end of the war were sent home. I have also had information that it might have been in Jersey but this seems less likely.

All we can say is that in 1919 or 1920 Joseph returned to Edith at 35 (or possibly 30) Brooks Road in Raunds. He took up his employment again as a finisher in Adams Brothers shoe factory and also continued with his work in the Salvation Army. We know that he had at some point the roles of Treasurer and also Bandmaster. Their only daughter, Ivy was an invalid and probably took most of Edith's time. In February 1931 Joseph, aged 42, had been distributing "self-denial week" envelopes in Leighton and Spaldwick with Captain Thomas Whitehead. It appears that they were both on motorcycles and, when on the Keyston to Bythorn Road, Joseph was in collision with a car driven by artificial stone contractor, Mr. F. Fentiman. He was knocked unconscious and Whitehead stayed with him while Fentiman went to Bythorn and telephoned Dr E. Gainer of Thrapston.

It does not appear that he regained consciousness and was taken home and seen by Dr McInnes of Raunds who ordered his removal to Northampton General Hospital. On February 22nd 1931 Joseph died of "laceration of the brain". His effects were £63 15s.

Early the following year Ivy, the invalid daughter of Joseph and Edith had also died. Edith now was on her own. I have not established certainly what happened to her after this double tragedy but it may be that she returned to the Royal Tunbridge Wells area where she had been a servant and, in 1939, was living with widow Edith Brown and was a "Daily Domestic Servant". If this was the correct person she died, aged 89 on 6th June 1975.

Chapter 3

The Peacock Family

The name Peacock has been in Ringstead at least since the Seventeenth Century, and first appeared in the Parish Registers with the christening of John Peacocke, son of John and Anne, on May 10th, 1629. We pick up the family with another John, christened on November 11th 1832. He married Jane Bates on 25th July 1856 and they had at least seven children: Eliza Jane, William, Sarah Ann, John Thomas, Sarah Ann again, Arthur Henry and Agnes, Both Sarah Anns died in infancy. Childhood was a dangerous time and between 1846 and 1865, nine children with the surname Peacock were buried in Ringstead Churchyard before their nineteenth birthday.

It is the two younger sons, John Thomas and Arthur Henry, whose own sons we will be looking at in this chapter. John Thomas had been baptised on 24th August 1864 with his seven-year-old brother William, and Arthur was baptised on 25th March 1867.

John Peacock ---------- Jane Bates
1832 – 1892 1837 – 1892
I
---------- I
Martha Ellen Bellamy --------John Thomas Peacock Arthur Henry Peacock ------Eliza Emma S. Bugby
1864 – 1928 1864 – 1896 1867 – 1957 1868 – 1956
I I I I
*Thomas **Cyril** **Horace** John **Thomas** Arthur E **Raymond***

A very simplified family tree to show the relationship of the four Peacock men, with the name they were usually known by, highlighted.

John Peacock, the father was a shoemaker and he and his wife, Jane were living in Church Street in 1871 with children William, aged 14 and an apprentice shoemaker, Eliza 10, [John] Thomas 8, Arthur 4 and youngest child Agnes two years old. By 1881 John Thomas had followed his father and become an apprentice shoemaker. Also living in Church Street was an army shoemaker called Michael Bellamy. He had been born in Sudborough but had married Ringstead girl Charlotte Childs and by 1881 there were seven children. Martha Ellen, the eldest, was seventeen years old and was a shoe stitcher. She like John Thomas preferred to use her second name.

The two obviously got to know each other because they married, both aged 20, on the 4th October 1883 in the local church. Perhaps surprisingly, at this late date, when John Thomas would have attended the village school, he made his mark on the Marriage Register although Martha Ellen signed her name in a clear hand. By 1891 the couple had four equally spaced children with Albert, the eldest seven and the youngest Oris (Horace) just one month old.

There was another dangerous incident prior to this, although we cannot be sure which John Peacock was involved. The Northampton Mercury of 6th August 1887 reported:

> *On Saturday morning, last week, an accident happened that might have resulted fatally. It appears that Mr Samuel Lockie went into the shop of a shoemaker named John Peacock. While there he took hold of a revolver and began to finger it about, not knowing it was loaded, when it went off and shot Mr Peacock in the thigh. Surgical aid was as soon as possible obtained and the ball extracted, and we understand that Peacock is progressing favourably*

Th couple had one more child, called Thomas, but a terrible tragedy struck the family before his birth. Ellen, pregnant with Thomas went to bed at about 11 o'clock on the 15th January 1896. She left her husband sitting by the fire reading by the light of a paraffin oil lamp. A few minutes later, he finished reading and started up the stairs to bed, carrying the lamp to light his way. Ellen heard a shout and then the crash of the lamp falling. She rushed out of their bedroom to see what had happened.

She saw Thomas enveloped in flames and ran back into her bedroom and opened the window and screamed for help. Amos Weekley, a neighbour, heard her screams and forced

the door open. He found John Thomas in flames and running about the house. Amos helped put out the flames and Thomas told him that that he had trod on his long shoemaker's apron on the stairs and fell forward on the lamp which at once caught fire and ignited his clothes.

A doctor was fetched and Thomas was taken to Northampton Infirmary suffering from severe burns to his right thigh and both hands. He survived for some six weeks but died on 27th February from "the shock to his system and the burns". His long survival may indicate that it was an infection which finally killed him, for this was still the most usual cause of death in burns cases.

At the inquest the jury returned a verdict of accidental death and the coroner, in summing up:

> *. . . commented on the regrettably large number of accidents caused through people using improper and unsafe lamps. He did not wish to praise any particular lamps but it was a grave misfortune that so many people had common lamps which easily caught fire, while there were so many kinds which did not allow the oil to escape into the flames.*

Ellen was left a widow with a young family and by 1901 she was living at 30 High Street in Ringstead with her five children aged from seventeen to four. Her younger sister, Ethel, a boot closer, was staying with her, perhaps also helping with the children. A year later, Ellen married widower Benjamin Phillips, a shoe worker in a local factory. In 1911 Benjamin and Ellen were living with Bert, Benjamin's young son from his first marriage and four of Ellen's children. Bessie aged 21 was a heel builder and Thomas, at fourteen, a "factory lad". Horace, aged 20, was working on a farm but it is Cyril, a year older, whose occupation is something of a surprise, for he was a hairdresser.

It was Cyril, Horace and John Thomas who fought in the Great War and it is their stories that we will first look at here.

Thomas Cyril Peacock (1887-1964)

In telling of the life of John Thomas Peacock Senior 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 was 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 he was known by his middle name, probably to distinguish him from his father, who also 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 showed him living with his mother and stepfather but a year later, on August 12th 1912, he married Rose Brayfield in Raunds Parish Church.

Cyril and Rose
With thanks to Glenda Burton

Cyril joined up on 10th December 1915 and became part of an Army Reserve Battalion. At this time the army 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 thousands. 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.

We know that, at first, he stayed in Ringstead and ran his own hairdressing shop in the High Street. In April 1916 he was summoned before the Thrapston Magistrates' Court for not having subdued the lighting of his shop.

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 new skill that he could take into civilian life so it may be 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 the 15th September 1916, tanks were used but it was only late in the war that they played a major role 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 was 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 when he returned to civilian life. Cyril did fulfil his ambition. The *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 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 of 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.

He seems to have been successful for, on the 12th October 1949, Cyril and Rose 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 eight years later, on 6th February 1964, of lung cancer aged seventy-seven and was buried in Elm Grove Cemetery, nearly half a century after many of his former comrades

Horace Peacock (1890-1922)

Horace Peacock, son of John Thomas and Martha Ellen was born in 1890 but not baptised in Ringstead Church until September 22nd 1901. This baptism was some five years after the tragic death of his shoemaker father, from burns, and just a year before his widowed

mother married Benjamin Phillips. By 1911 Horace was 20 years old and working on a farm, still living in Gladstone Street with his mother and her new husband.

In the Spring of 1913 Horace married Rose Hannah Taylor. She had been born on 14th October 1891 in Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire but had moved with her parents to Raunds in the mid-1890s. Her father, Frederick, had been appointed the manager of one of the new Co-operative grocery shops in Raunds but he died on 11th June 1907, aged 49, after a short illness. By 1911 the family were living in 3, Spencer Street in Raunds and Rose was working as a machinist in a shoe factory.

The young couple possibly moved to Ringstead after their marriage, and certainly they were living in Gladstone Street in 1918. Before then, of course, there had been the Great War, and Horace had been in France on the Western Front.

He joined the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) which spent all the war, from June 1915, fighting on the Western Front. At some point Horace was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Buffs. It seems likely that it was with the 1st that he was wounded near the end of the war. The report date was the 13th November 1918 just two days after the signing of the Armistice but it was likely that the incident was weeks or even months before this publication. He was entitled, under the Army Order of 6th July 1916, to wear a wound stripe on his uniform.

He was probably ferried back to England for treatment and, on recovery, became a part of the 3rd Battalion of the Buffs. This had remained in England throughout the war, and by this time was based in Dover. At the end of the war the 3rd Battalion were sent to Ireland to help with the policing there, following the 1916 Easter Rising and were, I believe, based in the Cork area.

We cannot be sure but it seems possible that the “wound” had actually been Trench Fever, and it became clear that he had not recovered from it. Trench Fever was a debilitating illness transmitted in the faeces of body lice. Symptoms included high fever, severe headaches, pains in the eyeballs, soreness of muscles in the legs, back pain and pain in the shins. It became a scourge of the Western Front with some one million casualties among the soldiers of all combatants. It was rarely lethal but, in severe cases, could lead to heart and other problems.

From his pension records, we see that he was finally discharged from the army on 9th October 1919 because of his illness. He returned to Rose in Ringstead and they continued with their family life. The couple had four children although Thomas, born in 1913, had died as an infant. Irene was born in 1915 and twins Alma and Horace in 1920.

He received a small pension but Horace died on 8th March 1922 aged 32 as a result of complications following his Trench Fever and his widow received a funeral grant. Horace was one of the unseen casualties of war not found on any memorial.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* records that Rose Hannah Peacock was a "Boot and Shoe Hot Wax Shoe Machinist living at 32 Cantrell Street in Raunds with her widowed mother, Ada Taylor. Rose died in 1974 aged 82, so she was nearly fifty years a widow.

John Thomas Peacock (1896-1956)

John Thomas Peacock was baptised in Ringstead Church on 19th July 1896, the youngest child of John Thomas and Martha Ellen. Only his mother was at the christening for John Thomas had died some five months earlier from burns.

It would have been a difficult time for John Thomas's widowed mother. In 1901 he was living with her and his siblings at 30 High Street. Ellen remarried, to Benjamin Phillips and in 1911 Thomas, as he was usually known, was living in Gladstone Street in the new Tilcroft Estate, with her and his stepfather. He was fourteen years old and he had left school and was "a factory lad"

As always in these biographies, war came to call him from the small village world. In the *1918 Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he is shown as a rifleman in the 25th Rifle Brigade with Regimental Number 50313. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he had been in the 1st Battalion of the London Rifle Brigade and, having served in France, was demobilised.

Although having similarities in their names these are two separate Regiments and he would have had a second Regimental Number. Unfortunately, and unusually, there appears to be no other military records for John Thomas Peacock, not even a Medal Card. This may be due to clerical errors but it makes it impossible to make any sensible record of his army service.

It seems unlikely that he was sent to France before 1916 and possibly he was first posted to the London Rifle Brigade and served with them on the Western Front. Andy (stiletto_33853) has posted on the Great War Forum that large numbers of the London Rifle Brigade were placed in the 25th Rifle Brigade at the end of the war prior to demobilisation. The 25th Rifle Brigade was actually the 25th (Reserve) Garrison Battalion and was stationed at Falmouth for the whole of the war.

Thomas was included in the Spring 1919 *Absent Voters' List*, although without any military unit shown, so we must presume that it was later in 1919 or even 1920 that he was demobilised and returned to Ringstead. It may be that he lived with his mother and stepfather for they are all listed in Gladstone Street in the 1920 to 1929 Electoral Rolls. In 1929 Thomas married Rushden woman, Elsie Lilian Dickens, and they moved to Pierce's (or Pearce's) Yard which was down a narrow lane beside the police house opposite Ringstead House.

Thomas worked in a local shoe factory and, in 1939, his occupation was shown as "Boot and Shoe Trade, Stitching Operator, Government Work". Ellen had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" and living with them was Ellen Bessie Peacock, Thomas's unmarried older sister who

had “occasional work” as a fitter in the boot and shoe trade. I do not think that Thomas and Elsie had any children.

John Thomas Peacock died on 12th December 1956. He was sixty years of age and at the time of his death he was living at White Cottage in Ringstead High Street. He was still working as a boot operative. Elsie died in 1970, aged seventy-three.

There was another Peacock, a cousin of the men we have so far considered who had a short but tragic army career.

Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock (1890-1914)

Throughout the Nineteenth Century, especially when agriculture or shoemaking were suffering hard times, some young men from Ringstead left to join the army, marines or navy. Some returned to their home village but many settled elsewhere or died in service.

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 none of them had died. 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 unit 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* has 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 was a Special Reserve number dating from January 1909 and the first letter we have of his, is from "The Barracks", which was the Gibraltar Barracks in 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]*

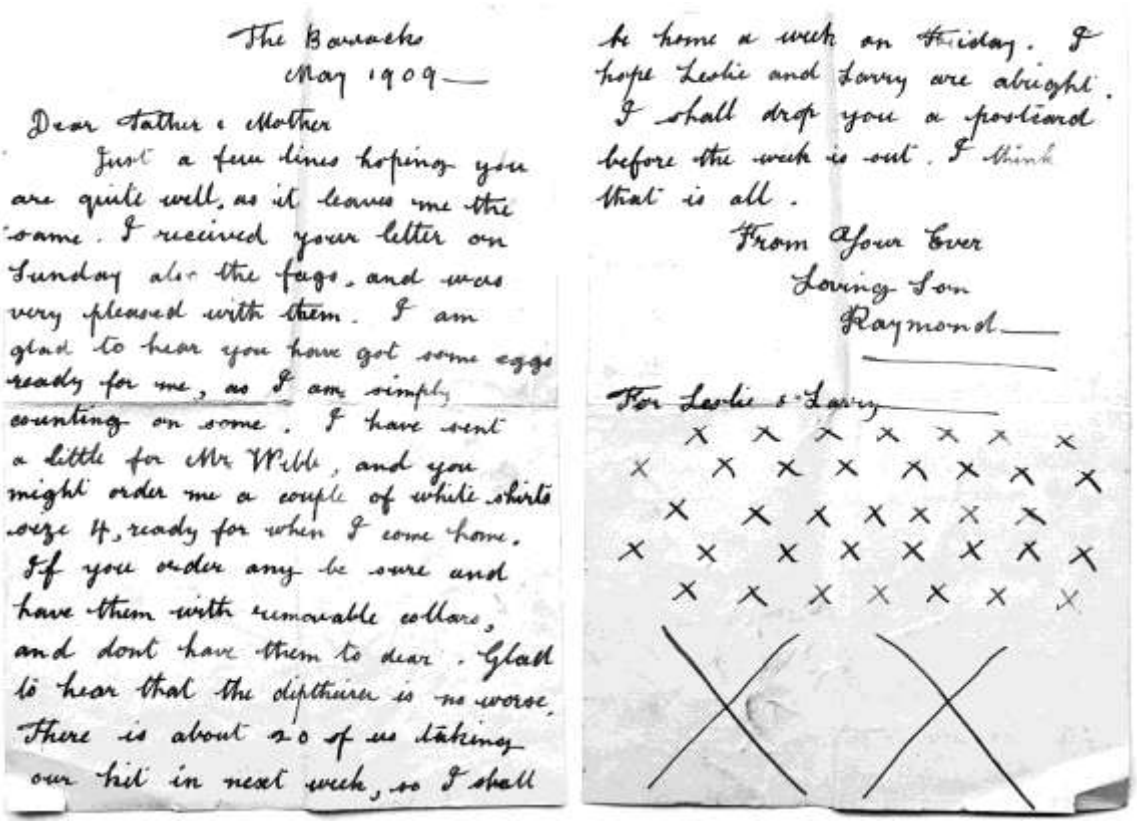
His letters tend to follow this pattern but with glimpses of his army life. In April he remarks:

> *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].

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.*



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 was 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 4, ready for when I come home. If you order any be sure and have them with removable collars, and don't have them to dear. Glad to hear that the diptheria 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 Lovey 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 & Lovey—

Letter from Raymond May 1909

With thanks to Kevin Varty

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

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's daughter, Rita Mary Scholes, who had died aged ten years old.*

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

Interior of Landguard Fort, Felixstowe (Author's Photograph 2017)

That was 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 still have continued with his 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 were 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 is filled in until the end of December 1913 but from January 10th 1914 it appears that he did 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 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. He 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 in the field.

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

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 the beginning of the war, the battles were far more 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 were buried together in Ringstead Cemetery.

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Chapter 4

John William Pearson (1895-1944)

The Pearson name was well known in Ringstead and became nationally famous when John William "Crutchy" Pearson was part of the Raunds March to London in 1905. The March was to press Parliament for better piece-work rates for the military boots and shoes that were the staple product of the Raunds and Ringstead "handsewn men". John walked all the way

on crutches because he was lame in one leg and he became an obvious target for the newspaper photographers and reporters. He is not our man, however, for he was born in 1869. He married and by 1911 had a cobbling business in March in Cambridgeshire although he had retired back to Ringstead by 1939

Our John William Pearson was born on 16th February 1895, the son of Tom George and Martha Jane. He was baptised on 11th August 1896 in Ringstead Church. His father was a local man but his mother, Martha Leigh was originally from Polebrook. Tom was a handsewn man and, in the 1911 Census, we see that he was working at home and, at a time of much unemployment among the shoemakers, he was still in work. John William, now 16 years old was also shown as a "handsewn shoemaker". He was very young to have earned this description.

The Great War began and John would have seen the local men going to France and the heartbroken families when they did not return. Others would have returned with terrible stories to tell. The reality of the war set in and the early optimism of a quick victory disintegrated. The Regulars, Territorials and Volunteers were not enough to stem the German onslaught and Conscription was brought in in early 1916.

John was conscripted on 16th February 1916 and became part of Machine Gun Corps and was given Service Number 65638. Once again, few of his records survived the German air raid in the Second World War. This is complicated by the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which states that he was in the 50th Battery of the MGC. There was no such unit, but there was a 50th Machine Gun Company as well as, from 1st March 1918, a 50th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. As a result, the following account is my best attempt but may not be reliable outside the basic facts.

It seems most likely that the R*oll of Honour* refers to the 50th Battalion of the MGC which was formed from the Machine Gun Companies of the 50th (Northumberland) Division. This Division had several Machine Gun Companies which were the 149th, 150th and 151st. Looking at the list of men who were transferred into the Machine Gun Corps, which was produced by Steve (hmsk212) on the Great War Forum, it seems likely that he went to France in late 1916 or early 1917. This list was based on transfers from other regiments and the numbers do not give a strict chronological order but do give some broad indication.

If we assume (and it is far from a certainty) that, in 1917, he was with the 50th Division Machine Gun Companies, which, moved into the 50th Battalion, he would have fought in the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Capture of Wancourt Ridge and the Second Battle of the Scarpe, which were phases of the offensive usually known as the Battle of Arras. The 50th then moved to the mud of Flanders and took part in the Third Battle of Ypres in a phase called the Second Battle of Passchendaele.

In 1918 there was a reorganisation and, on the 1st March 1918, the three Machine Gun Companies, the 149th, 150th and 151st were amalgamated into the 50th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps but remained part of the 50th Division. The new Battalion was at the Battle of St Quentin, the Actions of the Somme Crossings and the Battle of Rosieres, part of the Battle of the Somme 1918.

Perhaps the Division's hardest battles were in response to the last Great German offensive, at the Battle of Estaires, Battle of Hazebrouck (Battle of the Lys) and the Battle of the Aisne.

This would have seen the Division at its lowest ebb. It had suffered heavy casualties and was exhausted. It was taken out of the front line and the infantry units were replaced. It did not go into action again until October 1918. By then the German Offensive had been fought to a standstill and the pendulum had swung, with increasing speed, in favour of the Allies.

The 50th Battalion, as part of the 50th Division fought in the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Picardy. It was resting at Soire le Chateau when news of the Armistice came through on 11th November 1918.

The demobilisation began in December 1918 and John William Pearson was finally discharged on the 12th February 1919.

We know that John had been appointed Lance Corporal and also that he had been wounded twice. We do not have any dates for these events but we do know that he suffered a gunshot wound to his right thigh and received an Army Disability Pension. It may be that he had been wounded near the end of the war and was in hospital recuperating until his discharge

He returned to his family in London End in Ringstead and later, in 1919, he married Florence Manning. A John W. Pearson joined the National Union of Railwaymen in February or March 1919 and is shown in the records to have been working as a labourer based at Thrapston. It seems likely that this was our man. I think that the couple only had one child, Gertrude, who was born on 16th November 1919.

At some point he changed his work and became a foreman in a local Ironstone Quarry. This was his job in 1939 when the *Register of England and Wales* was taken, identifying the home population, as the Second World War began. Florence had become an Assistant Mistress in a local school. Their daughter, Gertrude, aged nearly twenty, was a student. The family were now living in Spencer Street on the Tilcroft Estate.

John died in Kettering Hospital on 10th July 1968, aged 73. At the time of his death his address was still 11 Spencer Street and he was a "Retired Steelworks Staff Foreman". Florence lived to be 88 and died in 1982.

Chapter 5

The Pentelow Family

The Pentelow name is a popular one in the East Northamptonshire area, stretching back through the centuries. The father of our two WW1 servicemen, however, came from just over the border in Dean in Bedfordshire. His name was Thomas Pentelow, born on 28th April

1870, the son of William and Mary Ann. His wife, Edith York (or Yorke) was born in Denford in 1872 and baptised there on January 19th 1873, the daughter of Eli and Emma.

Edith's family moved to Ringstead and the first time we meet her and Thomas together is in the 1901 Census for Irthlingborough where they were living in Queen Street. Thomas was working as a shoe finisher. They had four children and the three youngest children, Percy (8), Robert (5) and Daisy (3) were all born in Irthlingborough, but the eldest child, John Thomas, aged ten was born in Denford.

There is another complication because his surname is given as York, his mother's maiden name. I have not found his christening (although he is recorded in the fourth quarter of 1890 in the Civil Registration Birth Index), nor the marriage of Thomas and Edith, and I cannot find any of them in the 1891 Census. There is one possibility for a 22-year-old shoe laster named Thomas Pentlow, his wife Elizabeth (not Edith) aged 20, a shoe finisher, and their son Thomas, aged 11 months were visitors at 41 Boston Street in Shoreditch in London. They apparently came from Durnford in an unknown county (N.K.). There is a Durnford in Wiltshire but I cannot find the family again. Could Durnford be Denford? We cannot be sure.

By the 1911 Census the family were living in London End in Ringstead. Thomas stated that they had been married 19 years and had had eight children, six of whom were still living. The two new additions to the family are Fred (8) born in Irthlingborough and Elen 4 born in Ringstead. We see that the family must have moved into the village around 1905.

John Thomas Pentelow [York] (1890-1962)

As we have seen, the early years of John Thomas are a little confused. I think that he started using his father's surname in the period after 1911 and it may be that, except on official documents he and his family used "Thomas Pentelow" from the start. The changes in his name and the number of men with similar names in the area does make it sometimes less certain that we have the correct person.

We do know that in 1911 he was recorded as an "out of work" boot finisher. His trade was confirmed by a court case, recorded in the Northampton Mercury of 30th April 1909 where:

> *Thomas Pentelow, shoe operative and Percy Pentelow, labourer, of Ringstead were summoned by Ralph Whyman, farmer, of Ringstead for damaging a quickset hedge at Ringstead.*

His military records show that he had become a currier. Currying was the cleaning, scraping, stretching and finishing of the previously tanned hides by oiling, waxing or colouring them to the required surface finish. Again, we have confirmation of his new trade from a newspaper report, this time the Chronicle and Echo of 10th September 1915.

> *Thomas Pentelow, currier, Ringstead, was summoned for using obscene language at Irthlingborough on August 23, - Pleading guilty, he was fined 15s.*

We may conclude from these two cases that Thomas was something of a rough diamond but they would have been considered minor cases by most of the young men of the village.

It was not long after this, on 25th October 1915, that he attested for the army at Rushden. He was 24 years 6 months old and was 5ft 4 inches tall with a 33-inch chest which was quite small even by the standards of the time., The records also show that he had fair hair and blue eyes and was still living at London End in Ringstead. He had enlisted with the 8th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given Regimental Number 22280. The actual description in his records is the 8th Garrison Battalion 2nd Reserve

The 8th Battalion had been formed in October 1914 and, in May 1915, had moved to Colchester and become a reserve battalion, moving on to Sittingbourne in March 1916. They finally were sent to Maidstone and became the 28th Training Reserve Battalion but, before this move, Thomas had already been discharged on 27th July 1916. His records show that he had suffered from "fits" all his life and had been diagnosed as having epilepsy. He had never served abroad and had been a soldier for just 277 days. His character was described as "Fair" which indicates that he had a few issues with authority or perhaps his illness was not looked on with sympathy

It was not the end of his war, however, for, just over a year later, on 18th August 1917 he enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and was given the Service Number 124593. The RAMC had expanded rapidly during First World War from 9000 Other Ranks in 1914 to 154,000 in 1918. It served all over the world but for Thomas it was just service at home. He was a Private and probably had no or little medical training so would have done the necessary menial tasks of the old hospital porter.

The records do not show where he worked but do record that he was finally demobilised, again, on 10th October 1919. Once more the reason given was his epilepsy.

The story of his life after he returned home also has some uncertainty. It may be that on the 13th April 1919, he married Grace Adelaide Dawson. Certainly, a Thomas Pentelow, aged 27, and a member of the RAMC, whose father was also Thomas and a shoe finisher, was married at St Mary the Virgin Church in Lower Edmonton in Enfield. Grace's brother, Joseph Dawson, was married at the same time. He is also shown as "married" on a second Pension Card that was completed for him. We cannot be sure, but it does seem that there is enough, evidence to say that this is our man. There is also the likelihood that the couple had a child, Grace Pentelow, born in the Spring of 1919. The child's mother's maiden name was shown as Dawson.

What happened next lies outside the records that I have researched. In 1939, a Grace Pentelow was shown as an inmate in Enfield House, a "Public Assistance Institution" at 17/19 Chase Side Crescent in Enfield. She had been born on 31st December 1896 and was shown as a married domestic servant. Could this be Thomas's wife?

If this is the case, I think that Thomas returned to Ringstead alone. It is still not certain and the 1921 Census when it is released may give us a clearer picture. There is, in the *1939 Register*, a John T. Pentelow, born on 13th April 1890 who had a hut in the Ringstead

Allotments in Denford Road. He could be our "Thomas Pentelow" but his occupation is shown as "Drover" not Currier. There is also an earlier article in the Northampton Mercury of the 28th September 1934 which reported on a case where a man was convicted for driving a lorry recklessly. Rounding a bend on the Denford Road he had shed one of his barrels of tar. This time Thomas was a witness and told how he had to take sudden avoiding action to escape the barrel. This Thomas is again described as a drover.

Thomas was buried in London Road Cemetery in Kettering on 9th June 1962. He had died in Glapthorne Road Hospital in Oundle, aged 72, and was described as a "retired leather dresser". Was the drover and leather dresser the same man? It was not an uncommon name. I think that Grace Pentelow died in Enfield in 1965.

Robert Pentelow (1895-1959)

Thomas's younger brother (or half-brother) was born in 1895 when the family were in Irthlingborough. He was the son of Thomas Pentelow from Dean and Edith Yorke (or Yorke) from Denford. In 1901 the family were living in Queen Street in Irthlingborough but by 1911 they had moved to London End in Ringstead. Only the youngest child, Elen (Ellen) aged four, had been born In Ringstead and the next eldest, aged eight had been born in Irthlingborough so they must have moved to the village in about 1905.

Robert, aged sixteen, had become a coal hawker. A hawker was normally somebody who went around the villages selling goods. Could Robert have done it with a horse and cart or perhaps a barrow, yelling his wares? On the other hand he may have gone around the houses taking orders for the coal merchant.

By 1915 he had become an Ironstone Labourer. On 20th November 1915 he attested and was put on the Army Reserve. He was 20 years 8 months old and was mobilised on 26th June 1916 with the 28th Reserve Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers with Regimental Number 52947. As this unit's name implies he remained in England at first and we know that he was in the Ringstead area for some of the time for he married Eliza A. Joy in the Wellingborough District in the October to December 1916 period. Perhaps his imminent posting abroad precipitated the marriage but there was another possible reason. The couple had a daughter, Edith Ethel Pentelow, born on 25th September 1916.

Certainly, Robert was about to begin his military service and, on 14th December 1916, as part of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, he was posted to the Western Front. The 8th had first landed in France in May 1915 and saw action as part of the 36th Brigade of the 12th (Eastern) Division. During 1916 they had seen heavy fighting at the Battle of Albert, the Battle of Pozieres and the Battle of Le Transloy which were part of the 1916 Campaign known as the Battle of the Somme. In the Battle of Albert, on the 7th July the 8th, as part of the 36th Brigade, were sent to capture the village of Orvillers. The Battalion of 800 men was cut down by machine gun fire and were reduced to 160 by the end of the day.

Robert would not have joined the Battalion before the 1917 Campaign. The first major campaign of the year was the Battle of Arras and the 8th were in the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Battle of Arleux, the Third Battle of the Scarpe and the Cambrai operations.

It was at the Third Battle of the Scarpe on the 3rd and 4th May, that the 8th, along with the 9th, were given the task of advancing 1000 yards and attacking a German line 9000 yards wide. It was an almost impossible task and the 8th sustained heavy casualties from machine gun fire. Between them, the 8th and 9th had lost 282 killed and wounded and were then formed into one combined Battalion. At some point about this time Robert was wounded and on 10th May 1917 he left France for England. Later records show that he had received a gunshot wound to the right leg. He had been on the Western Front for 148 days.

For the rest of the war Robert was in England. His military records are a little difficult to decipher, but it looks as if he was sent to a Depot Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers and then transferred on 25th February 1918 to the 5th (Reserve) Battalion which was based in Dover. He remained there until he was transferred to the 9th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on the 10th August 1918 and given Regimental Number 91549. He was then posted to the 339th Company of the Royal Defence Corps on the 1st November of the same year. He remained with them until the 1st February 1919.

The Royal Defence Corps (RDC) had originally been formed by converting the Home Service Garrison Battalions of the Line Infantry Regiments. In general, they consisted of soldiers who were too old, or medically unfit, for Front Line service. The 339th were a part of the "Protection Companies" of the Western Command. By April 1918, of the 27,000 men serving in the RDC, 14,000 were guards in prisoner-of-war camps. Was this Robert's role?

He was finally demobilised as being unfit for service, having a 40% disablement, but one wonders if there was also another, compassionate, reason. Eliza, who Robert had only married in 1916, just before he was mobilised, died, aged 29, in early 1919.

Like his brother, Thomas, there is some uncertainty about what happened next in Robert's life. Again, the 1921 Census may help clarify his life after demobilisation. A Robert Pentelow married Ethel Payne in the Norwich District in the second quarter of 1920. It seems likely that this is the same man. In the later 1920s Electoral Registers he is shown living with Ethel in Norwich Road in Flordon until 1929. In 1930 the couple are shown in "Gravel Pits" in Brooke in Norwich.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* has them in Chapel Barn Cottages in Downham in Norfolk. His birth date is shown as April 13th 1895 and Ethel's as October 6th 1890. He was working as a cowman. Robert died in Norfolk in 1959 and I believe was buried in Boughton Cemetery on 2nd February, aged 64. Boughton is some seven miles east of Downham Market and 15 miles south of King's Lynn. I also think that Ethel died in the King's Lynn area in 1976.

Chapter 6

Charles William Pettitt (1890-1954)

Charles William Pettitt was born in Raunds on 10th January 1890 and christened in Raunds Parish Church on April 6th. His parents were James and Sarah Ann. James was a shoemaker

from Lower Dean, just over the border in Bedfordshire and Sarah from Bythorn In Huntingdonshire. All three places were in a triangle, some six miles apart from each other.

In 1901 James and Sarah were living in Marshalls Road in Raunds with children James (26), Albert (18), Fred (16), Arthur (13) and William (11). Charles William seems to have often been called by his second name. All the men were in the shoe trade except William who was still at school.

James, the father, died in 1907 and in the 1911 Census the widowed Sarah, aged 65 was still living in Marshalls Road with four of her children, including "William Charles". She had had twelve children and, unusually, all of them were still living. Charles was twenty-one and now a Clicker, the man who cut out the uppers from the hides and considered the most skilled of the tradesmen.

War came in 1914 but, at first, Charles did not enlist. We know that he was not entitled to a 1914/15 Star so did not enter a warzone until 1916 at the earliest. We also know that he married Gertrude Manning on 24th April 1916 in Ringstead Church. We have already come across Gertrude in these biographies. Her younger sister, Florence married John William Pearson and both women were teachers in local schools.

Apart from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voter's Lists* for 1918 and 1919, just Charles's Medal Card and the Medal Roll have survived so we only have a general idea of his war service. He did become a "Driver" with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and was given the Service number 182460.

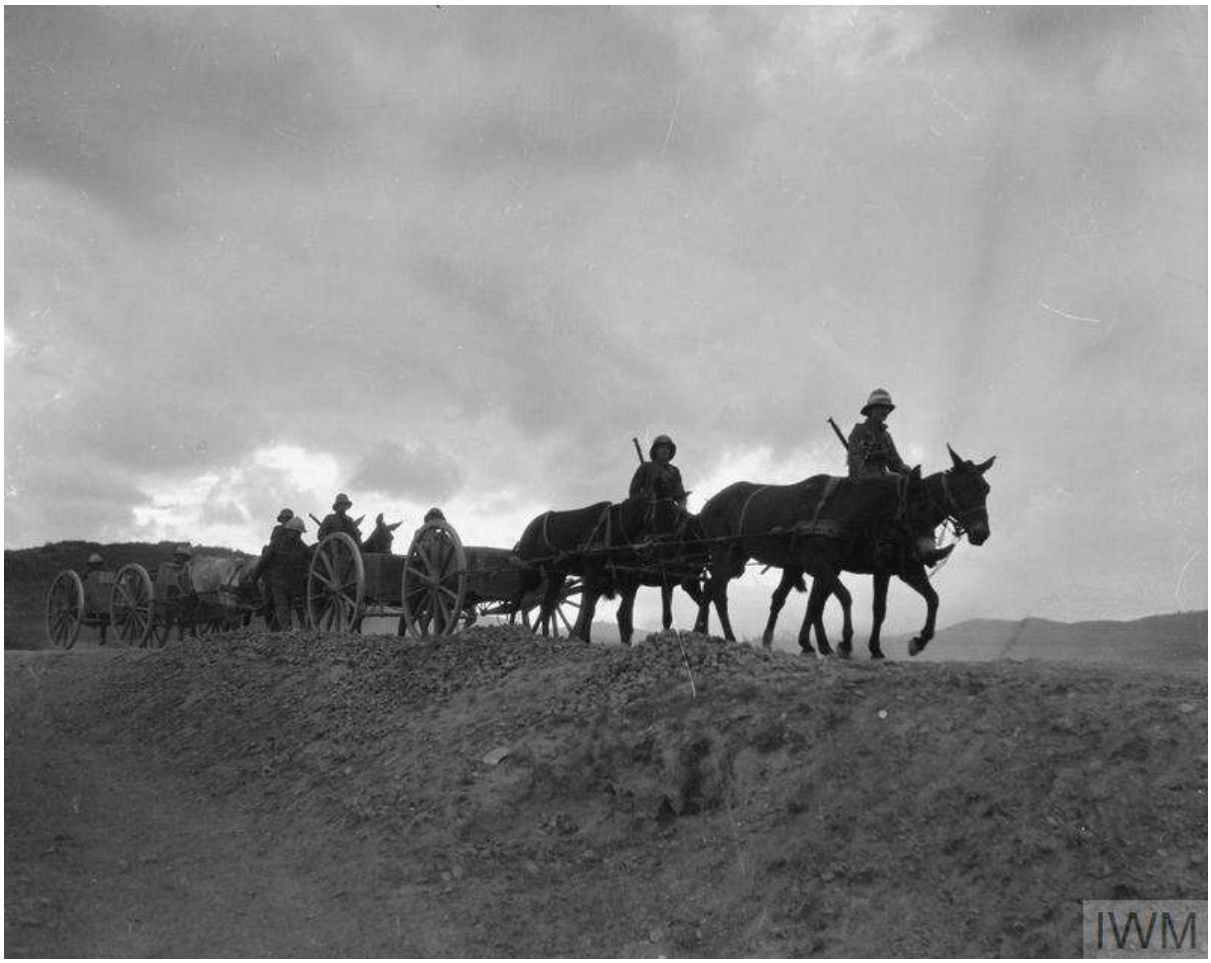
A Driver was a rank in the RFA for a soldier trained in the management and use of horses. Usually the guns or wagons were drawn by six horses, driven by three drivers, all on the nearside horses. Intensive training was given in order to make the drivers competent enough to work as a team. They would also look after the general health and welfare of the horses. At some point Charles had the additional appointment of Saddler which would have given him a higher rate of pay. His experience in the military boot and shoe trade would have provided him with the transferable skills to maintain the saddles and leather work, and make emergency running repairs as needed.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that Charles's war was in Palestine and Egypt. Then, as now, the Middle East was a volatile region with the once powerful Ottoman Empire becoming known as the "Sick Man of Europe" as it began to fall apart. The Turks were allies of the Germans and the area was strategically important, particularly around the Suez Canal, for British links with India, East Africa and Asia. Many men from these areas fought for the Allies, and the Chinese formed an important part of the Labour Corps.

The terrible defeat of the Allies at Gallipoli had made the position more perilous but, by the end of 1916, the Turkish threat to the Suez Canal had been largely beaten. Nevertheless, there had been defeats in the area and General Edward Allenby became the Commanding Officer and was given greater troop numbers and support. This led to the Turks being pushed back and Palestine was taken. By the end of October 1918 the Turks had been defeated and they sued for peace.

This was not an easy area for fighting, with poor communications, large desert areas and few clean water sources. The Allies' supply chains were critical to any success. It seems most likely that Charles was with the 75th Division of the RFA and later transferred to the 1st Section of the 191st British Ammunition Column (BAC).

The BACs, as the name suggests, had the task of moving ammunition from the "Third Line" to the Front ("First Line"). Exactly how they worked would depend on local conditions but most of the haulage would be done by horse-drawn ammunition wagons, although mules were also used. These would take the ammunition to a site behind the Front where it would be collected by the Batteries and Infantry Brigades. If needed, men from the BACs would be used as replacements for casualties in the gun batteries.



This is a British Ammunition Column moving along the Struma Valley between Greece and Bulgaria on 4th October 1916

© IWM Q32538

I have given below a very brief account of the battles which Charles would have been involved in, or supported, as part of the Ammunition Column. The 75th Division joined XXI Corps and took part in the invasion of Palestine, beginning with the Third Battle of Gaza on the 27th October 1917, leading to the capture of Gaza (6-7th November) and Junction Station (13-14 November), and the Battle of Nebi Samwil (20-24th November). In the Spring of 1918

the Division was involved in the actions at Tell 'Asur (11–12th March) and Berukin (9-11th April).

Following its reorganisation in the summer of 1918, the 75th Division joined General Allenby's final offensive (the Battles of Megiddo). At the Battle of Sharon (19th September) the Turks were defeated and a final pursuit began.

After the end of the fighting on 19th September 1918, 75th Division and the rest of XXI Corps were set on salvage work and road repair until the Armistice with the Turks was signed on the 31st October.

Demobilisation began early in 1919, but 75th Division was selected for the Army of Occupation of Palestine and we know that Charles was part of this. In March 1919 it returned to garrison duty in Egypt, becoming responsible for the Eastern Delta, which was renamed 75th Division Area.

The British had declared Egypt a "Protectorate", formally severing its connection to the Ottoman Empire. When war ended the Egyptians expected that there would be immediate independence and popular agitation began. There were mass demonstrations, but it was the uprising in the countryside that was more violent, involving attacks on British military installations, civilian facilities and personnel. By 25 July 1919, 800 Egyptians were dead, and 1,600 others were wounded. In 1922 Egypt was granted its independence although tension continued to simmer over British occupation of the Suez Canal area and broke out again with the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Nevertheless, after July 1919, the disturbances in Egypt had begun to die down, and units started to disperse to their home countries within the British Empire.

On the evidence of the *Absent Voter's Lists*, Charles was demobilised, probably in late 1919 or early 1920. We know that in 1920 he was living in Rosebery Street and, by 1925, he and Gertrude had moved to Gladstone Street, also on the Tilcroft Estate, In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were still living there. Charles was a Clicker's Sorter and Gertrude was an Assistant Mistress at Ringstead Church of England Primary School.

Charles died, aged 64, on the12th January 1954. He had remained in the trade and was shown as a "boot operative". Gertrude died in 1975.

Chapter 7

The Phillips Family

We will be looking at three men from the Phillips family of Ringstead who shared grandparents Thomas and Mary. The oldest son of the couple, also Thomas, was born in 1852. He had married Eliza Frances Roberts in 1872. Eliza had been born in Leicester but in the 1861 and 1871 Censuses we see that she was staying in Ringstead with her uncle and aunt, William and Charlotte Baxter. William was the local "Vermin Destroyer".

We will be looking at two of the couple's sons, Sidney (or Sydney) Thomas born on 26th September 1888 (1890 in the 1939 Register) and Ross born in 1896.

The youngest son of Thomas and Mary, Ralph, was born on 14th July 1867. He married Sarah Ellen Fox in 1890 and they had four children. It is the second child Arthur James, born on 3rd August 1895, who was the third young man called to serve his country.

Sidney Thomas Phillips (1888-1971)

In the 1901 Census, Sydney Tom Phillips was twelve years old and living with his parents, Thomas and Eliza. Thomas was a shoemaker and the eldest daughters, Rose Maud (17) and Ida Mary (15) were boot closers, and there were two younger children, Lily (10) and Ross (8). By 1911, only Sidney (21) and Ross (15) were still in Gladstone Street with their parents. Sidney was now a shoemaker, and, like his father, his occupation was in "Hand-Sewn Government Work". Thomas and Eliza had had ten children, seven of whom were still living.

Also in 1911, the older sister of Sidney and Ross, Rose Maud Phillips had married John Samuel Bates. He had been born in Kislingbury but he was the son of John Bates a Pastor of the Ringstead Particular Baptists for many years. John junior had not followed his father's profession, and in 1911 he had become a butcher in Scaldwell, just a few miles west of Brixworth. This move seems to have influenced Rose's younger brothers as we shall see.

Then came the First World War but, at first, Sidney remained in Ringstead and he, or his employers, sought to resist his call-up because he "was essential to business". He was a "Hand Welt Sewer" and, of course, good army boots were vital in the trenches of the Western Front. He had also married Ellen Storton at the end of 1917. Ellen was the daughter of Edwin, a butcher and farmer in Harlestone, and his wife Mary. In 1911, aged 20, she had been a student in a Training College in Dudley. Harlestone is some seven miles south-west of Brixworth. We see that butchery and the Brixworth area were key factors in bringing the couple together.

It seems that, at first, the couple may have lived in Ringstead, for this was given as his address on the 4th April 1918, when his second appeal against conscription, at the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal, was dismissed. It was only at this point that Sidney was enlisted with the 3rd Battalion of the East Kent (Buffs) Regiment and given the Regimental Number 20214. Not unexpectedly, there are few other military records for Sidney. The 3rd (Reserve) Battalion was a training unit which remained in the United Kingdom throughout the war.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that Sidney had been demobilised, so he would have returned home in late 1918 or early 1919. It looks as if the young couple lived in Gladstone Street with Sidney's parents. At first Ellen does not show on the Electoral Register, perhaps because she does not have a property qualification through Sidney. By 1922, however, when she was 30 years old, she too was on the Electoral Roll.

At some point the couple moved back to the west of the county and in 1939 were living at 25 Glasgow Street, off the Weedon Road in Northampton. Sidney was still a handsewn shoe operative. Ellen was not doing paid work and their son Alan, born on 16th June 1923, was a Mechanical Engineer's Apprentice. I believe that Ellen died in 1955 and Sidney in 1971.

Ross Phillips (1895-1974)

Sidney's youngest brother, Ross Phillips, was born on 13th June 1895. Like Sidney, Ross was living with his parents at 7 Gladstone Street in 1901. This was one of three roads built on the Tilcroft Estate at the turn of the century as better modern housing for working families. The house had six rooms and was just up a slope from the ill-fated Britannia Co-operative Boot Factory which was built as part of the same scheme. By the 1911 Census Ross was fifteen years old and a "Butcher's Boy".

When war came Ross enlisted in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and was given the Regimental Number 1074. We do not know exactly when he attested but his Medal Card does record that he first served in France on 27th March 1915 which means that he was one of the early volunteers. Checking his Regimental Number against others whose enlistment date we know, it seems that he joined up in September 1914, very soon after the start of the war.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was in "C" Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. The Headquarters of the Yeomanry was at Northampton but "C" Squadron was based in Kettering. We have previously written about Sidney Hunt who also joined "C" Squadron but he arrived in France over a year later.

In the period before March 1915 the Yeomanry were the support cavalry for the 8th Division but, in April, the three Squadrons (A, B and C) went their separate ways. On April 11th 1915 "C" Squadron was at Nouveau Monde when they received orders to join the 5th Division as its support cavalry and the next day were on the road through Sailly and Bailleul to billets at Boeschepe. This was just on the French side of the Belgian border, some ten miles south-west of Ypres (Leper).

Ken Tout has written in his book, *Yeomen of England*, about the almost humiliating shock that the Northamptonshire Yeomanry had when they first arrived on the Western Front:

> *The NY men soon discovered the realities of the so-called Great War of 1914-18. A mounted regiment experienced very rare, if any spectacular cavalry charges and underwent much undignified hard labour; most tasks if not justified by the demands of patriotism might have been categorised as slave labour; heaving barbed wire, digging trenches, burying the dead or acting as reserve infantrymen at a moment's notice.*

The War Diary for "C" Squadron bears this out in page after page. Through the rest of April the Squadron were training, with working parties on dugouts, "traffic control" of the movement of troops and supplies and an unsuccessful patrol near Pilckem. This continued through May and June, with unglamorous trench digging, particularly in the Zillebeke area of the Front Line. This was often at night and sometimes under heavy shell fire. July saw the Yeomanry digging in the Voorzetsels trenches but still working from the Boeschepe billets.

Finally, on the 22nd July, "C" Squadron marched to new billets at Hondeghem where the routine continues for the next week. On the 29th they were on the move again, marching to Cassel Station where they entrained to Méricourt l'Abbé and then marched again, to billets

and bivouacs (tents) at Bussy les Daours. At the time, the strength of the Squadron was 5 officers, 130 Other Ranks, 143 horses, 8 mules and 6 four-wheeled vehicles.

On August 4th, the Yeomanry sent out patrols to reconnoitre the area. They also acted as guides at Méricourt l'Abbé on the River Somme to prevent the French and British troops crossing into each other's territory. The patrols and working parties continued and on 19th August they moved billets to Sailly-le-Sec. This mixture of patrols, working parties and reconnaissance continued until the end of 1915.

In January 1916, the "C" Squadron men were in a rest area at Frechencourt but on 8th January marched to Bertangles and then on the 15th on to Hangest-sur-Somme but still in a rest area. Then on the 24th January they marched to Berteaucourt-les-Dames and the following day on to Hardinval (near Doullens). The War Diary records for the 25th January:

> *. . . heavy fall of snow and blizzard, obliged to proceed greater part of journey dismounted.*

The unit's movement continued and on 29th January 1916 they marched to Grand Rullecourt in the Pas de Calais and then on to Noyellette, some seven miles south-east, where patrols along the Front Line went out over the next few days. There was also instruction for the men in the use of the Hotchkiss Rifle which was a lighter version of the Hotchkiss machine gun. On May 29th 1916, the Squadron marched to Harbarcq (one mile outside Noyellette) and joined up with the "A" and "B" Squadrons to become a complete Regiment once again.

The Yeomanry Regiment was now attached to the 6th Corps at Harbarcq where they received instruction in the use of the new "smoke helmets". An American, Arthur Empey, who joined the British Army, when the USA did not, at first, enter the war after the sinking of the Lusitania, wrote of the smoke helmets in 1917:

> We had a new man at the periscope, on this afternoon in question; I was sitting on the fire step, cleaning my rifle, when he called out to me: 'There's a sort of greenish, yellow cloud rolling along the ground out in front, it's coming ---'
>
> *But I waited for no more, grabbing my bayonet, which was detached from the rifle, I gave the alarm by banging an empty shell case, which was hanging near the periscope. At the same instant, gongs started ringing down the trench, the signal for Tommy to don his respirator, or smoke helmet, as we call it.*
>
> *Gas travels quietly, so you must not lose any time; you generally have about eighteen or twenty seconds in which to adjust your gas helmet.*
>
> *A gas helmet is made of cloth, treated with chemicals. There are two windows, or glass eyes, in it, through which you can see. Inside there is a rubber-covered tube, which goes in the mouth. You breathe through your nose; the gas, passing through the cloth helmet, is neutralized by the action of the chemicals. The foul air is exhaled through the tube in the mouth, this tube being so constructed that it prevents the inhaling of the outside air or gas. One helmet is good for five hours of the strongest gas. Each Tommy carries two of them slung around his shoulder in a waterproof*

canvas bag. He must wear this bag at all times, even while sleeping. To change a defective helmet, you take out the new one, hold your breath, pull the old one off, placing the new one over your head, tucking in the loose ends under the collar of your tunic.

The working parties continued as before, much of the time spent on burying telegraph cables. Training also continued with officers and NCOs going on courses on "gas", sniping, and trench warfare. There was also the escorting of prisoners of war, as well as having to search for escaped ones.

The *War Diary* reported snowfall on the night of the 16th/17th January 1917 and that the weather remained frosty for the rest of the month, so that mounted training was impossible. A month later the "thaw commenced". On March 1st, the Diary reported:

Regiment collected for training (with exception of 24 O.R. employed threshing).

It seems that these ranks had been sent by the Regimental Purchasing Officer to a local farm to thresh corn that he had bought. Was it for the men or the horses?

What strikes you is that, certainly for "C" Squadron, there had been little Front-Line action. The Diary has little mention of action or casualties. Then things changed!

On 9th April 1917, the Regiment left Harbarcq. They had orders, as part of the 6th Corps to attack east of Arras. We now see the first account of a fierce battle since Ross had joined the Yeomanry in France. April 11th 1917 was an infamous day for the cavalry on the Western Front. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry arrived at Monchy-le-Preux to find that the planned attack had stalled because of heavy machine-gun fire. We do not get a real impression of the battle from the *War Diary* but, as we have seen in the stories of Archibald Dicks and Sidney Hunt, that they were under intense fire and lost a dozen men killed and fifty men wounded, shell-shocked or missing.

Just prior to this action, on 1st April 1917, all the Territorial soldiers had been renumbered and Ross's was changed from 1074 to 145345.

On 22nd April 1917, the Regiment moved to Agnez-les-Duisans. Here they were taking turns in the Front Line, as replacement infantrymen, and were under constant barrages sustaining casualties. Ross seems to have coped well with being a soldier. Unfortunately, we do not have records of when his promotions occurred but we do know that he had become a Sergeant by the end of the war.

The Regiment then moved back into reserve and on 23rd August marched to Fort Mardyck in Dunkirk, via Savy-Berlette, Pernes-en-Artois, Wittes, Staple and Wormhout, arriving on the 30th August. Here they took over the coastal defences and it seems that they were not again involved in further enemy action. In November 1917 they left the Western Front and moved to Italy to become part of the 14th Corps. They arrived there on the 5th November.

The Italians, who were our allies in the First World War, had been routed at Caporetto by and Austro-German force on 24th October 1917 and it was thought that their resistance would disintegrate. In fact, by the time that the French and the British arrived, the Italians

were retaking control of the situation. As a result, the Yeomanry found that they were largely held in reserve although the British did lose some 700 to 2000 men (statistics vary) in the campaign.

Ross (possibly a wedding photograph taken in 1922)
With thanks to Sarah Hayes

Ross does not appear in the *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 or 1919 but it may be that he had already moved to the Brixworth area and it seems likely that he was demobilised in late 1918 or early 1919. He returned to Northamptonshire and carried on with his trade of butchery. It seems possible that this was first with John Bates who had married Ross's sister, Rose and become a butcher in that area.

In 1922 Ross married Lucy Margaret Williams in the Brixworth District. It may be significant that in the 1911 Census for Spratton, Lucy's brother, John Turner Williams, aged 13 years, was working as a "Butcher's Apprentice". Her father was a "Stud Groom, Domestic".

In 1939 Ross was living at 106 Milton Street in Northampton, just a couple of miles across town from his older brother Sidney Tom Phillips, He was now a "Master Butcher (Retired)". He was only forty-four years old at the time. The corner shop still exists (June 1918) although no longer a butcher's shop. On April 1st 1950, the couple were still living in Milton Road when their only child, June, married Noel Messenger in St Giles's Church.

At some point Ross and Lucy moved to The Headlands in Northampton, for Ross died there on 29th September 1974. I believe that Lucy died some ten years later.

Arthur James Phillips (1895-1972)

A cousin of Sidney and Ross, Arthur James Phillips, was the son of Ralph and Sarah Ellen (née Fox). He had been born on the 30th August 1895 in Ringstead, the second oldest of a family of four. He had an older sister, Florence, and two younger siblings, Gertrude and Reginald.

We may sometimes be guilty of over-romanticising village life in the past. Its closeness could also lead to bitter squabbles. The *Northampton Mercury* of 16th June 1905 reported:

> *Lavinia Mayes, married woman of Ringstead, was summoned for assaulting Sarah E. Phillips also of Ringstead on March 25th. – Defendant pleaded guilty and pleaded provocation by the continual insults made to her by the complainant. – Defendant admitted throwing a bucket of water over the complainant. – The Bench fined the defendant 10s. and 6s. costs; in default 14 days hard labour.*

It seems likely that that London End could be a rancorous place at times.

By 1911 Florence had left home and James (his second name seems to have been often used) was the oldest child still at home. He was now eighteen years old and worked as a "Fitter-up" in a local boot factory.

Arthur enlisted on the 15th January 1916 with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and given Regimental Number 40755. We know that at the end of his time he was serving in the 2nd Battalion and it seems likely that this was his unit from the start of his service.

In 1916 the main battles that the 2nd Battalion were involved in were on the Western Front as part of the Somme Campaign. The *War Diaries* are not always easy to relate to the minor battles that were in turn part of major campaigns (also called Battles). The naming often came later and the Diary was about the actuality of small sectors, sometimes measured in yards. For most ordinary soldiers we have to make a best guess as to where they were, for they were rarely named.

It seems likely, however, that Arthur was at the Battle of Albert (1st-13th July 1916) which was one element of the opening phase of the Battle of the Somme. The 2nd Battalion were part of an attack by the British in the Thiepval area. Although planned, it became chaotic when a late change of plan did not reach some of the units involved until too late. Half of the original planned artillery barrage went ahead before it was aborted and the new bombardment on a wider front was carried out, but now with only half the ammunition available. As a result, the battle was a familiar story of hard-won gains followed by counter-attacks and forced retreats to previous positions.

The Battalion lost ten Other Ranks killed and 128 wounded, with 16 missing: 154 men in all. Eight officers were also lost, wounded or missing.

On 5th July the Battalion marched some three miles south-east, to Hedauville, for three days before moving on to billets at Bouzincourt. On 10th July they joined the 14th Infantry Brigade at Orvillers-la-Boiselle and in the attack that followed managed to advance a short distance. The ruined village was finally captured. This area, which had been ravaged by warfare since 1914, was then relatively quiet until the final German offensive in the Spring of 1918.

In this period from the 10th to 14th July 1916 the Battalion lost 3 officers killed and 5 wounded, while Other Ranks lost 34 men killed and 163 wounded with 36 missing. The summaries of the action seen by the Battalion show that they were also at the Battle of Bazentin (14th-17th July 1916). The *War Diary* tells that the Battalion were then on the move from Bouzincourt to Neuvillette and that this movement continued throughout July, finally ending at the end of the month at Heuchin.

Continuing into August, this movement took them 19 miles east to billets in the Tobacco Factory in Bethune. They were then in and out of the Front Line trenches in the Ginchy and Thiepval area as part of the Battle of the Ancre (13th-18th November 1916). After that, they were not part of any major action but still in localised fighting. On 23rd November, in an unsuccessful sortie, a party tried to rescue men trapped by enemy fire in a dug-out. In this action one Officer was killed and three wounded and four Other Ranks were killed and 42 wounded, with 17 missing. Apart from this assault, a further man was killed and 41 Other Ranks wounded with 5 missing. The slaughter on the Western Front was so great that such everyday losses almost went unnoticed.

The first major action of the new year was in March 1917 when the Germans began to make their planned withdrawal to the strong defensive line that they had been building. This retreat to the Hindenburg Line saw the Allied forces moving forward but against a strong rearguard action by the enemy. By April 11th the 2nd Battalion was at Holnon where they constructed a "line of resistance".

In June 1917 the Inniskilling Fusiliers began a move some hundred miles north as part of the 32nd Division, finally arriving at Nieuport les Bains on the Belgian coast and Ghyvelde, just across the border, in France. It was still part of the Front Line with regular deaths and woundings, but not on a large scale. On 26th July 1917, however, this changed when the *War Diary* reported:

> *1 officer and 243 Other Ranks (Gassed).*

It continued:

> *"Gassed". Caused by Gas Shell used by the enemy for the first time and very difficult to detect. It affected the eyes in some cases causing temporary blindness as well as causing temporary loss of speech, in many cases the effect only became apparent after a lapse of a few days.*

This new weapon was Mustard Gas, only detectable by smell, and of course your nose became desensitised as to any pervading smell. It was more serious than the *Diary* seems to indicate and could hang around in cold weather for days so was unsuitable as a "pre-attack" weapon. Vera Brittain, the novelist, who was a WW1 nurse, wrote in *Testament of Youth*:

> *I wish those people who talk about going on with this war whatever it costs could see the soldiers suffering from mustard gas poisoning. Great mustard-coloured blisters, blind eyes, all sticky and stuck together, always fighting for breath, with voices a mere whisper, saying that their throats are closing and they know they will choke.*

The Battalion was in billets at Ribaillet Camp but this was not a safe haven. On August 14th they were bombed with Gas and H.E. Shells from midnight until 4.30 am. The *Diary* records, however, that the casualties were very small "owing to the promptness with which the men put on their Box Respirators". They also cleared the camp during the barrage.

British soldier wearing a Small Box Respirator
From Medical Service: Diseases of the War (HMSO 1923). en.wikipedia.com.

By the end of August, the Battalion was in billets in Canada Camp at Coxyde (Koksijde). In September the usual pattern of being in and out of the Front Line continued in the Lombartzyde sector which was just across the Rover Yser from Nieuport. Casualties continued in large numbers for, as the *Diary* makes clear, the area was important for both sides.

> *The sector that the Brigade was holding was most important as it was the main Defence of the Bridges and Locks round NIeuport. In the event of these being lost the enemy would have been enabled to flood the country for a considerable distance; it was also important as the ground just in the rear of the front line position that could have been used as the jumping off place in the event of further operations.*

On 20th October 1917 J.A. Phillips (we know that he is correct man from his Regimental Number and reference to Ringstead) was in the War Office Daily List No. 5395. These lists of casualties could refer to events six or more weeks before publication so we cannot be sure of exact dates. We do learn that he had been appointed at some stage to Lance Corporal.

Arthur was discharged on 24th July 1918 because of disability caused by his wounds. He had sustained gunshot wounds to his right leg and ankle and also to his right eyelid. He received a small Army Pension. Considering the severity of his injuries, Arthur would have been taken back to England for treatment and it seems likely that he did not return to active service

again. Certainly, he married Annie Laurie Haxley in the second quarter of 1918 so he was back home before his discharge.

Annie was the daughter of Harry Haxley, who was originally from Catworth in Huntingdonshire and his wife Annie who was a local Raunds girl. Harry was a "Hand Boot Sciver" (or Skiver – someone who pared or cut off excess leather) and daughter, Annie, at fourteen years of age was a "Boot Factory Bench Girl". In 1911 they were living in Raunds High Street.

The Pension Card for Arthur shows that after the marriage the young couple were living at 36 North Street in Raunds. They had at least two children: Dorothy born on 25th April 1919 and Geoffrey on 28th September 1930. By 1939 the family were living at 3 Barn Close in Raunds. Arthur was now a "Sole Cutter" and Annie had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties".

By 2nd December 1972, when Arthur died, he and Annie had moved to 43 Park Avenue in Raunds. Annie died four years later.

Chapter 8

Walter Shedrick Pitts (1890-1966)

John William Pitts was born in Tansor on 13th December 1863. His background was a little complicated but, looking at the 1871 Census, he appears to have been the son of Mary Pitts before she married Thomas Upex on the 25th September 1865. In that Census, Thomas and Mary were living with her father, James Pitts, in Tansor.

John William seems to have been missed by the 1881 Census officers but this was not unusual for young men "on the tramp" for work. We next catch up with him when he married Theodosia Atkins in the Oundle District in the second quarter of 1884. Theodosia can also be a little difficult to follow through the records mainly because of the many versions of her Christian name. She can be Theodicia or Dosia or even Doshe. She was the daughter of William, a labourer from Elton in Huntingdonshire, and his wife Sarah Atkins.

Theodosia had had a child called John William P. Atkins before her marriage. It seems very likely that the "P" was for Pitts and, looking at the names, that he was John William's child, and he does eventually take the Pitts surname. In 1891 the family were living in Ringstead and there were three children. John William, the father, was a platelayer, working for the *London & North Western Railway Company,* based at Thrapston. Walter Shedrick, and it is usually this spelling rather than Shadrick or Shadrack, was just five months old.

By 1911 John was still a platelayer, and he and Theodosia had been married 27 years and had three children, all still living. Walter was now twenty years old and working as a shoe greaser, doing government contract work in a local factory. Theodosia died the following year.

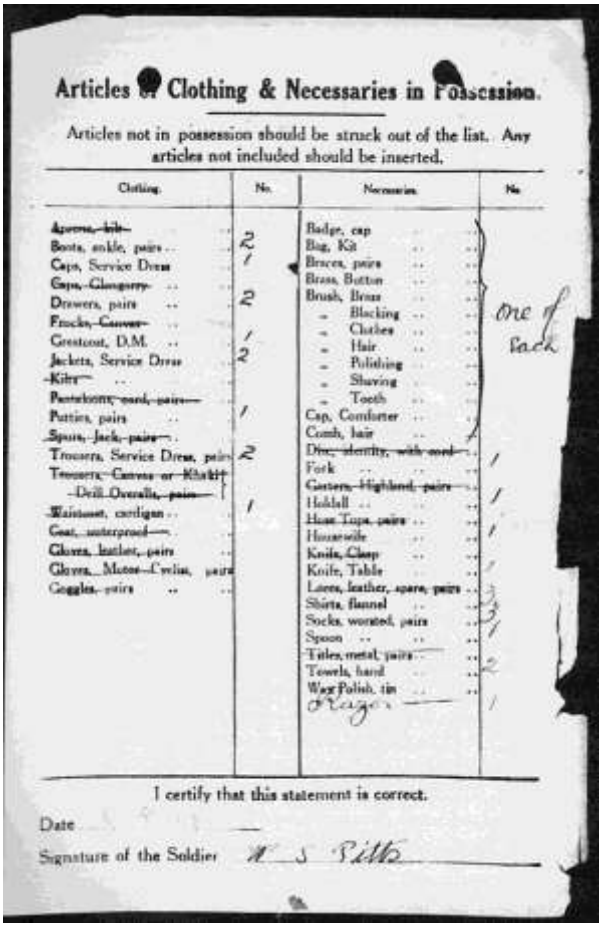
The Great War came in 1914, but like many others, Walter did not volunteer but carried on with his family life. On the 3rd April 1915 he married Mary Ann Hales. She was the daughter of farm labourer, John Hales and his wife, Emily, and in 1901 the family was living in Titchmarsh. By 1911, Mary Ann had become a domestic servant in Rockingham Road, Kettering. We do not know how Walter and Mary Ann's paths crossed but obviously they did. They had a daughter, Ivy May, born on 14th January 1916.

The young family set up home in Carlow Road in Ringstead, with John William Pitts, Walter's widowed father.

Walter was conscripted but, initially, was posted to the "C" Company of the 84th Training Reserve Battalion with Service Number T.R./5/59511. He was given a further medical examination at Northampton on 23rd November 1916. He was 5ft 8 inches tall with a 34½inch chest and a weight of 134 lbs. (9st 8lbs or 60.8 kilos). He occupation seems to have been given as just "shoe", but I believe that he was a labourer within the shoe trade rather than a craftsman.

He appears to be a reasonable candidate for active service but when we look at his other medical details, we see that he had poor eyesight (6/18 in both eyes) and deafness in both ears. He would have been a danger to himself and others in a warzone.

In June 1913 there was an *Army Council Instruction* which transferred the Agricultural Companies to the Labour Corps. On 18th June 1917 Walter was transferred to the 436th Agricultural Company of the Labour Corps, based at Northampton, and given a new Service Number, 495750. He took with him to his new unit a list of the army clothing and other items which helps give a picture of the non-combative soldier's pack. The items that he had were: 2 pairs ankle boots ; 1 service dress cap; 2 pairs of drawers; 1 D.M. {drab mixture] greatcoat; 2 service dress jackets; 1 pair of putties; 2 pairs service dress trousers; 1 cardigan; 1 each of cap badge, kit bag, pair braces, brass button, brass, blacking, clothes, hair, polishing, shaving, tooth, brushes; 1 fork; 1 holdall [like a cloth tool roll]; 1 housewife [sewing kit]; 1 knife; 3 flannel shirts; 3 pairs of worsted socks; 1 spoon; 2 hand towels; 1 razor.



Articles of Clothing & Necessaries in Possession.

Articles not in possession should be struck out of the list. Any articles not included should be inserted.

Clothing.	No.	Necessaries.	No.
~~Aprons, kit~~		Badge, cap	
Boots, ankle, pairs	2	Bag, Kit	
Caps, Service Dress	1	Braces, pairs	
~~Caps, Glengarry~~		Brass, Button	
Drawers, pairs	2	Brush, Brass	one of each
~~Frocks, Canvas~~		" Blacking	
Greatcoat, D.M.	1	" Clothes	
Jackets, Service Dress	2	" Hair	
~~Kilts~~		" Polishing	
~~Pantaloons, cord, pairs~~		" Shaving	
Putties, pairs	1	" Tooth	
~~Spurs, Jack, pairs~~		Cap, Comforter	
Trousers, Service Dress, pairs	2	Comb, hair	1
~~Trousers, Canvas or Khaki~~ ~~Drill Overalls, pairs~~		~~Disc, identity, with cord~~	
		Fork	1
~~Waistcoat, cardigan~~	1	~~Garters, Highland, pairs~~	
~~Coat, waterproof~~		Holdall	1
~~Gloves, leather, pairs~~		~~Hose Tops, pairs~~	
~~Gloves, Motor-Cyclist, pairs~~		Housewife	1
~~Goggles, pairs~~		~~Knife, Clasp~~	
		Knife, Table	1
		Laces, leather, spare, pairs	
		Shirts, flannel	3
		Socks, worsted, pairs	1
		Spoon	1
		Tallies, metal, pairs	
		Towels, hard	2
		Wax Polish, tin	
		Razor	1

I certify that this statement is correct.

Date —

Signature of the Soldier W J Pitts

From British Army WW1 Soldiers' Records. www.ancestry.co.uk.

The Agricultural Companies were not a "formed" unit. The 436th had a small headquarters section in Northampton but the men would have either lived at home or were billeted near the farm where they worked. The farmer would be charged for their services.

The shortage of men to work on the farms had become acute. Besides the need to feed the nation there was a huge army and its animals abroad. Philip Wilson, in March 2013, on the Great War Forum pointed out that, besides ammunition at 56,000 tons a week that was shipped out to the Western Front, the second highest weekly tonnage was forage at 35,970 tons. This would have consisted largely of hay straw and oats for the horses and mules.

On 3rd April 1918 Walter was examined again and reported to have "chronic middle ear catarrh" and given medical category BII (two). He would never serve in a fighting capacity and he was sent to the Dispersal Unit at Purfleet and demobilised on 23rd January 1919.

He returned to Carlow Road where he, and his wife May Ann and their children continued to live with Walter's widowed father, John William Pitts. Walter now had the vote and appeared on the *Electoral Register,* but Mary Ann did not qualify, and it was not until the 1928 *Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act* that she was able to vote. The couple had at least three more children after Ivy: Walter Richard had been born on 30th October 1917; John in 1921 and Leslie in 1924.

It would not have been an easy life and Walter was charged with petty theft. In the Northampton Mercury of 22nd January 1926 there is a report of a local court case:

> *Walter Shedrick Pitts, a labourer, living with his father at Ringstead was charged with breaking and entering, in the day time, the dwelling house of Alfred Reeder, and stealing a metal watch, value 7s. and a pair of leggings value 7s. 6d. at Ringstead on the 15th January. Sergt. Johnson stated that when he saw prisoner at Ringstead, prisoner at first denied knowledge of the matter, but eventually said he did go to Reeder's house and took the watch and leggings. Prisoner produced the watch from a tin in a barn, and the leggings from a barn adjoining. – Prisoner was remanded and told that if he could provide a surety he would be liberated on bail.*

Jon Abbott, on the Ringstead Heritage website has told how, in 1927, Ringstead had its first electricity sub-station built in Church Street near the junction with Carlow Road. Although they were living in one of the first houses which had a potential electricity supply laid to it, John William Pitts refused to have it turned on and the family continued to rely on oil lamps.

By the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, John William had retired and Walter was now a roadman with the County Council. His date of birth is shown as the 18th October 1891 but I think that this should be 1890 (and, in one of his military records, it is 1889).

Walter's eldest son, also Walter, married Edith Saddington in 1940. In October 1943 Walter Shedrick Pitts was once again in the newspapers because of a court case. He had stolen £30 in notes from his son's father-in-law Samuel Saddington, who was a smallholder and dairyman in Raunds. Samuel put in a plea for Walter, stating that he must have been desperate and at the time had yielded to sudden temptation. He also said that "during the last three years his troubles have been excessive".

We do not know all of Walter's troubles but his father had broken his thigh not long before this case. In the following year his youngest son, Leslie, was killed while fighting in Western Europe. What other troubles had assailed the couple?

Walter died on 8th November 1966 and Mary Ann, aged 87, died some ten years later, on July 4th 1976. She was living at 6 Greenbank Terrace in Ringstead at the time of her death.

Chapter 9

Oliver John Pothecary (1897-1923)

Pothecary was originally a Medieval surname, derived from the occupation of an Apothecary, who was a keeper of herbs and spices, or an early pharmacist. Our Pothecarys came from Woodford, where William John Pothecary married Mary Ann Gunn on the 26th November 1896. Their son, Oliver John was baptised in Woodford Church on the 23rd May of the following year. William was a "Furnace's Labourer" in the local iron ore blast furnaces.

In the 1901 Census they were living in Pleasant Row in Woodford and already had three children, Oliver (3), Herbert Victor (2) and William George (1). We see that William senior had been born in Wiltshire and the next Census shows that this had been in the small village of Corton on the edges of Cranborne Chase. Mary was a Woodford girl and perhaps it had been the work that had drawn William north. By the 1911 Census, the couple had two more children, Alfred and Horace Elijah. Was Mary Ann hoping for a girl? Oliver was thirteen years old and working as an errand boy for a fishmonger. War came in 1914 and conscription in 1916 but Oliver was not at first conscripted.

In the summer of 1917, he married Bertha Eleanor (sometimes Helena) Bates from across the Nene in Ringstead. She had been christened in her parish church, the daughter of William and Maud Bates, on the 16th April 1890.

Soon after the marriage Oliver was conscripted. He was enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps in August 1917 and was given the service number 123845. At some point, in late 1917 or early 1918, he was posted abroad to the 38th Field Ambulance (FA).

The 38th FA was part of the 12th (Eastern) Division) which fought on the Western Front throughout the war. On the 1st January 1918, the 38th FA were at Les Puresbecque and there was heavy snow. This was a farm 20 miles west of Lille in northern France, not far from the Belgium border. The 38th moved soon after to Fort Rompu in support of the Division, which was in the Front Line at Fleurbaix, west of Lille.

As we have seen in previous biographies, the Field Ambulance was not a vehicle but a medical unit that was based not far behind the Front Line. It included men and vehicles of various types. When at full strength, which was rarely, it had ten officers and 224 men. It would be divided into three sections and each one of these had a Stretcher Bearer and Tented subsection. Besides the doctors, the men would have a wide variety of roles, from nursing orderlies, to cooks, sanitation squads,, bootmakers, water carriers, and ambulance (some horse-drawn) drivers. The officers would also be responsible for inspecting the fighting men for illness and ensuring the drinking water and sanitation arrangements were safe from infection. Cleanliness was often impossible in the mud of Flanders.

The Field Ambulance was designed (in theory) to cope with up to 150 casualties and was also tasked with establishing and running the points along the casualty evacuation chain. This “chain” took the injured backwards from the Front Line through the Bearer Relay Posts to the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) to the Main Dressing Station (MDS) and, if necessary, to the Field Hospitals, large coastal hospitals and on to England..

We do not know what role that Oliver Pothecary was assigned, and it may have varied, but it seems likely that it was one of the more physical tasks.

In March 1918 he 12th Division had moved over 100 miles further south, and were in the Senlis-le-Sec, Bouzincourt area, north of Albert, on the morning of the 24th March 1918. The Germans, however, pre-empted any Allied attack by launching the Michael Offensive. On the 26th March, the enemy were seen advancing down the slopes of the Ancre Valley and

the fighting started. The Division was engaged in the Battle of Bapaume which was part of the 1918 Battle of Arras. It suffered heavy casualties in facing the massed German advance.

The German offensive continued in the rain and the *War Diary* shows the 38th Field Ambulance was constantly on the move as the Allied Line was driven back. The entry for the 5th April records:

> *A large number of gunner casualties have been dealt with and the dressing station has been working at full capacity.*

On the 8th April it reports that the neighbouring village had been bombarded with gas shells which might be of a new type.

> *In the opinion of the Divisional Gas Officer the nature was Mustard mixed with Di-Phosgene and Chloropicrin. Cases presented certain unusual features such as delayed gastric irritation with sickness and retching. . . 6 Officers and 112 OR* affected and evacuated.

It also states:

> *Men are tired and sodden with mud, and trench foot is beginning to appear again.*

The Diary records that, besides the usual bravery awards, the men could be awarded "Blue Cards" in recognition of distinguished conduct in the field.

It is difficult to imagine the mental and physical strain of constantly moving patients, men, tents and equipment and setting it up again, often in terrible weather conditions and then having to be ready to deal with new casualties. The Diary notes on the 26th April:

> *No building being available, an operating tent was pitched in the field next to the water mill.*

By May the tide was turning for the last time and the 38th were at Franqueville, trying to work in old Nissen huts which were in need of repair and cleaning. June came and now there was some time and energy for a football match to be organised. We see a movement forward from Le Plouy which is east of Abbeville, to Raincheval and Puchevillers. Then it was on to Harponville where they made use of a small church for the "sick". It is important to note the emphasis on the word "sick", for although many more men would be wounded and killed before the war was won, another scourge had moved west which would take even more lives than the war. The Diary entry for the 24th May notes that:

> *The present epidemic is apparently undoubtedly Influenza. The typical bacilli having been isolated in nearly all cases. It is characterised by a short period of Pyrexia [Fever] – usually three days, associated with catarrhal symptoms in nose and throat and slight bronchitis.*

This was the notorious "Spanish Flu" which actually came from the East. By July, the flu had begun to affect the RAMC men, making life even harder for those not affected. On the 1st July, the 12th Division attacked the enemy at Bouzincourt but could not break through and, on the 10th July, were relieved and moved to a new part of the Front Line south of Amiens.

On the 10th July the 38th Field Ambulance moved to Herrissart, and made use of two schools for the sick, and then on to St Sauflieu. The Germans were still putting up a stiff resistance as they tried to make an orderly withdrawal and their aircraft continued to drop bombs on the troops. The Allies were still moving forward and had to take care to avoid booby traps left by the retreating enemy. Gas shells were a major source of casualties. In October, the 12th Division were part of the Final Advance in Artois. On the 21st October at Beuvry the Diary records:

> *The civilians have been in the habit of paying 5 marks for a visit from a doctor and 2 to 3 marks for dressing or medicine.*

On the 30th October, the Division was withdrawn for rest and by the 11th November the 38th Ambulance was at Rumegies and the Diary briefly notes:

> *Hostility ceased at 11 am today. Cleaning and training.*

The unit continued its work into December where the Diary shows:

> *Trouble is being caused to the Troops by civilians returning and so turning troops out of their billets.*

We sometimes forget that these battles were fought across a populated, or recently populated, landscape. The new year brought an easing of the workload and the Diary tells of "a good deal of football being played" and the Divisional Boxing Championships. On the 15th January 1919:

> *The unit was photographed by the 1st Field Survey Battalion about three weeks ago. Lt. Col. Forsyth D.S.O. had prints for each man done at home. These are being distributed today. It is an excellent photograph and a very acceptable souvenir*

For many, unfortunately, their main souvenirs were battered bodies and minds and, for Oliver Pothecary, it appears, the illness that would soon kill him.

He returned to Bertha and his child in Sivers Row in Ringstead and became a labourer on the railway. The couple had three more children, Irene on the 8th December 1919, William on the 6th March 1922 and Kenneth on the 9th January 1924.

By the time Kenneth had been born, however, Oliver was dead. He had died on the 19th October of the previous year. Bertha was entitled to a widow's pension which included extra money for her children. Oliver had died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis (T.B.) which he had probably contracted during his war service. He is not on the War Memorial or the Ringstead Roll of Honour

Bertha remarried, to Arthur Dickens, in 1926 but he too died, aged 26, after an operation for appendicitis, just two years later. Bertha married again, this time to Percy Mayes in 1936 and they were together, with the Pothecary and Dickens children in the *1939 Register of England and Wales.* She died in 1950.

Chapter 10

The Roberts Family

We have begun a number of these stories, of men who fought in the Great War, by saying that the family name was well known in the village. The Roberts also had this distinction but, because of a Roberts who later became the first female Prime Minister, it is also known worldwide. In the *Ringstead People* books we have traced the family back to William Roberts who killed a fellow worker in the harvest field. William suffered many other tragedies in his family and we will see that some of his male descendants also struggled with what life had to offer.

For the purposes of our biographies, we will start their family tree with John Roberts, born in 1791, who was one of the surviving children from his father's first marriage. John married Alice Page on 7th August 1830 in Ringstead Church. This was John's second marriage, following the death of Rebecca, his first wife. The couple soon had another family and it is the lines of two of these sons, John born in about 1834 and Thomas born in about 1839, which we will be following.

The Roberts Family

A Very Simplified Family Tree

John Roberts ---------- **Alice Page**

I I

John Roberts *born 1834 m* **Letitia Phillips** **Thomas Roberts** *born 1839 m* **Mary Coleman**

I I I

Benjamin *m* **Ellen Smith** **John** *b1860 m* **Sarah Lockie** **George Henry** *m* **Mary Elizabeth Smith**

I I I

Edward Roberts *b1897* **John Owen Roberts** *b1888* **John Thomas Roberts** *b1892*

John Roberts married Letitia Phillips on 12th September 1853 and among their children were Benjamin, born in 1858, and John, born in about 1860. Benjamin married Ellen Smith, and one of their children was Edward, born in 1897. John married Sarah Lockie and became a well-known organ builder and repairer. One of his sons was John Owen Roberts born in 1888.

If we now climb back up (or is it down?) the tree to Thomas born in about 1839 we find that he married Mary Coleman. When she died in 1872, he remarried, to Elizabeth Greetham, but it is a son of the first marriage, George Henry, born in about 1865, whose son we will be looking at. George married Mary Elizabeth Smith in1887 and one of their children was John Thomas born in about 1892.

So, we have our three men, Edward, John Owen, and John Thomas Roberts after an almost Old Testament trail through the family tree. We will start with Edward.

Edward Roberts (1897-1917)

We have written elsewhere in the *Ringstead People* books about Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts. He was born in 1858, just twelve years before the death of his father, John, in 1870. In the 1871 Census we see that he was aged 13 and living with his widowed mother, Letitia and was already working as a shoemaker.

In 1881 he was still working at this trade and living with Letitia and his siblings in Ringstead High Street. Next door lived another widow, Catherine Smith. Catherine and her husband had come over from Ireland and made their way through England from the west, possibly escaping the terrible famines in Ireland. One of her daughters, Ellen, married Benjamin at St Sepulchre Church in Northampton on 2nd March 1883. This was a High Anglican Church and one wonders if it was a compromise with Ellen's possibly Catholic background and away from the Nonconformist eyes of Ringstead.

Benjamin and Ellen had eight children, one of whom died in infancy. In age order they were Eleanor (sometimes Helena), Harold, Frances, George, Alfred, Jessie and Edward. I have not found the infant death.

By 1911 three of the children had left home. Eleanor and Frances were both servants at Upton Hall. Eleanor was a parlourmaid and her sister a housemaid. Alfred whose eyesight was too poor for shoemaking became a shopkeeper in Grantham. It seems unlikely that he would have been conscripted in view of his disability.

It is the youngest child Edward, born in 1897, who was the only son that we know fought in the war. In 1911 he was a "leather chopper" in a "Lift Factory". A "lift" was a heel made up from layers of leather. *A. E. Fox and Company* was a firm based in Burton Latimer but they had also opened a second factory at the bottom of Spencer Street in Ringstead.

In 1915, Frances, who we had last seen as a housemaid at Upton Hall, married in the village church there to "Drummer Thomas Garland" from the East Surrey Regiment. Alfred too married, to Beatrice Stephenson, on 2nd June 1917 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Grantham. The children were leaving home. Edward either volunteered in late 1915 or was conscripted in early 1916 and was posted to the Suffolk Regiment and given Regimental Number34620. *Charlie* and *Jay* on the *Great War Forum* website have helped me give some reasonably accurate dating for Edward's service.

It seems most likely that he attested in December 1915 and was mobilised in June 1916. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure when he transferred to the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) but we know that this is what happened. The Regiment had been formed in 1881 as part of the Childers' Reforms. It was a bringing together of former Regiments and one of these was Canadian, raised in response to a massacre of 120 women and children in India. The link with the Canadians weakened through the years but it still retained its nickname, "The Royal Canadians".

Edward Roberts
Rushden Argus. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

Edward, probably with others from the Suffolks, joined the 6th Battalion of the Leinsters in Salonika. Clive Aslet wrote in *The Irish Times* in 2016:

> *Now called Thessaloniki, the city itself had, until a few years before, been one of the jewels of the Ottoman Empire – a mysterious compound of the exotic and cosmopolitan, the place to which St Paul had addressed his Letter to the Thessalonians, in which Roman ruins stood beside ancient basilicas, recently converted back to churches from being mosques. From the port, serving the Balkans, it was possible to see Mount Olympus, home of the ancient gods, across the bay. But outside the city, the countryside hadn't changed much from the days when Lord Byron was there, its tracks – there were no proper roads – still haunted by brigands. .*
>
> *. . . the French and British threw a ring of barbed wire fortifications around Salonika (it became known as The Birdcage) and occupied the plains; while the Bulgarians dug themselves into the mountains. That was how things remained until the last months of the war. Stalemate.*

It would have seemed a relief, at first, compared to the rain and mud of the Western Front but it had hidden dangers for the soldiers who were stuck there for two years. Writing of *Medicine and Medical Service in the First World War*, Leo Van Bergen stated:

> *At Salonika, the base of the British Balkan campaign, hospitals were in a dreadful state, every once in a while complicated even more so by extreme cold. Illnesses such as malaria, sand fever, typhoid, and dysentery raged among patients and doctors alike.*

61st General Hospital, Salonika

The Greek King changed his stance from neutrality to support of the Allied cause and, as a result, many of the British troops were not now required. In September 1917, the Battalion left for Egypt for service there and in Palestine. It seems unlikely that Edward travelled with them because he was already too ill to leave Salonika. He died of dysentery in the 61st General Hospital in Salonika on 1st December 1917. He was buried in the Salonika (Lambet Road) Military Cemetery in Grave 1300. He was 19 years of age. After the war he was also commemorated on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. His mother, Ellen, who, of course was Irish by birth, received a small pension.

Edward's sister, Frances, had also suffered. It appears that her husband, Thomas Garland had been reported wounded in 1916 and then in 1918 as missing. It is a little confused but it then seems that he was reported as killed on 6th May 1918. This, however, was not correct and he was a prisoner-of-war and he did return to England after the war had ended. He became a sub-postmaster in Asfordby in Leicestershire and he and Frances were there with their family in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*.

It would have been a terrible time for the Roberts family. When we look at photographs of Benjamin, he always had looked a rather sad, morose figure. This may have just been his natural look but we know that in the years after the war he began to sink into depression. In April 1925 he went to Irthlingborough Station and lay down, with his head on the rail, as a train approached the station. It was slowing, ready to stop, and the "lifeguard" in front of the wheels pushed Benjamin along so that he was not immediately killed but was badly injured. He was tried for attempting suicide and we learn that the family had sought to get him into a mental hospital but the required number of doctors had not agreed to certify

him. He returned home into the care of his wife Ellen, who was a St John Ambulance nurse. He died a few months later, on 17th September 1925.

Was he another victim of the war? We will never know and he was not the only Roberts man to suffer depression in his later years. As we will see.

John Owen Roberts (1888-1957)

Benjamin's younger brother was John Roberts who was first a shoemaker but later became a full-time organ maker and repairer. He had started his business in a barn behind the Post Office but later had a house he named *Mozart House* in Denford Road.

On 25th May 1885 he had married dressmaker Sarah Lockie in St Giles's Church in Northampton. Again, like brother, Benjamin, some two years earlier, he had chosen to marry, not in either the groom's or the bride's home villages but in the county town. He too was a Nonconformis,t so did his bride want a church wedding and he wanted it away from the local rivalries of church and chapel?

In the 1891 Census the couple were living in the High Street and John was working as a shoemaker. They had two children, Florence (5), and John Owen (3). In the same Census, living in Denford, were Freeman Arnold, a bricklayer's labourer, and his wife Lucy and their family, including youngest daughter Alice Martha Arnold, just three months old.

John Owen mother's connection to Denford may have led to him meeting with Alice and, in 1908, the couple were married. He had become an army bootmaker but by 1911, like many at the time, he was unemployed. He and Alice had by then had two children, Constance, two, and Winifred just five months old.

As we have seen in other biographies, the closeness of a village community could provide support in times of need but could also lead to tensions. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 14th March 1913 reported on a case in the Divisional Petty Sessions.

> *Neighbours' Squabbles – Harriet Bettles, married woman, Ringstead, was summoned for a common assault on Winifred Roberts, a child, at Ringstead on February 28 – Owen Roberts, shoe operative, Ringstead, (and father of Winifred Roberts) was summoned by Mrs. Bettles for assaulting her on March 1; and Mrs. Bettles was summoned by Owen Roberts for assaulting him on the same day. – Mr. J. Prentice appeared for Roberts – the Bench bound each party over in the sum of £5 to keep the peace for 12 months, each party paying own costs. – The case with regard to the child was dismissed.*

Of course, greater battles and tragedies were to replace the petty squabbles of village life.

Some nine months later, on 28th November 1913, the couple had a son, Wilfred Edgar. The war started in 1914 bringing much needed work to the handsewn men and, at first, married men in the trade had some protection from conscription which was brought in in early 1916. It was not until September 1917 that John was called up. John was quite unusual among the

Ringstead conscripts in that he was posted to the Royal Navy and was first sent to *Victory I*, the name given to the shore-based training unit in Portsmouth Harbour.

We do have a very brief account of his service and we see that he was 5ft 9½ inches tall with a 37½ inch chest. He had dark hair, brown eyes and a sallow complexion. John was given service number 7316 and trained as a "General Seaman" from 5th September 1917 to 15th February 1918 on "Victory I". It appears that he was still retained on the strength of *Victory*, so it may be as part of his training he was sent to *HMS Mars* and given a new number, 593, He was with his new ship from 16th February to 28th May 1918.

HMS Mars had been built in 1894 and it was coming to the end of its useful life. At this time, she was being refitted in Chatham Docks for conversion to a harbour depot ship and John presumably served on her during this time in harbour, continuing with his training.

On 29th May 1918 he was posted to *HMS Cardiff*, a light cruiser, which was based at Rosyth, on the Firth of Forth. From there it patrolled the North Sea.

John would have been witness to one of the great sights of the First World War. Ten days after the Armistice, the entire German Fleet surrendered in the Firth of Forth. It was the greatest gathering of warships that the world had ever seen. The German Fleet consisted of 9 battleships, 5 battlecruisers, 7 light cruisers and 49 destroyers. The seventy ships were escorted into the sheltered estuary of the Forth by hundreds of Allied ships and aircraft.

The Germans had been instructed not to have their guns loaded and to have everyone on deck except for the engine crew. The Royal Navy's Great Fleet had sailed into the North Sea forming two columns, six miles apart. Just before 10 a.m. it had met the German Fleet and it was *HMS Cardiff*, a small light cruiser, that led it to their surrender. A *Times* correspondent, on board *HMS Seymour*, witnessed this scene and described it as "a school of leviathans led by a minnow".

HMS Cardiff leading the main body of the German Fleet to the Firth of Forth.
Charles Edward Dixon 1918. National Maritime Museum. https://collections.rmg.co.uk.

At first the German crews were confined to their ships but gradually they were allowed ashore. After news of the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles which, among other

things, divided the fleet among the Allies, reached the Germans, Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter ordered the sinking of his own ships. On 21st June 1919 the remaining crew opened all the flood valves and watertight doors and smashed water pipes so that the whole fleet was sent to the bottom.

HMS Cardiff, however, by this time had sailed to Denmark where it was based at Copenhagen and Libau (now Liepaja in Latvia) and Reval (now Tallinn in Estonia) and also visited Riga. After its tour of duty, it sailed back to Scotland, reaching Rosyth on 7th January 1919 before returning to Portsmouth four days later.

John Owen Roberts was demobilised on 4th March 1919 and returned to his family in Ringstead. In the 1920 *Ringstead Electoral Roll* John was living in High Street. His wife, Alice Martha Roberts, had not yet qualified to vote although by 1923 she is shown on the roll because she had reached thirty years of age. As we have seen in Edward's story, John Owen's uncle, Benjamin Roberts tried to commit suicide in 1925 and died a few months later. John Owen's father, the organ-maker died in 1933. [Amazingly. His father-in-law, Lemuel Lockie lived to be 100 years old]. I think that Mozart House in Denford Road was, at some point after the death of John Roberts and the end of the church organ business, split into two cottages for John Owen and his married daughter.

John Owen and Alice Martha Roberts
With thanks to Terry Roberts

The *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows John and Alice in Mozart Cottages in Denford Road, John was still a bootmaker and Alice has the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Living with them appears to be four children (the record of one is "officially closed" but may be Wilfred). Winifred, born on 28th December 1910, was still at home but is shown as "incapacitated"; John Owen junior, born on the 3rd April 1917, may be a shoemaker but he

did become a brickmaker. Muriel, born on 24th January 1929 was at school. John's widowed mother, Sarah, who has private means was also living with them.

A few months before the Register was completed, John Owen advertised in the local newspaper for a "Swarm or two of Bees". It gives an impression of a happy country life. The years passed and Alice, John's wife, died on 7th January 1957. We see from the *Administrations and Wills Index* that John, who had been granted probate, was still a boot and shoe operative in a local factory. I think that he retired at about this time and it seems that he was hit hard by the death of his wife.

He was living in Mozart Cottages in Denford Road and his daughter Muriel, and her husband John Henry Simms lived next door. One morning in May of 1957, just before 7 am, John Simms had gone outside to feed his chickens. He saw John Owen who greeted him with his usual, "Hello Boy". Only half an hour later he went to the barn to fetch his bicycle where he saw John "hanging from the rung of a ladder standing at an angle"

John Simms fetched John Owen's son, Wilfred Edgar from the Post Office where he lived, although he also worked in a local Boot and Shoe factory. The two men went back to the barn and took down John Owen's body. His death was confirmed by Dr Alistair McInnes from Raunds who later told the inquest that his neck had been dislocated.

They found a small note written in pencil in John's pocket. It was unsigned.

John Thomas Roberts (1892-1944)

Finally, we will trace the line of Thomas Roberts (born in about 1839), the youngest son of John and Alice. Thomas married twice but it is the line from his first wife, Mary Coleman, who died in 1872, aged 32, which we will be following.

Thomas and Mary had a son George Henry, born in about 1865, who married Mary Elizabeth Smith from Polebrook in 1887. One of their children was John Thomas Roberts, born on 29th April 1892 and he is our third World War One fighter. In the 1891 Census the family were living at 2 Carlow Road, just a few doors away from cousin, Benjamin, at number 8.

The decade after the Boer War was a difficult one for the military boot industry, with the Government trying to reduce the piecework rates. This led to great unrest in the area and then to the Raunds' March in 1905. As happened, many years later, with the Miners' Strike, tensions in the village and even within families became strained. George Henry Roberts was one of the men who continued to collect their work from the factory in Raunds in defiance of the strikers. Finally, violence broke out and he was "kettled" home with pots and pans and the windows of his house were broken by stones. At the trial of the men, William Roberts, George's younger brother appeared on behalf of one of the accused.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of this case, it would have been a difficult and sometimes frightening time for the family. John Thomas may have suffered in the village because of his father's unpopular actions.

In the 1911 Census, after the troubles of the Raunds March George had been married 24 years and the couple had five children, all still at home. The oldest child, Florence, aged 23, was a hat maker, and John, aged 18, a miller's carter. Also in this Census was Annie Loakes, aged 17, a laundress's assistant living in Great Addington with 56-year-old widow, Emma Ward. Emma was a "Dairy Keeper".

The couple may have already met but in 1914 the Great War was to take John away from Northamptonshire. He first attested on 27th December 1915. We can see from his form that he was now working as a platelayer on the railways and was 23 years 7 months old. Initially he was put on Army Reserve but he was not mobilised until 8th February 1916. He was first posted to the 3rd Battalion of Northamptonshire Regiment and given Regimental Number 22989. The 3rd (Service) Battalion was a training unit which was based for most of the war at Gillingham. At the end of his training period he was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshires, known as the Steelbacks, and first set foot in France on 31st May 1916.

July 1st 1916 was the infamous first day of the four-and-a-half-month campaign known as the Battle of the Somme. The British offensive was designed to draw the German forces away, to improve the chances of the French-led attack at Verdun. Unfortunately, the Germans were in strong defensive positions in the British sector.

The 2nd Battalion was part of the 24th Brigade, which temporarily formed part of the 23rd Division. The Battalion was involved first on the 7th July in the area of trenches known as *Lozenge* and *Crucifix*. With rain falling in sheets and casualties building up, these trenches rapidly became a congested quagmire. Any gains were soon lost and, all the time, the fighting was fierce with continual casualties.

On the 15th July 1916, the 2nd Battalion was transferred to the 8th Division and was in the Cuinchy sector. The book of the *Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-18* records that:

> *"The History of the 8th Division" describes how the front was a maze of trenches, old and new. German, French and British; trenches blown in and disused, or abandoned and derelict; British fire trenches which had once been German communication trenches; trenches ending in saps twenty yards from the enemy lines; salients, re-entrants and fortified mine-craters – all reeking of death and stagnation. Any attempt to dig new lines was gruesome in the extreme. Bodies were turned up at almost every yard. In many places the parapet was largely reverted with corpses, thinly concealed by rotting sandbags through which at night rats fled squealing from their ghoulish repasts. And here in this sector was a continual struggle of mine and counter-mine which had reared great crater mounds of gleaming chalk along the narrow No Man's Land. And here reigned day and night the nerve-racking expectation of being blown sky-high without warning. As a sector it was "unhealthy" in more ways than one.*

The campaign, for the 2nds, continued with sporadic artillery fire and raids on the enemy trenches. On October 12th the 2nd Battalion moved south to take part in another phase of the Somme campaign. The weather had broken and the battlefield was once again a sea of mud. The 2nd, with the rest of the 8th Division, arrived in the Front Line and on 23rd October

and were part of an assault designed to secure positions for the launch of an attack to take the village of Le Transloy. So it was, on 22nd October, that the 2nds relieved a battalion of the Sherwood Foresters in the Front Line. The Regimental history of the war records:

> *It was a typical Somme relief. Most of the guides lost their way – as well they might, considering that the country was blasted out of recognition and landmarks were hourly obliterated by shell fire – and it was nearly two o'clock in the morning of the 23rd before the relief was complete and the 58th [the old name of the 2nd Battalion] then took what rest they could, preparatory to the coming battle.*

It is worth giving one more long quotation from the *Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-18* to show that, for the ordinary soldier, it was not a series of major battles but a movement from one hellhole to another with more, or less, enemy fire and gas. It describes the conditions:

> *Everything was mud, mud – and again mud. There was thin, liquid, watery mud – mud like inferior gruel. There was a slightly thicker mud - a porridge kind of mud. But the bulk of the mud like simmering glue – in everything but the temperature, for it clung with icy chill. Billets in the back area were camps of dirty, wet and decrepit – gloomy archipelagos rising from the mud seas. The front line beggars description. It consisted of a mass of shell holes; of oceans of mud; of gulfs, inlets, lagoons and lakes of icy water. Trenches scarcely existed except for short lengths on higher ground: of communication trenches there were practically none; men had to do the best they could to improve such shell holes "as were least full of water and other unpleasant relics of the battle". Villages there were in profusion – on the map; but in reality they were flattened brickwork. Looking back to those days it is hard to realize how human beings could have existed in such conditions.*

1917 came with little achieved but the war of attrition was also wearing the Germans down. At the end of 1916 they planned and started building a strong line of defences, known to the Allies as the Hindenburg Line, which was back from the existing front line and was shorter so meant their troops were not spread so thinly. On the night of 23rd/24th February 1917 the enemy began a planned withdrawal back to this line.

The Allies tried to harry the retreating Germans but there had been a thaw and with, once more, heavy rain, the area in front of the Allies was turned into a morass so deep that men were pulled into it and drowned. Nevertheless, because the Germans were retreating, good progress was made at first although the German rear-guard fought with bravery and determination. In the offensive of the 4th March, the 2nd Battalion had 242 casualties. They moved into the back line but were quickly brought up again in terrible conditions. The *War Diary* drily remarks:

> *Working parties spent a great deal of their time digging each other out*.

The losses would have created a constant need for promotions and John must have shown resolution and leadership skills for, on 17th March 1917, he was appointed a paid Lance Corporal. A little over a month later, on 20th April 1917 he was promoted to full Corporal.

Despite the general successes, there had also been the failure, in the Nivelle offensive, to break through the Germans decisively and it was decided that another attack must be launched. The Third Battle of Ypres started on July 31st 1917, and, after intensive training in this more mobile warfare, the 2nd Battalion became part of this new attack with three objective lines, blue, black and then green. In this, often featureless, terrain the lines were taped in advance (often to be obliterated in the mud and shellfire).

It was a difficult area in which to attack, with a large lake and a water-filled ravine. There was fierce fighting and many casualties but as the year moved to a close the action quietened, although not without casualties. The 2nd Battalion moved to Wizernes, training and resting for three weeks. After more time in the line they rested at Warrington Camp at the end of the year.

John was once more promoted to Lance Sergeant on 24th January 1918 and he retained this rank for the rest of his army career.

The Russian Revolution had taken them out of the war, enabling the Germans to bring more troops to bear on the Western Front. The Americans had also entered the war on the Allied side and their troops and fire power would be an increasing threat to the German Army. They decided to try one last decisive offensive to win the war.

The Michael Offensive began on March 21st 1918, on a morning of thick white fog. The Germans everywhere gained ground. The 2nds, as part of the 8th Division were at first in Reserve and by the time they were instructed to move forward the whole Allied line was in rapid retreat. The 2nds were forced to move backwards with this retreat in order to maintain the line and prevent the Germans getting behind them.

This rear-guard action was very wearisome and demoralising but the German attack began to falter. They too were worn out and the supplies and artillery struggled to keep up with the forward surge. The Battalion was relieved by the French in the line and, by April 2nd, were out of the action for rest and re-organisation. On the night of April 19th/20th the 2nds again went briefly into the line east of Villers Bretonneux. On April 24th the Germans launched another desperate attack and the Battalion, although behind the Front Line, were heavily shelled with high explosive and gas. It seems likely that this was when John Thomas Roberts was wounded.

His military records show that he suffered a gunshot wound in the head of the left femur (thigh) on April 25th 1918. We know that the tide was about to turn and the Germans, exhausted, would soon be in rapid retreat but, for John, the war was over. He was taken back to England for his injury to be treated and was transferred back to the 3rd Battalion on 7th September 1918. On 16th October 1918 he was demobilised. He had been in France one year 332 days,

John returned home and either met, or renewed his acquaintance with, Annie Loakes from Great Addington who we last met in 1911, aged 17, as a Laundress's Assistant. The couple married in the second quarter of 1920. I think that, at first, they lived together in Great Addington but at some point they moved to 43 Ford Street in Kettering. That is where they

were in the 1939 Census. John was working as a "Railway Relayer" which is described as "Heavy Work". Did his war injury still cause him problems? There is a young child, Jean Small born in 1930, living with them but it does not look as if they had any children of their own. Could she have been an evacuee?

John Thomas Roberts died on 10th November 1944 at Kettering General Hospital. I have not managed to find the death of his widow, Annie.

Chapter 11

The Ruff Family

Arthur and Sarah (née George) Ruff had moved from Keysoe, in Bedfordshire, to Woodford. Soon after their marriage, around 1869, they moved once again, this time to Ringstead. The *Roll of Honour* has only one Ruff included but at least two other men from the family fought in the Great War. All three men were children of Arthur and Sarah Prudence Ruff. The couple had ten children, although the oldest child, Elizabeth died when only fourteen years old.

We are able to deduce the family's movements from the birth places of the older children but all of the youngest eight were born in Ringstead. Of these, the last three sons, Hessel, Harvey and Reginald are the subjects of our biographies.

The Ruff Family outside Ringstead Church (c1912)
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Hessel Ruff (1880-1939)

Hessel, the seventh child, was the oldest of the three men who fought. He was born in Ringstead on 22nd May 1880 and in the 1881 Census was living with his family in Sivers Buildings. His father, Arthur, aged 36, was an army boot maker. The family were still there, at No. 7, in 1901 when Hessel was 21 and a boot finisher, Harvey (15) was a boot laster and Reginald (12) was probably still at school.

A descendant believes that at least one member of the family, possibly Arthur Ruff, was involved in the setting up of the Unity Boot and Shoe Co-operative Society. It is a little confusing for both Arthur, and eldest son, also Arthur, were of an age to be involved. The only reference in a newspaper I have found was that the secretary of the Unity was Mr. L. Ruff, who could have been another son, Lewis, born in 1878. Certainly, Arthur senior is shown in the 1901 Census as working at home.

On 22nd October 1907, Hessel married Eva Louise Weekley in Ringstead and they set up home in Denford Road. Eva had been born on 6th July 1880, so was just a few months younger than her husband. She was the daughter of William Bradley Weekley, a shoemaker and his wife, Elizabeth, and in 1901 they were living at No. 1 Church Street. By the 1911 Census the couple were living in the High Street in a five-room house and had a son, Edward Stanley born on 30th January 1909. While living there, they had a further child, Lily Ellen, born on 25th October 1912.

Hessel Ruff (standing)

With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Hessel's military records still exist, and we see that he was 5ft 9¾ inches tall with a 37 inch chest and weighed 149 pounds (67.6 kilos). He had dark hair with hazel eyes and was above average height and build for a working man of the time. He did have some physical problems, however, for he was assessed as 6/12 for both eyes and had varicose veins in his left leg. His *Attestation Form* also shows that he was a Baptist and was 35 years 9 months old when he first enlisted on 7th December 1915.

He was not finally mobilised until 3rd September 1918 and was posted to the Tank Corps at Wareham on 8th September. He was immediately transferred to the Tank Corps Reserve Unit for two weeks before being transferred again to the 22nd Light Tank Corps. He had been given Regimental Number 312427. I do not think that Hessel served in a war zone. A unit of the 22nd took one of their light tanks, a "Whippet", nicknamed Julian's Baby, (a larger tank named Julian had toured successfully before this), raising money for the War Savings Campaign by the sale of War Bonds. We do not know if Hessel toured with it.

The tanks were based at Bovington, near Wareham, and at the end of the war they were parked up there. We cannot be sure what exactly Hessel's role was during this time. All we know is that he was demobilised on 17th January 1919 as, the *Dispersal Certificate* states, because he had "an offer of employment"

Hessel and Eva settled in Denford Road and he worked in a local boot and shoe factory. The *Mercury and Herald* reported, on 4th January 1935, a case in Thrapston Police Court. The case related to an accident on December 7th. Hessel and two other men were walking in Ringstead. A lorry approached so they moved to the left but Hessel was hit by the mudguard of a motorcycle sidecar travelling the other way. It was said in court that Hessel was only brushed by the mudguard but he was knocked unconscious and sustained a fractured ankle and other injuries. Stanley Knight, the motorcycle rider was fined £5 with £1 2s 9d costs.

It was at about this time that the family moved to 1 Lancaster Street in Higham Ferrers. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, Hessel was shown there and working as a shoe finisher. Eva had no paid work but daughter Lily (25) was working as an uncertified teacher. Their son Reginald, born on 5th March 1921, was a milk roundsman.

Hessel had little time left to live, for he died on Thursday 9th November 1939. There was an account of his funeral in the *Evening Telegraph* on November 16th. This shows us that the official records only give a small part of anyone's life. Hessel was part of a working-class community that, denied by lack of other opportunity, continued to educate themselves and take pleasure in the world. The report states:

> *A native of Ringstead, Mr. Ruff resided there for 55 years before coming to Higham Ferrers, where he was employed by Messrs. John White (Impregnable Boots) Ltd. He was a member of the Rushden Adult School Choir and a past member of the Thrapston Band Club and leaves a widow, two sons and a daughter, Mr. Edward Ruff, Coventry, Mr. Reg. Ruff, Higham Ferrers, and Miss Lily Ruff, Higham Ferrers. Four brothers and three sisters are also bereaved.*

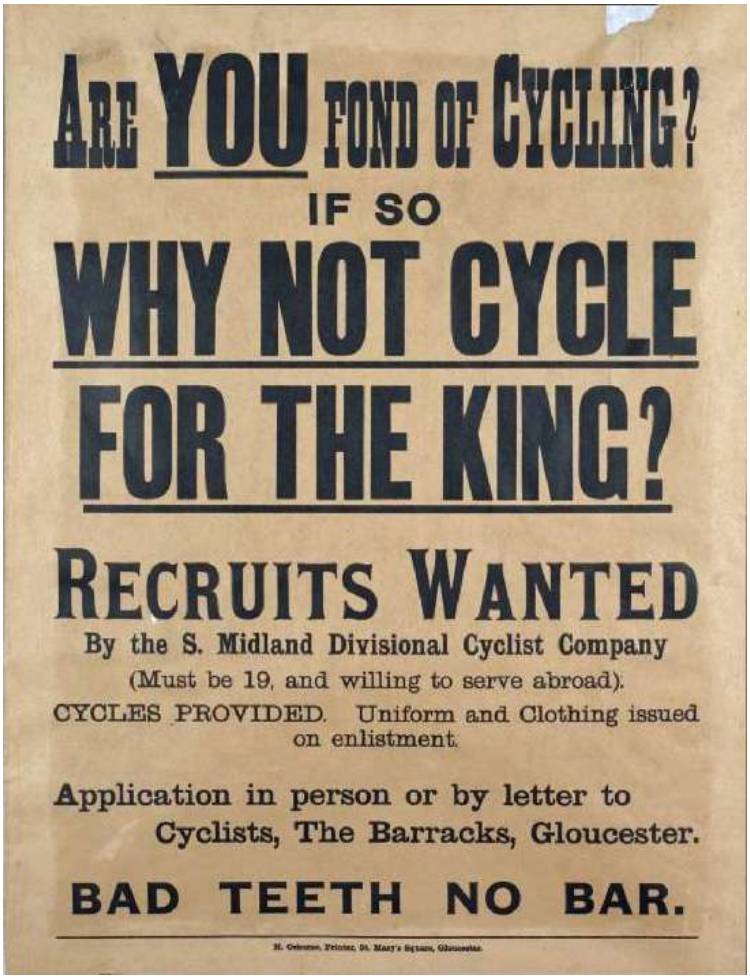
The report also shows that the service was held at Hessel's house and was conducted by a Minister of the Methodist Church. He was 59 years old. Eva died in the summer of 1954, aged 74.

Harvey William Ruff (1885-1962)

Harvey Ruff was the ninth child of Arthur and Sarah, born on 6th September 1885. By the 1901 Census he was fifteen years old and working at home with his father and siblings, as a boot laster. By 1911 Arthur was unemployed and Harvey, now 25, was the oldest child still at home, working as an army boot maker in a local factory. The time of the handsewn men, working at home, was drawing to a close.

In 1914, Harvey married Grace Evelyn (sometimes Evaline) Burton from Raunds. She was the daughter of William and Annie, born on 2nd April 1887 and by 1911 was living with her family in Wellington Street in Raunds.

Of course, war was imminent but we do not know exactly when Harvey first attested for the army. We do know from his *Demobilisation Certificate* that he served in the 67th Divisional Cyclist Company. This was a Second Line Territorial Force Division and served on home defence throughout the war but also recruited and trained men to provide drafts for overseas units. It is likely that the photograph of Harvey shown below, with other men from the 67th was taken somewhere in Eastern England.



Recruiting Poster for another area ©IWM PST4893
Bad teeth were a huge problem with more sugar being used and no National Health Service

The idea of a cycling unit may now seem odd but as Chris Baker, in an article in *The Gazette* has written:

> *As early as the 1880s, the army began to include the bicycle in its armoury. Prior to this the army relied on men or horse transport to cover the ground. Each had limits to speed and range, and the horse needed much by way of logistical support for its feeding and care.*
>
> *With a bicycle, an armed man could move relatively quickly across even poor ground and with a longer range than his marching capability. In other words, the bike brought new possibilities for the army to project its forces to where they were needed.*

Early in the war, each Division of the army had a cyclist company added. The main roles of the cyclists, rather like the more glamorous Yeomanry, were reconnaissance and communications but, like the Yeomanry, they would have to turn their hand to trench digging or as mobile infantrymen if required.

Harvey Ruff (back row extreme right)
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Based on the research of Steve and Charlie on the *Great War Forum* website, on Harvey's Regimental Number (21934), it seems likely that he was not transferred to the XV (15th) Cyclist Battalion of the reorganised Army Cyclists Corps until September 1917 at the earliest and possibly not until April 1918.

In September 1917 the 15th were at Fort Mardyck, some four miles west of Dunkirk centre, undergoing training with numerous parades. They were still in a war zone, however, and were at times under fire, so that one man was killed and six wounded during the month. In the middle of October, the Battalion moved to Coxyde de Ville, (15 miles east of Dunkirk along the coast) carrying out fatigues, mainly digging trenches under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. This continued through November with the men carrying out "salvage fatigues" before moving back to Fort Mardyck where the work continued.

On December 3rd 1917 the Battalion moved to Wormhoudt and then, via Morbecque, to Estaires, where the working parties continued into the new year. At this time, they were mainly digging trenches for communication cables, to keep them, as far as possible, out of danger from enemy bombing. Lack of reliable communications was a constant problem, and as a result, some attacks started in confusion and the planned strategy disintegrated. Although not under intense fire the men did suffer occasional casualties from gas shell attacks.

The tedious, but essential work, continued through March with, on many days, the *War Diary* recording similar entries, such as:

> *1 Officer and all available OR [Other Ranks] on working parties under A.D. A.S. XV Corps.*

So it continued, but on April 9th there was a change and the *Diary* records that the Battalion came under "heavy bombardment" and sent out patrols to see what was happening with the enemy. They were now under sustained shell fire as part of the German's great Michael Offensive which had begun on March 21st 1918. The second phase of this offensive, known as the Lys Offensive was designed to capture the important rail centre of Hazebrouck and push on to the Channel coast so cutting off the British holding the Ypres Salient. The 15th were caught in the first attack in the Battle of Lys, known as the Battle of Estaires.

The *Diary* tells of the cyclists on patrol encountering and engaging the Germans and one patrol took part in fighting through the streets of Estaires. It was a frightening, chaotic time for all the soldiers, with the Allies in almost constant retreat. In the onslaught, one officer and two Other Ranks were killed and four officers and thirty-eight men wounded with twelve men missing (two believed prisoners) and eight Other Ranks wounded but remaining on duty.

The moved to Le Grand Hasard and were on digging duties, still in the Hazebrouck area, one of the prime targets for the Germans because of its rail links. The War Diary entry at the end of April shows the terrible times that Harvey and the other had endured:

> *Owing to the destruction, in action, of the Bttn documents and records the strength of the Bttn at the beginning of the month cannot be given. The Bttn are now 2 officers and 63 OR under strength.*

Although much ground was lost along the Western Front, the line finally held, and the German Offensive, men exhausted and supply lines overstretched, began to falter. Through May 1918 the Diary tells, beside the working parties, of the training of guides as well as Lewis Gun and musketry training. They were based at le Grand Hasard but now, through to July, there were few casualties. On the 7th July, the 15th moved into billets at Blaringhem where Platoon Training continued.

The pendulum was now swinging back at increasing speed and on 1st September the Battalion were instructed to pursue the enemy as part of a concerted Allied attack. The *War Diary* reports that they were now at De Seule-Sternwerck and that:

> *The cyclists were detailed to form a screen in front area of the infantry and to locate hostile snipers and the M.G.s [machine guns] when located, word was to be sent back to the infantry who would deal with the hostile opposition. If, however, the cyclists were strong enough to tackle the opposition themselves they must do so.*

On 17th October they were once more in the firing line with orders to reconnoitre the enemy positions. By the 18th the outskirts of the village of Petit Audenarde had been reached and there was now continual forward movement, although sometimes met by

heavy rearguard shelling by the Germans. Through early November the Battalion was at Mouveaux, undergoing training, and they were there on the 11th when they received news of the Armistice and were ordered to "stand to".

From then on, the *Diary* lists parades, educational lectures and classes, rifle drill and generally anything to keep the men occupied. This continued into December but now also with medical inspections and baths to try to clean the men up ready for a return to civilian life. On Christmas Day there was Divine Service, followed by dinner and a concert.

The military and educational training continued into January 1919 but, all the time, men were being sent back to the UK for demobilisation, or to other units as part of the Rhine Army of Occupation. By the end of March only three officers and 32 men remained. The entries in the *War Diary* for these last few days have faded away like the men although the numbers now stay constant until the end of May 1919 when the *Diary* ends.

Harvey was demobilised on 19th May 1919 and returned to Northamptonshire but he was not in the 1918 or 1919 *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* because he had already moved to Raunds where his service is remembered in the town's Memorial Project.

Harvey and Grace only had one child, a daughter Phyllis Marie, who had been born on 10th October 1916. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, the family were living at 26 Park Avenue in Raunds and Harvey was a stainer in the leather trade. Grace had the usual Unpaid Domestic Duties. Phyllis, who was a clothing finisher, married soon after the Register was taken, to Ernest Arthur Wheeldon and it is their son Martyn who we have to thank for the family photographs.

Harvey died on 20th May 1962 and Grace followed him, aged 85, in 1972.

Reginald Frank Ruff (1888-1956)

Reginald, the youngest child of Arthur and Sarah, was born some twenty-two years after the firstborn, on 12th August 1888. In 1901 he was twelve years old living in the Sivers Buildings in Ringstead with his family. By 1911 he was 22, and a clerk for a "Pork Pie Maker"

In the same 1911 Census we see that living in *The Manse* was Baptist Minister, John Bates, aged 55, and his wife Jennie (sometimes called Rebecca) who was 57. They had been married 29 years and had had five children, all surviving. Still at home were their two daughters, Beatrice (26), and Ethel (25), both schoolteachers in a County Council school and Stuart (19), who was a butcher and who we have encountered in these stories before.

John Bates had been a Baptist Pastor at Bugbrooke, where Beatrice and been born, and then at Kislingbury, the village of his birth. In 1893 he had been appointed by the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church and had been very active in fundraising in order to carry out extensive renovations to the Baptist Chapel. The family continued to live in The Manse until John's death in 1930.

On 12th October 1912, Reginald Frank Ruff married Beatrice Elizabeth Bates at Thrapston. Their only child, Kathleen Mary, was born on 14th November 1915 and, less than a month later, on 9th December, Reginald attested and was placed on the Army Reserve. He was mobilised on 22nd May 1916 and posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery and given Regimental Number 86198. We see in the *Descriptive Report on Enlistment* that Reginald was 27 years old and was 5ft 8½ inches tall. His occupation was still listed as "clerk". What is new is that his home address is shown as Shaftesbury Avenue in St. Neots in Huntingdonshire.

Reginald Ruff
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

We do not know if it was pork pies that had taken Reginald to St Neots but it seems likely that, when he was mobilised, Beatrice and Kathleen moved back to live with her parents in *The Manse* in Ringstead. His military records, like many, are difficult to decipher, but it looks as if he was first posted to Harwich and, on 27th October 1916, he qualified as a "First Class Signaller". On 9th November he was sent to "A" Siege Depot at Catterick as part of the Royal Garrison Artillery. This was to become a Signalling Training Centre in December 1916 so perhaps Reginald was sent to improve his skills.

He remained in the UK for 276 days but, as some point he joined the 266th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. It had been formed on 30th September 1916 and moved to Horsham and on to Lydd and Codford. Reginald joined them and embarked at Portsmouth (although the *War Diary* says Southampton) on 16th February 1917. He disembarked at Le Havre the following day. On the 19th February they entrained and during the next week after a series of daily moves they arrived at Dainville on 9th March and took up their first position at the railway station there. Nine days later they had to dismantle the battery and move it to Agny.

It would have been heavy work and we get a hint of the frustration that the men must have sometimes felt from the *War Diary*:

> *19th March. Arrived Agny and started to get into action. When nearly ready [we] were ordered to move to another position to make room for the 9.2inch Battery.*

By 21st March they were in a new position and in action. Most of the *Diary* is made up by details of how much ammunition has been fired, the time, and a map reference and type of target, such as "trenches". They were positioned in the Agny area until the 11th April when they moved to Neuville Vitesse. Of course, they were also a prime target for the enemy and at St Martin Sur Coseul seven men were killed and five wounded. Still the entries are mainly lists of map references and targets.

In May the Battery were on the move through La Herliere, Framecourt, St Venant, Morbecque and Fletre to Kemmel, some 85 miles north, arriving there at 1 am on 21st May. Immediately, they went into position. On 24th, however, they left the section and moved into billets, but by the 29th they returned to Kemmel. Once again the lists continue.

In June the 266th moved to Vlamertinge and the bombardments continued through July. On August 2nd they moved once again. We see now in the *Diary* the continual daily casualties and the lists of targets which include harassing fire on road, barrage fire, house, dugouts, trench, wire and neutralising fire on a hostile battery.

In October 1917 the 266th were stationed at Crucifix Road at St Martin-sur-Coseul and the litany of the bombardments continue, even on Christmas Day. Men only appear anonymously as wounded or killed.

The *Diary* does not even record the places they were at but merely states "In the Field". The lists continue into 1918 as before but at this point the *Diary* finishes, the rest, presumably, destroyed. We do get some idea of the daily slog amidst the mud and the fear but much of it lost in the detailed ballistics.

We do know that, at some point in 1917, he was appointed as an Acting Bombadier and this was confirmed on 18th July 1917. Also, on 13th April 1918, he was appointed Acting Corporal to stand in for a wounded man and this promotion was confirmed when this man was invalided out of the army. At some point after this he was, for a time, sick and in hospital. Martyn Wheeldon has confirmed that he was badly gassed and this caused chest problems for the rest of his life. There is also an entry to show that he was granted leave to the UK from 27th December 1918 to 10th January 1919, probably because of his exposure in a gas attack. Whilst on leave he was sent to Purfleet for discharge.

He returned to civilian life and it seems, from one undated note on his file, that at the end of the war, or just after it, he was residing at 37 Symington Street in the St James area of Northampton, with its rows of neat terraced houses. By 1926, however the family were living at "The Stores" in Grantchester near Cambridge and we see in the *1939 Register of England and Wales* that they were still there, next to the *Rose and Crown Yard*, and Reginald described himself as a *Grocer and Confectioner.* Beatrice had no paid work but daughter Kathleen, who married the following year, was a Municipal Clerk.

We know from the Electoral Roll that they were still there at least up to 1945 and Martyn has confirmed that in 1947 Reginald and Beatrice with Kathleen and her husband, moved back to Northamptonshire. They lived together in Raunds, at 65 Midland Road. Reginald became Secretary at Nene Plastics in Grove Road in Raunds, a post he held for seven years until his retirement at the age of sixty-five. He died on 15th September 1956 at Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge. I think that Beatrice may have moved back to the Cambridge area after his death, living in Girton, but she died in Woodlands Nursing Home in Earith in Huntingdonshire on the 10th September 1961.

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Chapter 12

The Sawford Family

Very Simplified Family Tree

George Sawford *b 1795* ---------- **Ann Cobley**

I I

Thomas Sawford *b1818 m* **Elizabeth Whiteman (2nd)** **William Sawford** *b1821 m* **Mary A Barker (2nd)**

I I

Thomas Sawford *b1853 m* **Elizabeth Childs** **Walter Sawford** *b1854 m* **Elizabeth Perkins**

I I I

JESSE Sawford *b1879* **George Sawford** *b1873 m* **Minnie Braines** **ERNEST Sawford** *b1894*

L I I

ARTHUR *b1895* **WILLIAM** *b1897* **PERCY** *b1900*

The men who served in WW1 have forenames in CAPITALS

The Sawford (or usually Sorford in the early 19th Century Parish Registers) family have been an important part of Ringstead village life. The Sawford men who we will be looking at all trace their ancestry back to George Sawford and Ann Cobley who married in Ringstead Church on 14th October 1816. Two of their sons were Thomas, who was baptised in the same church on 24th July 1818 and William who was born on 23rd August 1821, but not baptised until July 24th 1831, (when they also tried to baptise Thomas again). Ann died, aged 47, and was buried on 16th April 1837.

Thomas, the older son, married Elizabeth Richardson on 10th January 1839 but she died just six years later, aged 28. He married again on 14th October 1847 to Elizabeth Whiteman and

it is a son of this second marriage, another Thomas, who was born in 1853, whose line we will follow. He married another Elizabeth, Elizabeth Childs, on 30th November 1876. The couple had at least six children but it appears that only one son, Jesse was called to service. There were other sons in the unlucky age range which qualified them to be conscripted but do not appear to have been called up. It may be that they had moved and do not appear on the Ringstead record, or they had illnesses or disabilities that exempted them from service.

As we have seen, George and Ann also had a son called William who was born in 1821. He married Esther Hornsby in a joint wedding with his brother Thomas's second marriage, on 14th October 1847. Esther gave birth to a child they called George but he died soon after, on July 6th 1849. Esther followed him before the month was out, on the 24th July.

Like his brother, William re-married, to Mary Ann Barker from Old. They had a son called Walter, born in 1854 who married Elizabeth (what else?) Perkins on 25th December 1872 in Ringstead Church. Walter and Elizabeth had eight children and the eldest son, George, married Minnie Braines and three of their sons were called to serve in the Great War. There were two other brothers of George, John William, born in 1880 who died of fever in South Africa in the Boer War, while serving with the St John Ambulance, and the youngest brother, Ernest Walter whose military service spanned a far greater period than most of the men from Ringstead.

Jesse Sawford (1879-1944)

Jesse was the second child of Thomas and Elizabeth, born in late 1879. He had an older brother Reynold (sometimes Reginald) and four younger siblings, three of them male, William Harold, Alec and Horace Ralph, none of whom appear to have been conscripted. [William] Harold did go to a Military Tribunal in 1917 and was given temporary exemption. He died in 1924 so may have had medical problems. Horace Ralph, born in 1891, died in 1917 so, again, he may have had good reason not to be called up.

In the 1881 Census, the family were living in Church Street, near the school. By 1891, now shown as living at 7, Church Street Jesse had become a shoemaker. He married Ellen Archer in 1910 and, in the 1911 Census, they were living in Church Street. Jesse was shown as an "Army Bootmaker" and more specifically a "Sewer", but like many at the time he was out of work. Next door lived his widowed mother, Elizabeth, and his unmarried brothers and sisters. The two sons, who were handsewn men working at home, were both out of work like Jesse. The factory-made boot was taking over the military trade.

Ellen (sometimes Nellie) was the daughter of Arthur Archer who was an innkeeper and shoemaker. He had taken over the licence of the *New Inn* in the mid-1890s. Arthur died on 20th February 1913, aged 54 and his widow, Sarah Ellen, took over the licence. It is likely that she had always done much of the bar work when Arthur had been the licensee. We have looked previously at the brothers and cousins of Ellen who fought in the war.

It may be that Jesse had to swallow his pride and get factory work when the Western Front demanded huge numbers of boots and the military boot trade was briefly reinvigorated in Raunds and Ringstead. In 1917 he was working for *Owen Smith*, a wholesale boot and shoe

manufacturer, who had a factory in Grove Street in Raunds. Jesse was working there as a "Hand Laster". He was called to appear before a Northamptonshire Military Tribunal to rule on his exemption from service. His case was first adjourned to the 26th June 1917 and he was then granted a further exemption until the 10th July.

That appears to have been the end of the delay to his conscription and he was posted to the Royal West Surrey Regiment. He was given the Regimental Number 61022. It is not clear, but it may be that he was first with the 1/4th (Territorial) Battalion and was perhaps transferred to the 1/5th at the end of the war. All we know is that he served in these two Battalions. Both served much of the war in India but the 1/4th spent the whole war there and the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* only mentions India in his entry.

Jesse with younger brother Alec
Picture on Ancestry in Family Tree of "rorystark".

The 4th Battalion of the Royal West Surreys was a territorial unit, originally a volunteer force, designed for home defence. With the coming of the Great War, many territorials volunteered for overseas service. This new reserve unit became the 1/4th Battalion. The Regular Army was initially desperately wanted on the Western Front so forty battalions were replaced by some 55,000 territorial soldiers in India.

Jesse did not see those early years where the 1/4th were on the North-West Frontier, close to the Afghanistan border. Like many Europeans, before and after, in the sub-continent,

they were struck down with sickness. In May 1917 while waiting at Tank the men contracted malaria, sand-fly fever, as well as suffering heatstroke. The Battalion was withdrawn from active service and sent to Dashai and Jutogh in the Simla Hills, to recover. Only some 200 men, out of a force of 750, could make the initial move, with many of the sick being left to recover at stations along the route, only rejoining the Battalion later.

The men then moved to Lahore and it is about this time, in early 1918, that Jesse probably joined the "Queens" as the Royal West Surrey were known. There was little fighting during this time but an outbreak of what was later, in Britain, called "Spanish Flu", swept through India, killing six million people in two months. Among the dead were twenty soldiers from the Battalion.

In January 1919 demobilisation began, with small parties of men returning home, when a new crisis on the North-West Frontier sent the 1/4th back into action. The end of the Great War meant little to the Afghans, still subject to foreign interference. The British had been concerned that the Russians would launch an attack on India through Afghanistan. There had been two Anglo-Afghan Wars in the Nineteenth Century and at the end of the First World War a third Afghan War flared up when they invaded northern India. The Afghans wanted greater recognition of their status and control over their own foreign policy. There were also political tensions within Afghanistan and, when their leader was assassinated, his successor decided to invade British India, partly to placate the hardliners in his own country.

The Afghan army was comparatively small and poorly organised but there were some 80,000 tribesmen who were formidable fighters, especially in the rocky terrain which was their home. The 1/4th were posted to the Peshawar area in May 1919. They were part of a British and Indian force that surrounded the city and threatened to cut off the water supply. The pro-Afghan faction's leaders were delivered to the besieging force and the crisis averted. By August the incursion was over but, in the following settlement, the Afghans did gain control over their own foreign policy and it is seen by them as an important War of Independence.

It was a short but sometimes vicious war and it was said that captured British soldiers could expect torture, mutilation and death. The whole Indian posting was unpopular with the territorial troops because they were mainly confined to garrison duties with, added to the dull routine, often sickness, heat, and little chance of home leave. Once the Great War had finished the men wanted to be back home and one can imagine that the 1/4th was not a particularly happy unit at this time.

From Peshawar the Battalion were sent to Bombay where, on 18th October 1919 they embarked, arriving in England on 14th November 1919.

Jesse was not entitled to the Victory Medal but he was to the India General Service Medal with a clasp inscribed *Afghanistan- North-West Frontier 1919*. By 1920 he was back living in Church Street Ringstead with wife Ellen.

In 1939 they were in Warners Cottages in London End in Ringstead. Jesse was working as a bench hand in s shoe factory. Living with the couple was Ellen's widowed mother, Sarah Archer.

Jesse died on 5th May 1944, aged 66, and Ellen in 1967 aged 78.

Ernest Walter Sawford (1894-1934)

We now look at the other side of the tree which comes down from William, born in 1821, who married Mary Ann. in 1854. Their eldest son, Walter, born in 1854, married Elizabeth Perkins on Christmas Day 1872 in Ringstead Church. They had eight children and the oldest son, George, born in 1873, had three sons, and we will look at these next. First, we will look at the youngest son Ernest Walter born on 27th July 1894.

As we have said earlier, Ernest's older brother, John William, had died of Enteric Fever in the Boer War in 1900. In the 1901 Census, Ernest was living with his parents in No. 1 Dearlove Cottages in Ringstead. His father, Walter, was the Manager of a Boot and Shoe Factory. By 1911, Ernest was the only child living at home and was working as a butcher.

Ernest's war career was unusual, although not unique, in the men of the village who went to War. He enlisted on 29th July 1912, two days after his eighteenth birthday, with the Royal Marines Light Infantry and was given Service Number 16385. We can see from his Service Register that he enlisted in Birmingham. He was 5ft 6¾ inches tall with hazel eyes and brown hair. He also had a birth mark on his upper arm and various scars on his face and body.

He was first sent to the Reception Depot at Deal in Kent and was in training there until 14th May of the following year. It seems likely that he was able to swim when he enlisted, for he was tested and passed on 16th September and, on 5th December 1912, he was given the Certificate and Medallion of the *Royal Life Saving Society* at Deal.

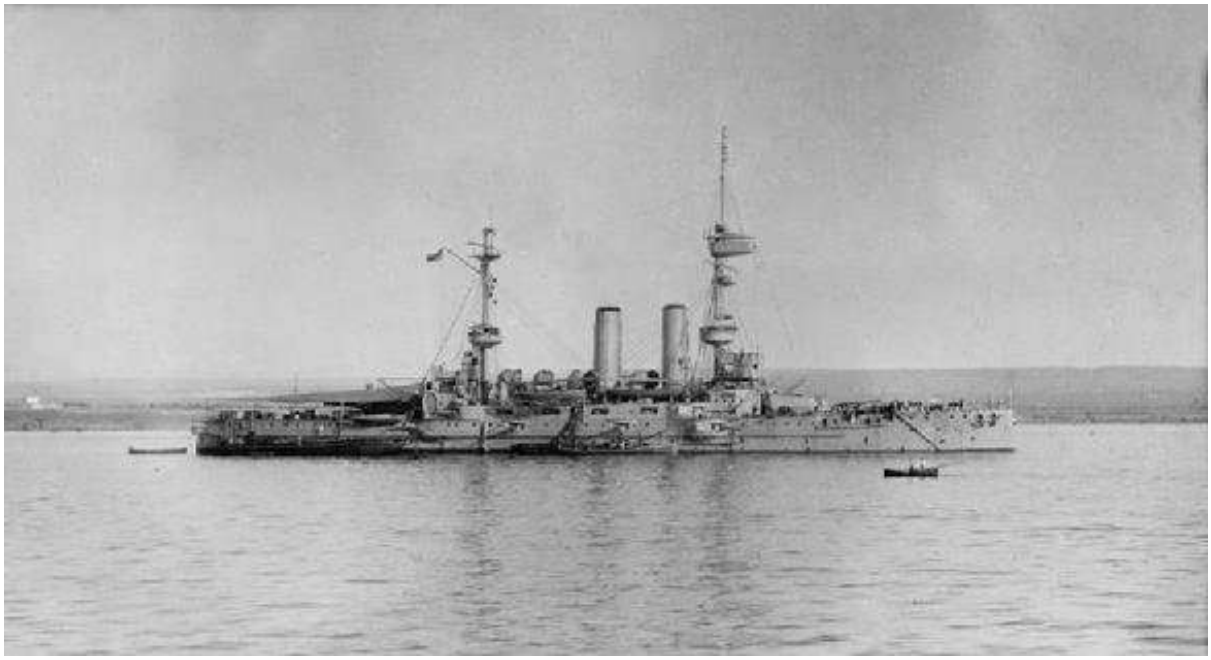
On 15th May 1913, he was sent to "E" Company of the Portsmouth Division. On 5th November 1913 he was posted to *HMS Glory* for which *HMS Argonaut* was the depot ship. *Glory* had been launched in 1899 and in 1909, after service abroad, she was reduced to reserve status and remained militarily inactive until the outbreak of the First World War.

Before then, Private Ernest Sawford was posted to the Portsmouth Division on 6th February 1914. He was posted again on 27th May to *HMS Venerable* and this was his ship for the first two-and-a-half years of the war. *Venerable* was a London Class Pre-Dreadnought battleship. She had four 12-inch (305mm) guns and a top speed of 18 knots (21 mph). She was launched in November 1902 and in 1909, after a major refit, she served with the Atlantic and Home Fleets.

When war broke out in August 1914, *Venerable*, with Ernest aboard, worked in the Channel covering the Portsmouth Marine Battalion's movement to Ostend and in October bombarded German positions on the Belgian coast. Areas around Nieuport were deliberately flooded, stopping the German attack which then diverted inland, out of range of the *Venerable's* guns.

She returned to home waters but once again sailed out to bombard German positions near Westende, designed to engage German attention to support a British offensive at Neuve Chapelle. She was used again in May to try to stop German artillery attacks on Dunkirk but was unsuccessful. It was at this time that Ernest sustained wounds in his head. She was sent to the Dardanelles and from 14th to 21st August bombarded Turkish positions at Suvla Bay. Bad weather made accurate shelling impossible and *Venerable* left the area and in October was refitted at Gibraltar. Then in December she was sent to the Adriatic Sea to reinforce the Italian Navy against the Austro-Hungarian fleet until December 1916.

Ernest Sawford returned on the *Venerable* to Portsmouth and, on 28th December 1916, was once again part of the Portsmouth Division, remaining with it until the 6th March 1917. He was then posted to *HMS Caledon* the following day.



HMS Venerable in Malta Harbour 1915
Photograph by Surgeon Oscar Parkes. © Imperial War Museum (IWM SO 596)

The *Caledon* was a modern cruiser and Ernest was part of its first crew as it completed its trials, ready for operational service. He now saw very different waters to the Mediterranean because the *Caledon* became the Flagship of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron as part of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. This is an area of sea in the Orkneys, north of the Scottish mainland. Its importance through the ages has been that it is protected from the worst of the weather, in the lee of some of the main islands in the group. Another Ringstead man, John Owen Roberts was also in this area from 29th May 1918 on *HMS Cardiff.*

On 17th November 1917, the *Caledon* took part in a naval action against the German warships in Heligoland Bight. She was part of an attempt to cut off and destroy a force of German minesweepers which was being escorted by light cruisers. A chase followed but the British cruisers came under fire from German battleships and broke off the engagement.

Caledon was hit by a single 12-inch shell but luckily it did not explode and the ship did not sustain any major damage. Nevertheless, five men on the *Caledon* were killed and John Henry Carless was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for remaining at his gun after receiving a fatal wound.

Through 1918 the *Caledon* continued as part of the Grand Fleet, based in Scapa Flow. On November 21st the German fleet surrendered. When the Germans heard that the fleet was to be divided up among the Allies, they scuttled their own fleet on 21st June 1919. Before this, however, the *Caledon*, as part of the Grand Fleet, had sailed to the Baltic in support of shore operations against the Bolshevik forces who had taken over Russia and also blockaded a fleet, now in Soviet hands. The *Caledon* became Rear Admiral Cowan's flagship and moved to and from the Baltic.

We do not know exactly when *Caledon* ended these Baltic exercises but we do know that on 3rd March 1920, Ernest was 25 years old and staying in the *Union Jack Club* on Waterloo Road in London. On that day he married Dorothy Vavasour Elliott who was living at 22 Tenison Street in Lambeth. The wedding was at Lambeth Wesleyan Chapel. After the marriage the couple seem to have set up home in Portsmouth where Ernest was in the Portsmouth Division from 29th July 1920 until 5th September 1922.

On 6th September Ernest joined *HMS Fisgard*. This, however, was the name of a shore establishment used to train artificers and engineers for the Navy. It was based on old moored ships at Portsmouth. This training was widened to include an electrical and ordnance branch. On 25th September 1925 he moved briefly to the Portsmouth Division before a posting to *HMS Cardiff* on 24th October 1925. He was again at sea, for the *Cardiff* was the flagship of the Third Cruiser Squadron, in the Mediterranean. On 29th May 1928 he was back in Portsmouth, based at Deal from 13th August, until the end of 1930. He worked as a butcher at Deal Depot and received three pence a day extra.

On 19th November 1930 he started a year on *HMS Iron Duke*. The London Naval Treaty specified that the four Iron Duke Class battleships should be scrapped, or otherwise demilitarised, and it had been converted into gunnery training ships. Ernest then moved onto *HMS Dolphin* which was another shore-based establishment. It was at Fort Blockhouse in Gosport and was the home of the Royal Navy Submarine Service from 1904 to 1999.

Ernest's time in the Navy appeared over on 28th July 1933, which was the end of his second period of engagement. He received a pension of £57 1s 0d. He and his wife were living at 37 Henderson Road, Eastway, Southsea. He then enlisted in the Royal Military Police on 6th February 1934. These "pensioner special constables" were the forerunners of the Admiralty Constabulary. *Horatio2*, on the *Great War Forum* website, has revealed that "Applicants were accepted only after replacing substandard teeth with dentures at their own expense".

In many ways the military police fulfilled a role not dissimilar to the original duties of the Marines as maintaining order aboard ship. Unfortunately, Ernest did not have much time in his new post, for he died on 22nd October 1934.

The Sons of George and Minnie Sawford

We will look finally at three of the sons of Ernest's oldest brother, George. He had been born in 1873 and married Minnie Braines from Twywell in 1893. At first, the young couple lived in Rushden and Arthur their first child, was born there on 3rd August 1895. They soon moved back to Ringstead and, in 1901, were living at 4 Denford Road. The two youngest children, William (3) and Percy (9 months) had been born in the village.

By 1911 the family had moved to a six-room house in Gladstone Street. There were now five sons in the family but their mother, Minnie was missing. She was a patient in Crescent House, a "Female Convalescent Home" in Marine Parade, Brighton. The census show that she had had had six children, five of whom were still living. Was it the death of a child that led to Minnie's convalescence?

It is worth pausing a little, before we look at the three sons, who were called up to serve in the war, to consider George, their father. A newspaper article in the *Evening Telegraph* on 15th February 1939 reports on his life and his funeral. It shows us, once again that, for all the people we look at, the official records leave out much of the important things of their lives. In the case of George we see that he had been a member of the local Labour Party and of the Ringstead Co-operative Society for forty years and had held "a position of trust" at the "Working Men's Club" for many years. He had also worked tirelessly to raise money for the *Blind and Crippled Children's Fund*. He was obviously a well-liked and respected member of the community and these aspects of character, negative or positive, do not usually show up in the public records.

Arthur Sawford (1895-1981)

In the 1911 Census, Arthur, aged 15 had worked in a local boot and shoe factory as a "Boot Tipper". His work would have given him some exemption from conscription but not for long.

Most of Arthur's military records have been lost but we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was posted to the 21st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery in Egypt and Salonika. The *Absent Voters' List* reveal that he was also in the Army Service Corps (ASC) with Service Number 390437. There are also a couple of Medical Records that have survived and with these we can give some account of Arthur's wartime service.

Arthur would have enlisted, in about October1915, with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), and was given the service number 114121. It seems likely that he had six months training, possibly at Woolwich, and was posted to active service, around March 1916, with the rank of Gunner.

There is some confusion about the units he served in, according to the *Roll of Honour* and the Medical Records, although it may be that he served in the 21st Battery briefly. When we look at his Medical Records, it would appear that he was first in "D" Battery of the 100th Brigade, which was part of the 22nd Division, in Salonika. There were various reorganisations and renumberings of the batteries and he was later shown as part of "C" Battery. The 22nd Division had been in the eastern European warzone, based in Salonika, from 27th October

1915 although the artillery units were still arriving into mid-December. We cannot be sure when Arthur arrived but we do have accounts of the original journey of the 100th Brigade which was through France and by ship from Marseilles. Certainly, part or all of Arthur's journey would also have been by ship under similar conditions.

The horses for the artillery would have travelled with the men and "mucking out" was an awkward job. Ivor Davies, from the 100th Brigade, is quoted in the *Under the Devil's Eye,* describing the scene.

> One man would manoeuvre the horse into the alleyway between the stalls – his mate would shovel and sweep away any manure into the alleyway. The other men would shovel the manure into large baskets, carry them outside and empty them overboard; those fellows soon found the windward side of the ship.

There was also a very real threat from the German and Austrian submarines and Hospital and Troop Ships were regularly hit and sunk.

The troopship would finally arrive in the Gulf of Salonika. The city had a fairy-tale appearance from afar with towers and minarets and Mount Olympus in the distance. Unfortunately, although it was a picturesque, vibrant and multicultural place it was dirty and smelly according to the men who served there. Also, the ships sunk by the enemy meant that human and animal remains would wash up on the beaches to the south of the city.

The early fighting against the Bulgarians, allies of the Germans, by the French supported by the British, had not been successful and they had been forced to move back to Salonika to regroup. At this time the British government was considering abandoning the whole campaign in the region, especially as the Greek King's government was a hostile host to the Allies. Nevertheless, during the winter, the army built defensive lines in the surrounding country and the city itself became a large military base, increasingly under Anglo-French control. The enterprise became too large to be abandoned.

It was the French who were the senior partners in the Salonikan Campaign, but the main focus of both governments was the Western Front and the upcoming French offensive at Verdun. It was decided that a breakout north from Salonika would tie down German troops and prevent them from reinforcing their army in France and Belgium.

It seems likely that Arthur was part of the 22nd Division that moved north out of Salonika on 15th April 1916, although some units did remain behind to protect the city. The new British commander in the area, Milne had decided that Sarrail, the French commander, was too much of a risk-taker and it was agreed that the British and French should have responsibility for different sections of the advance.

After long, exhausting marches in the intense heat, the British engaged the Bulgarians in the Battle of Horseshoe Hill. This was finally taken but the Bulgarians were strongly entrenched and in the following advance to reclaim Serbia, the Russians and Serbs particularly suffered many casualties.

On 2nd November 1916, Arthur was taken to 28th General Hospital suffering from "Debility". Debility was often used as another name for "Shell Shock" or "exhaustion of the nervous system". We would probably now see it as a form of Depression or Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. However, debility was a term that was also used when men suffered from lack of energy caused by other illnesses. Perhaps he had undiagnosed malaria. The area north of Salonika was often swampy and malaria was endemic. Arthur remained in hospital until the 20th December when he was "discharged back to duty".

The following Spring, on 15th March 1917, he was once again sent to the 28th General Hospital but this time diagnosed as "Malaria R", a reoccurrence of malaria, which perhaps throws light on his earlier episode of debility. This time, it was decided that he should be put on *H.M Hospital Ship Dover Castle.* He was taken to No. 2 Convalescent Hospital in Egypt on the Suez Canal.

A couple of months after Arthur was on board, on 26th May 1917, the *Dover Castle* was sunk between Malta and Gibraltar by a German U-boat. The captain of the U-boat was later tried for sinking a Hospital Ship but was acquitted by a German court as he believed that he was acting under Government orders.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* states that he had been invalided home and demobilised so it seems that he did return to England and was discharged from the Royal Field Artillery. This was not the end of his war service, however, because, as we have seen, in the *Absent Voters; List,* he was in the Army Service Corps with Service Number 390437. Chris, on the Great War Forum, has shown that a number of men with adjacent service numbers to Arthur in the ASC were transferred in January 1918 but we cannot be certain.

The Army Service Corps were the support men of the army, taking supplies, food, equipment and ammunition to the troops. We do not know where Arthur served but it seems likely that it was a home posting. His service number has a "T" before it which indicates that he was in the Horse Transport section of the ASC where his experience with the Royal Field Artillery would have been useful.

He was discharged on 19th March 1919 and received a pension because of his malaria. It is also noted on his records that he had exophthalmic goitre. This is also called Graves Disease. Symptoms may include irritability, muscle weakness, poor tolerance of heat, diarrhoea and weight loss. It can also lead to eye problems including protruding eyeballs. Its cause is still not entirely understood but it can be triggered by stress. Could this be another explanation of his debility?

Arthur returned to Ringstead and in 1920 he was living with his parents, George and Minnie in Gladstone Street. In the following year he married Rose Harrison. They had two children, William born on 11th April 1922 and Kenneth on 6th November 1924.

Both Arthur and Rose worked in the boot and shoe trade. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales,* Arthur was a "Boot Operative, a Stitcher and Screwer" and Rose was a Hot Wax Machinist. They were now living at 27 Barn Close in Raunds.

In March 1939 William, their son, was hit by a car near Chowns Mill and had to be taken to Northampton General Hospital with an injured right leg. Arthur died on 8th September 1981 and Rose on 2nd September 1985. Her son William followed a few weeks later.

William Sawford (1897-1917)

Arthur had a brother born in 1897 who was called William. In 1911 he was thirteen years old and was still at school but he also worked part-time as a grocer's errand boy. When war started in 1914 it was thought that it "would be over by Christmas" but soon reality set in as the injured men came home and many never returned. On 31st March 1916 William was 18 years 7 months old and was medically examined for military service. He was 5ft 5 inches tall, weighed 124 lbs and had a 34 inch chest.

William Sawford
From Rushden Argus 18th June 1917. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society.

William had started work at Adams Brothers (in the former Britannia Boot and Shoe Co-operative building in Denford Road) but he was called up for service on 17th November 1916 and first drafted into the 99th Training Reserve Battalion of The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) two days later. He had been given Regimental Number G/13877 and probably did his initial training at the Maida Barracks in Aldershot. He was then transferred to the 1st Battalion, which would have been a Regular Army unit at the beginning of the war, on 12th April 1917, and posted overseas.

The *War Diary* of the 1st Buffs recorded that on the 29th April 1917 the Battalion was in trenches near Philosophe, between Bethune and Lens. On that day 122 Other Ranks joined the unit to replace those lost. We can see the ferocity of the action the Buffs were confronted by, in that, in April, for three Military Crosses, one Distinguished Conduct Medal and eleven Military Medals were awarded.

On 1st May the 1st Battalion were in the Hulluch Sector but on 3rd they were relieved and went into huts at Mazingarbe. Another 50 Other Ranks joined the unit on the 6th. They were once again in the Front Line trenches on the 19th May. The *War Diary* shows a continual drip of the wounded and killed. On 23rd May one Other Rank was wounded in action and on the

24th two were killed. One of these men was William Sawford although some records show his death as on the 23rd May.

William had been in France for six weeks and only about half of that that time in a war zone. The Corporal of his company wrote to his parents:

> *It is with the utmost regret that I have the painful duty to perform of informing you of the death of your son on May 23rd. He was killed instantaneously by a shell and suffered no pain whatever. Although he had only been with the regiment a short time he made himself well-liked by his willingness and devotion to duty, showing signs of becoming a non-commissioned officer very shortly. Both the platoon and myself wish to tender our sincere sympathy.*

Was it really like that? We will never know. He was nineteen years old.

He is commemorated at Philosophe British Cemetery at Mazingarbe. The inscription on his grave, selected by his family was:

> *He rose from the ranks to a higher life.*

William had been the secretary of the Wesleyan Bible Class in Ringstead. A remembrance tablet for him and four other young members of the class, killed in 1917 and 1918, was erected in Ringstead Wesleyan Chapel. This was moved later to the back wall of the former Cemetery Chapel which is now the Ringstead Heritage Centre. His name is also on the War Memorial erected in the churchyard in 1924.

Percy Sawford (1900-1960)

The last of the brothers, old enough to serve in the Great War, was Percy, born on 18th June 1900. His parents would have thought that he at least would be safe from being in a war zone. In a way they were right although it must have been hard for them, especially after the death of William in 1917. Percy was conscripted but was not called upon to serve abroad.

He enlisted on 18th June 1918 when he was just eighteen years old. He was 5ft 4½ inches tall, weighed 115lbs with a 33½ inch chest, and had brown eyes and a pale complexion.

He was mobilised on 3rd July 1918 in Northampton and was first posted to the 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own) which had been founded there on 27th October 1917. Two days later, on 5th July, he was transferred to the 52nd (Graduated) Battalion.

The 52nd was based at Colchester and on 2nd February 1919 he was fined four days' pay for overstaying his leave pass. It was a common offence among the men who we have looked at in these biographies, especially after the war had finished. On 12th February he was compulsorily retained in service and on 21st March was posted to the 5th Battalion at Colchester.

The 5th (Reserve) Battalion had also spent the war in England. From March 1916 it had been stationed at Eastchurch on the isle of Sheppey, in the mouth of the Thames. It was separated from the north Kent coast by a narrow sea channel called the Swale. Eastchurch was part of a defensive system for the Thames and Medway. It was also the site of one of the earliest airfields and saw the development of the British aeroplane industry by the Short Brothers. The Isle of Sheppey was so important that it was sometimes called Barbed-Wire Island and a passport was needed to get on the island during both World Wars. It is not clear if Percy saw any service in Sheppey or spent his time only at Colchester Barracks.

He was finally posted, on 7th August 1919 to the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade and on 24th September was appointed as an unpaid Lance Corporal. Demobilisation of all the volunteer and conscripted troops was now moving towards completion and on 24th October 1919 Percy "proceeded to No. 9B Disposal Station" at Purfleet. His short time in the army was over.

On 16th October 1918 he had had a medical examination and, although his eyesight and physical development were considered good, he was placed in category B2. It appears that he had flat feet and suffered from goitre, like his brother, Arthur.

Percy returned to Ringstead and in late 1922 he married Lily Waterman. Lily had been born in Sunderland in County Durham. Her parents were from Oxfordshire but her father, Cardinal William Waterman, had worked as a foreman in a clothing factory in Sunderland and the family were there in the 1901 Census. He obtained a new job as manager of a clothing factory in Woodford, across the Nene from Ringstead. In the late 19th century two clothing factories had opened in Woodford, *Wallace and Linnell* and the *Ideal Clothing Factory and* it was the latter which Waterman managed. In 1911 the family were living in "Sunnyside" in the village.

Percy became a worker for the *London Midland and Scottish (LMS) Railway Company* and, soon after their marriage, the couple moved to Nottinghamshire. In 1924 they had a daughter, Edna May born in the Mansfield District and, in 1930, another daughter, Mary, born in the Southwell District of Nottinghamshire. The 1927 Electoral Register shows Percy and Lily living in Main Street, North Muskham, a few miles north of Newark.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, Percy was a "LMS Signalman" and Lily had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". There are two "officially closed" records at the address, probably the two daughters.

Percy died on 22nd October 1960. He was living, at the time of his death, at 9 Cedar Avenue in Newark and was still working as a signalman for British Railways. Although there is a small discrepancy in the given birth date it looks as if Lily died, aged 87, in 1987 in the Burnley and Pendle District of Lancashire. Her daughter, Edna, had married Thomas Pickles from Nelson in Lancashire so perhaps she was living near or with the Pickles at the time of her death.

Chapter 13

Alfred Edward Shaw (1897-1917)

Alfred's grandfather, William Shaw, was a basket manufacturer in Raunds and his son, George, carried on this trade, making domestic and industrial baskets, until his death in 1954. Another son of William, called Thomas, became an army bootmaker and married Ringstead girl, Martha Jane Tilley, on January 25th 1894. The couple lived at No.5 London End in Ringstead, next door to Martha's parents, Samuel and Catherine (Kate) Tilley.

Thomas and Martha had four children, Martha, Alfred Edward, Ellen Bessie and Thomas. In the 1911 Census they were in Spendlove's Yard and the oldest child, Martha was a leather heel builder, almost certainly working in the heel factory nearby, at the bottom of Denford Road. Alfred, aged 13, was working as an assistant baker. He had been baptised in the parish church on August 13th 1897 although Alfred, at least, had become a Wesleyan as a teenager.

Alfred first enlisted in the month from October 24th 1914 when he was just seventeen years old. It would have been in one of the Territorial Battalions of the Northamptonshire Regiment which volunteers could join at this earlier age. He was given the Regimental Number 3201. The men trained at weekends or in the evenings and went away to a summer camp. Territorials were not obliged to serve overseas but enlisted knowing that, in the event of war, they could be called upon for full-time service ("embodied"). In theory, no men could be sent to serve abroad until they were nineteen years old and, although some did, it appears that Alfred was posted when he had just reached this age.

He was sent to the 17th Infantry Base Depot (IBD) at Étaples near the French coast. The IBD was a holding camp for receiving men on arrival from England. Some of these camps were not liked, especially by the New Zealanders, because of the harsh discipline. The men were kept in training while awaiting being sent to a unit at the front. Alfred was posted to the 6th Northamptonshires on 28th September 1916 with a new Regimental Number, 40292.

The *Medal and Award Roll* shows that a draft of men transferred from the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment to the 32nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) on the 10th October 1916. The 32nd (East Ham) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers had been raised by the Mayor and Borough of East Ham in London on 18th October 1915 and had first landed in France on the 5th May 1916. On the 12th October the 32nds were in Becordal Camp and the *War Diary* records:

> *Draft of 1 officer and 60 O.R. arrived.*

Further large drafts arrived in the following few days and the number of these replacements show the size of the casualties that the Battalion had suffered. Figures in the *War Diary* show that that at the end of the month there were 971 Other Ranks and 25 Officers but at one point before the replacements arrived there were only 493 men and 15 officers. Alfred was one of these new men. On 16th October they marched to Mericourt and entrained for Longpré where the new arrivals were trained, alongside the old hands, in company drill with

bayonet fighting and rifle exercises. They then moved to Ridge Wood, a few miles south-west of Ypres, where they were trained in the routines of life at the Front in old trenches.

On the 28thOctober 1916 the men experienced trench life for real when they relieved the 10th Queens. There was heavy rain and little enemy action so the men repaired the trenches during the lull in the fighting. The Battalion followed the usual pattern of periods in and out of the line. On 6th November the men were given the new "box respirators" which gave better protection against chlorine and phosgene gases that were being used by both sides.

History of the Great War Based on Official Documents. London: HMSO.
https://commons.wikimedia.org

They were now in the La Clytte (De Klijte) and Vierstraat area, providing working parties for the Front Line through November. For the most part, December continued with exchanges of artillery fire and on the 9th they were bombed with "Tear Gas" In January 1917 the activity slackened but, in February and March, the fighting became fiercer again. On the 22nd March they moved into billets at Steenvoorde

In April they were in the St Eloi section of the Western Front before moving to Houle and on the 20th May they bathed in the lake, with the weather warm and sunny. The weather remained fine in June when the battalion was based at Elzenwalle (Elzenwallekasteel). At first, they were in support, but the enemy's artillery was very active in *Ravine* and *Deny's Wood.*

A British offensive had been planned and, following a week-long barrage by the Allied artillery, on the 7th June 1917 the Battle of Messines began. The objective was the capture of the Messines-Wytschaete (Wijtschate) Ridge which overlooked the British positions and made any further progress in the Ypres sector hazardous and difficult. It had been gradually transformed into a German stronghold. The Royal Engineers, however had been mining beneath the German positions and 21 large mines had been laid. At 3.10 am these were detonated and 19 of them exploded. It was the largest explosion before the nuclear explosions later in the century and was said to have been heard by Lloyd George in Downing Street. It is now believed that the Germans suffered far fewer than the 10,000 men later

said to have been killed, but it was a morale shattering experience and made the task of the Battalion and the other troops, from Ireland and the Empire, much easier.

The 32nd were on the left in the initial night attack. The infantry had, as usual been preceded by a moving artillery barrage ahead of the attacking troops. The *War Diary* noted:

> *The whole ground and enemy trenches in this neighbourhood were so ruined by our shell fire as to be practically unrecognizable and a part of the Battalion in the excessive keenness which they showed throughout went on with the 26th Bn. Royal Fusiliers right up to the Dammstrasse [name given to a sunken road] and took part in the assault of it. The Stream marking the right of the RED LINE had been converted into merely a string of shell craters having more water in them than those in the neighbourhood.*

A smashed-up German trench on Messines Ridge 7th June 1917
Photograph by John Warwick Brooke ©IWM Q5787

The raid was successful and most of the Germans had fled. By 8.10 am the work of the 32nd was over except for consolidation and organisation of the positions. Many men were killed but the battle was considered one of the few clear successes for the Allies until the last months of the war. Unfortunately, it was followed by a continuation of the terrible war of attrition in the mud of the Third Battle of Ypres (Leper) often called Passchendaele.

Through July, at La Clytte, the Battalion was mainly engaged in working parties, digging trenches for cables. Nevertheless, there were actions on the 31st July and 7th August in

which 43 men were killed and 7 died of wounds and a further 90 were wounded. On the 5th August the Germans had attacked the line at Klein Zillebeke (four miles south-east of Ypres) held by the 32nd and temporarily broke through in one area but they were soon repulsed, and the line held.

September came with the Battalion in training. On the 14th September they began to move up to the Front Line, marching 12½ miles to billets at Zuytpeene and then over the next few days reaching the Canada Street Tunnels, near Zillebeke, by the 18th. The *War Diary* reported:

> *Battalion Concert Party gave a performance prior to the Battalion moving to the forward area.*

On the 19th September the Battalion moved forward to its assembly position for an attack on "Tower Hamlets". A new world of Anglicised French place names mixed with British names for features in the landscape had been laid over the map of the French countryside. August had seen a reduction in action because of the rain and mud but there was better weather in September. The British re-launched their attack with an assault on the German positions on the vital high ground of the Gheluvelt (Geluveld) Plateau astride the Ypres-Menin Road. This offensive became known as the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge.

There had been, first, a tremendous bombardment of the German front. The plan was called a "bite and hold", to take a position and then consolidate it before moving to the next objective. The Tower Hamlets sector held by the 32nd was just west of Gheluvelt village The Battalion made repeated attacks but by nightfall, the Germans still held their positions.

In the period from 20th to 25th September the British lost 20,255 wounded, killed or missing. One of the men who died between 19th and 22nd September (dates vary in the records) was Alfred Shaw. The page of the Service Medal and Award Roll which shows the transfer of Alfred from the 6th Northamptonshires to the 32nd Royal Fusiliers on 10th October 1916, shows four other men who followed an identical path. Of these George Trenwith was killed on 7th August 1917, Arthur Sargison was killed on 22nd September 1917 and Albert Waterfield died on 19th September 1917.

Alfred was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals. At some point he had been appointed a Lance Corporal. He was twenty years old and his parents received his small war gratuity. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial (Panels 28-30). Like William Sawford, William Sibley, Edward Roberts and Percy Wilson he was also remembered as a member of the Wesleyan Young People's Class on a tablet which is now on the back of the former Cemetery Chapel (now the Heritage Centre). Along the road from there, into the village, he is also on the war memorial outside the parish church.

Alfred's mother, Martha Jane died in 1922 but the family continued to live in Spendlove's Yard. In 1934, his father was attending to a dog whose sores, it was thought, came into contact with a scratched pimple on his arm. He developed blood poisoning and died in Northampton General Hospital a week later.

Chapter 14

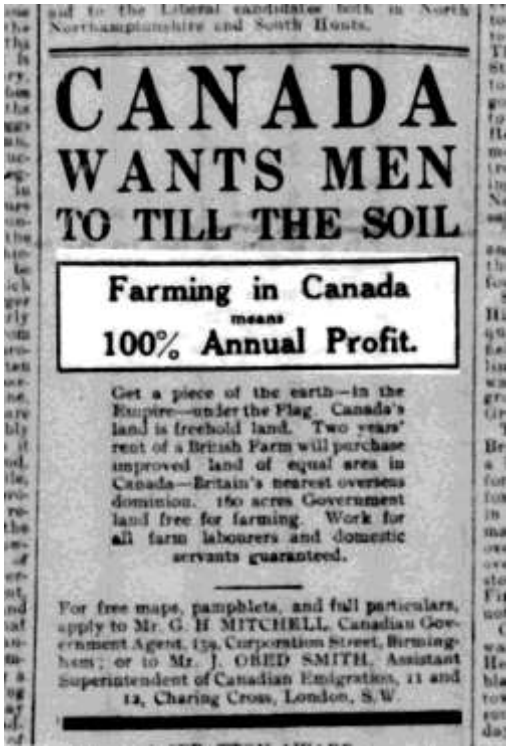
William Sibley (1894-1917)

William Sibley was born in 1863 in Old Bolingbroke in Lincolnshire. His father, Daniel, was a bricklayer's labourer, who had originally come from Crouchfield in Hertfordshire. In 1881 William was a labourer on the railways, lodging in the Nag's Head in Helpringham, a few miles south-east of Sleaford. In the same Census, Clara Childs, aged 17, was a domestic servant living in Leveratt's Row in Ringstead with her parents, Robert and Mary Ann and her six siblings.

Soon after this Census William moved to Ringstead, probably to find work in the ironstone quarries of Northamptonshire. On 25th December 1883, he married Clara Ann and by 1891 William aged 30, and Clara, aged 27, were living in Carlow Street with their two children Harry, four, and Marge, one. William was working as a labourer in a local quarry.

In the 1901 Census William was still working in a local quarry but eldest son, Harry, now 14, was a "shoemaker" although this probably exaggerated his role. Besides Margie there were now three more children, Bertie (Bertram Frank) aged 9, William aged 7 and Kathleen – Mary Katherine aged 3. By 1911 there were three more children, Florence, Olive Frances and Gladys. The Census also shows that Clara has had 12 children four of whom had died.

The oldest son still at home, Bertram Frank (19), was a farm labourer, and William (17), born on 25th March 1894 had become a porter on the railway.



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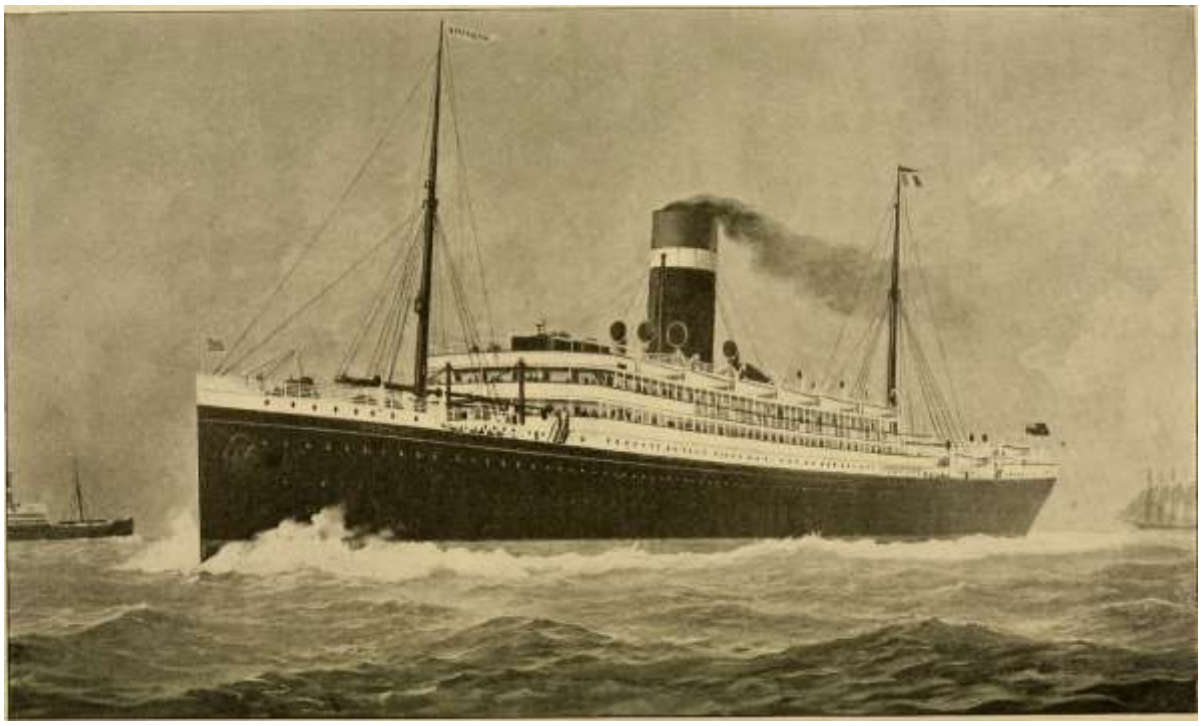
Northampton Mercury 3rd February 1911
www.britishnewspaperarchives.co.uk

At this time there were many advertisements in the local and national newspapers encouraging people to emigrate to Canada. There were also very well attended lectures, on the benefits of the new land, by representatives of the western Canadian states. Agents for the assisted travel were in towns like Northampton. In 1913, 158,398 people emigrated to Canada and from 1912 to the start of the Great War, the number was over a million.

One of these emigrants was Bertram Frank Sibley, William's older brother. He took one of the subsidised tickets on offer from the Government and the promise of free land and sailed in "Steerage" on the *S.S. Southwark*, arriving in Montreal on 4th May 1911. He was bound for Alberta and Saskatchewan. It was the end of *Southwark*'s career because she was scrapped in that same year.

Bertie became established in Hacke in Alberta. The settlement was named after William Hacke who was appointed postmaster of the post office there on 1st June 1914. We can imagine a small number of strung out homesteads with the post office becoming the point of reference to enable mail to arrive once a week from Magrath. It was not a village in the same way as Ringstead with shops and houses, church and chapels huddled together. Hacke later became known as Twin River.



RMS Victorian
Cassier's Magazine 1904 (Wikimedia Commons)

He would have written back to his family telling of his good fortune and William decided to also try his luck in the New World. He left Liverpool on the 16th July 1913 on the *RMS Victorian,* travelling Third Class. It was the first large civilian ship propelled by steam turbines and had been launched in 1904. In these large ocean liners 3rd class cabins had replaced the public dormitory conditions of "Steerage".

The family believe that the two brothers had been granted 50 acres of land each and that men with 75 acres were not conscripted. They tossed a coin to see who would have both lots. William lost and joined the army. The problem is that William volunteered before conscription and it seems that the two men lived some distance apart. This does not mean that these events did not happen in some form.

War came to Europe in July 1914, and the attitude in Canada to the conflict was very mixed. At first, large numbers of men volunteered, so that in the first two years 300,000 men signed up from a population of about eight million. By 1916 the terrible toll of soldier's lives meant many new recruits were needed but few came forward. Conscription was mooted but the French-Canadian population, particularly were opposed to it and there were riots in Quebec. Nevertheless, on 29th August 1917, it was introduced for all male citizens between 20 and 45 years old. It was evaded by many and most claimed exemptions of some kind so that the first conscripts did not reach Europe until 1918.

William Sibley
With thanks to Fay Hardwick

William, however, was a volunteer. He attested at Cardston on April 20th 1916 and was enlisted in the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR but sometimes copied as OMR) and given Regimental Number 228244. At the time he was farming in Mountain View in Alberta,

which was a hamlet some sixteen miles west of Cardston and sixty-five miles south-west of Twin River. Mountain View had originally been called Fish Creek and had been founded by the Church of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in 1890. In 2016 it had a population of ninety people. At enlistment, William's occupation was shown as "farmer" so it seems likely that, like his brother he did have a land grant from the Government.

We know that the Sibleys were Wesleyan and William had been a member of the Bible Class in the local chapel. From his *Attestation Paper* we can see that he had converted to the Mormon faith which was a popular sect in southern Alberta and had a large church built in Cardston.

William was 5ft 6 inches tall with a 34½ inch chest. He had a fair complexion with light brown hair and blue eyes. The *Attestation Paper* used in Canada was a little different to the one used in Great Britain. The recruits agreed:

> *To serve in the Canadian's Over-Seas Expeditionary Force and to be attached to any arm of the service therein, for the term of one year, or during the war now existing between Great Britain and Germany should that war last longer than one year, and for six months after the termination of that war provided His Majesty should so long require any services, or until legally discharged.*

William embarked in Canada on the *RMS Olympic* on 28th June 1916 and disembarked in England on 4th July. *Olympic* was the older sister of the ill-fated *RMS Titanic* and she could take nearly 6000 troops on each sailing.

At first, he was sent to the Canadian Cavalry Depot (CCD) and became, briefly, part of the Fort Gary Horse Reserve Regiment at Shorncliffe. The reserve provided officers and men for the Regiment on the Western Front. These barracks had first been chosen when the British volunteer battalions had vacated them. The first Canadian troops had been housed in tents on Salisbury Plain and had suffered many illnesses and deaths. As a result later Canadians went into quarantine barracks on Dibgate Plain for 28 days on arriving. Did he get a chance to visit his family in Ringstead before he left for France?

On the 27th September 1916 he was taken on the strength of the 11th Battalion at Shorncliffe and from there he was sent overseas on the 13th October 1916. He would have been marched with his fellow soldiers, from the barracks, the few miles to Folkestone to board the troopships. On the 31stOctober he joined the 8th Battalion in the field.

There is some confusion about the naming of the 8th Battalion and it is sometimes called the 8th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Manitoba Regiment). Certainly, he was in the 8th Battalion which had been in France from 13th February 1915 joining the 1st Canadian Division of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade.

William joined the 8th after they had endured heavy action at the Battle of Ancre Heights in the last actions at the end of the long, bloody campaign 1916 known as The Battle of the Somme. He was one of 262 Other Ranks who joined on the 31st October. On 1st November the Battalion moved billets from Bonneville, finally reaching a relief campsite in the Bethonval Sector some 30 miles north before going up to the Front Line. Intermittent

fighting continued before they moved back into billets in Chateau Cauvet at Gouy Servins. The *War Diary* reported:

> . . . hot tea for all on arrival, this is immensely enjoyed by all after the march out.

Amid all the death and terrible living conditions the small things held more importance. On the 20th of the next month the Diary states:

> *A Drying Room for rubber boots is in the trenches close to the Bttn Headquarters, a great boon.*

They moved on to a rest area at Bruay (Bruay-la-Buissière), six miles south-west of Bethune, where they remained for a month, with lectures such as "Christianity and War" in the Grand Theatre. The *War Diary* on the 23rd records:

> *British Columbians meet at Battalion H.Q. to vote on the question of WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE AND PROHIBITION.*

In 1917 some women in British Colombia did get the vote.

On the 13th December 1916 William was admitted to the Canadian No.1 Field Ambulance, (which was a mobile front-line medical unit not a vehicle), with an infected eye and discharged three days later

On 24th January 1917, the Battalion moved to Brigade Support at Bully Grenay where they remained during February. It was very cold and frosty with intermittent bombardments and raiding parties. On March 2nd 1917 they moved to Ecoivres and up into the line. It continued comparatively quiet. On March 17th the Diary has the entry:

> *One of our planes brought down in Afternoon by a German Plane known as the "Red Fellow" who appeared to have a remarkable speed.*

This was probably Manfred von Richthofen, usually known as the "Red Baron", who was the scourge of the British pilots. He was eventually shot down and killed near Vaux-sur-Somme on the 21st April 1918.

April 1917 saw the Canadians involved in the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the two Battles of the Scarpe. The 8th Battalion was not one of the lead battalions in these battles but during this time in the first half of April they still lost 19 men killed and 90 wounded. After the battle they rested up in the Douai Tunnels.

On 26th April they moved up into the Front Line in Brigade Support at Farbus Wood in the Battle of Arleux. During early 1917, the Germans carried out a planned retreat to the line of fortifications that they had been building which became known by the Allies as the Hindenburg Line.

During May and June, the 8th Battalion moved to Haillcourt and into the old British Front Line trenches at St Vaast. The Germans were still moving back but the Canadians found that the enemy trenches were still heavily defended. On July 1st they were based in the Railway Area of Vimy Ridge.

On July 16th 1917, the Battalion was instructed to move their camp forward from Fosse to Hersin, ready to move up to the Front Line. During the night of 20th/21st July they relieved the 5th Battalion in the trenches. The changeover was a dangerous operation, with the German artillery shelling the Canadian lines intermittently during the night. William was one of three men who never made it to the Front Line but were killed during this transition on 21st July. A soldier, who knew William, was reported in the *Rushden Argus* in August as saying that he had been killed instantly by shrapnel from a shell.

He was twenty-three years old and was buried in Loos British Cemetery near where he fell. This cemetery was begun by the Canadian in July 1917 and, after the Armistice, was filled up with the graves of men from battlefields all around the village of Loos. He is recorded in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and on the War Memorial as well as on The Canadian Virtual War Memorial. His British War and Victory Medal, and his Memorial Scroll were sent to his mother in 1920.

Before he left Canada, like most soldiers, he made a Will in case of his death in action. His brother, Bertram was one of his trustees. We see from the Will that William grazed cattle on his small farm. He had bequeathed his property to his mother in England. This consisted of:

> *One Red Cow & Calf Branded KS Left Ribs, Calf Branded on Right Ribs, Four Yearing [sic] Heifers Branded KS Right Ribs, One Yearing Holstein Heifer Branded Left Thigh, One Steer Calf Branded KS Right Ribs and all other property accruing from the other said property.*

He also gave to his brother and J.S. Parker, as his trustees, all his estate and effects although it is not clear exactly what this means.

In Canada, his brother, Bert, had been granted his homestead at Hacke on 9th August 1915. In 1918 he married Pauline (or Paulina) Elvira Lewis at Cardston when she was only seventeen years old. Her parents, Jesse Jerome and Elvina (née Fredericksen) Lewis, also had obtained a homestead in Hacke in 1913. The couple may have been of Norwegian origin although this would have been some time back in their family's history.

Bertram and Pauline had eight children. The second oldest, Floyd, became a ranch hand in Montana. In the 1921 Census Bertram was 30 and Paulina was 19 years old and they already had two children, Stanley (2) and Roy (6 months). It appears that on 16th October 1928 Bertram was granted further land. From 1951 to 1965 Pauline ran the Twin River Post Office. Bertram died on 26th February 1974 and Pauline in 1985. Both are buried in Milk River Cemetery.

Back in England, William and Bertram's father, William, died in 1932 and after a ceremony in the Wesleyan Chapel, he was buried in Ringstead Cemetery with most of his family still around him. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, Clara was still living in Carlow Street with her unmarried daughters, Florence and Gladys. She died, aged 85, in 1949.

Chapter 15

George Slack (1870-1942)

We have come across the Slack family before, when we told the story of the Dainty brothers. Walter and Charles. The two families interlink, moving between the counties of Yorkshire and Northamptonshire. The Dainty family had originally come from Titchmarsh but George William had moved north to Brightside Bierlow, near Sheffield where he had married Sarah Ann Schofield. He had been working as a stone quarryman and in the early 1900s they had moved back to Northamptonshire, living in Thrapston but still working as a quarryman. His father, William who had also moved north, had remained in Sheffield.

One of the children of George and Sarah was Jane Elizabeth Dainty and, aged 22, in the 1891 Census she was a domestic servant for Thomas Garbutt. He was a sixty-six-year-old Turkish Bath Proprietor, living at 8 Armstead Road in Attercliffe. Later that year she married George Slack. George had been born in Wirksworth in Derbyshire on 4th May 1870.

In the 1911 Census, we see that twelve children had followed, of whom eight survived childhood. When we look at their birth places, we see that they had moved around the south Yorkshire area, from Grimethorpe to Darnell and Masbrough. We also see that two of the children Rose (Titchmarsh) and Arthur (Woodford) had been born in Northamptonshire so probably the family had moved south for a few years before returning to Yorkshire. The family were living at 73 Titterton Street in Attercliffe with seven of their children, Ernest Edward (17), Lily (12), Beatrice (11), Willis (10), Rose (8), Arthur (5) and Bernard (2), and Jane's elderly parents, William and Maria Dainty. William Dainty is shown as blind and he was killed in a tramcar incident soon after the Census.

At some point in the next few years George and Jane Elizabeth moved back to Ringstead and certainly, by 1918, they were living there.

Two of their sons joined the services. Their eldest son, George William Slack, had left home in 1911 and was boarding in Attercliffe and working as a miner in a colliery. The following year he joined the Royal Navy and served throughout the war. The second eldest son, Ernest Edward, was still living with his parents in 1911 and, aged seventeen, he was working as a pony driver at a colliery. He seems to have been into mischief as a young man for, in 1913, he was in Wakefield Prison accused of stealing a jacket on 28th March 1912 and the following year of trying to obtain money with a forged document. He had been "received into custody" on 11th July 1913 but, when tried, he was found not guilty and discharged.

Ernest may have first enlisted in 1912 with the 4th (Hallamshire) Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment but was then (it seems) transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers. It may be that he was discharged when accused of the crimes and then re-enlisted at the start of the war. I have not managed to sort out his army career. By December 1914 he was home on sick leave and on December 18th he was staying in Ringstead with his aunt, Sarah Ann Dainty. While there, he stole a ten-shilling money order from her, which he used, first to buy a pint of beer and some bread, and cheese at the *Red Lion Inn* in Raunds. He was tried,

found guilty, and sentenced to one month's prison with hard labour. Was it preferable to the army?

If we return to George Slack, the father, most of his military records have been lost but we know from his pension card that after the war he was living in Chapel Lane in Ringstead and this is confirmed by the 1918 Register of Electors. The card has his date of birth as 1873 and there may have been a reason for this discrepancy. Until April 1918 the official upper age limit for enlistment was 41 and George would have been nearer 45 years old. Nevertheless, we can find other men in the 270th who were older than George.

He enlisted as a Pioneer in the 270th Railway Labour Company of the Royal Engineers. The Pioneer rank or appointment was used in a number of ways but here it probably denotes a labourer working for the Sappers who were the more skilled men. His medal card has him entering a war zone on 25th November 1915. The list of Railway Companies on the *Long Long Trail* website has the 270th in Egypt and it may be that after being formed in Cheltenham, they first sailed to Egypt before moving on to Salonika (sometimes Salonica). A man from Leeds in Yorkshire wrote to his brother, Frank Hayes, of his experiences with the Royal Engineers. In his letter, published in the *Leeds Mercury* on the 7th February 1916, he wrote:

> *My stay in Egypt was a fine experience. We had late passes in Alexandria nearly every night, and we had some good fun.*
>
> *In Egypt we had not much work to do; we were generally done by one o'clock in the afternoon, and it was too hot for parade. At four o'clock went into the sea to have a dip. I can tell you I enjoyed it. We were to have gone to the Pyramids at Cairo, but it did not come off, as we left the country so soon. I was very sorry. . .*
>
> *[In Salonika]. We have moved up now nearer to our work, and at night, when all the ships light up, and with the mountains behind, it is indeed, a grand sight. We generally find time to have a song and a bit of chat. Some begin talking about home, and what everyone will be doing in their respective homes. In that way we always put a good night in when the letters and parcels come. We always tell each other what is going on at home. We have a tent full of good company. Parcels are always shared round.*

The initial campaign against the Bulgarians by the Allies had been a chastening experience and they retreated back to Salonika to lick their wounds. The Royal Engineers would have been working around Salonika building defences and stringing barbed wire, giving the city the nickname, "The Birdcage". In 1916 the Allies took over control of the railways from the Greek government. Railheads were established, allowing them to have headquarters "up country". A large marshalling yard was constructed at Dudular near Salonika to allow the fast movement of stores away from the congested port to secure places where they could be sorted and protected. There was also the construction of several narrow-gauge light railways to help the supply of troops to the front lines.

The Balkans campaign, although often ignored in commemorations, had many British casualties. It was also a very unhealthy place, especially for troops unused to the conditions. It often had hot humid weather but could also be very cold. The areas to the north of Salonika were marshy and Malaria was endemic. It was hard work in these conditions for the men in the 270th who were often middle aged, the younger fitter men being taken for the fighting units. Sickness was prevalent and we see from the sickness forms that some of these older men also succumbed to rheumatism. One Royal Engineer humorously described the conditions in Salonika in a piece published in the *Bath Chronicle* in 1917.

The Macedonian Health Resort

Bright! Briny! Breezy! Balkans!
(For the holidays)
ATTRACTIONS
A war held daily (Wednesday early closing day).
Aeroplane and artillery exhibitions (no extra charge for night stunts).
No railway – but Shanks's pony to all parts.
Big Game Hunting
Bulgars, Turks, snakes, mules, mosquitoes, wild dogs, flies, ants, creepers, crawlers, and jumpers of all species.
Fishing
All kinds of fever caught every day.
Mails
Delivered daily (one a month) unless otherwise disposed of
Bathing
Mixed, six or seven to every bucket.
Miles and miles from civilisation and from the influences and flirtations of the fair sex.
Temperature
Boiling point guaranteed. "Hotel Berrypole" not five minutes from the front.*
Menu
Biscuits or bread (G.S. mark cut) with bully beef or meat (fresh), jam issue, marmalade (every day sometimes), wine list, quinine nightly.
Our Motto – "Wot Opes"

- *Does this refer to a cemetery with wooden markers on the graves or to tent poles?*

Like many other, George did not last long in these gruelling conditions. He was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis and on 18th October 1916 and was discharged from the army. He returned home and was awarded a Silver War Badge so that he could not be accused of shirking his duty by the White Feather brigade. He was awarded the 1915 Star as well as the British War and Victory Medals.

As we have said, he is shown in the 1918 *Register of Electors*, living in Chapel Lane in Ringstead and the *Electoral Registers* record that he and Jane were still living there in 1931, with, as they too had reached voting age (21), their sons, Arthur, Willis and Bernard being also recorded in the village.

George Slack on the right
With thanks to Jon Abbott

It seems likely that he continued labouring despite his arthritis and the *1939 Register of England & Wales has* the couple, with unmarried son, Bernard, still living in Number One, Chapel Lane. George is shown as a "General Labourer, Retired", for he was nearing seventy years old. He died early in 1942, aged 71. Jane Elizabeth Slack lived to be 88 years old and died in 1958.

Chapter 16

George Stanley Smart (1884-1917)

A Henry Smart had been born in Raunds in about 1814. He married Mary Ann Litchfield of Rushden in the Rushden Parish Church on June 4th 1838. Henry was a shoemaker and both the couple's fathers were also in the shoe trade. Henry, however, changed his occupation and by 1851 the couple were living in Newton Bromswold, just three miles south-east of Rushden, and seven miles south of Raunds.

Henry was now a publican and grocer at the *Swan Inn* and Mary Ann was working at home as a dressmaker. Over the last decades we have seen the closure of many village pubs and it is worth remembering that, even in the Nineteenth Century, many needed at least a second income to survive. It is also likely that Mary Ann took an important part in the running of the business.

Among the couple's children was Charles William Henry Smart who was baptised on April 2nd 1858 in Newton Bromswold.

On 24th 1862 Henry Smart appeared, at the Old Bailey in London, charged with trying to sell "a large quantity of beef unfit for human food". From the court case we gather that Henry only had a couple of cows. Fortunately for Henry the cow was "thin" and poor-quality meat but not diseased or unfit for human consumption. He was therefore acquitted.

By 1881, Mary Ann was temporarily apart from her husband and she was in Rushden High Street with her son, Charles. He was twenty-three years old and shown as a farmer of 155 acres, employing two men and two boys. His father, Henry was still in Newton Bromswold living with his daughter Mary and her farmer husband. It appeared that the fortunes of the family were on the way up.

Later in that Census year, Charles married Maria Reynolds, on the 18th October in Pertenhall. By the 1891 Census he was still shown as a farmer living in Rushden High Street with Maria and their three children, George, (7), Florence (6) and Harry (1). Living with them was William Bailey, aged 18, an "Agricultural Servant" from Ringstead. Their son, George Stanley Smart, who is the subject of this biography had been baptised on March 2nd 1884.

It seems that the family's circumstances waned because, by the 1901 Census, they were living at 5 Sivers Buildings in Ringstead. These "buildings" were a row of fairly poor cottages with few amenities. Charles, aged 42, had become a cattle stockman working on someone else's farm. George, aged seventeen, was a boot and shoe maker.

By 1911 Charles, aged 53, was shown as a labourer on a farm and both George, aged 27, and his younger brother, Harry, were army shoemakers, but "out of work". In 1914 the Great War was to bring work again to the army boot and shoe makers but in 1916 it also brought conscription which took many of the sons of the village.

George attested with the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the weeks after 27th June 1916 and given Regimental Number 19334. After that, the dates are more problematic. He was probably transferred with a large group of his fellow soldiers to the Machine Gun Corps between the 14th and 16th September 1916 and given new number, 57027. They all would all have been sent on a six-week gunnery course at either Belton Park near Grantham or Clipstone Camp near Mansfield. Once this had been completed George would have been posted as soon as possible to France, to arrive by mid-November, at the Machine Gun Depot at Camiers. This was part of the vast Étaples Base Depot of the British Army.

A rather poor picture of George Smart from the Rushden Argus
but showing the MGC badge quite clearly
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

From Camiers the men would have been sent to whichever Machine Gun Company most urgently needed their services. For the Corps the manning of the units was far more fluid than for the Regiments for the guns needed to be at constant full strength.

When George joined the 8th Company of the Machine Gun Corps it was in the closing stages of the Somme campaign They were in action there, in the Battle of Ancre, from the 13th to the 18th November.

In early 1917 they had moved to the Arras area and fought in the Battles of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux. The Company then moved north into Flanders and were in action again in the Battle of Menin Road Ridge (20-25th September).

At this point the picture is a little confusing. Graham Sacker, on whose research much of the account of George's military career is based on, admitted in his e-mail to me:

> *As a researcher and port of call for enquiries about the fate of MGC soldiers, this is one case I would hope never to be called upon to explain!*
>
> *There are obviously some serious issues with the official version of events surrounding the death of George Smart.*

Simply put, there seems to have been a confusion of Company and, more importantly, of place. When one considers the tens of thousands of men and the huge number of military units involved, organised on a system based on index cards, it is surprising that there were not more mistakes. One must also add into the mix, the often terrible, chaotic conditions under which field reports had to be written or typed. With the rider, that some things cannot be stated with absolute certainly, Graham Sacker did manage to bring some clarity to the confusion.

It seems likely that the "5th Company" in George's records is an error and he was with the 8th Machine Gun Company throughout this time and certainly at the time of his death. We

know from the *War Diary* that George Smart was named as part of "D" Section of the 8th Company on the 18th May 1917.

Following the Battle of Menin Road Ridge, the 8th were fighting, as part of the Flanders Offensive, in the Battle of Polygon Wood from the 26th to the 30th October 1917. "D" Company, which, as we have seen, George was part of earlier in the year was initially in reserve but was called forward and the War Diary records:

> *. . . the 4 guns of D Section were sent up at 9.30 am to consolidate, 2 guns being directed to Hill 40 + 2 guns to Leys [?] Cottage. The Section were much delayed by sniping and the Section Officer and several men became casualties on the way up. On finally arriving at the front line, there were only sufficient men and ammunition to service two guns; the guns were therefore sited in pairs [?] in shell holes, on the ridge between the WINDMILL CAB and the Railway Station.*
>
> *At about 6.30 pm, while the teams were engaged in digging emplacements the enemy delivered a counter-attack. One gun came into action and fired a few bursts, but the line was forced back a little distance, and as the teams were reduced in numbers, the guns could not be got away and were lost.*

The D Section suffered significant casualties during this opening phase of the battle, including one man killed, twenty wounded, thirteen gassed, one sick and four missing. George was one of these casualties.

It seems likely that he was one of the "four missing" for in the War Office Daily List 5412 of the 9th November 1917 he was reported as such. It was not until the 25th January 1918, in the Daily List (5475), that he was shown as:

> "Previously reported missing, now reported killed"

Finally, it was clarified that he had been killed on the 26th September 1917. Unfortunately, it was also recorded that he was in the 5th Company and, later, he was commemorated on the Jerusalem Memorial (Panel 54 Upper). It seems certain that both of these "facts" are wrong. The correct version of events was recorded in the *Army Register of Soldiers' Effects* which show that he was killed in action in France or Belgium and was with the 8th Company of the Machine Gun Corps.

It must have been an agonising wait for his parents, Charles and Maria, having some initial hope that he might have survived, but finally being informed of his death. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

His mother, Maria, was awarded a dependant's pension of four shillings a week (20 new pence) on the 4th June 1918. George's name was inscribed on the Ringstead War Memorial which was erected in the churchyard in 1924.

Chapter 17

Sydney William Smith (1897-1947)

Although village populations were more settled in the past, it would be a mistake to believe that they were completely static. In the biographies of various Ringstead people we have seen emigration to the rest of the world as well as movement, in and out, from all over the British Isles. Mostly, however, this migration was comparatively local as men, for the most part, followed the work. As a result, there was a steady influx of newcomers into the village.

John Smith was one of these incomers. He had been born in about 1864, in Harpole in the west of the county. On 4th August 1890 he married Annie Hephzibah Barrs in Ringstead Parish Church. Annie's father, James, although he appears as Charles in the 1871 Census, was also an incomer from Spaldwick in Huntingdonshire. He had married a local woman but had been living in Holbeach in Lincolnshire, when he married Elizabeth Saddington in Raunds on August 10th 1856.

John Smith became a shoe riveter and, in the 1901 Census, the newly married couple were in Irthlingborough High Street. Living with them were their children, Esther and Sidney, born in Harpole and John, four months old and born in Irthlingborough. By 1911 they had moved to Ringstead where John was a boot laster. They were living in Carlow with children Hester (Esther) 18, a boot heel builder, Sydney William (14) an errand boy, and John Arthur (10) who was still at school. Living with them was Annie's father, James Barrs who was a seventy-eight-year-old widower but still recorded as a farm labourer.

Sydney William Smith
With thanks to Heidi Smith

It is Sydney William (sometimes shown as Sidney), born on 3rd February 1897, who the Fates had chosen to be male and of the right age to go to war.

Very few of Sydney's military records have survived the Second World War German bombing raid, but we do know that he joined the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and at some point, was given the Regimental Number 200638. This was a Territorial Battalion originally formed in 1908. The minimum age of enlistment for the Territorials was seventeen and, with the help of the experts of the Great War Forum, it seems that he joined up in October or early November 1914. These units were made up of part-time soldiers who, after an initial training period, would have an annual camp. They were designed for home defence in case of war but the Regular Army, who made up the first British Expeditionary Force, suffered such unexpectedly high casualties that replacement soldiers were needed almost immediately. Most of the territorials signed up for overseas service and, although, at first looked down upon by the regulars, they soon became an essential part of the wartime army.

The official age for overseas service was nineteen so Sydney would not have been considered for overseas service until his birthday on 3rd February 1916. It seems likely that sometime in the months after this date he was sent abroad to join the Battalion.

The 4th had been at Gallipoli but moved to Egypt as part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. In February and March 1916, they were at Mena Camp near Cairo. New drafts from other Regiments as well as from home brought them back up to strength after their losses. It is possible that Sydney joined the 4ths at this point as part of the 162nd Brigade of the 54th (East Anglian) Division. The Battalion, however, suffered many casualties over the next six months and there were further drafts brought in as replacements.

Part of Mena Camp, Cairo (Australian War Museum P00152.022)

In April 1916, the Division moved to the Suez Canal. The Northamptonshires marched into the desert and manned the defence posts at Darb el Haj, Halfway House and the Kubri Railhead. They remained there throughout the rest of 1916, improving the defences and

sometimes forming part of the columns that marched into the hills leading to small skirmishes with enemy troops.

It was blisteringly hot with the May temperatures reaching 122 degrees Fahrenheit (50 Celsius) in the tents. This almost unbearable heat was only relieved by rest periods in Alexandria.

In January 1917 the 4th were in camp before entraining at Kantara (El Qantara). They then marched across the Sinai Peninsula and prepared to move into Palestine. Although unopposed, the Battalion had to endure some sixteen days marching, to Bela, south-west of Gaza, which was the objective. On March 26th there was a general advance on Gaza, held by the Ottoman (Turkish) troops, with the 4th in trenches along the Gaza Road. Suddenly it was realised that the Turks were advancing and the Northamptonshires were in grave danger of being cut off by the enemy. They had to retreat across a country without roads, trees or landmarks to rejoin the safety of the rest of the Brigade. What became known as the First Battle of Gaza was over, ending in an ignominious retreat. For three weeks then, the whole Division held their line awaiting orders.

On April 17th 1917 the Second Battle of Gaza began with the Northamptonshires in support. By the 19th they were in the Front Line but, in a battleground devoid of trees and covered in barley only nine inches high, they were totally exposed to enemy fire and some 80% of the Battalion were casualties. When dusk fell, they were forced to retire to some shallow trenches dug a thousand yards back from their original positions. When the position was finally taken in November the dead were found lying on the Turkish parapet.

There followed a comparatively quiet period, during which the Battalion was, once again, built up to strength. Another attack was launched, this time from Beersheba to the sea, with the Northamptonshires in the coastal section. At first there was some success although the tanks, which it was hoped would play an important part in the attack, mostly broke down. Then the Turks counter-attacked and forced the Allies to withdraw. The Northamptonshires lost five officers killed and three wounded and 45 Other Ranks killed, 129 wounded and 33 missing. During the retreat most of the badly wounded soldiers had to be left to their fates.

There had been some success on the Beersheba flank of the attack and the Turks had been forced to withdraw along the whole front. The 4th held part of this new line at Wilhelma which was a German colony so the inhabitants, rather worryingly, wore German hats and spoke German.

On November 27th1917, the Turks advanced, dug into their positions and started shelling the Allied line. The Turkish troops then launched an attack but, as so often in this war, the defenders were at an advantage and the enemy was repulsed, suffering many casualties. There were two further attacks and the second one did make some headway, threatening the Allies' position. A counter-attack stabilised the line and the threat was averted. The Northamptonshires suffered badly again with 69 men wounded and 20 killed.

The Battalion was then relieved and moved back out of the line. Its next action was on December 22nd 1917 with an advance on Ras-el-Ain in which they encountered little

opposition. Heavy rains set in, stopping any further significant action, and they camped in the neighbourhood of Mulebbis.

On 12th March 1918 the 4th were part of an advance to near Mejdel Yarba, by the River Jordan and there followed a period of desultory trench warfare. At one point the Division was ordered to proceed to France but, after packing up and travelling to Kantara by train, the order was cancelled and they returned to the Palestine force.

On September19th the final attack began, but in very hot conditions, and with little drinking water available, it was an exhausting march for Sydney and his fellow soldiers and, again, they suffered badly, with 75 casualties. The Turks, however, like the Germans on the Western Front, were now broken and they retreated in disorder. The fighting for the infantry in the area was over. They marched through Haifa, Acre and Ras el Ain to Beirut. On the day of their arrival there, the Armistice with Turkey was signed. On December 4th1918, the Battalion embarked at Beirut and travelled by sea and rail to Helmich, outside Cairo.

The men must have thought that at last their fighting was over but the Egyptians wanted the British out of their country and 1919 began with Independence riots which the Northamptonshires had to suppress. Order was restored and, finally, demobilisation began.

Sydney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in Spring 1919 but he was missing from the Autumn list so was obviously back home with his family in Carlow. We also see him in the early 1920s in the *Electoral Rolls* with his parents, John and Annie. In late 1926 Sydney married Annie Redhead. Annie had been born on 10th April 1901 in Peterborough, the daughter of John and Bertha. They had been living in 1911 in 9 Gladstone Cottages in Water End in the Woodston area of Peterborough. We see in the various Censuses that John had worked as a coal porter on the barges and in 1939 was a Coal Wharf Foreman.

We cannot be sure of Sydney's work after his demobilisation but in the *1939 Register of England & Wales* his occupation, which is something of a scribble, looks like a "Chrome Calf Tanner – Pit and Lime Worker". He would have worked in a local tannery, probably in the Wellington Works in Raunds, preparing the hides for tanning. The lime pit was the first process where the hides were de-haired and cleaned before the tanning began.

Sydney and Annie had three children, Edith Margaret Annie (Peggy) born on 14th February 1927, Jean Elizabeth, born on 11th June 1928 and Sydney William on 14th November 1931. Sydney, the youngest child has written a fascinating account of his childhood in Ringstead. He tells how the family lived in Leveratt's Row which was a terrace of six two-bedroomed cottages in Carlow. During his childhood in the 1930s they had no electricity, running water or indoor toilets. The bucket toilets were a little distance from the end of the terrace and had to be emptied regularly into a hole dug into the garden. This was far from uncommon in the village at this time.

Soon after the war Council Houses were built in the High Street with, as Sydney the son recalled, bathrooms, electricity and hot and cold water. Homes fit for heroes! Unfortunately, one reason for the family being allocated a house was, besides the

overcrowding, Sydney's illness. Sydney William, the subject of our story, died suddenly, on 30th March 1947 when he was fifty years old but Annie lived until 1981.

Leveratt's Row just before demolition in the 1970s

Chapter 18

The Other Smith Families

There were other Smith men who were in the army in the First World War who were not related to Sydney William and did not appear on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. They had left the village before the war but we will include them briefly in our life stories.

The lines of these other Smiths all lead back to William and Sarah and their two sons, George born in 1848 and William born two years later.

We will start with Frank, the child of George.

Frank Smith (1873-1942)

George Smith married Susan Ager on May 2nd 1870 when they were both living in Northampton. George was working as a shoemaker there but, by 1871, the couple were back in Ringstead, living in Shop Street with their eight-month old daughter, Lily. We see that Susan was originally from Grafton Underwood. They were still in Ringstead in the 1881 Census and now had five children. Sadly, Lily was not with them because she had died and had been buried in the churchyard on February 2nd 1872.

One of these children was Frank Smith, born on 8th August 1873, and it is his story that we will be following. By 1891 Frank was seventeen years old and working as a shoemaker, like his father. Another ten years went by and the family had moved to 47 Victoria Place in Rushden. But Frank had left home.

We can see from his later military records that Frank had joined the Regular Army a year after the 1891 Census, on the 9th April 1892. He first enlisted in the Northamptonshire Regiment and would have sailed with the 1st Battalion when they left for India on 5th October 1892. We know that the 1st Battalion was stationed first at Bangalore and then in 1897 moved through Secunderbad (now part of Hyderabad), some 356 miles due north. It continued on a further 900 miles north to Tirah in June of that year before returning in April 1898 to Secunderbad.

It was at this time that Northamptonshires were part of the Tirah Campaign against the feared hill tribes of the North-West Frontier who were in revolt. The purpose of the campaign was to restore order but also to establish control of this area which posed a constant threat to British India. It was a difficult kind of war for the British army and it was the Gurkha and Sikh regiments who really understood the terrain and the type of warfare. They were often faced by guerrilla tactics, with small ambushes and skirmishes, in the often barren, mountainous country. In November, the Northamptonshires were trying to take a mountain crest known as Saran Sar, held by the enemy. The Regiment, with the 36th Sikhs, took the ridge with little opposition as, it transpired, the enemy had vanished into the hills. It was decided that the position could not be held, and a decision, widely criticised later, was made that the Northamptonshires should retire. The enemy fighters quickly reappeared and fired from overhanging crags onto the troops as they retreated down the steep ravine.

The *Northampton Mercury* reported, on the 12th November1897, that most of the casualties had occurred as the men tried to save the wounded and bring them to safety. One group was cut off and had to be left behind and their naked bodies were later found. It proved a disastrous day for the Regiment and the *Mercury* of the 19th November recorded the names of the dead and the wounded. Among the wounded was Private F Smith of Ringstead who was twenty-three years old.

1st Northamptonshire Regiment
London Illustrated News December1897

We do not know the exact nature of his wound but, judging by the total length of his service in India it seems that he recovered and did not return home.

In 1899 the Regiment were in Fyzabad, some eighty miles east of Lucknow. Finally, in 1902, it was posted to Dagshai, which was a hill station where Prisoners-of-War from the Boer War were kept for a time. We do not know if Frank was in this last posting for it was about this time that he completed his term of service and returned to England. He had served just over 11 years, of which ten years five months had been in India.

On his return to England, Frank was quick to re-enlist. In late 1903 or very early 1904 he joined the 3rd (Depot) Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment, based at the Fulwood Barracks near Preston, with Regimental Number 7882. While based there, he must have had

some home leave for, on December 28th 1907, aged 34, he married 21-year-old Ada Meadows in Rushden Parish Church.

He served ten years with his new regiment but on the 1st May 1913, aged 39, he was assessed by a doctor for his pension and discharge. Did his young wife assume that his army life was over? They moved to 32 Winsdon Road in Luton and he was possibly working as a professional musician. That was how he described his calling when he enlisted again with the 5th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment on the 5th May 1914. He gave, as his employers, Messrs Carruthers Brothers who were a large company producing straw and felt hats in Luton. Was he working with them as a musician or was he having to work in the factory while he found enough work as a musician?

He was given the Regimental Number 3547 and three months later was appointed a Lance Corporal. Four days after that he was promoted to full Corporal. Nevertheless, he was not destined to go to war. The 5th was a Territorial Battalion designed for home service, and he remained in England. After 206 days in the Bedfords he was examined and found medically unfit for further military service. It appears that he had varicose veins and had refused to have an operation to correct the condition.

After his discharge he returned to life at home in Winsdon Road. I have not found any children for the couple but the *Luton Reporter* of 28th June 1921 reported that Frank had been summoned and found guilty of having two dogs but only one licence. His defence was that he was going to get rid of one dog but his "boy" had persuaded him to keep it and he had forgotten about the licence. The couple therefore had at least one child. In the court case he had described himself again as a musician. By 1939 he was now a "Professional Musician – Unemployed". Fortunately, his wife, Ada, was working as a "Forelady in a Fancy Leather Goods Factory".

Frank died, aged 68, in the second quarter of 1942. Ada married again, just a year later, to widower George Bowles on 4th April 1943. He, too died, aged 72, in 1945. She then married finally, on 23rd February 1949, to John Stevenson. I think she may have died on 26th December 1954 in Surrey.

Richard Smith and his brothers

The other son of William and Sarah, also called William, was a Raunds shoemaker who, on September 14th 1876, married Ann (usually Annie) Ball of Ringstead. Annie was the sister of my great grandfather, John Ball and he married Susannah Phillips in Ringstead Parish Church on the same day.

Annie and William with their eleven sons and three daughters. The family are (from left) Back Row: Albert, William, Fred, Richard, Thomas, John. The two young boys standing in front of this row are Arthur and Walter. The older seated row are Sarah, William, Annie, Elizabeth and Eva. The three youngest boys seated in the front are Alfred, Sidney and Ernest. (Taken about 1903)
With thanks to Karen Wright

Two years later, on August 4th 1878, in Ringstead Church the Smiths had their three children, Sarah Ellen, Richard and Thomas all christened and John and Susan Ball had a son, George Henry christened. In 1886, tragedy was to befall the Ball household for John was killed by an earthfall in Peray Pit near Islip. The Smiths went on to have an exceptionally large family, even for those times. Annie gave birth to sixteen children, three of whom died before 1911.

I believe that fifteen of them (with approximate birth dates) were: Elizabeth Annie (1874); Sarah Ellen (1875); Richard (1876); Thomas (1878); John (1879); William (1881); Frederick (1883); Albert (1885); Eliza Emma (1886); Eva (1887); Walter (1889); Arthur (1890); Alfred (1893); Sidney (1896) and Ernest (1897). Even with one child missing, the dates seem impossible but Annie confirmed the number in the 1911 Census.

Annie and William must have dreaded the coming of war, with so many sons of an age likely to volunteer or be conscripted. Only the first four brothers were born in Ringstead before the family moved to Raunds and, of these, only Richard was conscripted. Thomas and John were not forced to serve by the Northamptonshire Military Tribunals and, I believe that,

William may have died in 1909. There were, in total, six other sons who fought and we will briefly describe their lives later but first we will look at Richard Smith.

Richard Smith (1876-1918)

Richard was the oldest son, born on the 24th November 1876, and christened with siblings Sarah Ellen and Thomas on the 4th August 1878. By 1891 the family were living in Sanders Gardens in Thorpe Road in Raunds. Richard was fourteen years old and working as a riveter in a shoe factory.

Like many young men, he was a keen footballer and played for Raunds Town around the turn of the century. In 1901 he was still at home, aged 24, and working as a shoemaker like his father. They were now living in Brook Street in Raunds. At the end of the following year, on Christmas Day 1902, he married Lucy Ellen Stanhope, (always known as Nell or Nellie), the daughter of John Stanhope, a shepherd, born in Lincolnshire.

At this time the local military boot industry was going through a difficult time, with factory-made boots undercutting the hand-sewn men and the piece work rates being reduced for government work. Richard was one of the 115 men selected from, the 300 volunteers from Raunds and Ringstead to march to London. The Raunds March in 1905 was an eighty-mile trek, led by James Gribble on military lines, to present the shoemakers case to the Government. The men were preceded by outrider cyclists who found food and lodgings for the men at various stops along the way, and a brass band, made up mainly from Ringstead men. All along the way they were cheered by crowds and interviewed by journalists. In London Gribble spoke to huge crowds in Trafalgar Square and they came triumphantly home. The Government did give some concessions but it was the First World War that gave the industry a temporary respite.

In the 1911 Census we see that Richard and Lucy had been married eight years and had four children, Harold (7), Fred (4), Albert (2) and Doris Jane (1). Richard was working in a local factory and they were living in "The Colony", the two facing terraces at the top of Marshalls Road. Richard was working for the *Regulation Boot Company* in Raunds. At some point after 1911 the family moved to 38 Albert Road in Kettering.

In 1912 and 1916 the couple had two further daughters. Richard was now forty with a large family but this did not protect him from eventual conscription. He was enlisted in the 9th Battalion of the Essex Regiment on 1st October 1917 and was given the Regimental Number 38537.

The 9th Battalion had first landed in Boulogne on 31st May 1915 and had taken part in the Battle of Loos and, the following year, in the Battles of Albert, Pozieres and Le Transloy. In 1917 they were around the Arras area and fought in the First and Third Battles of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux.

Richard in late 1917 or early 1918
With thanks to Karen Wright

Richard did not join the 9th Battalion on the Western Front until 1st February 1918. As we now know, 1918 was to be the decisive year of the war. The Germans were aware that the Americans would enter the war in increasing numbers and that their own resources were becoming exhausted. The German Supreme Command planned a great final assault to break through the Allied lines and push the British to the coast and trap them there. The "Kaiserschlacht", codenamed *Operation Michael*, was launched on 21st March 1918, between Cambrai, St Quentin and La Fère on the Somme battlefield. The British, taken by surprise, were outnumbered by the enemy, three to one, and were inevitably forced into rapid retreat. Great courage was shown, however, and the line was maintained and a major German breakthrough was narrowly averted.

The 9th Essex were at the First Battle of Bapaume (24-25th March) and the First Battle of Arras on the 28th March. It was a constant retreat as the enemy pushed relentlessly forward. The British were driven back to the outskirts of Amiens but that was the nearest the Germans came to taking the city. The line held there and the German army, exhausted and with supply lines stretched to breaking point, now ground to a halt. The pendulum swung back and they were suddenly giving ground and trying to maintain an orderly retreat until the Armistice, on 11th November 1918, ended the most terrible war in history.

Richard did not live to see this final victory for, in the defence of Amiens, he was "killed in action" on the 5th April 1918. (The Commonwealth Graves Commission's website has the 7th April.) His death was reported in the *Weekly Casualty List* on Tuesday 14th May. He was buried some five miles south-west of Albert in the Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension with the epitaph "Rest in Peace". Richard had been at the Front for little more than two

months. He was later put on the Kettering and Raunds' War Memorials but is not on the Ringstead Memorial, the place of his birth.

Lucy, (Richard's widow) with her six children (1920s)
With thanks to Karen Wright

Lucy was a widow with six children aged between two and fifteen. She received an initial grant of £5 paid on the 25th April 1918 and then a widow's pension of £1 6s 8d and a children's allowance of £1 5s 6d giving a weekly total of £3 2s 2d.

It would have been a hard time for her and the family but she did not re-marry. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* she was living at 90 Stamford Road in Kettering and running a small greengrocer's shop with daughter Kathleen helping in the house. [Her granddaughter, Karen Wright believes that the Census collector has mixed up the two women's occupations and it was Kathleen who worked in a Co-op grocery in Stamford Road]. She moved to Wellingborough with Kath, her youngest daughter in 1951. In her later years she suffered

from Rheumatoid Arthritis and died in the Park Hospital in Wellingborough on 27th December 1958, aged 78.

The rest of the Smith men, after John (Jack), had all been born in Raunds but because of the connections to Annie we will briefly record their lives.

Albert Smith (1885-1942)

Albert was born on the 15th August 1885 and, in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses, we see that he is with his family and working as a shoemaker after he left school. When he was twenty-two years old, he decided that he would try his luck in the New World. He sailed from Liverpool and arrived in New York on 20th October 1907. His final destination was Buffalo, a city of some 400,000 people, in New York State. It is on the eastern shores of Lake Erie, sixteen miles south of the Niagara Falls. Buffalo is also only a few miles from the Canadian border.

It appears that he did not marry and was possibly staying with his Aunt Sarah who lived at 343 New Abbey Street in Buffalo. I think that she may be have been the wife of Walter Smith who was born in Raunds in about 1862 but had lived in Buffalo for many years. Walter seems to have continued to work as a shoemaker in his own shop.

Canadian Wartime Recruiting Poster (©CWM 1994001-300)

On February 25th 1918 he crossed the border into Toronto in Canada and attested with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). He was now 32 years 7 months old and was five feet

five inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He had an appendix scar and his left hand had been stiffened as the result of a burn. He became a gunner with the 69th Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery and was given the service number 340544. The 69th did not see action but it provided reinforcements for other CEF units.

I have not found any military service in Europe for Albert but we do know that he arrived back in Buffalo on 13th December 1918 and that his passage was paid for by the army. On return he became a labourer at an oil refinery and had moved to Baraga Street in Buffalo but still staying with his aunt, Sarah Smith.

Albert in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

There was another voyage when Albert arrived back in New York on *S.S. Adriatic* from Southampton on 17th October 1919. Was this a visit home to see his family in Raunds and Ringstead. We do not know what happened next and many Ancestry.co.uk family trees have him dying in England but an Albert Smith died on 17th July 1942 in Buffalo aged 56. Was this our Albert?

Walter Smith (1889-1970)

Walter, the next soldier son, was born on the 20th May 1889 [His passport application has 24th May 1890]. The 1911 Census shows that he had left the family home and was a servant living with Milk Retailer, William Mitchell and his wife, Minnie. The house was in Brick Kiln Road in Raunds and Walter was helping with the milk delivery.

The following year he followed his older brother to America. He was on the *S.S. Mauretania* which arrived in New York on December 12th 1912 en route to Buffalo. He did not have a shoemaking trade but became a worker in a steel plant. Unlike Albert, he became a naturalised American which meant that he would become part of the American army in Buffalo rather than cross the border to join the Canadian force in the First World War.

His Draft Registration Card shows that he was living at 343 New Abby Road in Buffalo in New York State. His trade was described as “Pipe Fitter” for Contact Processes”, in Albert Road in Buffalo. There was a slightly chilling instruction on the Registration Card which stated, “If person is of African descent tear off the corner”

Walter was 28 years old when he started his service on 26th May 1918. Unfortunately, I have not found if he was actually sent to Europe to fight with the Allies. Nor have I found his marriage for certain. A Walter Smith married Florence Jaspers on the 8th September 1919 in Manhattan. Could this be the right man?

Walter (back right) with his sister Sarah Ellen (who had married John Henry Hall) seated in the centre. With thanks to Debbie Billson.

Certainly, we know that his wife was called Florence and the 1920 Federal Census records them living at 201 Baraga Street in Buffalo. On the 8th November 1923 Walter applied for a United States passport. On the application form he wrote:

> *I, Walter Smith, a naturalized and loyal citizen of the United States, hereby apply to the Department of State of Washington for a passport.*
> *I solemnly swear that I was born at Raunds, England on May 24th 1890, that my father is William Smith and now residing at Raunds, England that I emigrated to the United States, sailing from Liverpool, England about December 7th 1912 that I have resided uninterruptedly in the United States from 1912 to 1923 at Buffalo, New York, that I was naturalised as a citizen . . . on 5th July 1918.*

He wanted the passport to visit the British Isles to see his parents and intended to return within six months. He had already booked to sail on the 15th December 1923 on the *S.S. Majestic*.

By the 1925 New York State Census they are in 670 Hopkins Street and have three men lodging with them. Walter's job appears to be an "awning maker". I have not found the birth of their three children, but there is a later photograph which shows the family visiting Walter's older sister Sarah Ellen who was some fifteen years his senior. In the picture appear to be two of Walter's children.

We must leave his life there. I think he may have died in Buffalo in 1970 aged 81 but, like much in this life, this has to be confirmed.

Arthur Smith (1890-1987)

Arthur, the next in line of the Smith soldiers, was born in Raunds on the 2nd October 1890. By 1911, he was a shoemaker, probably working for Owen Smith and was living with his family in Marshalls Road,

Certainly, he was working for this firm as an "Army Welt Sewer" when he signed his Short Service Attestation Form on 11th December 1915. He would soon be wearing the military boots that he had been making. He was still living with his family at 84 "Fairlawn" Marshalls Road. He was also a member of the Rechabites which was a popular temperance organisation but also acted as a friendly society giving sickness and death benefits.

Arthur Smith in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

He would have been attested by the Northamptonshire Regiment but was sent first to the 5th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers which was a training unit, based at Dover from the 26th June 1916 to the 17th October. On the 18th October 1916 he was posted to the British Expeditionary Force in France and joined the 17th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers.

The 17th had fought in the Battle of the Somme which finally ended with the battles in the Ancre area. These continued sporadically into 1917 when the Germans carried out a

planned retreat to the fortified line that they had been building, usually known as the Hindenburg Line.

In 1917 there followed the Battle of Arras and then the Battle of Cambrai. It was in this latter battle, in the Bourlon Wood area of the Front in the Battle of Cambrai that the 17th were in a long trench called the Rat's Tail which took the brunt of a huge attack made by four German Divisions. The Battalion fought heroically and helped prevent the Germans from breaking through. During this battle on the 30th November 1917 Captain Stone was ordered to withdraw and he sent three platoons back but remained behind with a rear-guard to give them time. The *British Empire* website records:

> *His last stand was one of the great heroic feats of the war. He and his men fought with rifles bayonets and grenades while Captain Stone stood at the forefront, with telephone in hand to report back vital information. It was a suicidal act of defiance and they were all killed. The battalion was, for the most part, withdrawn to a safer part of the line but C Coy remained in the Rat's Tail behind a block and fought throughout the day*.

It was during this ferocious battle that Arthur received a gunshot wound in his left hand. He had been previously wounded by a gunshot in his left arm on 2nd May 1917 during the Battle of Arras. This time, however, his time in the Front Line was over.

He returned to England to be treated on the 6th December 1917 and on 10th April 1918 was declared no longer fit for physical service. He was also “permanently excluded from liability to medical re-examination” which shows that his wound had left him with a permanent disability. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He would have suffered the deaths of his brothers, Richard and Sidney in 1918 and in 1919 and his sister, Eva also died. He decided to follow his older brothers, Albert and Walter, to seek a better life in America. He was not alone, for he travelled with his younger brother, Alfred and his wife Rose, on the S.S. Mauretania. They arrived in New York on 16th May 1920, bound for Buffalo. Both the men were “bootmakers”.

In the 1930 Federal Census, Arthur, still single, was staying with his Aunt Sarah Smith and her sister, Ellen Nugent, at 351 Baraga Street in Buffalo. He was now 38 years old and working as a cobbler, repairing shoes.

In about 1980, Lilian Coggins of Raunds went to America to visit relatives and while there met Arthur, who was now ninety years old. He gave Lilian the photograph of the family shown at the beginning of this article and asked if she would try to trace his relatives in Raunds. He told her that he went to America because of the difficulty of finding work in England. I am not sure if she managed to find any long-lost relatives.

I have not found him after that but some Ancestry.com family trees have him living to be 95 and dying on 22nd June 1987 in Hamburg, on the shores of Lake Erie, some fifteen miles south of Buffalo.

Alfred Smith (1892-1976)

Alfred Smith was one of three sons of William and Annie who joined the Royal Fusiliers. In 1911 he was eighteen years old and working as a "Milk Hawker", presumably trying to sell milk around the streets of Raunds. He had been born on 11th May 1892.

He was close in age to his brothers Sydney and Arthur and all three were posted to the Royal Fusiliers. Arthur had the Regimental Number 49444, Sydney 50873 and Alfred 50877. We see that the last two must have signed up at the same time. The old "Pals Battalions" which could see whole families or villages' young men being wiped out in an engagement had been abandoned so although they were all in the Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) they were posted to different Battalions.

It was to the 8th Battalion that Alfred was sent. The 8th had been raised in Hounslow as part of Kitchener's First New Army. They first landed in France between the 29th May and the 1st June 1915. Alfred, probably, would not have joined the Battalion until late 1916 at the earliest.

Alfred Smith in Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

At the end of 1917 Alfred was wounded and was entitled to wear a wound stripe on the sleeve of his uniform. He was wounded again and this was reported on 25th September 1918, although the next of kin were living in High Wycombe. The initial and Regimental Number are correct so perhaps this is a mistake.

On the 6th February 1918, the 8th Battalion were disbanded in an army reorganisation and it seems that Alfred was transferred to the 23rd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers which was known as the "1st Sportsman's". It had been raised in the *Hotel Cecil* in the Strand in London on 25th September 1914. We see the patriotic fervour of the times reflected in this extract from a later poem by "Touchstone" in the Daily Mail, quoted in the Battalion's History:

> *Sportsmen of every kind,*
> *God! We have paid the score*
> *Who left green English fields behind*
> *For the sweat and stink of war!*

New to the soldier's trade,
Into the scrum we came,
But we didn't care much what game we played
So long as we played the game.

By the time that Alfred joined the personnel would have been different and it would not have been looked on by any of the men as a "game" of any kind.

We also see in the *Gazette* published on 13th June 1919 that Alfred had been awarded the Military Medal. At this time there was often a long delay in the announcements of the Military Medals, and I think it may refer back to the action in 1918 when he had been wounded.

He was discharged from the army and possibly, immediately after that, or during his sick leave, he married Rose Annie Bailey in September 1918. She was a Raunds' girl, daughter of George and Mary.

After the war, Alfred and his new wife, Rose decided to follow his brothers to America. On May 8th 1920, together with brother Arthur, he arrived in New York on the *S.S. Mauretania*, bound for Buffalo. Both men were given as bootmakers. In 1925 the couple were living at 10 Boone Street in Buffalo. Alfred was working as a wheelwright and they had a three-year-old daughter, June.

Unlike his brothers, Alfred did not settle in America and on 18th November 1927 the small family arrived in Southampton, on the *S.S. Homeric,* bound for Red Row in Raunds and their intended country of residence was shown as England. By 1939 they were living in 68 Alexandra Street in Kettering and Alfred was a "Dairyman and Retail Grocer". Rose was shown as having "unpaid domestic duties" but one suspects that she would also have taken some part in the small business. Rose died on the 1st August 1966 when the couple were living at 79 Brook Street in Raunds and administration was granted to Alfred, a "retired dairyman". Alfred was living in Red Row when he died on 12th April 1976 aged 84.

Sydney Smith (1895-1918)

Sydney, the fifteenth of sixteen children for Annie Smith, was born in 1896 and in the 1911 Census was fifteen years old and was already earning a living in "shoework". He was with the family in "Fairview", 84 Marshalls Road in Raunds.

When war came, he did not volunteer, like some of his brothers, and his parents would have prayed that the war would be over before he was called up. This was not to be, and he was conscripted and called up to the Depot of the Northamptonshire Regiment around the 26th June 1916. He was then posted to the 28th Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) and given Regimental Number 11409. This was a Reserve Battalion which trained the men for transfer to a fighting unit abroad. He would have been renumbered when this unit became the 104 Training Reserve. Sydney landed in France on the 10th October 1916 and was posted to the

8th Battalion and was given a new Regimental Number GS/50873 ("GS" is short for General Service).

It seems most likely that he was finally with his battalion in the Front Line on 19th October 1916 when a draft of sixteen men arrived at Bernafay Wood, located near Montauban village, which had captured by the 9th (Scottish) Division on 3-4 July 1916 during the opening days of the Somme offensive. On the 22nd, the 8th marched to Ribemont and were taken by buses to Fosseaux. After a brief spell settling into billets, they marched to occupy the same trenches they had been in September at Agny. The Somme campaign was stuttering to a close and there was comparatively little artillery fire and few casualties through to the end of the year where they were finally behind the lines, training at Moncheaux. This lasted until the end of January 1917 when the Battalion moved to Noyelette and Habancy and continued with their training and working parties.

Sydney Smith in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

On 7th February they moved again to billets in Arras and on the 11th were once more in the Front Line. Again, it was a quiet time and in March the Battalion moved back to Beaufort for training and working parties. They were now mainly providing working parties, for other Regiments and the Royal Engineers, improving trenches.

On the 9th April the 8th received attack orders and they "went over the top" and secured their allotted targets but at a great cost. The *War Diary* reports that 40 men were killed, 2 died of wounds, 119 were wounded and 7 were missing. There was no immediate respite and they received orders to move up again and sustained further casualties before being relieved and moving back into "the caves" to rest and clean up. On the 14th they moved back to Grenas for training and reorganisation. It was not for long, for, on the 26th April they were once more in the Front Line at Feuchy near Arras.

The 8th were next sent to near Monchy and on the 3rd May they attacked the enemy positions but were met with heavy machine gun fire. During the action 40 Other Ranks were killed, 144 wounded and 92 were missing. The Battalion moved back out of the line to Arras and trained and reorganised again, finally at Sus St Ledger.

By the 26th June they were back in the trenches at Monchy-le Preux and they were in and out of the line for most of the rest of 1917, mostly described as "quiet" in the *War Diary,* but still regularly sustaining casualties. They moved back to St George for rest and training before, in November, moving into the Front line at Gonnelieu where they were part of an attack which cost 15 Other Ranks killed and 78 wounded. Another attack at Balouzelle added more wounded and killed.

At the end of November 1917 the Battalion was in the trenches east of La Vacquiere when, on 30th November the enemy "opened a violent bombardment" and by the end of the day the 8th had ten officers and 247 Other Ranks as casualties. The 8th were finally allowed back for rest and reorganisation until the end of the year.

1918 found them in billets in Bannigues and, on 5th January, they celebrated Christmas Day as they had been in close support on the 25th December. The moved to "Dirty Bucket Camp". There was one final spell in the Front Line before the moved back to Hospital Camp at the end of January. Sydney had been with the 8th until 29th January 1918 but the Battalion was to be disbanded under an army reorganisation, and, a week later, Sydney joined the 7th Battalion.

The 7th Battalion *War Diary* tells that 6 officers and 180 Other Ranks joined the 7th from the 8th on the 5th February 1918 at Beaulicourt where they were furiously digging revetements. They moved into the Front Line at Ribecourt but with little action and few casualties. In March they were in Havrincourt Wood in the reserve trenches carrying out wiring and digging duties before moving into the Front Line. They were attacked with gas shells and 250 men were affected.

The great German, Michael Offensive began and the 7th were part of the British retreat. In March, 4 Other Ranks were killed, 40 were wounded and in the chaos 104 were missing. April found them at Forceville as the British began to try to hold the line and force a counter-attack. In May the fighting continued and 30 Other Ranks were killed, 95 were wounded, 8 were poisoned with gas and 8 were missing. Among the wounded was Sydney Smith. He had shrapnel wounds to his right chest, back, right arm and right foot. He was taken to the Casualty Clearing Station and given 750 units of Anti-Tetanus Serum. It was put on his casualty sheet that "he could be put forward as an eligible candidate to be awarded a wound stripe". He was sent on to a hospital but he did not survive his wounds and died on the 27th May 1918.

Sydney was buried, aged 23, in the cemetery at Doullens Communal Cemetery Extension (I. C. 21). He was entitled to the British War and Victory medals. His mother, Annie, received a five shillings a week dependant's pension.

Ernest Smith (1897-?)

Ernest was the youngest of the children born on 28th October 1897. In 1911 he was with his family in Marshalls Road and was thirteen years old.

War came, and Ernest would not have been eighteen until the end of 1915. He enlisted with the Bedfordshire Regiment and was posted to the 6th (Service) Battalion with Regimental Number 33577. We do not have his Attestation papers but, from later records, we see that he enlisted around September 1916 and joined his Battalion in France in December 1916 or January 1917.

Ernest Smith in Rushden Argus 19th 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

The 6th were one of the Battalions raised for Kitchener's New Army (K1). They had first landed in France on 30th June 1915 and had suffered terrible losses in the Battle off the Somme, particularly at the Battle of Bazentin Ridge.

Ernest joined them as one of the replacements after all this carnage. In 1917 they were in the campaign known as the Battle of Arras, specifically in the First and Second Battle of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux where, in the assault of Greenland Hill on 29th April, they finished with only 58 men standing.

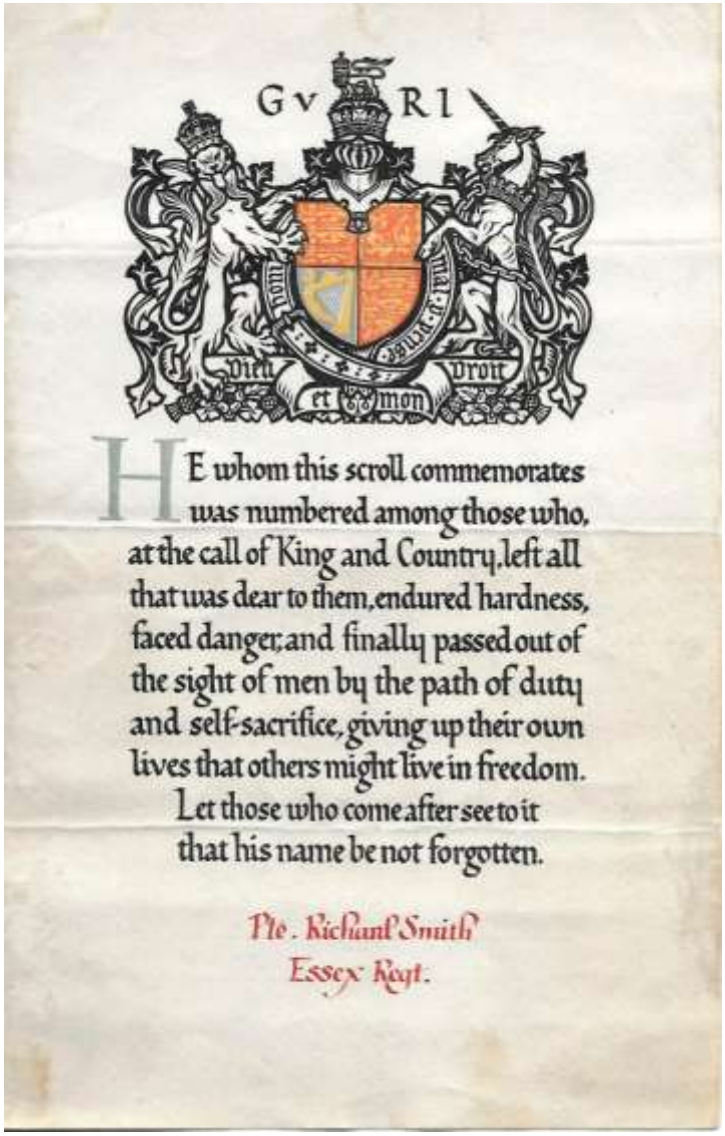
Later in the year they were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres, a campaign which ran from the end of July until November 10th and is now best remembered for the terrible mud and slaughter of the last phase in that Autumn, often called the Battle of Passchendaele. Ernest was wounded in the head by gunshot. He was taken to 140th Field Ambulance on 23rd September 1917 and transferred by the Sick Convoy to No. 21 Ambulance Train. The wounding was reported in the War Office Daily List on 22nd October 1917.

We are not sure of the seriousness of the wound or whether Ernest was treated in one of the hospitals on the French Coast or returned to England. We do know that by the time that the local newspapers reported on the seven sons, in April 1918, that Ernest had been transferred to the Machine Gun Corps and given new number, 139381. Looking at other numbers in the Corps it looks as if his transfer would have probably been not long before the articles were published. Nor do we know if Ernest entered the war zone again or when he was discharged.

He returned to civilian life but I have not yet clarified what exactly happened to him. There were a surprisingly large number of Ernest Smiths around, of about the same age, at that time. I believe that he married late, to Ringstead woman Gertrude Phillips in 1935 and in the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were living in West End, Chapel Lane, in Ringstead. Gertrude is shown as a heel builder and Ernest as a boot and shoe finisher. I do not think that they had any children.

Afterword

What about the parents of the sixteen children? William died in 1926 but I believe Annie lived to the good old age that she deserved. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* she is shown widowed and now living on her own in 19 Red Row in Raunds with her date of birth shown as 7th May 1855. Annie had been baptised on 8th November 1863 in Ringstead Church, aged eight years. I have not yet confirmed the date of her death.



The Death Scroll that was sent to the next of kin of men killed in WW1
With thanks to Karen Wright

Chapter 19

Frederick Sykes (1887-1914)

Frederick, usually known as Fred, was born in late 1887 to Henry and Rachel Sykes. Henry was an agricultural labourer from Ellington in Huntingdonshire who had married Ringstead girl, Rachel Ball, on 13th November 1873. Fred was baptised with three of his sisters, Rose, Ida and Elizabeth in Ringstead Church on the September 30th1888. There had also been three older children, Mary Ann, Henry and William and two more sisters, Maud and Gertie, were to follow. By 1891 Henry, the father, had become a platelayer on the Midland Railway. The family were living in The Terrace at the end of Shop Street (part of High Street) in Ringstead. Rachel was also working as a shoehand, as were the older children, Mary Ann and Henry.

By 1901, they were now living in Carlow. Henry was still working as a platelayer, heavy work as one gets older. In 1906 he died, aged 53, and in the 1911 Census, the widowed Rachel, aged sixty, was a "charwoman out of employment". The only child still at home was 32-year-old daughter, Eliza, who was working as an "Army Boot Stitcher" and she was in partial employment. A granddaughter, Ivy Robinson, was also living with them. Times would have been very tough.

The children had flown the nest and Frederick, was lodging with widow, Emily Yeuell, and her family at 179 Eastfield Road in Peterborough. He was 22 years old and now working as a shoemaker. We know that he had other part-time employment that would have given him a small extra income. On 9th January 1909 he had joined the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment.

Over many centuries, men had been called to serve, however unwillingly, in the armies of their lords and monarchs. We see the remnants of this in the Eighteenth Century Militia Lists for Ringstead and all other parishes. In 1801, when Napoleon threatened an invasion, a military reserve force was established and during the Nineteenth Century various forms of these part-time soldiers' units existed. In 1908, the system was reformed and the militia infantry groups became known as the "Reserve Battalions", mostly attached to Regiments. There were one hundred Infantry battalions, 33 Artillery regiments, and two Engineer regiments of special reservists.

Unlike the militia, which was intended solely for home duties, the new "Special Reservists" were designed to make up drafts to serve where needed in time of war, at home or abroad. Fred signed up for six years' service and was given Regimental Number 3/8618. He first had to undergo six months of basic training, for which he would be paid as a regular soldier. After that he had to attend an annual training camp for three to four weeks each July.

Fred had been "temporarily unfit" for the 1914 training camp but now he was called upon to fulfil his contract and was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires. It may be that his temporary unfitness delayed his joining with his Battalion. It crossed the Channel

on 13th August 1914. Hopes were high that the war would soon be over, and cheering crowds lined the streets when they marched through Le Havre. The men then entrained and passed through Amiens, Arras and Cambrai, places they had never heard of, but which would soon be seared on their memories. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was shocked by the next month when, at the battle of Mons and Le Cateau, they were beaten and found themselves in almost constant retreat. It seemed the war would be over quickly with a German victory. The enemy had, however, as would happen again in 1918, stretched their supply lines to breaking point and the front line had become fragmented.

Through this period, although they did suffer some casualties the Battalion was largely on the periphery of the main action. At the Battle of the Marne the Allies did first push the Germans back. It was at this time at the end of the long retreat, on 11th September 1914, that Fred joined the Battalion in France. The Allies' mood had become more optimistic believing that the tide had turned, but not for the last time, it was premature. The Germans had conducted an orderly retreat to a predetermined line that was a position of strength.

On September 13th, the Battle of The Aisne began in earnest. The British attacked all along their front. They were allowed to cross the wide Rive Aisne by an aqueduct with little opposition. The Germans held a strong position on a plateau overlooking the British who now had a deep, unfordable, river at their backs.

For the first time, the Northamptonshires faced an enemy determined to stand their ground and in a naturally strong position. The Germans also held a sugar factory, north-west of Troyon, which provided a base for their artillery. This stronghold resisted the British attacks. The weather was cold with persistent rain. The Northamptonshire were stationed on a small hill trying to work out what was happening, through the driving rain. At 11.30 am the Battalion was ordered to back-up the preliminary attack on the guns at the sugar refinery and on the ridge. The German firepower inflicted heavy casualties particularly on the Loyal North Lancashires, but also on the battalion, which was forced to dig itself in for the night on the slope of the German-held ridge.

Over the next two days the holes that they had dug into the ridge were desperately turned into shallow trenches. There was one notorious incident during this time when a group of Germans, under the pretence of surrendering, reached the Northamptonshires trenches and then began firing. They were saved by a nearby battalion's machine gunners who saw what was happening and mowed them down from the side and the survivors fled back to their own trenches.

The British High Command were concerned that the troops were too far away from their supply bases in the Channel Ports. Liaising with the French who filled the gaps they moved west. The Germans too were looking to cut off the supply to the British and to get around the Allied Front Line. The result was a westward movement which became known as the "Race to the Sea". The Northamptonshires entrained at Fismes and travelled through Amiens and Étaples to Cassel where they rested in billets.

The rest was brief for, on the 19th October, they marched to Elverdinghe (Elverdinge) and then moved up to Pilckem where they occupied trenches dug by the French. There was now

persistent heavy fighting as the campaign, known as the First Battle of Ypres, began. The 1st Camerons, despite a gallant resistance, had been driven out of their trenches and the Battalion moved forward to assist them and to mount a counter-attack.

The town of Ypres was, at this time, described as a "lovely place". It was soon to be a shattered ruin. The Germans were attacking with a much larger force along the British lines and the Northamptonshires were constantly on the move trying to shore up one position after another as the German attacks ebbed and flowed.

On October 30th 1914 the Battalion, with the Royal Sussex, were ordered to a place later called Bodmin Wood, south of the Menin Road, due west of Gheluvelt (Gueluveld) where they dug temporary trenches. The next day saw the critical action of the Battle of Ypres. The Germans mounted an attack and the Northamptonshires were forced to withdraw. The battalion on one side of them had retired which forced the Northamptonshire to do the same in order to keep the line. Unfortunately, they were badly hit by enfilading fire along the road which had protected them and suffered many casualties.

They now held a position on a crossroads in what was known by the troops as "Shrewsbury Wood", but the Germans were already inside the wood. The Northamptonshires, with the Royal Sussex, and Gordons, with loud cries charged the enemy with fixed bayonets. They killed some two hundred and routed the rest. It was the brutal hand-to-hand fighting that soldiers, going back through the centuries, would have recognized.

The Germans, however stood firm in their positions and both sides tried to straighten and strengthen their trenches. Continual German attacks and bombardments led to many casualties and even the reserve trenches were often under fire.

On November 8th, the depleted Battalion moved to a trench in the support line on the north side of the Menin Road and came under heavy shell fire. On November 11th the elite Prussian Guard launched an attack, but they were repulsed. The battalion was then ordered to advance into Polygon Wood where the men again came under heavy shellfire.

It was during this time, on 11th November 1914, that Fred Sykes was killed. This was to be the last significant action of the First Battle of Ypres. Both sides were utterly exhausted.

Fred Sykes is remembered on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial at West Vlaanderen (West Flanders) on Panel 43 & 45. He is also on the Ringstead and Irthlingborough War Memorials. Besides the British War and Victory Medals he was entitled to the 1914 Star with Clasp. The Clasp was awarded to those who had been under fire between 5 August and 22 November 1914 but was said to be only awarded to the recipient if he claimed personally, Frederick must have made a Will before he was posted abroad because he left his War Gratuity divided almost equally amongst his mother and his eight siblings. Each received eight shillings two pence or eight shillings one penny. A Mary Ellen Cappo was also left the latter amount.

Chapter 20

Harry Tilley (1895-1915) and Horace Edwin Tilley (1899-1969)

For some men their service in the First World War was a long, terrible experience that scarred them physically or mentally for the rest of their lives. For others it was a brief interlude which, if not forgotten, was not a major influence on their later life. I think for Horace Tilley his military experience was more like the latter case although it was not without danger and unpleasant memories. For his older brother, Harry, it was even briefer.

There is some confusion about their father's ancestry. Jonathan Tilley senior married Elizabeth Dixon on 25th December 1865. Jonathan junior was probably born on 29th December 1861, four years earlier, although he seems to have claimed a younger age sometimes, perhaps because of the age of his wife. When he married Susannah Dicks on 17th September 1894 he was shown as thirty years old and Susannah as seventeen. At his marriage his surname was given as Tilley-Dixon but he later dropped his mother's surname and became John Tilley

Harry Tilley was born on the 31st November 1895 and Horace Edwin on the 22nd December 1899, the sons of Jonathan (usually known as John) and Susannah (or Susan). Horace was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on the 5th June 1900. In the 1901 Census we see that father, John, was a farm labourer and milkman and he and Susan were living in Drayton Cottages.

The 1911 Census had them in the same home, now known as Agutter's Cottages. John and Susan had been married 16 years and had had nine children, of whom five were living and four still at home. The children at home in 1911 were all boys, Harry (16), Horace, (11), Bertram (10) and Leslie (7 months). Susan's widowed mother Emma Dicks was also living with them. The father, John, was still working as a "milkman on farm".

The oldest daughter Jessie seems to be missing in the 1911 Census but she later married Wellingborough Engineer, Sydney Summers, in 1925 in Ringstead Wesleyan Church.

It was the oldest son, Harry who first enlisted. He volunteered on the 7th September 1914 in Northampton. He gave his occupation as "Carter" and was nineteen years nine months old. He was 5ft 5½ inches tall and weighed 134 lbs. Harry was enlisted in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and given Regimental Number 15142. He was medically examined and declared fit for service. On the 10th October 1914, however, he was discharged as being unfit for service. His character had been good but he had "very bad flat feet". His service had lasted thirty-four days.

At the time, of course, marching both, in training and in troop movements, was a very important part of army life but perhaps there was something else wrong with Harry. On discharge he worked with the horses at Praed's Mineral Water Works in Wellingborough. He was living with his mother's widowed mother, Emma Dicks. In the 1911 census she had been in Ringstead with her daughter's family but in 1915 she was living at 23 Palk Road in

Wellingborough She may have moved but a Census is only a "snapshot" of one night so she could have been just visiting in 1911.

The *Northampton Mercury* of the 13th August 1915 told the story of his sudden death.

> *Emma Dix [sic] told that. . . he did not complain of anything and seemed all right. He was at work until 5 p.m. on Thursday and went out after tea in his usual health. He went to bed about 10.30. She awoke about two o'clock on Friday morning, and when looking to see what the time was she heard a noise in her grandson's room. She went to him and waited with him until he died. He did not speak but made a noise. He died about 2.15, before the doctor arrived.*

The doctor also gave evidence that he had died from double pneumonia and the postmortem showed evidence of "old-standing pleurisy".

His brother, Horace Edwin Tilley, was some five years younger than Harry so was only eighteen on 22nd December 1917 and nineteen, the official age for overseas service, at the end of the following year. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* does not have any wartime service listed for him but records that he was then (late 1918/early 1919) serving in Ireland with the 4th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment.

We do not have any of his military records and, because he did not serve in a war zone during the Great War, he was not entitled to any service medals. I think the "4th Battalion" may refer to the 4th Reserve Battalion (rather than the 1/4th Battalion) which originally had been known as the 3/4th Battalion and on the 8th April 1916 had changed name. However, the only Norfolk Battalion to serve in Ireland in the 1918/1919 period was the 1/6th (Cyclist) Battalion which had remained on home defence during the war. It therefore seems most likely that he was transferred to the latter Battalion.

Although Horace had not served in the Great War, the posting to Ireland would have been a far from pleasant experience. At the end of the war, when the victorious powers were redefining the boundaries of many countries, Sinn Fein attended these meetings and argued that an independent Ireland should be included in this redrawing of the map. They were largely ignored and returned home empty-handed.

Frustrated by this lack of support and the long, dragged-out, passage of a Home Rule Bill, sections of the Independence movement began to organise on military lines and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was born. On the 21st January 1919, the IRA shot dead two Irish policemen. This began an escalating series of attack and counter-attack with the war-hardened British troops retaliating to incidents with harsh, sometimes misdirected, reprisals.

For a young man caught up in this, it must have been a frightening experience. At least, in war, one usually knew one's enemy.

At some point Horace returned home and, in 1921, he was living with his parents in Agutter's Cottages again. By Spring 1925 they had moved to Carlow Road. It seems likely that Horace continued with his father's milk round although I have not found proof of this.

In the Spring of 1914, before the war had started an Edward Tilley, who was probably Horace's cousin, had been summoned for selling adulterated milk in Ringstead. The case does show how different the local milk delivery was then to today's industrialised process. The *Northampton Mercury* of 10th April reported on the case:

> *Aubrey Butlin, assistant to Mr T. Mattinson (Inspector under the Food and Drugs Act, Kettering), proved the purchase of a sample of milk, which was found to be deficient in fat to the extent of 12 per cent.*
>
> *: - Defendant went into the box, and stated that he was milking five cows, two were in calf and three were not. On that particular morning he did not mix the milk as was his usual custom, as he was busy.*

The Bench took a lenient view of his mistake and he was fined ten shillings (50 pence).

In the booklet "*Stanwick – a retrospective glance No. 4*", Joan Whitby, talking of the 1940s, stated:

> *Taking the milk round was not like today – bottles and an electric float- but a horse and float and 2 gallon can with a measure. Customers used various receptacles – jugs, basins, etc.*

Horace married Ada Beatrice Robinson in Spring 1930 and I think that they had four children. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he was still a milkman, living in Carlow Road.

Horace (standing) at the closing of the Swan Inn in 1953
With thanks to Jon Abbott and Robin Pentelow

Horace died on 2nd March 1969, still residing at 23 Carlow Road and Ada, his widow, was living there when she died on 26th April 1984.

Chapter 21

Thomas Alfred Tomlin (1884-1968)

Thomas Alfred Tomlin was the son of Charlotte Tomlin, born on the 14th May 1884 and baptised the following year on October 28th, in Raunds Parish Church. In the 1891 Census, Charlotte was living with her parents and her children, Thomas (6) and Nellie (2) in Rotton (or Rotten) Row in Raunds. She was working as a charwoman

In early 1893, Charlotte married Thomas Adams and the couple had further children together. In 1901 Thomas was sixteen years old and still living with his grandparents, William and Emily Tomlin. He had become a pressman in a boot and shoe factory. The pressman would put the "knives" of the shapes of the shoe or boot pieces, rather like pastry cutters onto the leather. He would then operate a foot pedal which brought down the press to cut out the shapes. It was a skilled job and certainly not one for a daydreamer.

By 1911 he was back with his mother and her husband, Thomas Adams, who was a local builder. They were living at 14 Rotton Row and Thomas Tomlin, aged 26, was still a leather pressman. On the 10th February 1912, his mother, aged 49 years, was buried.

The war came but at first the army's need for boots gave him exemption from conscription but, as the war dragged on, the rules tightened and also older men were being conscripted. On the 1st April 1917 he was called before a Military Tribunal and given a temporary reprieve but on the 15th June when he came before them again, the appeal by his employers, Adams Brothers, was dismissed. It was during the period of uncertainty that Thomas married Lily Henrietta Attley. Lily had been born in Ringstead on the 4th May 1893. Her father, Frederick was also born in the village but her mother, Frances, had been born in India. In the 1901 Census the family had been living in Northampton but, by 1911, Lily, aged seventeen, was working as a domestic servant in Finedon for butcher Edward Shelton and his wife, Ellen.

After their marriage in 1917, Thomas and Lily moved to Pierce's Yard (various spellings) which was a group of cottages down the side of the old Police House, nearly opposite Ringstead House. The young couple were to have a brief time together in Ringstead and Thomas was living in the Yard when his conscription came through.

Unfortunately, as for so many men, his military records have been mostly destroyed in a WW2 bombing raid. As a result, although I have been helped by Peter and Charlie on the *Great War Forum* website, the account of his army career I have given seems a reasonable fit but is far from certain and must be read with this proviso in mind.

From the *Ringstead Absent Voters' List* for 1918 and his Medal Roll and Card we know that he was first in the Norfolk Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 205464, These six-figure numbers were not given to men in the Regular Army battalions and it seems likely

that he was first sent in July 1917 to a training battalion, possibly the 4th Reserve (or 3rd) Battalion at Halton Park, near Tring, before being posted to the 2nd Norfolks.

A number of men were drafted, first into the 2nd Norfolks, and later transferred to the 7th Berkshires. One of these was John William Clement Thake, who boarded a ship on the 7th October 1917, and arrived in India on 4th December. He joined the Depot of the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolks at Belgaum in India. John remained there for one year fifty days and then, after the Armistice, was sent to Salonika, arriving there on the 19th December 1918.

As a result of this, because he had not been in a warzone, there was initially some confusion as to William Thake's entitlement to both of the basic war medals. It is possible that Thomas Tomlin followed the same path and it certainly seems, from the *Roll of Honour,* that he went to India first. There are differences, however, for the Roll also states that Thomas was posted to Mesopotamia, rather than Salonika. It may also be that Thomas went to a war zone earlier than John Thake. All we can repeat is that the following account is a possibility rather than a certainty.

In the summer of 1917, the 2nd Norfolks had been camped at Karnabit, east of the Diyah River on the Persian Front. There was also a separate "Segregation Camp" there because they had suffered a major outbreak of Diphtheria in the Battalion. On the 27th August 1917, the War Diary noted that, "the battalion is officially clear of diphtheria". On the 2nd September, the Diary also recorded:

> *100 B.O.R.s joined the Bttn this day. This is a draft from England and the majority of the men having had 8 weeks training before being sent out*

It seems possible that Thomas Tomlin was one of these men.

The 2nd Norfolks had been a Regular Army Battalion when war broke out but it had suffered a terrible and humiliating defeat by the besieging Turks at Kut-ul-Amara in present day Iraq. The Norfolks had been part of an ill-conceived attack on Baghdad which, after being taken with great loss of life, could not be held and the force retreated back down the Tigris, together with 1,600 Turkish prisoners and more than 4,500 wounded from both sides. They made at stand at Kut at the end of 1915 and into April 1916 but they were slowly starving to death. Cats and dogs were eaten and the Indian troops, unable to eat meat, were down to seven ounces of grain a day.

During the siege, some 1,750 men died. After the surrender the men were marched into captivity, with great brutality and two-thirds of the British troops did not survive. The 2nd Norfolks, as part of this force suffered terrible losses and as a result, for a time they were combined with the 2nd Dorsets and became the Norsets. Replacements were drafted in and the two units separated on the 21st July 1916 into their component parts. Few of the original "Regulars" would now have remained in the Battalion.

The war in Mesopotamia has been largely overshadowed by the horrors of the Western front but often the conditions were at least as bad as in the European theatre of war. The area could be very wet and cold but in the April to October period, temperatures were usually over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and often much higher. There were also many days of

strong winds and sometimes tornados, stirring up great clouds of dust. In the same way as the rain in Flanders was unusually bad so, the hot season in Mesopotamia, was the worst in living memory.

Jebel Hamrin (Hamrin Hills) in 1918 (Australian War Memorial website)

For the most part there was little large-scale fighting and heat and disease killed or incapacitated more men than the enemy. The area had few roads but did possess an important, ancient canal and irrigation system. In October 1917 the Brigade of which the Norfolks were part, was directed to occupy Jebel Hamrin and clear the Turks from the left bank of the Diyala River so that the Allies could control this canal system. The 2nd Norfolks task was to dislodge the enemy from the crest of the Jebel Hamrin. The Turks abandoned their positions before any real engagement and a pursuit began across the rugged hills and the broad plain beyond. After a brief skirmish at Kizil Robat, the Turks again quickly withdrew.

The Norfolks had to drive the Turks westerly from the far side of the river but the bridge had been destroyed and, when they tried to ford it, the men were swept off their feet and had to retire under cover of supporting machine gun fire. Eventually they did cross, using a makeshift pontoon bridge.

The enemy were in continual retreat north during early 1918 and in January the Norfolks were camping near the Ruz Canal, moving on to Kurdarrah where a tornado "flattened bulk of tents in camp". When the strong winds allowed, they were digging strong points. In March 1918 the rains came and on the 31st of that month, the Diary records:

Whenever the wind blows from the south rain is sure to follow.

In April 1918 they marched to Mirjana and on to Kizil Rabat (Quizil Rubat) and on to Kifri. The enemy, however, was generally retreating before them so there was little contact and it was the harsh conditions which were hardest to bear. On 5th May 1918, the *Diary* wearily reports:

> *Dust storms all morning. No tents for troops, very hot, mosquitoes by night and flies in enormous numbers by day.*

Now the *Diary* mainly reports on training, fatigues, firing practice and work on the railway. The heat began to increase in intensity. It is no surprise that on 12th June 1918, one man, Private Pocknall, decided to take a swim in the river and drowned.

By July 1918, the temperature had risen to 120 degrees and there was little activity. On the 12th July the War Diary irritably states:

> *The failure of Ordnance to supply us with Boots as required has now placed 102 men on the immobile list.*

Would Thomas have seen the irony of this?

Work continued on the railway with the only death reported in the Diary coming from heatstroke.

It may be, at this period of inactivity that Thomas and some other men were compulsorily transferred to other Regiments, although it is not recorded in the War Diary. As we have said, the Medal Rolls do show that many men were transferred out of the 2nd Norfolks but, unfortunately, no dates are given. It is even possible that it was at this time that Thomas had spent some time in India because of a wound or sickness and then transferred to the new Regiment. We cannot be sure.

What we do know is that at some point in late 1918 or early 1919 Thomas Tomlin transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Berkshire and was given the new Regimental Number 219036. At the end of September 1918, the 7th Berkshires were advancing towards Sofia as part of the Army of Occupation, after the Bulgars had surrendered. On the 15th October, however, they were suddenly diverted to go to Mustafa Pasha, a railway station outside Odrin (now Edime). They then moved some fifty miles south to Adrianople, named after the Roman emperor Hadrian, and now confusingly called Edirne.

The Berkshires had suffered, like many troops who served in this area, with malaria and now "Spanish Flu" hit the camp. They moved on the Rustchuk (Ruse) and, on 11th December 1918, they entrained for Dobritch (Balchik), north of Varna, on the eastern shire of the Black Sea. Here they put the ejected Rumanians back in charge, in place of the Bulgarians, and went out in small parties to quell any minor uprising in the surrounding villages as a result of this change back to the pre-war situation.

On the 4th May 1919 the Battalion, sailed from Varna, across the Black Sea to Batum (Batumi) in Georgia, which was in a confused state after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Battalion entrained again and travelled to Tiflis (Tblisi) some 300 miles east.

Demobilisation had already begun before the Battalion went to Koda, a hill station south of Tiflis. For the diminishing Battalion, it was then back to Batum before a small residue sailed to Constantinople where they were absorbed into other Regiments.

It seems most likely that Thomas Tomlin had left for home before this final date and would have been back in England by the end of 1919 at the latest. He returned to his wife in Pierce's Yard in Ringstead. I believe that they moved back to Raunds in the early 1920s. By the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, they were back living in "Greyfriars", Rotton Row in Raunds. Thomas was still working as a Pressman and Lily was a Ladies Hairdresser. I do not think that they had any children

Thomas died on 2nd June 1968 and Lily on 13th March 1973. She was still living in Greyfriars at the time of her death.

Chapter 22

The Walker Families

There were two Walker families which had men who served in the First World War. One was an established Ringstead family while the other was only there for a few years. Both had complicated histories and, although I have not found any link between them, both had a son called Herbert Cecil, but born ten years apart.

We will first look first at the two families of Thomas Robert Walker.

The Sons of Thomas Robert Walker

Thomas Robert Walker had been born in 1843 in Raunds, to William, from Carlton in Bedfordshire, some fifteen miles south of Ringstead, and his wife Elizabeth (née Corsfort), a Ringstead woman. They had married in Ringstead Parish Church on the 9th May 1822 but had first lived in Raunds. The couple had six children, including Thomas, before moving to Ringstead. In the 1841 Census, William was shown as a "Farmer" but by 1861 he was just a "Labourer". His wife, Elizabeth, died the following year, and by 1871 William, aged 72 years, was in Thrapston Union Workhouse.

Meanwhile, Thomas Walker had married Rebecca Staines on the 24th August 1864 in the Church of St Sepulchre in Northampton. They remained in Ringstead and had seven children in rapid succession: George, Maria, Jane, Ralph, Anne, Frank and Harvey. Rebecca died and was buried in Ringstead Churchyard on 27th September 1884. Thomas re-married some three and a half years later, in 1888, to Mary Jane Baines. Mary had been born in Stanground in Huntingdonshire and was some thirteen years Thomas's junior. She had worked a servant and there is certain a nod to the Upper Classes in the names of the six children that the couple had. They were Horace Ross, Herbert Cecil, Hugh Lancelot, Percy Eric, Dorothy Emma Marguerite and Winifred Jessie.

Of the thirteen children of Thomas, only Frank, Harvey, Horace, Herbert, Hugh and Percy were of an age that made them likely to be conscripted. The oldest of this group, Frank, was born in 1874 and had moved to Higham Ferrars. The youngest was Percy born in 1893. I do not think that either, for whatever reason, was called to fight in the First World War.

Harvey Edward Walker (1880-1946)

Harvey was born on the 21st September 1880 to Elizabeth, Thomas Walker's first wife. By 1891 he was living with his father and stepmother, Mary Jane, in Shop Street in Ringstead. By 1901 they were in No.1 Barnwell Cottages, next to the church, and he now had six stepbrothers and sisters. Harvey, aged 20, was working as a shoe riveter.

Harvey married Edith Louise Abbott in 1910 and in the 1911 Census we see that the couple were living in Sivers Buildings at the west end of the High Street, opposite the Swan Inn. Both were thirty years old and Harvey was working as a boot laster in a local army boot factory. Sadly, Edith died the following year and when war came Harvey was a widower.

In a previous biography we saw that Thomas Tomlin joined the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and was given the number 205464. It seems likely that Harvey was enlisted at the same time for he was given the number 205461 when he also joined the 2nd Battalion. As with Thomas Tomlin he would have been conscripted first to a training battalion as the six-figure numbers were not used in the Regular Army Battalions like the 2nds. Unfortunately, as we saw with Thomas, most of the records no longer exist, so any details of their service can only be seen as a possibility.

Unlike Thomas Tomlin, who served in India and Mesopotamia, Harvey served in India and the Salonica (or Salonika) warzone. After his initial training he would have been posted to India. He sailed out to Bombay (Mumbai) and then, probably mainly by train, travelled south some 300 miles to Belgaum where the 2nd Norfolks had a base camp.

The records show that many soldiers were posted to the 2nd Norfolks in India before being transferred to different Regiments in Salonika to fight the Bulgarians, or Macedonia against the Turks. It also appears, however, that most of the men first spent some time in India at the base camp. For example, it was raised in the House of Commons by his M.P. that Private Arthur William Corney, who was with the 9th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment:

> . . . was sent to India in July 1917, arrived in Salonica, just before Christmas 1918.

Harvey Walker was also posted to the 9th South Lancs. and the timings of his move were probably similar to that of Corney. He would have entered the war zone area after the Bulgarians had surrendered. The Medal Cards for this group of men, from the 2nd Norfolks, via India, all have a resolved doubt about their entitlement to the British War Medal. It appears, as Peter (PRC) has pointed out on the *Great War Forum,* that they were entitled to the medal because they were in transit to a warzone, even though the conflict had ended before their arrival.

The issue raised in Parliament was about the fact that Arthur Corney had not had any leave and his MP was urging his speedy demobilisation. On 10th January 1919 Winston Churchill,

who (as part of a Liberal Government) had become the Secretary of State for War, promised to look into the matter. We can only assume that Harvey was also fed up with life as part of the British Salonika Force (BSF), now an "Army of Occupation". The Battalion was sent by Destroyer to attempt a landing at Dede Agach (now Alexandroupoli in Greece) but had been forced back by bad weather. They finally managed a landing and reached Makri, now also swallowed up by Alexandroupoli, just before the Armistice was signed with the Turks.

They returned to Chugunsi, now the Greek village of Megali Sterna, due south of Lake Dojran where demobilisation began and was completed by March 1919.

We do not have evidence for when Harvey was demobilised but it was likely to have been by mid-1919 and we know, from the Electoral Registers, that he was back in Ringstead by 1920. Oddly, the 1920-1923 Electoral Registers only show him in "Ringstead" with no mention of a street. Was he living somewhere away from the main village? By 1926 he was back living with his father Thomas and brother Percy in Leveratt's Row (off Carlow Road, next to the Brook).

By 1929 Harvey had moved to Sivers Row (or Buildings) and in Spring 1931 he re-married, to Hilda Maria Abbott, both now in their fifties. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were shown as living in West End in Ringstead, which may refer to the same house as his father had lived in. Harvey was a bootmaker. Living with them was Gertrude (Gertie) Abbott, Hilda's unmarried sister who was a lift (heel) cutter.

Harvey died on 4th March 1946. Hilda lived for another fifteen years and died on 14th February 1961. At the time of her death she was still living in West End and the *Index of Wills and Administrations* has her wrongly as a spinster. She left her effects to her sister, Gertrude.

Herbert Cecil Walker (1890-?)

Horace Ross Walker, the first child of Thomas's second marriage, to Mary Jane Baines, would have been the next oldest child. He was a farm labourer before the war and had married Elizabeth Jane Headland on the 25th September 1912 in Woodford. I do not think that he was conscripted although we cannot be certain. He later became an Iron Ore Filler at a local blast furnace.

The next son after Horace was Herbert Cecil, born on 19th May 1891 in Ringstead. He had been christened with three of his brothers on 5th February 1894 in Ringstead Parish Church. He was with his parents in Leveratt's Row and, aged twenty, was working as a baker.

War came, and the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows Herbert as first having been in the Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). It seems most likely that he was sent to one of the training battalions but was deemed not fit enough for military service in a war zone.

He may have been with the Regiment in the county of Surrey because he was sent to the 680th Agricultural Company, which was raised in Surrey, and given Service Number 464899.

Martin Stilwell, on the *Surrey in the Great War* website, has posted a fascinating account of agriculture at the time, and the role of the Agricultural Companies in the First World War. He tells how, before the war, agriculture was in recession particularly because of cheap imported grain and refrigerated meat. As a result, Britain had become dependent on imported food. The war took away men and horses from the land. At first, two good growing seasons mitigated this situation but increasing U-boat attacks, poor North American harvests and a bad local potato harvest, meant that, by December 1916, the Government realised that it needed to take action.

It agreed to pay a fixed price for the foodstuffs it wanted but it also took control of what farmers could grow. We know of the *Dig for Victory* campaigns of the Second World War but it was first in WW1 that "Ploughing Orders" came in, and pasture, cricket pitch or tennis court could be ordered to be ploughed and crops grown. This did not solve the food shortages and in 1917, among a raft of other help, the Agricultural Companies (ACs) were formed from those soldiers not fit enough for combat. It was also at this time that the Women's Land Army was first used. Further men were still needed and the 680th and the 694th Companies were added to the work force, along with a fleet of tractors.

When Herbert was demobilised, he returned to Ringstead and in 1919 was living in Leveratt's Yard (or Row) with his father, Thomas, and brother Hugh. He continued to live there until 1923, when he disappears from the Ringstead Registers. I have not managed to definitely place Herbert after that. There are some possibilities, including a "House Parlour Man" working for a Solicitor at Upton, but no one man whom we can identify as correct. We must leave it there.

Hugh Lancelot Walker (1891-1965)

The third "H" son, baptised on February 5th 1894 in Ringstead Church, was Hugh Lancelot Walker. There is some confusion about his date of birth. The Civil Registration records it in the January to March 1892 period which would normally mean that he was born at the end of 1891 or early 1892. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he gave his date of birth as 3rd December 1894. I have found similar discrepancies in this register and I think his birth was probably on the 3rd December 1891.

In 1901, Hugh was living with his parents and siblings in No.1 Barnwell Cottages in Ringstead. He seems to have been missed by the 1911 Census but we know that he fought in the First World War. As for most of the Ringstead men, the military records of Hugh Walker have been largely lost in the Second World War German bombing raid. What we have are the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 which give some service details and his Medal Card and the Medal Rolls.

Fortunately, we have already written about George Stanley Smart who also joined the Machine Gun Corps with Service Number 57027, just four ahead of Hugh Walker, whose number was 57031. Like George, he would have first been enlisted in the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment for his basic training. They were both part of a large draft of soldiers who were then posted from the Northamptonshires to the Machine Gun Corps in mid-September 1916. Graham Sackler, the researcher for the *Machine Gun Corps Database*

website, states that Hugh, like most of those posted, after his initial machine-gun training, would have been sent first to the MGC Depot at Camiers, near Étaples.

At this point in the war the men would have been sent to reinforce, or bring back up to strength, any of the Brigades along the Western Front that needed new men. George Smart, went to the 8th Machine Gun Company and was killed, probably on the 26th September 1917. Hugh, however, may have been sent to another company, so we cannot be sure in which actions he took part.

What we do know is that he did serve with the newly organised 57th Machine Gun Corps Battalion, which was part of the 57th Division and had been formed on the 1st March 1918. The *War Diary* of the Battalion starts on the 1st April 1918 and charts its progress during the last nine months of the war and into 1919. It does not give a real sense of the progress of the war and, like many of the diaries, tells of small battles and high casualties as the Allies began to push the Germans north and east on the Western Front.

The great "Michael Offensive" of the Germans in March 1918 had forced the Allies back and threatened to win the war. On April 1st the 57th were at Mondicourt, some seventeen miles south-west of Arras. They moved nine miles east to Fonquevillers in the Front Line and were subjected to artillery fire but also the "Yellow Cross Gas Shells" which sent the dreaded mustard gas into the troops in the village. Unusually, the *War Diary* lists all the casualties, including the Other Ranks, giving names and service numbers. In most of the Battalion Diaries only the officers and the very brave were named.

By September they were a further seventeen miles east-northeast in the area of Hendecourt-lès-Cagnicourt and Fontaine-lès-Croisilles. The Front was moving forward fast by the standards of the trench warfare that had preceded it, but it was still hard-won, and the 57th Battalion continued to sustain heavy casualties. In early October they were again attacking further north in the Fromelles area. The WW1 maps plot the Germans retreating east and north but they were not usually giving ground easily. In the period from the 1st to the 14th October 1918 the Battalion lost 10 men killed or died of wounds, 43 men wounded and 11 men missing.

On 11th November 1919, the Armistice brought fighting (almost) to an end. It is not recorded in the *War Diary* and the only entry is "No Change" from the previous day. On 30th November it recorded that "Ploughing for local farmers ceased". On 17th December thirteen coal miners were released to demobilisation. Their services were needed urgently at home. On the 21st December "Salvage Operations Commenced".

The new year began an accelerating demobilisation of the soldiers. Hugh Walker had been appointed a Lance-Corporal at some point and the Medal Roll shows that he was discharged and placed on Class "Z" Reserve. In effect his army service had finished. *The Ringstead Roll of Honour* states, however, that he was a Sergeant in the *107th Chinese Labour Corps* and this is confirmed by the Ringstead *Absent Voters' List* for Autumn 1919. Graham Sackler has suggested that he only held this post for a matter of months and perhaps he was "attached" to the Labour Corps while remaining on the MGC books. It may also be that his was a

temporary promotion to enable him to have sufficient rank to carry out his new appointment.

The Chinese, until recently, have been the forgotten men of the Western Front. When we see China now, as a major world power, it may be difficult to believe that in 1914 this huge new republic was still in the thrall of various imperial powers including Britain, France, Germany and Japan. When war broke out the Chinese Government declared "Absolute Neutrality" but it began to believe that, to be on the winning side, would give it some standing in the world and a place at the table when the map of the world was redrawn. They also came to see that the Allies would be the ultimate victors and began to secretly petition to send soldiers and labourers to fight on their side.

At first, they were rebuffed but, after the terrible slaughter of the Somme in July 1916, the British followed the French, in accepting Chinese labour on the Western Front, in order to release soldiers to the fighting units.

The Chinese labourers were volunteers who signed a contract with their thumbprint and each was given a bracelet with their name (or nickname, if a written version of their name not known), and a number, in English and Chinese. This had to be worn at all times and the men, although technically civilians, were subject to military discipline.

Altogether some 94,000 men were used by the British during the war. With justification the Chinese considered that they were badly treated and not given proper respect. To get to Europe they had sailed across the Pacific in crowded ships and then were forced to cross an antagonistic Canada in locked train carriages with blackened windows. They were not allowed to set a foot on Canadian soil for any purpose or they would be subject to a prohibitive "head tax", equivalent to a labourer's wages for ten years.

Once in France or Belgium they were organised into companies under the command of British soldiers and worked behind the front lines. These men, from a quiet rural background, were often traumatised by the noise of artillery, gunfire, aircraft and bombs, as well as danger from enemy fire. Most did not believe that this is what they had signed up for.

After the Armistice the British soldiers began to demobilise but the Chinese remained until 1920. It was hard, unpleasant work and still had hidden dangers. In the *Chinese Labour Corps*, Mark O'Neill has written:

> *To the Allies, the Chinese men were as valuable after the war as they had been during the conflict. Large areas of Northern France and Belgium resembled a lunar landscape, with no buildings left standing, no roads, railways or telegraph poles, no farmland that could be cultivated. The countryside was covered with trenches and the debris of fifty-two months of fighting – the dead bodies of humans and animals, spent bullets, unexploded shells, barbed wire, rusting vehicles and scrap metal.*
>
> *The enormous task fell to the French and British armies, each with their own contingent of Chinese.*

Hugh became a Sergeant with the 107th Chinese Company. We do not know exactly when, but it seems most likely that it was early in 1919. As we have shown it would not have been an easy posting. The Chinese wanted to be home and many of the local people also resented their presence even though they were doing invaluable work which would enable the farms and factories to start working again. Discipline, through an interpreter, became more difficult to maintain as tempers frayed and fights broke out. Ten Chinese labourers were executed for murder during their time in Europe. One of these was Wang Ch'un Chi'ih who was in the 107th Chinese Labour Company. On the 8th May 1919 he was tied to a post and shot. The post is now on display in the town hall at Poperinge, near Ypres. Did Hugh have to stand and watch the execution of one of his men?

The Treaty of Versailles ignored the Chinese contribution and they were written, or painted out, of most of the memorial works produced after the war.

Hugh was finally discharged, as a Corporal in the Machine Gun Corps, on 3rd October 1919 and placed on the Class "Z" Reserve List, meaning he could be recalled if there was an unexpected resumption of hostilities. He returned to Ringstead and in the 1920 *Electoral Register* he was living with his parents in Leveratt's Row. By 1923 he had disappeared from the *Ringstead Electoral Roll* and had probably moved away. At the end of 1925 he married Ida May Joyce. Ida had been born in 1897 at Harringworth in Northamptonshire, the daughter of Alfred Henry and Mary Ann Joyce. I believe that Hugh and Ida had one child, also Hugh, born on the 16th December 1927.

It may be that Hugh had to move to Rushden to find work. Certainly, the family were living there, at 101 Westfield Avenue, in the 1939 *Electoral Register of England and Wales*. Hugh was working as a boot operative.

Hugh Lancelot Walker died on the 4th January 1965. Ida lived almost a further two decades and died on the 19th November 1986, aged 89.

The Other Sons

There were three other sons who, as I have said, I do not think fought in the Great War. It is possible that they only did home duties so went unrecorded in the Medal Rolls, other records having been destroyed. There are also many soldiers with similar names who, without other evidence, we cannot be sure are the correct men.

Frank Walker was born on 14th September 1873 and married Mary Hannah Jackson on 20th August 1894. They moved to Higham Ferrers and he first worked as the secretary of the Boot Production Company and became a boot manufacturer in his own right.

Horace Ross Walker was born on 1st January 1889. He married Elizabeth Headland on the 25th September 1912 and in 1939 was an "Iron Ore Filler" living in Gladstone Street. He died in 1972.

Percy Eric Walker was born in about 1893. I believe that sailed to Brisbane in Australia on 16th August 1911 in the Assisted Immigration Scheme. If so, he seems to have decided to return to England and in 1931 was living in Leveratt's Yard. He died in 1966, aged 73.

The Family of Alfred Walker

Charles Leigh Walker (1886-1966)

Andrew Walker, a saddler and harness maker, had moved, from the Kimbolton area of Huntingdonshire, with his wife Lucy (née Smith) to Raunds in the 1850s. In 1861 the couple were living next to the *Robin Hood* pub in Raunds with children, George (6), Alfred (2) and Walter (1). By 1871 Andrew had become the local Postmaster and the family had moved to the Post Office at 29 Brook Street. The Census shows that he was still a saddler and also had become a local preacher.

Andrew died on 7th January 1888 and in the 1891 Census we see that the oldest son, George, who had followed his father's trade of saddler, had also taken over the Post Office. It is the second son, Alfred, born in 1858, whose families we will be looking at. He married Elizabeth Miller in 1877 and the couple had four children: Thirza, Annie Elizabeth, Ethel Ashton and Charles Leigh. In 1881, Alfred, aged just 22, had become a "Rural Messenger" and they were living at 61 Huntingdon Road in Thrapston with daughter, Thirza, only one year old.

Charles was born on the 13th August 1886 in Raunds. It is at this point that the family story becomes more complicated. His mother, Elizabeth, died in 1890 and, in the 1891 Census, Charles and his older sister Ethel were living with their Uncle George, the postmaster, and his wife, Mary. We also see that Ethel had been born in Ilkeston in Derbyshire, so the family had been on its travels in the 1881 to 1886 period. This was almost certainly connected with Alfred's job, for in the 1891 Census, he was recorded as a "Railway Signalman" in the signal box at Spalding in Lincolnshire. Next door in "The Gatehouse" another signalman and his wife were living. Could it be that the Census found Alfred on night duty and he was lodging in the town or even in the Gatehouse?

Alfred remarried, to Alice Amelia Dent, on 16th October 1892 in Barnet in Hertfordshire and the couple had a further four children, Alice, Stanley Alfred, Leonard William and Herbert Cecil. As we have seen this last name had also appeared in the Ringstead, Walker family some ten years earlier. All the children were born in Hertfordshire.

When we look at the 1901 Census, we see that Charles and Ethel were still living with their uncle and aunt in Brook Street in Raunds where George continued as the postmaster and saddler. The couple also have a seven-year-old adopted son so perhaps they could not have children of their own. Meanwhile, Charles and Alfred's father, Alfred, shown as a Great Northern Railway Signalman was living with his second family who were born in London, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Did Alfred keep in contact with the children of his first family? In 1911 Alfred and Alice were living with sons Stanley and Herbert at "Nantglyn" in London Road, Knebworth, near Stevenage. Of their four children, one had died. Alfred was now 53 and we might expect

that he would carry on being a signalman and then retire close by. This was, surprisingly, not quite the case.

Meanwhile, Charles Leigh Walker had become, a Post Office Clerk and in 1911 he was staying with his sister Ethel who had married Alfred Jesse Penny in Raunds Parish Church on the 10th September. The couple had moved back to Ilkeston, where Ethel had been born, and so, confusingly, had Alfred Penny. There is a hidden connection here to link the two families. Alfred was working as a stone mason and they had a one-month-old daughter, Jesse. Was Charles saying goodbye? The following month Alfred Penny sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, preparing the way for the couple's emigration. On 15th September 1911 Ethel, with six-month-old daughter, Jesse arrived in Canada bound for Calgary to join her husband.

Charles said by his family to be in Canadian Mounted Police uniform
With thanks to "Rosspenni" on www.ancestry.co.uk.

Did Charles join them for a time? The family have a photograph which they believe is of Charles, in Royal Mounted Police uniform as a young man. I have not found him definitely on a ship, to or from Canada, but Charles Walker (without the Leigh) is a common name. We also know that Alfred and Ethel Penny returned to Ilkeston during the war. Their son, Alfred Leigh Penny was christened in Holy Trinity Church there on May 4th 1916 and Alfred's occupation is shown as "soldier".

Charles was definitely in England in 1914 because he was in a court case, reported in the *Mid-Sussex Times* on October 19th 1915. A soldier had tried to fraudulently withdraw more money from his account than he had in it, by altering a number in his deposit book. Charles Leigh Walker was the clerk who, on November 23rd 1914 had been working in Rickmansworth Post Office and took the accused man's initial payment. By the time of the case Charles had moved to the Gerrard's Cross branch.

It was at Gerrard's Cross that Charles enlisted in the Royal Engineers on the 11th December 1915 and his address was given as "Llanberis" Knebworth Station, Hertfordshire so we see that he had kept in contact with his father, Alfred and his step family. His occupation was given as "Post Office Clerk and Telegraphist". At first, he was put in the Army Reserve Class "B". He was given a medical examination and was adjudged to have a very good physical development but "bad teeth" and was "slightly varicosed". On the 25th April 1916, Colonel A.M. Ogilvie, Director of the Army Signals Home Defence, wrote to the Recruiting Officer at High Wycombe, stating that Charles now needed to be called "to the colours". He was sent to the Stratford Signal Depot at Bletchley.

Charles became a Sapper in the Royal Engineers and was first granted an extra sixpence (2½p) a day from the 1st May 1916 and a shilling (5p) a day when he had successfully completed his initial training on the 29th May at the Signals School at Fenny Stratford. After finishing his training at Bletchley, he embarked for France on the 14th July 1916.

On the 22nd July he joined the 4th Divisional Signals Company in France. At the start of the war there were fewer than 6,000 in the Royal Engineer Signals Service in twelve companies, with the Regular Signal Companies supported by a single motorcyclist section of the Special Reserve, and by 29 Territorial companies. By 1918 there was 589 companies, the majority of which were in France and Flanders.

We do not know the role that Charles played in the Signals. Because of his background and training much of his time would have been operating the telegraph system but whether in the Front Line trenches or in the Company Headquarters we cannot be certain. The men not only operated the systems but laid, and repaired, the communication wire, handled the mail, and carried messages by foot or horse. They would also operate in forward positions to assist the artillery in providing information on the enemy targets. In these positions they were an obvious target for enemy snipers and many were killed and wounded.

We know that Charles must have had leave in England for at the end of 1917 he married Sarah Jane Warren in the Thrapston area. Sarah had been born in Little Addington, the daughter of bricklayer Thomas Warren and his wife Sarah. It looks possible that it was at this point that they set up home in Spencer Street in Ringstead but this is not certain.

Signallers working at the HQ of the R.E.S.S.in France WW1
Photograph by David McLellan. National Library of Scotland (CC BY 4.0)

Charles returned to the Front and, on 8th March 1918, he was admitted to hospital with Trench Fever. This illness had first occurred in the soldiers in 1915 and was characterised by symptoms including headaches, dizziness, severe backache and severe pain in the shins. The fever usually lasted a matter of days but sometimes reoccurred and could be serious in some patients. It baffled the doctors at first but was finally found to be caused by the faeces of lice in the trenches entering a wound or abrasion. That Charles was stricken by it does show that he was probably sometimes in the front-line areas. Initially he was in hospital for 22 days but it seems that at the end of this time he was re-admitted for further treatment.

We do not know the details of his service but he was discharged in early 1919 and given a "Protection Certificate" to show that he was a returning soldier. The next of kin had been written alongside one document showing "wife" at 9 Spencer Street in Ringstead.

Charles's half-brother, Stanley Alfred Walker, had been with the 17th (County of London) Battalion of the London Regiment, known as the Poplar and Stepney Rifles, as a Territorial soldier prior to the war. He fought in France from 9th March 1915 to 19th October 1916 but had been wounded in action and lost most of his right leg. Nevertheless, he later emigrated to Australia, as did his younger brother, Herbert Cecil. Perhaps more surprisingly, Charles's father, Alfred, aged 61, with his second wife, had also sailed to Brisbane on the S.S. Euripides on the 25th September. He became a well-known figure in Maroochydore, a coastal town, some seventy miles north of Brisbane, where he had settled. He died in 1939

aged 81. His death certificate shows all his living children, from both marriages, including Charles.

I do not think that Charles and Sarah remained long in Ringstead and he disappears from the Electoral Registers in the early 1920s. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he was living at 13 Milton Avenue in Barnet where he was still working as a Postal Clerk. It may be, however, that the couple did move back to Northamptonshire on Charles's retirement. When his wife Sarah died in Kettering Hospital on 7th July 1956 she was shown as the wife of retired Civil Servant, Charles Leigh Walker, and was living at "Denscot" in Little Addington.

Charles then seems to have moved, like many others, to the coast for the rest of his retirement and lived at "Sea Merge" Overstrand on the north Norfolk coast. He died on 12th June 1966 in Sun Court Nursing Home in Sheringham.

Chapter 23

John Thomas Watts (1887-1917)

Hannah Groom was born in Denford to brewer John Groom and his wife, also Hannah, in 1844. In 1861, aged 16, she was living in Church Lane with her father and her brother, Joseph, and his wife and family.

Hannah had not married, but had three children, George, Harry and James. Meanwhile, over the hill in Ringstead, William Thomas Watts had married, the unfortunately named, Fanny Elizabeth Annies on the 19th November 1874. I have not found any children for the couple who, in 1881, were living in Ringstead High Street. Fanny was entered under her second name, Elizabeth. She is shown as having been born in Pertenhall in Bedfordshire, but so is the next person in the Census, and I think this may be an error by the collector.

In 1886 Fanny died and was buried in Ringstead on the 14th August. William married again, to Hannah Groom of Denford on 10th October 1887. As we have seen, Hannah had three children of her own. She was seven years older than William and at 44 years old would seem unlikely to have a further child but, by the end of the year a son, John Thomas Watts was born. He was christened in Ringstead Parish Church on March 9th 1888.

William Watts
With thanks to Madeline Whiteman

In the 1891 Census, William, aged 40, and now an Ironstone Labourer, was living in Carlow Street with Hannah, her three grown up sons and three-year-old John Thomas. They were next door to the *Axe and Compass* public house. By 1901, William was a builder's labourer. Hannah died in 1908, aged 65, and in the following Census, at the age of 60, he was now a road labourer. Only George Groom, aged 49, an Ironstone Labourer, one of Hannah's older children, was still with his widowed stepfather. [John} Thomas, aged 23, and now a "Handsewn Army Man" was also with them in Carlow Street.

John was out of work, as many of the "Handsewn Men" of Raunds and Ringstead were in this Census. When the Great War came three years later, it brought work but took away fathers, sons, brothers and husbands.

As John's military records have been largely lost we can only estimate when he attested, mobilised and was posted to the Western front. We do have some evidence. He joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given Regimental Number 23449. Two experts on the Great War Forum, Steve (Stebie9173) and Craig (ss002d6252) have used the records to show that he would have attested in late 1915 under the Derby Scheme.

This scheme, named after Lord Derby, was introduced in 1915 to try to increase the number of recruits, because the initial flood of volunteers was drying up. All men between the ages of 15 and 65 had to register and this revealed that almost five million men of military age were not in the forces. Of these, only 1.6 million were in protected occupations. The Derby Scheme was brought in to allow men, who voluntarily attested, to either agree to

immediate service (Class B) or be put on a deferred list (Class A) under the understanding that they would be mobilised later.

John Watts attested under this Scheme and at about the same time he married Lucinda Bate (or Bates) at the end of 1915. I Have not managed to find Lucinda in other records before her marriage but I think this may be that she used another first name.

Craig, on the *Great War Forum*, has looked at John's pension records and has estimated that he would have been mobilised in February 1916 and Steve, on the same site, has worked out that he would have been with the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in France in late July 1916. We also know, however, that Lucinda became pregnant in late 1916 so, unless John was not the father, he either did not go to France before the end of 1916 or he had leave from the army at this time.

If John had joined the 6th in late July 1916, he would have joined a unit that had fought bravely, with terrible losses, at Tones Wood and Pozieres. After that the Battalion was in and out of the trenches, sometimes under heavy fire, but with no further significant actions. That winter was a bitter one for the men with snow and ice.

In February 1917 the 6th were in the line near Miraumont and Grandcourt, battles mainly remembered for the terrible conditions. The Germans had started a planned retreat to the heavily fortified Hindenburg Line that they had been constructing. Although they were giving up their positions, they had planned this an orderly retreat with a strong rearguard action to allow this to happen.

At the beginning of March, the Battalion moved to dugouts and tents in Thiepval Wood. They were fighting alongside the 12th Middlesex and the 7th Bedfordshires, supported by a squadron of cavalry and a company of cyclists. On the 21st March the 6th were relieved in the Front Line and in a series of moves by bus and train, linked by marches, they had reached Thiennes by the end of the month. In the following two weeks they were in camp, training but the weather was very wet and often the physical work was replaced by lectures in the billets. They may have been bored but at least they were dry.

On the 21st April 1917 the Battalion moved to Manqueville, still training and with the luxury of an occasional bath. They then received orders to move to the Arras area and by the 28th, the A and D companies were in the Front Line, with the B and C companies in support. It was here that another Ringstead man, Charles Arthur Major was killed. By May the Allies were in front of the Hindenburg Line with the 6th at Cherisy.

On the night of the 3rd May 1917, a preliminary bombardment was followed by a rolling barrage some 200 yards in front of the advancing troops. The *War Diary* has inserted a report of this attack by the 6th on Fontaine Trench, by Lieutenant Colonel R Turner D.S.O. which continues with the account:

> *. . . the Northampton Regiment attacked on a 2 Company front in three waves. They must have followed the barrage very closely having of course a certain percentage of casualties from our own barrage. Immediately they came into view over the crest*

they were under very heavy Machine Gun fire and they covered the ground at the double.

The left Company seeing that the way was clear and that there was cover in the CABLE TRENCH) O.32.a.3.8 got into the trench and bombed straight down FONTAINE TRENCH and were in the trench 10 minutes after barrage opened having a bombing post at O.32.a.5.7 to protect NORTH flank as the Company advanced down FONTAINE TRENCH they killed a few of the enemy and discovered a few dead from previous artillery fire and could observe from their position the right Company advancing to the attack. The right Company as they neared the trench did so in small rushes from shell-hole to shell-hole, when within 30 or 40 yards of enemy wire they were completely held up in shell holes by very heavy Machine-Gun fire.

A vigorous resistance was made but left Company Commander seeing that the right Company could not possibly gain their objective and as the left attacking Battalion was not in touch with him although he was actually in that area - he retired along CABLE TRENCH back to their original front line.

Some of the right Company started a gradual retirement from shell-hole to shell-hole.

The account does not give any hint of the noise or the fear of the battle. The estimated casualties for the day were 6 Officers and 105 Other Ranks killed, wounded, or missing. This disastrous attack was eventually successful but for John Thomas Watts the war, and his life, were over. He was now not a man but merely a statistic. His name is on the Arras Memorial, Bay 7. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

His widow, Lucinda, was given an immediate grant of £3 and a pension of 18s. 9d (about 95 pence) a week from the 19th November 1917. She is shown on the *Army Pension Card* as now living in Carlow Street, possibly with her father-in-law. A daughter, Gladys May was born four months after John's death on 29th August 1917.

Lucinda married again, to Ross Mayes at the end of 1919 and they had a child, Sylvia Bertha Mayes, born at the end of 1921. Ross Mayes died in 1928 and, in the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Lucinda Mayes was still living in Carlow Street with daughter Gladys and possibly Sylvia (usually known as Bertha), for a record has been officially blanked out. Also living with them was Harold H. A. George, a furnace labourer, who Gladys was to marry soon after the Register was compiled.

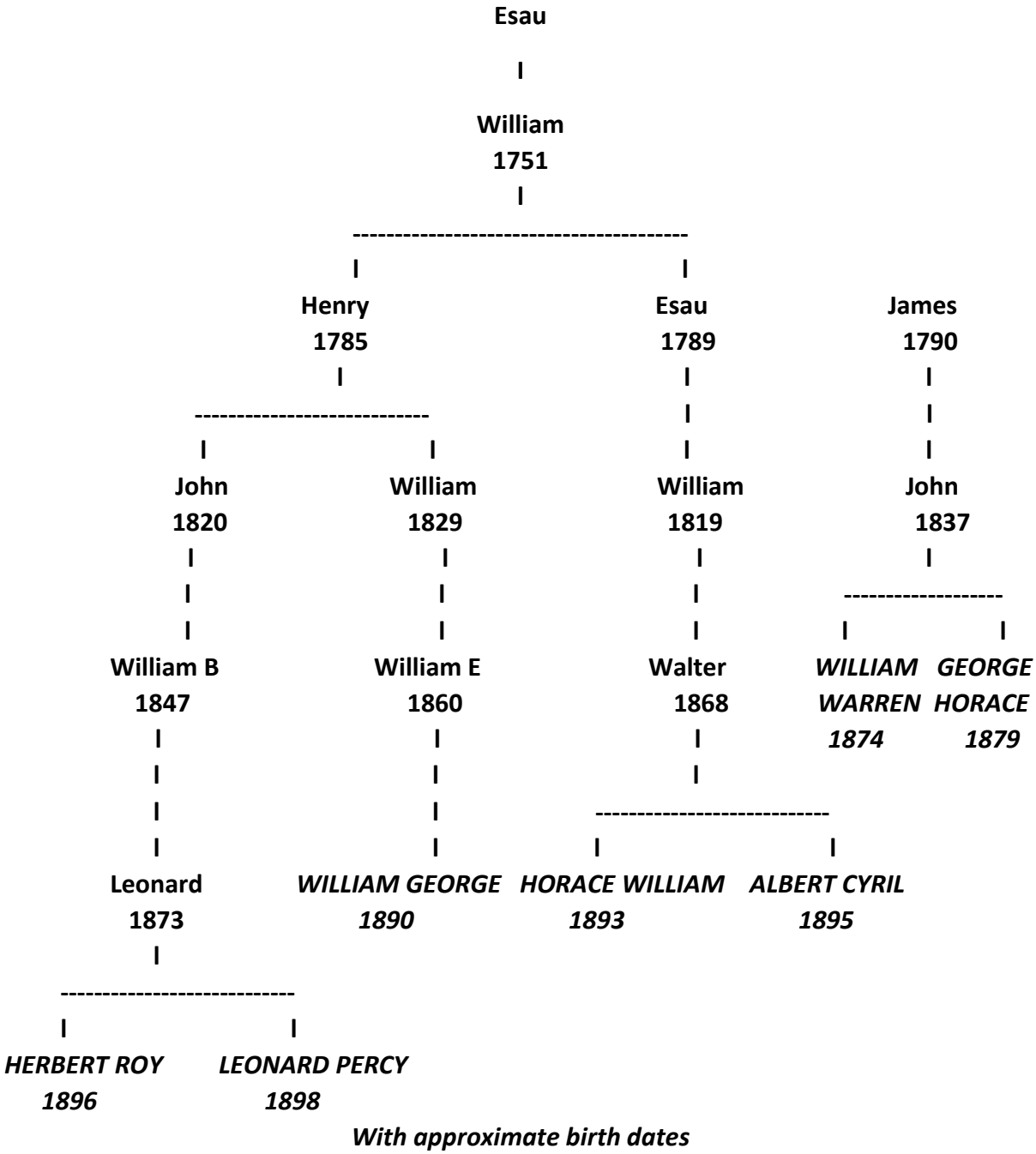
Gladys went on to work for BeBe Dolls, a firm which was set up in Ringstead by the Popper family, originally Jewish refugees from Czechoslovakia. They had first started the business in London and, when that had been bombed out in the Second World War, moved out to Ringstead. They made dolls, bears and other soft toys and employed many Ringstead women before selling the business in the early 1980s. It finally closed in 1987.

Lucinda Mayes died in 1984 aged 91 years, 67 years after the death of John Thomas Watts.

Chapter 24

The Weekley Families

A Simplified Family Tree following the male line only



With approximate birth dates

I have not found the link between the right-hand line and the others but Weekley is a common name in the area and in Polebrook (where the Bradley women came from). There would be other connections through the female lines but I hope this gives a simple basis for the relationships of the WW1 men.

The Weekley Families

The Weekley family name has been in Ringstead for centuries. It may be that it originally came from the Addingtons where they are shown in the Parish Registers in the Seventeenth Century. The Warwickshire Record Office holds the deeds relating to the Manor of Little Addington for a number of properties, and included in these was:

> *. . . a yearly rent of 2s. of Cotton Mills in Ringstead, the property of John Weekley, whose son Thomas inherited them after his death in 1633.*

The number of Weekley entries in the Ringstead Parish Registers increases through the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. We will be recording the lives of six men who saw service in the First World War.

We have looked back at some of the ancestors of the men, and found that links exist, but we cannot say definitely that they form part of one large family tree. There were farmers and butchers in the families and the land and money may have passed down some lines, leaving other to make their own way.

We will begin with two brothers who were a generation older than many of the young men who were called to serve.

Sons of John and Ann Weekley

William Warren Weekley (1874-1935)

James Weekley was born in the late Eighteenth Century and married Elizabeth Miller of Raunds on 11th December 1815 in Ringstead Parish Church. The couple had at least six children and one of them, John Miller Weekley was baptised in Ringstead on the 4th May 1837. John became a shoemaker and, in his turn married Ann Warren on 13th September 1858. Ann was a lacemaker, the daughter of Richard Warren who was to give evidence in the 1864 trial of William Weekley Ball for the murder of Lydia Attley. Both William Weekley and Ann Warren had been born in Ringstead but were both living in Raunds at the time of their marriage. Could there have been some ill feeling against the family after the disappearance of Lydia in 1850?

If this was true, by 1861 they were back in Ringstead and their two children, Thomas (1) and George (8 months), had both been born in Ringstead, as were all the rest of their children. John and Ann had at least eleven children between 1859 and 1879. The four oldest sons were past the age of call-up for the war but the two youngest, William Warren and George Horace did not completely escape.

William was born at the end of 1874 and, in the 1881 Census, his father, John, was a “Coal Hawker” and they were living in London End, a group of poorer cottages where Back Lane joined the Denford Road. William became a carrier, possibly working for a relative, Lot Weekley. He married, aged twenty, to Clara Jane, daughter of John and Jane Peacock, on the 16th September 1895 in Ringstead Parish Church. She was just seventeen years old. In the 1901 Census he was still a “Carrier’ Van Man”. He was 26 years old and Clara was 22 and they had two children, Florence (5) and Eleanor (Coral) just one month old.

We get a possible idea of what William's "van" may have been from a report in the *Northampton Mercury* on the 14th September 1906.

> *A party of young footballers had an unusual experience on Saturday evening. It appears that they had been playing at Rushden in the afternoon and were being driven home by Mr. William Weekley of Ringstead, in a horse-drawn brake. After leaving Stanwick and nearing Westfield-road, Raunds, a collision occurred with a pony and trap coming from the opposite direction. The impact was felt most by the occupants of the trap, three in number, who were thrown out, but fortunately escaped with a shaking.*

Was William blamed by his employer, although it appears that he was not at fault? All we know is that by the 1911 Census, aged 36, he was still living in Church Street but was now a farm labourer. The couple had been married 15 years and had had three children, Florrie (Florence) 15 who had become a domestic servant, Coral (Eleanor) 10 and (Oliver) Jethro, one year old.

The *Mercury* reported, on the 24th May 1912, that William had been summoned and fined six shillings costs for "neglecting his child", Jethro. This was because he had not had him vaccinated and he was ordered to get this done within fourteen days. An Act in 1836 had established the compulsory registration of all births, marriages and deaths from 1837. This began to provide an accurate record of the population and enabled further legislation to be enforceable. One area was the vaccination of children which was made law in 1840, first as a voluntary, but free, service. In 1853 it became compulsory, with a £1 penalty for parents who did not comply. Further acts followed in 1898 and 1907, and although, following some opposition, "Conscientious Objectors" were allowed to not have their children vaccinated, in practice this dispensation was rarely granted by the magistrates.

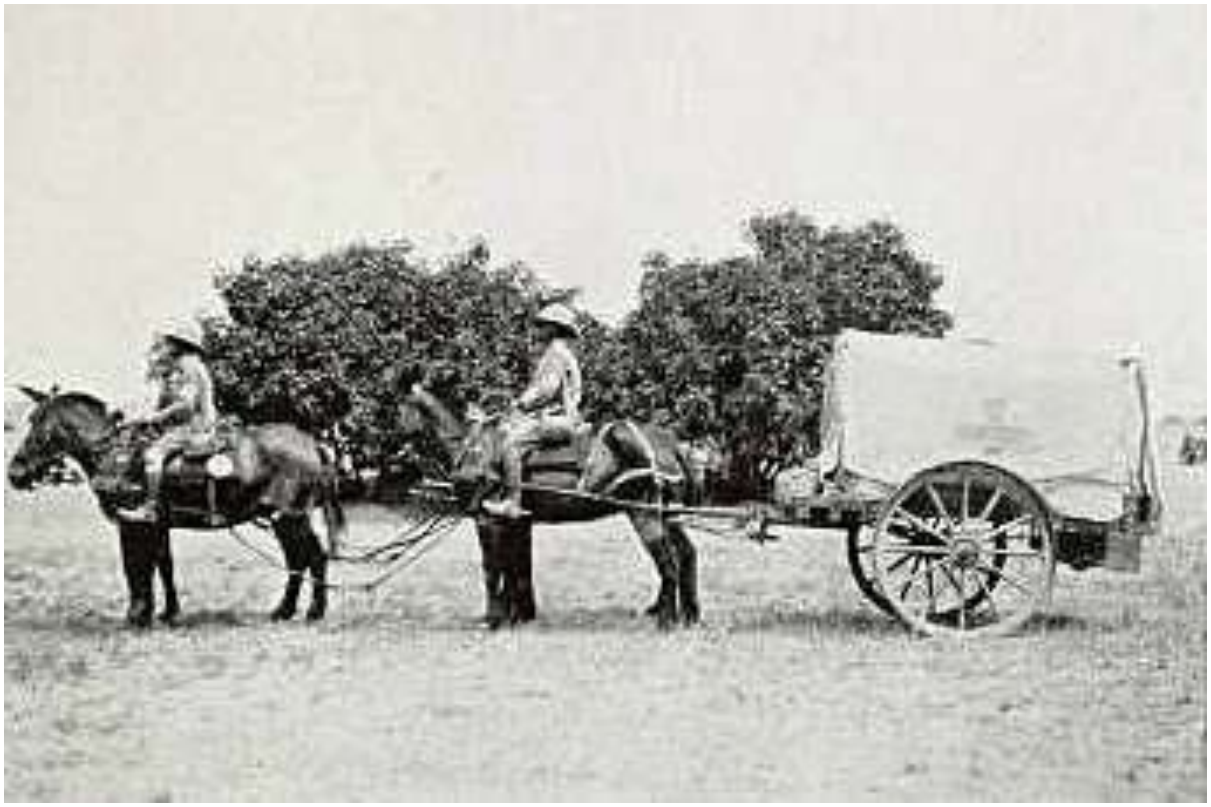
Was it through conscience or idleness that William did not have Jethro vaccinated? The *Chronicle and Echo* reported on the 7th July 1912, that he had been s fined 10 shillings with six shillings costs for not doing as the magistrates had ordered.

When war came in 1914, William would not have expected to have been asked to serve. The war dragged on and the army suffered terrible losses. Conscription was brought in at the beginning of 1916 when William was in his early forties but eventually he was called to service. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. The *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 adds that his service number was 84507. We only have a few of his military records but another man named Albert Scurrell was allocated 84506, the number before William's and he would have followed the same initial path. Albert was called up on 24th June 1916 and mobilised on the 24th August and William's dates would have been similar. Like Albert, he probably was sent first to Aldershot initially for basic army training with some simple instruction on handling patients and stretcher bearing.

The history of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) can be traced back to 1660 when each Regiment had its own Surgeon and Deputy appointed. Nevertheless, in the Crimean War many men were lost to disease because of the inadequacy of the medical support. On the 23rd June 1898 the RAMC was formed by Royal Warrant. Once more, in the Boer War of

1899-1902, the RAMC treated 22,000 men for wounds but 74,000 for dysentery and typhoid alone. This was mainly due to lack of water purification and poor sanitation. Lessons were learnt and the RAMC in the First World War, confronted by a volume of casualties and diseases, not seen before in the history of warfare, developed efficient systems that saved many lives.

As we have seen in the story of Albert Dicks, the main innovation was the “Chain of Evacuation”. Casualties were dealt with close to the Front and then, as quickly as possible, moved on through a series of hospitals with the cured returned to active service. The men needing further treatment or rehabilitation were moved down the chain to the larger hospitals (on the French Coast for the Western Front) and finally, for some, back to the UK.



A mule-drawn sandcart
From: With the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. www.archive.org.

Albert Scurrell never left England but William was posted to Egypt. In Egypt there was not usually the same volume of casualties, although it was the main base that received the wounded from the actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 1915/16 the disastrous Gallipoli offensive filled the Egyptian hospitals, especially with soldiers from Australia and New Zealand. Besides being a base for the hospitals, the British were there to defend the Suez Canal from the Turks, it was a place from which to launch an attack on the Ottoman Empire in the Palestine area.

The "improved" cacolet for seated casualties
From: With the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. www.archive.org.

Unfortunately, we cannot give an account of William's specific role in Egypt but we can give some idea of the work of the RAMC and the conditions there. These were very challenging for the Briton of the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The Western Front had mud, Egypt had dust and sand. A "Sergeant Major R.A.M.C." wrote a book, published in 1918, telling of his experiences in Egypt in the first three years of the war. He wrote:

> *I have said that the climate has a deal of influence over hospital-work in Egypt. Only those who have lived the year through in a hospital here can fully realise what that influence is. In Egypt, even in mid-winter, the days are always warm so long as the sun is up. It is only the nights that are cold, sometimes bitterly cold. The Egyptian winter is very short, however. Both days and nights, for the greater part of the year, are hot, with a peculiar dead dry, scorching heat that is particularly trying to sick and well alike. And there is always an impalpable dust in the air that even on the stillest days steadily collects upon everything - a dust that in all probability is capable of carrying the germs of almost every known disease. When the wind gets up, the dust gets up with it; and the harder the wind blows, the more dust it brings. The dust-storms in Cairo must be classed among the most unpleasant things that it is possible to conceive.*

The sand in many areas was also a major problem for the transportation of equipment and casualties, with no roads and few railways. Often motor transport was not possible and various designs were tried, such as mule-drawn sledges but in general the most useful

carriers were “sand carts” and camels and mules. Specially designed “cacolets” were made for camels to carry both seated and lying patients. It still would not have been the smoothest of rides for the wounded.

The *Absent Voters’ List* for 1918 has William in the “MT RAMC” and although this is difficult to interpret it seems most likely that William was part of this transportation system. His experience as a carrier would lead one to expect him to be a Private, working with a Driver from the Army Service Corps. The problem is that MT usually stands for “Mechanical Transport” but this may be an error in the *Absent Voters’ Lists* which were not infallible. Unfortunately, except for the facts we have so far given, we know little more of his career.

The RAMC was responsible for the physical welfare of the troops and there were weekly inspections to check for any signs of disease. One important area of the RAMC’s work which might come as a surprise was dentistry. The Egypt Expeditionary Force (E.E.F.) had thirty dental surgeons. The “Sergeant Major” tells us that:

> *Taking a typical specific period [not given]: we find that in this time a total number of 28,300 dental cases were treated, involving some58,600 attendances at the depots. These included the cleaning and filling of about 17,000 partially decayed teeth, of which number about half required preliminary treatment in the form of nerve devitalisation and removal of septic root-conditions, thus vastly increasing the work called for in the process of filling. New dentures supplied during the period reached a total of only 4,000. . . In addition . . . over 28,000 summary extractions of hopelessly decayed teeth were performed within the same typical period, the men in nearly all cases being returned to their units forthwith.*

Would the users of the service have had a different recollection of their treatment?

It is also often forgotten that the RAMC was responsible for ensuring that drinking water was not contaminated and that waste from the food, whether eaten or not, was disposed of, in a way that did not bring flies, vermin or disease. Near the main base, there was a supply of fresh water known as the Sweet Water Canal but the bacteriologists discovered that this contained many “disease germs” including the then incurable Bilharzia. It had to go through a filtration process and was then sterilised with acid sodium sulphate before it was safe to drink. For those in the desert in the area, the water was carried by camels in two light tanks on either side of their backs. Troops further out used water from local wells where possible which was then chlorinated and finally, if this was not possible, the men were issued with chlorine tablets to put in their water bottles. The problem was that the tablet needed to be in the water for at least half an hour to be fully effective and, in the heat, soldiers were sometimes too impatient.

With regard to waste, the sand provided a reasonable solution as the “Sergeant Major” described:

> *The disposal of urine, so formidable a task with a large force operating in ordinary country, proved a comparatively simple problem in the absorptive soil of the Desert. We found all that was necessary was to dig a fairly deep pit and fill it with drainage*

material such as stones or pieces of rock in which a number of light sheet-iron tubes or "trumpets" could be partially embedded. A thick layer of sand well beaten down round the bases of the tubes completed the contrivance. A precautionary spraying of the surrounding soil with an antiseptic was regularly carried out. The device proved to be entirely fly-proof, and on striking camp, nothing more was needed than to pull up the trumpets and fill in the holes with sand. The trumpets being graduated in shape, fitted one into the other, and were thus readily portable. They were also cheap, simple, and easily made. Waste water from cookhouses and ablution places were dealt with by soakage pits constructed on similar lines; but in place of the upstanding tubes, partially sunk petrol or other tins with cullender bottoms were fitted. The trapped contents of these were periodically removed and consigned to the incinerator.

In these short biographies we have, of course, concentrated almost entirely on the men but it is worth remembering that, particularly in the medical services, women also played an important part. The "Sergeant Major" writing of his time in Egypt told of the tensions that sometimes emerged between the male orderlies from the RAMC and the, much better qualified, ward sisters when they were reprimanded or given orders. Although his attitudes to women can sometimes seem patronising, and there is a caveat even in his praise, he does make it clear that the men should accept their role with good grace.

The sisters rule the wards simply because they are more competent to do so than the brothers; and any other arrangement, for the present at least, seems to be alike contrary to justice, to public policy, and to common sense.

He finishes the book by listing the honours the RAMC in Egypt gained, and states:

The women of the British Army Medical Service in Egypt have equal right to be proud of the distinctions conferred on them, as they have equally shared in the dangers and privations of the War.

We have no reason to believe that William Weekley was a Conscientious Objector but some did accept service in the RAMC, while others refused this and were imprisoned. It seems that, once in the RAMC, some men in Egypt were instructed to transfer to other units and refused. On April 15th1919, a Colonel Wedgewood asked a question of Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, in the House of Commons:

. . . how many men are still imprisoned in Egypt for refusing to accept transference from the Royal Army Medical Corps to combatant units; how long have these men been in prison and whether he will now order their immediate release?

We do know that William was finally discharged on 20th April 1919 but it seems likely that he left Egypt before that date, possibly in 1918. His reason for discharge was injuries sustained in an accident. He suffered a fracture of a tibia and fibula but we do not know the cause. Was it a transport accident? His wound was declared as attributable to his war service and he received a small disability pension of five shillings and sixpence a week with an additional one shilling and fourpence for his son, Oliver Jethro.

William returned to his family in Church Street in Ringstead. He died, aged 60, in early 1935.

George Horace Weekley (1879-1960)

William Warren Weekley had a younger brother, George Horace, who was born on the 16th March 1879. By the 1891 Census he was twelve years old and living with his family in London End in Ringstead. He was, like his older brother, already a farm labourer. By 1901, however, still living at 1 London End, he was working at home with his father as a shoe riveter.

On the 16th November 1903, aged 25, he married Clara Maud Hayter, who was two years his senior, in Ringstead Parish Church. Clara had been born in Salisbury in Wiltshire, the daughter of Edward, a coachman for a wealthy family, and his wife Elizabeth. In 1901 Clara had been working as a domestic nurse for the family of retired Major General George Paxton in Midhurst in West Sussex. How did George Weekley and Clara meet? Perhaps she had moved to a new position in Northamptonshire but on their marriage certificate she is shown as a shoemaker like George. Her sister Edith Mabel Hayter, who was a housemaid at Cockley Cley in the 1901 Census, was one of the witnesses.

By 1911 George and Clara were living in London End with their three children, Minnie [Lizena] who was seven, Charles [Vivian] 5, and Hugh [Colin} who was seven months old. George's widowed mother, Ann, was also living with them. George was a bootmaker producing military boots for the Government but, as we have seen with many others in the area, he was unemployed.

When war came, George, naturally with his young family, did not volunteer and when conscription was introduced in 1916 the needs of the army's feet gave him some exemption. By 1917, the terrible number of men wounded and killed, led the Government to seek more recruits and the factories and farms were stripped to the bare minimum. On the 1st of April 1917 he was employed by *Owen Smith* in his Raunds' factory as a "hand laster" and the Military Tribunal granted him a temporary exemption until 31st July. The Government challenged this but it appears that he was confirmed in this stay of conscription until the end of July.

At some point after that, George was mobilised and, after basic and gunnery training, he was posted to the 65th Company of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) which had been based in Malta since 1904. He became a Gunner and was given the Regimental Number 198492. It is possible that he never fired a gun in anger.

Malta was, at that time, part of the British Empire and was a strategic base in the Mediterranean. In the Second World War, with Italy part of the Axis Alliance and the greater range and destructive power of aircraft, submarines and ships, Malta became a prime target and was almost starved into submission. In the First World war it did not see any significant action although German submarines were a constant threat to the Allied shipping.

I have said that Malta saw no significant action but this is wrong in one important respect. It became known as the "Nurse of the Mediterranean" because of the Allied hospitals that

were based there. The worst of these times was caused by the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign which sent many casualties, especially from Australia and New Zealand to Malta and Egypt.

We do not know when George was demobilised but he was in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* but not there in 1919. Also, the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which was published in June 1919 has him as already demobilised. It seems certain therefore that it was in late 1918 or early 1919 at the latest. The records seem to show that he was only entitled to the British War Medal as the Victory Medal was for those, with some exceptions, who had served in a warzone not just overseas. It was rare for them not to be awarded as a pair, nicknamed Mutt and Jeff after cartoon characters.

In the 1920 Electoral Roll he is seen living with Clara in the Sivers Building and she too was entitled to vote after the passing of the 1918 *Representation of the People Act*. This gave women aged over 30 who occupied land or premises with a rateable value above £5, or whose husbands did. It is usually forgotten that many men got the vote in 1918 as well as women.

By 1930 George and Clara were still living in the Sivers Buildings and their son, Charles Vivian Weekley, was also entitled to vote. By 1939 George was working as a general labourer, probably for Northamptonshire County Council. Clara died early in 1944 and on the 30th October 1945, George, now in his sixties, married widow, Gertrude Duffey (née Ginns). George was living in Church Street in Ringstead when he died in St Mary's Hospital in Kettering, on the 4th October 1960. Probate was granted to his son, Charles Vivian Weekley who was now a Boot and shoe retailer, and William Freeman, a Council employee.

His daughter, Minnie Lizenza, had married William Sellick and died in Sidmouth on the 9th July 1947. His youngest son, Hugh Colin Weekley, married Margaret Gilbert and lived until 1999.

The Sons of Walter Henry and Adeline Weekley

We will now look at two more brothers whose line links back through Walter Henry to William and on to Esau who had been baptised on the 14th September 1789. He was the younger brother of William whose descendants we will look at next. As usual, the limited range of Christian names that most families used in the past, makes the extended tree something of a maze.

The brothers were the children of Walter Henry, often known as Harry, Weekley who had been born in about 1868 and his wife Adeline Richards, born in about 1872. She had come from Melksham in Wiltshire. They had married, however, in Woodford on the 4th May 1893 where both were shown as living at the time of the marriage. Adeline's father, William Richards, was a furnace labourer, working in the iron ore smelting furnaces that were in the Islip parish but sited nearer the village of Woodford. It seems likely that it was this work that had drawn the family to Northamptonshire.

By 1901 the couple were living at 6 Church Street in Ringstead and the children, Horace (7) and Albert (5), had both been born in the village, so William Henry's stay in Woodford had been brief. By 1911 Henry (as he now called himself) and Adeline had been married seventeen years and had four children, of whom Horace, aged 17, a shoehand, Albert, 15, a

shoe finisher, and Reginald, 9, were still living. Henry was a foreman in a local boot factory and they were living in Denford Road.

Horace William Weekley (1893-1972)

Horace was born on the 21st October 1893 and, as we have seen, had become a shoehand by 1911. The war came but, at first, his work in the military boot trade gave him exemption from conscription. In 1911 Eleanor May Smith, who had been born in Islip, was working as a servant in a Nursing Home at 34 Billing Road in Northampton. Horace and Eleanor met, and, on the 2nd August 1915, they married in Islip. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 6th August 1915 carried a report of their wedding.

> *At St Nicholas' Church, Islip on Monday, a pretty wedding was solemnised by the Rector (Rev. W. St. George Coldwell), the contracting partners being Miss Eleanor May Smith, second daughter of Mr and Mrs Frank Smith of Islip, and Mr Horace William Weekley, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Harry Weekley of Myrtle Cottage, Ringstead. The bride was attired in a silver-grey poplin dress with black hat trimmed with ostrich ruche. She was attended by Miss Dorothy Smith (sister) who was dressed in a navy costume with blue hat to match and Miss Edie Smith (niece of the bride) who was dressed in cream. The bride was given away by her father, while Mr Bert Weekley (brother of the bridegroom) was the best man.*
>
> *After the ceremony a reception was held at the Parish room. Mr and Mrs Weekley received a large number of useful and handsome presents.*

The protection given by Horace's work became weaker as the demand for men grew ever greater. Horace, like George Weekley, had been working for *Owen Smith* in his Raunds factory. Also, like George, he came before the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917. Horace was working as a traditional hand sewer. He gained further exemption until the 30th June and, on the 7th September, although his appeal was dismissed, he was given a further six weeks.

The reason for his further appeal had been the illness of his wife, Eleanor. It may be that she was having a difficult pregnancy because their first child, Albert was to be born on the 16th November 1917.

Eventually, however, Horace was mobilised to the Royal Field Artillery and given Regimental Number 237383. Unfortunately, there is some confusion here. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 have his unit as the 18th Siege Battery of the Royal Field Artillery (RFA). The only unit of this name was part of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). The military records that still exist clearly show him in the RFA. He would first have completed his basic and gunnery training and would probably have not reached the Front Line until 1918 at the earliest.

At the end of the Nineteenth Century the Royal Artillery had been divided into the Garrison and Field Artillery. At the start of the Great War there were three sections to the Royal Regiment of Artillery: the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) with light mobile, horse drawn guns; the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), which had been developed from the coastal defence

units and was equipped with heavy large calibre guns and howitzers; and the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), the largest group, which had medium calibre guns and howitzers. The RFA operated close to the Front Line whereas the RGA were further back sending shells with a higher trajectory, often at unseen targets.

It seems most likely that he served in the RFA, but whichever unit he was in, we know that he was in France and Belgium with the artillery. Like the machine gunners, the artillery were a prime target for the enemy because of their capability to inflict terrible damage on men and machinery. The Imperial War Museum (IWM) has collected the recollections of the various "Gunners" in "Voices of the First World War". One of them was Tom Brennan who explained the various types of shells that they had to handle.

> *There were four kinds of shells. There was a DA, direct action; there was a shell they used for blowing up billets and that which didn't go off for a minute or so, it sunk into the ground before it went off, delayed action; then the third one was shrapnel and the fourth was poison gas. They were all painted a different colour so you'd know which was which. At night time, if it was dark, you would know which shell you were going to fire. The shells were very heavy and had to be carried up by animals or men to the guns.*

It was hard, dangerous work, with always the fear of a "Premature", a shell going off before it was fired, with terrible consequences for the, usually eight-man, crew.

We do know that Horace was wounded, as this was reported in the *War Office List of Casualties Number 5735*, on the 27th November 1918. The date of his actual wounding may have been many weeks before that, so he was probably not in the Front Line at the time of the Armistice on the 11th November. His Pension Card shows that he had suffered a gunshot wound (GSW) to his left leg. It also records that he had Bronchitis and this had been aggravated by his war experience. One can imagine that the daily conditions, with gun smoke, together with the various poison gases would not help any man with a respiratory complaint.

He was discharged, presumably from a hospital in the UK, on the 22nd February 1919. He was said to have a 20% disablement and was granted a small pension of eight shillings, with an extra three shillings and sixpence for his child. By the 8th December 1920, his disablement had been reduced to 14% and he received a total allowance of nine shillings and sixpence weekly allowance. He was entitled to the British War and Victory medals.

Finally, Horace returned home to Church Street in Ringstead. Albert had been born in 1917 just before he left for war. A daughter, Ivy Browett Weekly was born on the 15th November 1922. In 1939, the *Register of England and Wales* shows them all in the old family home of Myrtle Cottage in Denford Road. Horace was now a general labourer and Eleanor had Unpaid Domestic Duties". Their son, Albert, was a leather dresser and Ivy a machinist.

Horace died on the 14th November 1949 at Church Hill in Stanwick. Eleanor died almost thirty years later, in 1978, aged 83 years.

Albert Cyril Weekley (1895-1964)

Horace's younger brother, Albert Cyril Weekley, was born on the 22nd September 1895 but was not baptised until the 17th June 1908, along with his younger brother, Reginald. He also went into the shoe trade and was shown in the 1911 Census as working for *Owen Smith* in Raunds as a shoe finisher. He was living with the family in Myrtle Cottage in Denford Road, Ringstead.

By the time that he was old enough to be conscripted he had become a pressman in a factory and, with Horace, he came before the Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917 and again on the 15th June. *Owen Smith* was putting the case for retaining staff for the military boot production, but it appeared that he accepted that Albert would have be conscripted. Towards the end of 1917 Albert married Elsie Annie Christobel (she had been born on Christmas Day 1896) Mayes, daughter of Ebenezer and Ellen who in 1911, aged 14 was already a leather cutter in a village lift (heel) making factory.

What happened to Albert next? We would expect that in late 1917 or early 1918 he would have been mobilised and served at least in 1918 but I have been unable to find any records for him. This does not mean that he was not conscripted but it is possible that he failed the medical or served in a home-based unit. We cannot be sure.

After the war we can see that the couple lived first in London End and then in Gladstone Street. By 1939 they were still there and Albert was a "Pressman – Insole and Through Cutter" while Elsie had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". When Albert died on 23rd October 1964 in Park Hospital in Wellingborough, the couple were living at 37 High Street in Ringstead. Elsie lived to be 83 years old and died in 1980.

Sons of Leonard and Emma Weekley

We have seen in the last pages how two brothers linked back to Esau and Mary Bates. An older brother of Esau was Henry Weekley, baptised on the 29th May 1785. He married Eliza Goodwin and it is their line which links down to Leonard born in about 1873, who married Emma Woodward form Woodford in 1895. Leonard Weekley had become a shoemaker like his father, William. There was also a link to William George Weekley through the Bradley family of Polebrook. The Weekleys would have had brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins living in the village.

It is the two sons of Leonard and Emma that we will be looking at in this section.

Leonard and Emma Weekley with their family
Herbert standing centre in his new uniform with brother Leonard Percy on his left
With thanks to Jennifer James (née Weekley)

Herbert Roy Weekley (1896-1983)

The oldest son, Herbert, was born on the 11th April 1896 in Ringstead and, in the 1901 Census, we see the family of three children Herbert, Leonard and Ivy living at 3 Denford Road. Ivy was only three months old, so one-year-old daughter Carmine Olive was living with her grandparents, George and Esther Woodward In Woodford to give Emma some respite. By 1911 the family had grown again and living with Leonard and Emma were Leonard Percy (13), Ivy Ellen (10), Dorothy Maud (8), Kate (6), Louise (4) and Eva (1). Also living with them was Leonard's widowed mother, Bessie Elizabeth (62) a sick nurse and Frank Brown, a one-year-old "Nurse child". Leonard was now the manager of a "Lift [Heel} Making Factory.

Two of the children are missing, [Carmine] Olive was still living with her mother's parents in Woodford. Herbert was staying with his uncle and aunt, William and Mary Ellen Neall in Daventry. Mary was Leonard Weekley's younger sister. William was a cycle manufacturer and Herbert, aged 14, was working as a clerk in the factory. Many small local cycle firms grew up in this period. The *Lightstrung Garage* in Rushden produced cycles locally and I remember my mother riding an old *Lightstrung* sit-up-and-beg bicycle in the 1950s. Most of these small makers disappeared as the large factories came into production.

Advert; September 1920. www.gracesguide.co.uk.

It is not clear if Herbert had returned home by the outbreak of the Great War but we do know that he enlisted and two of the major sources for our information, besides the Medal Index Card and Roll, are the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voters' Lists*.

We see from these that he joined the Machine Gun Corps which had been created by Royal Warrant on October 14th 1915. Before this, each Infantry unit had its own machine-gun section of two teams manning Maxim guns. Soon after its formation, the Maxim was replaced by the superior Vickers machine-gun. For some administrative reason the numbering of the men started at 3000 and Herbert's number was 3145 so he was only the 145th man to join the new Corps. At first the old system continued whilst the new Corps were trained and ready. Two training bases were set up, one at Belton Park near Grantham in Lincolnshire and one in Camiers in France.

The machine gun was the most lethal weapon of the war but the converse of this was that it was a prime target for enemy fire. It was not for nothing that the MGC was known as "The Suicide Club". The Vickers Gun was very heavy and required a team of six men to transport and operate it.

We do not have most of Herbert's military records but we do know a little more about a Private Charley Watts whose number was 3142, just three before his. It seems likely that Herbert, like Charley, first joined the Northamptonshire Regiment, possibly the 8th (Reserve Battalion) for his basic training, before being transferred to the Machine Gun Corps, on the 1st January 1916.

He would have then undergone intensive training for his new role, probably at Belton Park before being posted abroad. The 44th Company landed in France on 9th February 1916 and joined the 44th Brigade on the 12th February 1916 and was attached to the 15th (Scottish) Division.

.303inch Vickers Machine Gun ©York Castle Museum (Commons)

The 44th Machine Gun Company, was at the Western Front in the Battle of the Somme, fighting at the Battles of Pozieres Ridge, Flers-Courcelette in September and finishing at the Transloy Ridges in October. In 1917 the unit was in the Battles of Arras and Ypres. On March 17th1918, the companies were reorganised into battalions and the 44th along with the 45th, 46th and 225th became the 15th Battalion of the MGC. The problem is that we know that the Ringstead Roll of Honour has him in the 41st Battalion which had been similarly formed on March 17th 1918 from the Machine Gun Companies of the 41st Division (122nd, 123rd and 124th). The *War Diary*, however, does report that the numbers were made up to strength from other infantry units.

We cannot be sure when Herbert moved from the 44th Company and ended up in the 41st Battalion. One possibility is that he was wounded or incapacitated and went to the base at Camiers and, when recovered, was posted to another unit. Unfortunately, there is so much uncertainty that any attempt at plotting his time in the army could be mainly guesswork.

There is a gap in the *War Diary* of the 41st Machine Gun Battalion from the end of August 1918 to the beginning of November 1919 but they do show that it became a unit of the Rhine Garrison Troops and remained in Germany until early 1920 as part of the Army of Occupation.

There is further confusion for it is the Spring edition of the *1919 Absent Voter's List* that shows Herbert as a Corporal in the Labour Corps (607892) and the Autumn one which has him listed in the Machine Gun Corps. The Labour Corps are not on either the Medal Index Card or the Medal Roll so it may be that he was wounded or sick in Germany, was "invalided

home" and was appointed as a Corporal in the Labour Corps before returning to the MGC. Of course, the AVL entry could be a mistake. The Medal Roll shows that on the 9th of November 1919 he was demobilised and placed in "Class Z A.R." [Army Reserve] which meant that he was fit enough to be called up in the unlikely event of the war starting up again.

There are still anomalies in this explanation so all we can be reasonably certain of, is that he served with the Machine Gun Corps from early 1916 and was part of the Army of Occupation after the end of the War, before being invalided home.

There is a little confusion about what happened to Herbert after the war. He is in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in 1919 but is shown in the lists for Daventry at 16 Badby Road for 1922, 1924 and 1925. In 1929 he was living in Carlow Road in Ringstead. In 1929, also, he married Rosetta Victoria Cook in Epsom. Rosetta had been born in Carshalton in Surrey on the 30th March 1901. In 1911, she was living with her parents, George, a jobbing gardener, and Elizabeth who was originally from Flore in Northamptonshire, at 33 Mill Lane in Carshalton. By 1929 she was with Edna Alice and Walter Harold Felton at 31 The Ridgeway, Carshalton. We do not know her occupation. Was she a domestic servant or a relative?

Nor do we know how the couple met. Flore is only some seven miles from Daventry, so was Rosetta visiting relatives in her mother's home village? The couple moved back to western Northamptonshire and settled in the High Street in Towcester. They were living there, at 5 Addison Terrace, when the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* was compiled. Herbert had become an "Accountant and Typist" which possibly means that he worked in the office of a local company. Rosetta had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Herbert's mother, Emma, had died in 1936 and his father, Leonard died too, on the 6th September 1945. He was living in Carlow Street at the time and the *National Probate Calendar* shows that he left £1048. 9s. 11d to Herbert and his younger brother Leonard. The entry also reveals that Herbert was now working as the manager of a Tyre Depot

Herbert lived to be 87 years' old and died in the Daventry area in 1983 and Rosetta died in 1995, aged 94.

Leonard Percy Weekley (1898-1972)

Herbert's younger brother, Leonard Percy Weekley, was born on the 29th April 1898 and, in 1901, was with his parents and siblings in the new Ringstead housing estate at 3 Gladstone Street, the roads named after Liberal politicians. By 1911 his older brother was living away from home, but he now had five younger sisters. He was thirteen years old and was working in a local lift (heel) factory. A.E. Fox & Co. Ltd. were based in Burton Latimer where they made leather heels for shoes. For a time, they also had a factory in Ringstead, making heels for military boots, which was built on the outside of the sharp bend at the end of Church Street where it becomes the Denford Road.

When war came Leonard was only sixteen years old and it would have seemed very unlikely that the Great War would involve him. This was not to be, and he served on the Western Front. Also, like his brother, there is some confusion among the few records of his military

service that do remain. The 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead has Leonard in the 25th Battalion of the Kings (Liverpool Regiment) while the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* (published in June 1919) also has him the same Battalion but invalided home and demobilised. On the other hand, his military records show him in the Manchester Regiment and the Labour Corps.

The following account was only arrived at with a great deal of help from the *Great War Forum*, especially Ken (kenf48), whose knowledge of the war records and especially the Regimental Numbers has enabled him to plot a course through the various stages of Leonard's career.

In March 1916 Conscription was introduced for single men born in 1897, who were deemed to have enlisted and were placed on the Army Reserve. In May 1916, men born in 1898 were attested and were placed in Group A. For men like Leonard who had become eighteen this Group closed on June 7th. The men were called up when they had reached the age of eighteen years and seven months. As Harry Patch remarked in his memoir, "We all knew when the call would come" and, for Leonard, this would have been in November 1916 at the earliest, though it is possible that he was not called up until January 1917.

He would have first reported to the local regimental depot and from there posted to a Reserve or Training Battalion. It seems likely that Leonard was one of a group of men from Northamptonshire who were posted to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment, which had been formed at Tring in Hertfordshire in April 1916, although definitive details of his home service have been lost. Certainly, he was in a draft from the 4th Norfolks who embarked from Folkestone to Boulogne on 28th May 1917, barely a month after his nineteenth birthday, the official age for service abroad.

The draft arrived at 32 Infantry Base Depot at Étaples and were posted to active service battalions of the Norfolk Regiment, specifically the 8th or the 9th. They would have spent a few weeks being toughened up for front-line duty. On the 19th June 1917, the men were posted and renumbered to the 2/6th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. Leonard was allocated the number 270116 and with his comrades, joined his Battalion in the field a few days later. The 2/6th War Diary records that, while the 2/6th were in billets at Allouange reinforcements arrived: 61 on the 20th; 122 on the 21st and 85 on the 26th.

The 2/6th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment were part of the 199th Brigade in the 66th (East Lancashire) Division. Ken believes that the men were posted to bring the Battalion and the Division up to strength, ready for a planned amphibious attack by the Allies on the Flanders Coast. By the 26th June, the 2/6ths were in billets in a Corn Warehouse at St Pol near Dunkerque. On July 15th they took over the coastal defences at Dunkerke Bains and spent time working for the Royal Engineers digging defences. On July 24th they moved into Front Line trenches at Lombartsyde where they suffered many casualties, 182 suffering from the effects of a gas attack. On July 1st 1917, the actual strength of the Battalion (as opposed to the strength on paper) was 34 Officers and 927 Other Ranks. On August 1st the "Trench Strength" was 15 Officers and 405 Other Ranks.

They remained in the coastal area near the Belgian border, but the planned "Operation Hush" did not take place and, in October, they moved from their base at Heuringhem to the Front Line near Ypres. The weather was now terrible with heavy rain and deep mud and they were often employed in working parties. In December they were in the Reninghelst area south west of Ypres still suffering casualties, mainly from shellfire.

In the new year the *Diary* reports that the Paper Strength of the Battalion was 41 Officers and 795 Other Ranks, but the Trench Strength was 28 Officers and 589 Other Ranks. By February they were in the infamous Passchendaele area. In March the last great German "Michael Offensive" broke upon the troops and, as with many battalions, there was a sudden headlong withdrawal before the onslaught. The *Diary* records:

> *Please note that, as all records. operation orders etc. have been lost in action, this summary has been completed from memory.*

Through March 1918 we see from the placenames in the Diary, Herbécourt, Harbonières, Gullaucourt, Aubercourt, Hangard Wood, a scramble south and west as they gave ground and tried to establish a holding point. Eventually the attack lost momentum as the German troops were exhausted and the supply lines overstretched. In April the tide began to turn. The 2/6th Manchesters did not see this as a unit for, in March, it was reduced to a small training cadre with the large majority of the men being sent to base to be added to other units. The Battalion was completely disbanded in July 1918.

There are now several possibilities for Leonard. He could have been wounded or sick and sent back to England and, when recovered, posted to the 25th Battalion of the King's (Liverpool Regiment) and returned with them to France. There is also the possibility that when the 2/6th Manchesters' men were reallocated to other units he returned to a base and, rather being posted to a combined Manchester unit was then posted to the 25th Liverpools in France.

If the posting was in England, the 25th Battalion was in Norfolk in 1917, first at Sheringham and then, from July, at Sidestrand. They left Cromer and sailed from Dover to Calais on 6th May 1918. It was a 3rd Echelon unit which meant that the men were not expected to fight in the Front Line and were known as a Garrison Guard Battalion. On arrival they were attached to the 59th Division, stationed at Estrée-Cauche where the men's main task was digging defensive positions.

Almost as soon as they arrived the Battalion was struck down by a "Pyrexia of Unknown Origin" (P.U.O) epidemic, losing, at the peak in June, over a hundred men a day to hospital. They had to have 50 reinforcements in July, before they lost anyone to enemy action.

P.U.O was better known as Trench Fever and could affect men several weeks after them being originally infected. It had a range of symptoms including a sudden fever, loss of energy, bad headaches, skin rashes, pains in the eyeballs, dizziness, muscle aches and severe pain in the shins which is why it was also known as "Shin Bone Fever". As in the 2019/20 Covid 19 pandemic, symptoms could be fairly brief and mild in some patients but could affect others very badly, causing heart problems and depression. In some it could lead

to relapses for up to ten years. It was only at the end of the war that it was found to be caused by bacteria in lice faeces, often infecting the men while they were feeding on their blood.

The exigencies of war now forced these soldiers, not considered fit for front line service, into the trenches. They were posted to the 176th Brigade in June 1918 and, on the 25th July, they first moved up into the trenches, suffering their first casualty on the way. Although the 25th (they had dropped the Garrison Guard part of their title) saw action, most of their work was in consolidating positions taken by the advancing army.

At some point, after the *1918 Absent Voters List* was compiled, Leonard had been invalided home and demobilised. It is possible that this could be as a result of the P.U.O, outbreak or he could have served with them in the subsequent action until the Armistice. In December 1918 he was transferred to the Labour Corps and given a new number 471672. Again, it may be that he worked in clearing up the battlefields on the Western front after the fighting finished which was a mammoth and often unpleasant task. The Labour Corps was not mentioned in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. This was published in Thrapston in June 1919 but the information may have been gathered some time before this date and not updated, or this may be because his time with Labour Corps was brief.

As this was his last unit, it was the one that completed the Medal Roll and gave the Manchester Regiment, his first in a war zone, as the one to go on his British War and Victory Medals. In the first part of 1919 Leonard was discharged from the army and by 1920 he was back in Ringstead, first in Gladstone Street, moving to Carlow Road by 1923. He married Elizabeth Whiteman Arnold in 1924. She had been born in Denford on the 8th February 1898, the daughter of Henry, who had died in 1914, and Annie Arnold. The couple moved to Front Street in Denford and they were there in 1939. Leonard was working as a "Boot and Shoe Operator (Pull Outs)" and Elizabeth was looking after the house.

Leonard died, aged 75, on the 19th July 1972, still living at 2, The Bungalow in Front Street in Denford. Elizbeth died on the 3rd May 1992.

William George Weekley (1890-1983)

The story of the final Weekley man from the family is very different from any of the others. He probably did not serve in the Great War although he did contribute at a distance. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly recounting, for it is one with some unexpected twists and turns.

William George Weekley was the son of William Edward Weekley and his wife Sarah, (née Povey). William Edward traces his line back on the Weekley side through William Edward, born in 1860, who was the son of William (baptised on 18th September 1829 in Ringstead) and Charlotte (née Bradley). Charlotte was the younger sister of Rachel who had married William's oldest brother, John. The line then leads back through Henry, another William to Esau and Mary in the early Eighteenth Century.

We will start with our William's father, William Edward who, in the 1871 Census of Ringstead, was ten years old and living in Sivers Row with his father William, aged 42, and working as a shoemaker. Charlotte the mother was not at home on the Census night but his

grandmother, Ann Bradley, a farmer's widow and now an annuitant, was living with them. Charlotte was elsewhere and in 1881 neither she nor William can be found. Meanwhile by 1881 William Edward, in one of the surprises in this story, was now a manservant at 103 Lexham Gardens in Kensington. The head of the house was John Strachey and next door lived 35-year-old barrister Sidney Woolf and his wife Maria. They have a daughter Bella and their son, Leonard Sidney, was just five months old. Leonard was to marry Virginia Stephens.

John Strachey had been a very senior Civil Servant in India and was for a short time, the acting Viceroy. He was the brother of Sir Richard Strachey whose son was author, Lytton Strachey. William Weekley was working among the children who would later form the Bloomsbury Group to surprise and shock Edwardian England. Also working for the Stracheys was a nurse, Selina Bradley from Polebroook, who was his mother's sister. Could this have been how William came into the household?

We must beware of thinking that the Censuses always define where someone was living, rather than visiting briefly, especially when a family member, who is merely stated to be a son or daughter. In 1891 William Edward was shown back with his parents at 21 Duke Street in Kettering. The form also shows that he was married and a "Shoe Manufacturer". Could this really be true? When we look for his wife, we find that he had married Sarah Povey in the Kensington District in 1888 and in 1891 she was living with her 78-year-old widowed father Francis Povey, an undertaker, at 23 Church Street in Chelsea. Also, with her, was her son, William George Weekley, who was just one year old. He had been born in Ringstead so it is possible that the family home of the Weekleys was in Northamptonshire rather than London and she was the one visiting relatives.

As usual in this story, the truth is a little more complicated. Her father was probably still counted as widowed from his second wife, Frances (née Holman). Even more surprising is that his full name was Francis de L'Horme de L'ile Povey. Like the D'Urbervilles in Thomas Hardy's novel, the title was a relic of a more illustrious past. His father, John Francis Mary de L'Horme de L'Ile, had been born in Martinique and held important posts in the French military and police He had fallen out of favour, when he had allowed a prisoner to escape, and lost much of his income. He had moved to London allegedly to because it was easier to get his income from Martinique in England. His wife, and mother of Francis, was Rebecca Smith. He divorced his first wife in 1818 and his son inherited much of his name but apparently little else. He seems to have left all his assets to the six children of his sister.

The domestic arrangements of father and son have a number of twists and turns, both possibly running two households. Francis had been born in 1813 and in the 1851 Census he was living at 39 Marsham Street with his wife Frances and their young family. Also in the household was a nineteen-year-old servant called Sarah Tilley. In 1861 he was a widower, still an undertaker, at 8 Broadway in Westminster. In 1871 he was running the Boar's Head Inn in Braintree with his nineteen-year-old "adopted daughter", Amelia Sheates. In 1881 Sarah Povey (née Tilley) is shown as married with her five children, including Sarah, born in about 1865 at 23 Church Street in Chelsea. Meanwhile, Francis aged 68, was a master coffin-maker, still a widower, in Broadway. Sarah Povey/Tilley was buried in a common grave in

Brompton Cemetery on September 5th 1881. Francis died in 1899 and left £1,280 to his unmarried daughter, Frances.

We left William Edward Weekley in 1891 in Kettering with his parents, and his wife and son with her widowed father. Soon after this, the "shoe manufacturer" and his young family had moved to Great Oakley, near Corby In Northamptonshire. William was now running a poultry business. His three children, William George, Edward and Alice, were christened there on the 24th September 1892.

By 1901 his parents were living in Anglesey and 72-year-old William was working as a caretaker. In the same Census we see that the poultry business had not been successful and William was once again a butler at Woodlands in Fulshaw Park in Wilmslow, some eleven miles south of Manchester and now, a very desirable postcode. William George had been born in Ringstead, Edward in Kettering and Alice in Great Oakley.

Once again, he was on the fringes of the famous radicals of the times. His employer was William Cobbett aged 54, a solicitor and his wife Fanny who had been born in New York. This man was the grandson of a famous William Cobbett who, in the early Nineteenth Century, had been a journalist, pamphleteer and reformer, and had been forced to flee to the United States for a time to escape a possible charge of sedition.

A *County Directory* entry shows that by 1905, at the latest, the family had moved again, and this is confirmed by the 1911 Census that shows that William, now 56 years old, was a milk dealer. The new home was 2 Kent Road in Birkdale just down the coast from Southport in Lancashire. The couple had been married 22 years and have had three children. Edward was working as an apprentice coach builder and William George (21) and Alice (17) were helping their father in the milk business.

William and Sarah did return to Northamptonshire and William died there, at Creaton on 17th January 1933. Both lived long enough to see a remarkable change in their eldest son's life and career.

As in all these biographies, war came in 1914. We do not have any military records for William and it seems likely that he never served in the British services. What we do not know is what he was doing between 1911 and 1915 because he then made a sudden change of direction which later accounts seem to imply was based on his work during this time. It is possible that he would not have been conscripted because we know from a form he completed in 1917 that he had to wear glasses with "thick lenses".

In fact, William had left England before he could be called up. He arrived in New York on the 15th October 1915 on the *S.S. Lapland*. It appears that from the start he wanted to become a naturalised American citizen. As part of this process, he later had to sign that:

> *I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy.*

He also agreed that:

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereign and particularly to George V, King of Great Britain and Ireland.

When the United States joined the Allies on the 6th April 1917, Draft Cards were issued to call up men for the Expeditionary Force. The first draft was held on the 5th June 1917 for men ages 21 to 31. William had already served one month in the infantry in Plattsburg, New York in 1916. William completed his form which showed he was living at 277 Linwood Avenue in Buffalo, New York. He was already a Head Checker with the Curtiss Aeroplane Company in Buffalo. This could mean several things but according to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles produced by the United States Employment Service in 1945, it is a person who:

. . . checks requisitions for supplies for accuracy, agreement with authorised allotment and correctness of form.

It may be that his expertise was on the paper trail side of engineering but we cannot be sure. Nor can we be certain about his connections to the aeronautical industry in Britain immediately prior to his emigration. Before he formed his own company, Geoffrey de Havilland was a designer with Airco who produced some of the important British planes of the war and versions of its DH4 were manufactured in America, particularly after the USA joined the Allied cause. Was William connected to this collaboration? Again, we cannot find the evidence for this.

In the 1920 Federal Census William was living on 121st Street in Manhattan 13 and described himself as an Engineer with an aircraft company. He was lodging with Jean and Jeanne Leeman who were from Belgium. Jean was a teacher of French. An ability with languages was an important skill that William seems to have possessed.

We see that over the next decades William made several sea voyages. In November 1921 William arrived in New York from Hamilton in Bermuda on the S.S. Fort Hamilton. Earlier that year he had become a naturalised American citizen, having lived five years in the country.

In 1923 he sailed home to visit his parents in Creaton in Northamptonshire before returning to his country of adoption. He went again in 1927. It may be that there were also some work reasons for these trips.

He seems to have become a member of the Presbyterian Park Avenue Church and it was there that he met Arezona Celeste Turley. She worked in the Earth Science Laboratory of Columbia University but was also a talented artist and sculptor. The couple were married in Manhattan on the 29th May 1930 and had one daughter, Rosemary. The couple also did volunteer work in the deprived areas of New York including classes where Celeste gave sculpture workshops and William, classes in poetry.

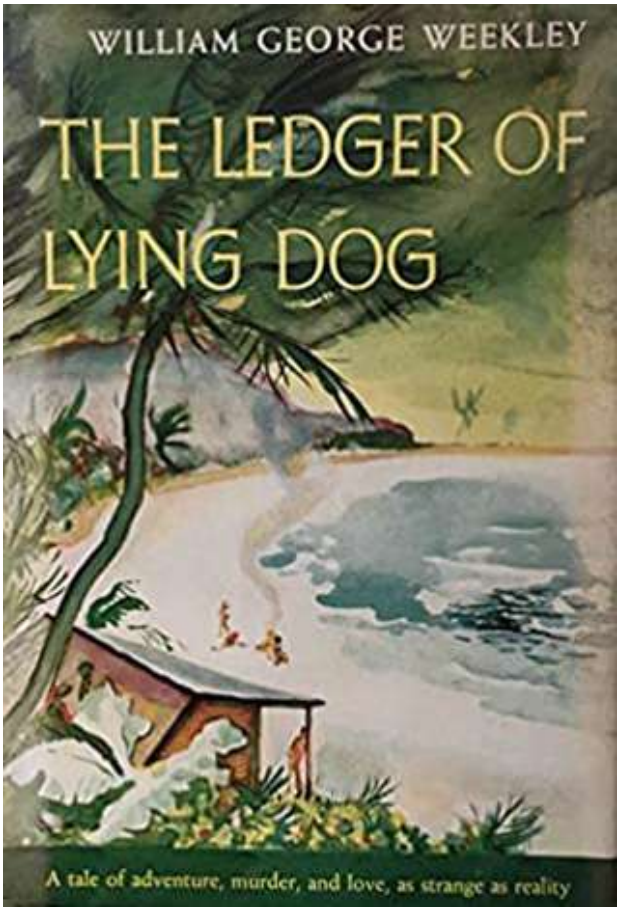
William's father died in 1933 and, in 1937, his widowed mother, Sarah, now 72, visited the family who were living at 3970 48th Street on Long Island. William's aeronautical work continued through the Second World War. In 1942 he had to complete another Draft

Registration Card. He was now 52 years old and was working in the Curtiss Wright Corporation – Wright Aeronautical Division. He was living in West Nyack in New York. The card also gives his physical appearance. He was 5ft 7 inches tall with black hair and blue eyes and weighed 140 pounds.

There is one more surprise in his story. On August 7th 1947 his novel, Ledger of a Lying Dog was published by Doubleday in America. One reviewer described it as:

> *A castaway story published for adults but my guess is that teens will adopt it as their own. A convincing story, purporting to be a log belonging to the author's great uncle. As the story unfolds, one is convinced that here is the day-by-day record of a youth, shipwrecked with a group of cut-throats and wretches (plus a woman of uneasy virtue) and finding in himself unguessed ingenuities, skills, abilities to fend for himself and fight his own battles.*

Do we see a metaphorical account of his own life?



It was successful and was re-issued, as a paperback, in 1951 under the new title of "Castaway Island" which had an attractive woman on the cover to draw in the young male readers.

When William died in 1983, he was residing at 10994 West Nyack, Rockland in New York. He merited a short obituary in the *New York Times.*

William George Weekley, an aeronautical engineer who was author of the 1947 novel "The Ledger of a Lying Dog" died Sunday in Nyack Hospital. He was 93 years old. His book, which was well received tells the story of a shipwreck and murder in the South Pacific. Mr. Weekley is survived by his wife Celeste, of West Nyack, N.Y. and a daughter, Rosemary of New York.

Another obituary in the magazine of the *Historical Society of Rockland County* reveals that there is much of his life's achievements that we have missed.

WILLIAM GEORGE WEEKLEY (1890-1983) was remembered during January in a memorial service at the Clarkstown Reformed Church, West Nyack of which he was a member. Engineer for aircraft needs during both World Wars, author (The Ledger of a Lying Dog reprinted in paperback as Castaway Island), translator for law firms of French and German scientific patents and a student in several languages of literature, physiology, interplanetary travel and development of an international language, he quietly lived most of his life in an old sandstone house on North Greenbush Rd., West Nyack. Born Jan 23, 1890, to William and Sarah Weekley of Ringstead, England, and educated in British schools, he died Dec. 11 at Nyack Hospital. Mr Weekley is survived by his wife, Celeste, a sculptor of note, and his daughter, Rosemary, of New York City.

Family remembrances seem to have expanded this background:

Bill was born in England, tutored in languages as a child and studied at Dijon University in France and Heidelberg University in Germany. He was a production engineer in the de Havilland airplane factory in England, transferring to Curtiss-Wright in the United States.

William certainly had a fascinating and full life and contributed to the war effort in World War One which justifies his inclusion in these series of short biographies. To fully research the truths of his life would need far more time than I can give. What we do know is that a man born in Ringstead had a remarkable life, achieved a little fame, and helped the Allies win two World Wars.

Chapter 25

Percy Reginald Wilson (1897-1918)

As we have seen with the Weekleys, some families had lived in the village for generations and were interwoven with other names, so, for better or worse, they could not turn a corner without meeting a grandparent, uncle or aunt, nephew or niece, or cousin. The name Wilson was not unknown in the village but our family came from the nearby town of Thrapston. Percy's grandfather, William Wilson had originally come from Wadenhoe but had become a millwright and publican at the *Fox Inn* in Thrapston High Street. The millwright

was a mixture of blacksmith, wheelwright and carpenter, and, as the name implies, he was often involved in the repair and construction of mills.

William's son, Herbert, had followed his father's trade. He met Amelia (or sometimes Emilia) Groom from Denford. In a case reported in the Northampton Mercury on 4th October 1881, about trouble at Denford Feast, it told of a "battle royal between the rival clans of the Yorks and the Grooms, old inhabitants of Denford". When we look for a marriage, we cannot find one. The only Amelia Groom who married locally was in the Wellingborough District in 1899 and the husband was James Britchford. He was part of another family that had its fair share of time in court for fighting and drunkenness. Is it possible she had an unhappy marriage but, for whatever reason, was never divorced? For now, it is just speculation. In 1911 Amelia and Herbert stated that they had been married 22 years which would be about the time of this other marriage. There could have been an error in the original records or its transcription but in the1939 *Register* the couple are both described as "single".

By 1901 the Fox Inn was run by Frederick Hodson and his wife Caroline. Herbert was now in the adjacent Brawn's Yard plying his trade as a millwright. He was 38 years old and "Emilia" was 30. They had six children living with them. On the 8th February 1904 all the children were baptised together in Thrapston Parish Church. The oldest, Rose Maud, had been born on April 4th 1890 and the youngest, Margery Mabel on February 4th 1900. Percy Reginald's birth is shown as October 7th 1898 but, judging by the Civil Registration Index, this is a year late.

Soon after this, the family moved to Ringstead and in 1911 were living in Pearce's Yard (various spellings exist) and Herbert was working as a "Millwright - Flour Mills" The couple have had nine children, eight of whom were still living. New additions were May (6) born in Thrapston and Samuel born in Ringstead. They are shown as having been married 22 years.

Percy was working on a farm but, by the time that he was conscripted on 29th November 1916, he was in shoe work. He was posted to the No. 13 Territorial Force Depot which was in Clare Street in Northampton and was in the 3/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Number 7461. After his basic training there, he was posted to the Machine Gun Corps for his further training on the Vickers Machine Gun.

Percy was in England being trained for a total of 133 days. On 11th April 1917 he embarked on a troopship at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne on the same day. He went to the MGC Base at Camiers before finally joining the 9th Company in the field, on the 21st April 1917. The 9th Company were part of the 3rd Division who fought on the Western Front for the duration of the war.

The Allied High Command had planned a major offensive. It was forcibly argued for by the French, who believed that the time was right was an attack on the Aisne-Champagne Front, with the British providing a diversionary attack in the Arras area. The Germans rather pre-empted the attack by making a planned retreat to the Hindenburg Line where they had been building concrete reinforcements and bunkers.

The British attack became known as the Battle of Arras and the first action that Percy would have been involved in was the Second Battle of the Scarpe which ran from the 23rd to the 24th April 1917. Although the British achieved some limited success, the main French attack was a failure with terrible losses, leading to low morale and mutinies in their army.

Further phases of the Battle of Arras, in which the 3rd Division were involved, were the Battle of Arleux and the Third Battle of the Scarpe. With the French temporarily in disarray, the British needed to continue the fight in the Arras area to give their allies time to regroup. The resulting British engagements had some minor successes but few gains, mainly because of a lack of artillery. This holding campaign was bought at a terrible price in British casualties. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, the British Commander, believed that in modern war, you had to wear down the enemy until they were unable to resist a decisive blow. The French attack had come too soon in this process.

The Battle of Polygon Wood (painted 1918) by George Edmund Butler
© Archives New Zealand (NCWA 474)

The British now moved to their own plan for a Flanders Offensive but the Germans, with the French weakened, could afford to concentrate their troops in this area. The result was the Third Battle of Ypres.

To prepare the way there was an attack on the strategically important Messines Ridge on the 7th to 14th June 1917. There was a four-day barrage followed by the detonation of twenty-one mines containing a million pounds of high explosive that the Royal Engineers had been laying in mines underneath the German positions.

The long preparations and the devastating explosions proved successful and the Messines Ridge was gained. But time was lost as the troops and artillery were made ready for the second phase. The 3rd Division entered the offensive at the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge

on the 20th to 25th September 1917, leading onto the Battle of Polygon Wood which finished on the 3rd October. The "wood" had been fought over through the war and now only had the burnt stubs of trees.

The later phases of the 3rd Battle of Ypres are often known as the Battle of Passchendaele, a name that has come to stand for all that was terrible about the Great War, with its misery and death but particularly for its mud.

The final engagement of 1917 for the 9th Company was the Battle of Cambrai which ran from the 20th November to the 7th December 1917. It is now most remembered for being the first Allied mass tank attack. The 450 Allied tanks led a surprise attack, not heralded by the usual artillery barrage. Ground was quickly gained but over the next days, in a familiar pattern, most of it was lost to German counter-attacks.

Percy Reginald Wilson
Rushden Argus April 5th1918. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society.

The final year of the war came, and, on the 18th February, Percy accompanied an officer, as his servant, when he was sent to a training course with the 43rd Wing of the RFC. He re-joined the 9th Company three days later. This was just two days before the Machine Gun Companies of the 3rd Division became the 3rd Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. He was then allowed to take 14 days leave in England from the 2nd to the 16th March 1918, rejoining the Battalion in the field on the 18th.

He had returned to the comparative quiet before the storm because, on the 21st March, the Germans launched a long planned onslaught on the Allied lines in a last desperate attempt to win the war before their own men and supply lines collapsed and the American might joined the frontline war. In the 3rd Battalion Machine Gun Corps Journal, William Cranston wrote:

> *Furious bombardments covering the entire system took place at 2.50 a.m. and 3.20 a.m., each bombardment lasting half an hour and was succeeded by utter stillness.*

Few barrages were so accurately synchronised as that which rang up the curtain on the great offensive. At 5.00 a.m. with one reverberating and tremendous crash every gun, mortar and projector the enemy possessed threw off its winter guise of idleness. Large number of heavy howitzers which had only moved in that night came into action.

The inception was like an unexpected peal of thunder overhead, so incisive and deafening was it, nothing escaped this annihilating barrage; front trenches and rear, roads and all headquarters were heavily barraged, chiefly with gas, while, during lulls one could hear H.V. shells travelling to the distant rear.

The Division had to resist and retreat, trying to keep some order in the desperate flight. For Percy, it must have seemed unreal after the normality of his time at home. By the 28th, the Battalion was continuing to move backwards, still inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, but also suffering many casualties themselves. The same Lieutenant-Colonel William Cranston, Commander of the 3rd Battalion, who wrote the piece above, spoke proudly in the *War Diary* of his men in this action.

Our line was penetrated at various points where the barrages had fallen with most accuracy and either annihilated or disorganised the garrison. There were many parts left who fought in a most heroic fashion with the enemy on every side of them, until at last were all wiped out in some cases, dying to a man or as a last desperate remedy, cut their way to the rear. Our machine guns in most cases were not in the same trench as the Infantry and their intentness in engaging targets prevented them noticing our Infantry was withdrawing. Other guns which had an Infantry garrison in the vicinity were ordered by the Infantry Commanders to stay and cover their retirement. Very few of these guns were got back to consolidate in the rear. Some fought to the death, some fought rear-guard actions, some withdrew what remained to them of equipment and fought with the Infantry. Not one withdrew until he was driven.

The tide would soon begin to turn and the exhausted Germans would be rolled back until the Armistice in November. Percy was not to see this for, on the 28th March 1918, he was one of the many men who were killed in this action.

He does not have a grave but is remembered on the Arras Memorial in Bay 10. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals and his mother to a small pension. He is also remembered on the Ringstead War Memorial, which was erected in the churchyard in 1924, paid for as a “humble offering of Herbert Billson who loved the village”. There is, on the back cover of the first volume of these biographies, a photograph of the quiet crowd at its dedication and one imagines his parents were there with the other relatives in their Sunday best.

Herbert and Amelia continued to live in Denford Road in Ringstead. A 1919 military form, unusually, lists all his immediate family. Besides his parents we see some of the family continued to live in Ringstead but four had moved to Finedon. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* we see Herbert is a “retired wheelwright” and “Emilia” are still in

Denford Road and, as we have said, are shown as single. Had they been some fifty years together, single?

Chapter 26

Evelyn Wood (1886-1918)

Evelyn Wood had been born in Raunds in 1886, the son of Edward, a bricklayer from Little Addington, and his wife, Ann. It would seem an unusual name for a boy but when you look through the military records you discover many men with the same name, even without exploring other surnames. It may be that these men were named in honour of Sir Evelyn Wood who won the Victoria Cross in 1858 and was a senior officer in the Boer War. He also championed the use of female nurses, against the views of many of his colleagues. Unfortunately, he became increasingly deaf and disorganised.

Our Evelyn Wood was baptised in Raunds Parish Church on March 21st 1886. By 1891 Edward and Ann had six children: Celia (12), Beatrice (10), William (9), Lily (7), Evelyn (5) and Ernest (3). Edward was still a bricklayer and they were living in Litchfield Yard In Raunds. By 1901 Edward had become a Bricklayer's Foreman and they had moved to Mapletoft Street and five children had been added to the family; Walter (10), Frances (8), Ralph (7), Emily (4) and Elsie (3). Edward died in 1909 and, in the 1911 Census, Ann, now a 36-year-old widow, was living at 11 Wellington Street and we see (though crossed out) that she had had 13 children but four had already died. Only four children were still at home and they were all working in the shoe trade.

Two of the sons had joined the Territorials, formerly the Rutland and Northamptonshire Militia. Evelyn was first to enlist in the 3rd (Militia) Battalion on the 21st April 1904 and was given the Regimental Number 7076. The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907 changed the unit's title to the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion. The "Saturday Night Soldiers" had regular training sessions with a yearly camp. His records show that he attended this each year and, on the 26thJuly 1908 he was given a "Free Discharge". His military career seemed over.

His younger brother, Ernest, also joined the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the number 3/8631. We do not have details of when he joined up, but another local man, Cecil Burton, with number 8645, had enlisted on the 14th January 1909. Ernest would have joined up at a similar time.

Ernest married Ellen Favell on the 28th March 1910 in Irthlingborough and, we see in the 1911 Census that they were living there, at 11 Upper Victoria Street with Ellen's parents, Frederick and Margaret. Also, there, was the young couple's one-year-old son, Dennis.

War came, and Ernest was immediately called up to join the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires. The military records appear to have mixed up Ernest with Ernest Edward Wood (8501) who survived the war but we have some idea of his time in the war.

The 1st Battalion was taken by destroyers to Le Havre, arriving there on the 13th August 1914. Disembarking, they marched to their camp on the outskirts of the town. The History of the Regiment records:

> *The march was through crowds of rapturously enthusiastic French people and to the roars of "Tipperary" – that haunting marching song of the Old Contemptibles, as the British Expeditionary Force was soon to be known from the famous reference by the German Emperor to the "contemptible little army" of England.*

The German plan was to sweep through Belgium on a left wheel before marching on to Paris. The BEF, including the Northamptonshires, rushed to join up with the French to confront the German offensive. At first the Northamptonshires were in reserve after a tiring day-long march.

For the British Army, which was considered a professional force, although including many part-time soldiers, and few who had been involved in warfare, the first encounters with the enemy were a terrible shock. The Battle of Mons has attracted a number of myths but the truth is that the Allies were steamrollered by the German army. Streams of weary men were soon marching back along roads crowded with soldiers' horses and guns and fleeing civilians.

An unnamed Raunds School's former pupil wrote to his old headmaster telling of the other ex-pupils in the Battalion. He wrote:

> *There are several of us here now, and most of us have been out since the beginning of the war. I myself have been present at all of the engagements, including the retreat from Mons, the battles of the Meuse, Marne and Aisne. . .*
>
> *. . . We have had some rather exciting times up to now, and I suppose we shall have some more before the war is over. We did a bayonet charge on the Prussian Guard last month (14th September) which I dare say you have read about in the papers and I think that we did very well indeed.*

He mentions nine men of the Raunds' contingent, six of whom were killed later.

The First Battle of Ypres came, with the Northamptonshires at a small village near Pilckem. At 6pm on the 23rd October the enemy attacked all along the line and this continued through the night. The Regimental History records:

> *Shelling continues intermittently through the next day, the reserve company again being the chief sufferers. In the afternoon German shells set fire to the mill that stood in the vicinity of the centre companies of the 48th [1st Battalion]. Houses and haystacks were on fire in all directions, and when dusk fell the whole countryside was lit up by bright jets of flame. At 6 pm the enemy made another determined general attack which was preceded by heavy artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire.*

The Northamptonshires fought on bravely and suffered 150 casualties. Ernest was one of the men killed. Ellen received a pension of £2 10s. 10d. and also £5 1s. 8d. for her son, Dennis until he became 16 years old.

Ernest's older brother, Evelyn, had married Ringstead girl, Maud Cope, in 1904 and the young couple had moved there. As we have seen, he had served his time in the Territorials and had been given a free discharge in 1908. The couple had three children, Edward James who was born on the 7th March 1905, Mabel Evelyn, 18th April 1907, and Lawrence Evelyn on the 9th March 1911. Early the following month, the 1911 Census shows the family in Leveratt's Row in a two-up two-down cottage. Evelyn was a Handsewn Bootmaker working at the Unity Co-operative Society factory in the High Street.

At first his family and his military work saved him from being conscripted. His brother's death so early in the war would have been a great shock and he would have heard from others of the terrible conditions at the Front. He first came before a Military Tribunal on the 9th February 1917 citing "family commitments" as his reason for appealing against conscription. He was granted a temporary exemption but, on the 14th May, his case was considered again. This time we see that he revealed that besides family commitments that he had an invalid child. Despite this, his plea for a renewal of his exemption was refused.

Later documents indicate that the disabled child was probably his eldest son, Edward. We do not know the nature of his disability but we do know that, later, his "guardian" was Mr Boyden, who was the "Collector" for the Thrapston Union. Thomas Boyden had been appointed the Relieving Officer for the Union in 1917.

As so often, we have few military records for Evelyn after he enlisted in 1917 but there is a record of an injury that he sustained that does give approximate dates for his enlistment and time in a warzone. From this we see that he joined up in late May or early June 1917 and we know that he first was sent to the 4th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment and given Regimental Number 34300. After some four months training, he joined the 12th (Bermondsey) Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment in the field in September or early October.

The 12th had been formed in Bermondsey on the 14th May 1915 by the Mayor and the Borough and first landed at Le Havre on the 2nd May 1916. In early September 1917, the Battalion was in training in the Zudausques area of France, some forty miles due east of Boulogne. They then moved some thirty miles east into Belgium, south-east of Ypres. Starting on the 21st, the 12th were in the Battle of Menin Road Ridge which was part of the Third Battle of Ypres. This was an unusually successful, well-planned success leading to a run of small victories, all hard-won.

It is possible that Evelyn missed this battle and joined the Battalion after they had been relieved at the Front and moved to La Danne on the 1st October for rest and training. Soon after, they moved to coastal defence at Nieuport Bains near Dunkirk. The Front Line here was not without danger but was quiet compared to the areas around Ypres and Arras.

On the 27th October the Battalion was relieved by the 1st South African Brigade and were taken by lorries to Couderkerque for training and recovery. On the 12th November orders were received to proceed to Italy by rail. The Austrians, with the help of the Germans, had inflicted a terrible defeat on the Italians at Caporetto on the 24th October 1917. A quarter of a million Italians had been taken prisoner and some 200,000 deserted. It looked as if the Italians were going to be defeated and the French and British rushed troops to shore up the Front.

The *War Diary* charts the 12th Battalion's journey over the next few days through France from the Boulogne via Mesgrigney, through the Riviere. They halted on the 16th November at Campomorone (six miles north of Genoa) . . .

> *. . . where a cordial reception was given to the Battalion. Sandwiches and cigarettes were handed to them and the C.O. was presented with a bouquet.*

By the 17th they detrained at Mantova (Shakespeare's Mantua) and rested nearby at Guidizzolo and then had to move by a series of daily marches: Malavincina, Trevenzuolo, Isola Della Scalla, Bagnolo, Lonigo, Serego, Presina, Longare, Pieve, Casacorba, Musano, Falze, Selva, Conegliano.

It was near Casacorba on the 28th that Evelyn sprained his right foot. He was seen by the 138th Field Ambulance and No. 38 Casualty Clearing Station which would have been accompanying the Battalion. Perhaps he gained a few days rest from the perpetual marching.

It was not until the 1st December 1917 that they marched to the Montello Range and took over the Reserve Line from an Italian Regiment. On the 3rd the *Diary* reported that the Artillery were active on both sides. There was some rain but it was mainly frost and snow and the roads were treacherous in the mountainous country. There were casualties mainly from artillery and enemy planes. On the 8th December the Diary records:

> *An Italian Airman brought down an enemy machine in our vicinity. The prisoner was severely wounded and was attended to by our Medical Officer. The machine was a single-seater Albatross with two machine guns. The Airman was of German nationality and appeared very surprised to find English troops holding the Line.*

Some idea of this very different terrain can be seen from a brief extract in the Diary from the 12th December.

> *The enemy opened a heavy bombardment of our lines throughout the morning, shells, including Shrapnel and H.E. and several 15inch shells, about 1500 shells of different calibre fell in our area during the bombardment. Our "A" Company how 9 casualties, 2 killed and 7 wounded. "B" Company had two wounded. . . Great difficulties were experienced by the ration carriers owing to the steep inclines of the cliffs. The majority of our posts are situated on the Face of the Cliffs which ran along our entire front.*

After these first encounters by the British troops it soon became clear that the Italians had re-grouped and could win the war on this Front. The British first moved into Reserve and then were ordered back to the Western Front. Again we see their daily journeys through Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Milan, Turin and just over the border, to Modane. Once in France they moved to Amiens and on to Mondicourt where training and route marches continued.

On the 21st March the Battalion entrained to Achiet le Grand, finally coming to the Front here at Sapignies on the 22nd March 1918. They arrived at a bad time for the Allies when the great Michael Offensive of the Germans forced the Allies into a desperate but reasonably ordered retreat. In early April they moved to Poperinge, some 75 miles north, and on the 7th relieved the 1st Guernsey Light Infantry. They were now on the Ypres Salient and took over the line on the Passchendaele Ridge. There was heavy shelling, including gas shells, by both sides and, on the 22nd June, the Battalion:

> *. . . marched to Divisional Gas Hut where men passed through the Hut and all Gas Respirators were examined by Divisional Gas Officers.*

In July 1918 they were in Reserve at La Clytte before moving into the line at Westouter. During July and August they were in and out of the Front Line.

After some time in billets in September, they once more moved forward to relieve the 27th American Division on the Vierstraat Road where they encountered strong parties of the enemy and suffered casualties from machine-gun fire. The British main attack came on the 4th September but Evelyn had been killed the previous day. Like so many others he had been killed when victory was assured but the fighting still continued for a few months more.

He was buried at Wytschaete Military Cemetery in Belgium (Grave 1A. B.B.) and he is the last of the names on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was awarded the British War and Victory Medals.

His widow, Maud, received a small pension for herself and her three youngest children (until each was sixteen years old). The pension for her oldest child, Edward was paid to Thomas Boyden who was his guardian on behalf of the Thrapston Union. He would have been sixteen in 1921, so the pension was not for long. I have seen, on some Ancestry trees, that he went to Australia but an Edward J. Wood, birth date about 1905 died in the Thrapston area in the April-June period of 1929. Was this him?

We have followed Evelyn in his army career and sad ending but he may have heard by letter from Maud, his wife, of another tragedy that had struck her family in 1918. Maud's older brother, Harry Cope, had married Lucy Bird in 1909 and they had had four children. Reginald, the oldest, was probably born before their marriage for he died in 1911 and he was registered as Reginald C [Cope} Bird. In late 1917 Lucy died of cancer and Harry was a widower with three young children. At this low ebb he received a call-up for war service. He did appeal but, not surprisingly in the circumstances, he submitted the form too late to be considered by the 14th February meeting. The Tribunal was sympathetic and had written to the military to reconsider his conscription. It seems likely that his appeal would have been allowed.

But it was too much for Harry and although he does not seem to have shown any outward change in his personality, he suffered a terrible mental breakdown. Just four days after the Tribunal met, he cut the throats of his two sons, despite the older one's struggles, and then took his own life. A neighbour saw the lack of activity in the house and broke in the next morning and found the bodies. The daughter survived as she had been staying with another family. Maud attended the funeral which saw the streets, from the house to the cemetery, lined with people from the village and the surrounding area.

She must have felt that the world was falling in on her. In 1939 she was living in Whyman's Road, still a widow, with her son Roland who was a motor mechanic. Her widowed sister Maggie Mayes was also with them. Maud died, aged 85, in 1971.

Chapter 27

A Few Other Men that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* Missed

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* published in Thrapston in June 1919 included most of the men who served in the Great War. Some, however, for a variety of reasons, were missed. We have covered a few of these but we will now briefly tell the stories of the rest of the ones who appear on the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 but were not included.

John Harold Allen (1894-1991)

John Harold Allen is one of the men who is not on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* but is shown in the *Absent Voters' List* and *Electoral Roll* for the village in 1919 and has "NM" beside his name which indicates that he was a "Naval or Military Voter". There is not a military unit beside his name, however, and, like some other men we need more information to be sure of his military service. It also appears that he did not live in the village for many years. We will give a very brief account of his life in the hope that others may be able to fill in the missing details.

He was born on the 14th August 1894, in Maidwell, a small village, some ten miles north of Northampton, between Lamport and Kelmarsh and, significantly, not far from the Northampton to Market Harborough railway line. This had been built in 1859 by the *London and North Western Railway Company* and finally closed in 1981. His father, Jesse, had been born in Maidwell in1851 and was, in the 1901 Census, a "Platelayer" on the railway. His wife was from Bourne in Lincolnshire and, in this Census, they are shown with six children. They were living In *Railway Cottage* at Lamport Station. By 1908 John, aged 14, was also on the railways and we see him at Lamport and Ditchford (once famous for its Treacle Mines) learning his trade.

By 1911, he was sixteen years old and lodging at Seaton with a young married couple. He was working as a station porter. Seaton was again a small village in Rutland but in 1911 it

was a junction on the Rugby to Peterborough line and had branch lines to Stamford and Uppingham. A 1910 Timetable shows over 25 trains a day called at the station.

When the Great War came, it appears that John served in some capacity but, as yet, this has not been discovered.

In 1918 he married Mabel May Page at Uppingham in Rutland and, as we have said, in 1919 John was an absent voter from the High Street in Ringstead. We must presume that Mabel was living there at this time.

By 1939 John was still a station porter and Mabel had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". They had three children with them, Cecil, at 18, was a railway cloak room attendant and Dorothy was an apprentice in the "Drapery Trade". The youngest, Christine was just five years old and still at school. They were living at the Station House in Twywell, just three miles west of Thrapston. It was on the Kettering to Huntingdon line which was in danger of being closed in the late 1930s but the needs for munitions traffic in the Second World War gave it a reprieve.

John's daughter Dorothy Mary married Reginald Childs and in the 1980s she recalled her time living at Twywell Station in *Strapetona*, the magazine of the Thrapston District Historical Society and which is now on the Thrapston Heritage Group website. It is a wonderful account of the life of a rural station. She tells that John first came to the station in 1929 and lived in the local pub until his wife and children arrived. She described him as a station master which may have been a later promotion but perhaps the station did not warrant a man of "stationmaster" grade, even if performing those duties. She remembered that he earned 32 shillings (£1. 60p.) a week.

The station closed in 1964 and Dorothy Childs recalled:

> *Now the activities and the station garden for which my father won prizes are only a memory.*

Mabel Allen died on the 20th April 1970 but John lived another two decades and died on the 17th December 1991.

Christopher Baseley (1882-1932)

George Basely (or sometimes Bazeley) was a yeoman farmer in Staverton, a small village a few miles south west of Daventry, in the west of Northamptonshire. He was born in 1836 and married Selina Marriott on 13th April 1857 but less than two years later she was buried aged 23 years old. In the 1861 Census he was living again with his parents. He was 25 years old and shown as a farmer of 80 acres (his father had 35). It was not until the 21st November 1878 that he married again, to Frances (Fanny) Adkins in St Sepulchre Church in Northampton. The couple continued to live in Staverton and had a family of eight children. The youngest, Anthony, was born in 1887 when George was 51 years old.

It is the fourth child, and oldest son, Christopher, who found his way to Ringstead and served in the First World War. He had been baptised in Staverton Church on the 25th May 1882 and by 1901, aged 18, was described as a "Farm Manager", presumably for his father who was a "Grazier and Farmer". In December of the following year George died in "Northampton Station". Was it suicide or an accident? There is nothing in the local newspapers so perhaps it was from natural causes.

This seems to have led to the dispersal of the family, although they were also of an age to begin setting up by themselves. By 1911 the widowed Fanny was living on her own private means. Only four daughters, all aged between 25 and 32 and single, were now at home. Two were teachers and one a dressmaker.

But what of Christopher, once the farm manager? In the 1911 Census he was 28 years old and working as a butcher for Charles Coombs with whom he was living in High Street, Finedon. The *1915 Electoral Roll* has a section on "Lodgers" and from this we see that he was paying 12s. 6d. a week, including board for a single one-room on the first floor of the house of T.H. Walters in Finedon High Street. Early that same year Christopher married Alice Georgina Weekley.

Alice was the daughter of the Ringstead Sexton (and Carrier), Amos Weekley and his wife, Ellen. Alice had been born in Wellingborough on the 23rd September 1892, but this seems to have been a brief stay for the family, and, in 1911, they were living in Ringstead High Street. The next few years are not clear but it appears that Christopher and Alice first moved to Peterborough and were living at 180 Oundle Road. This is from the *Absent Voters' List* so it was Alice who would have been there, presumably on her own. It then seems possible that she moved back to Ringstead and the *Absent Voter's List* shows the absent Christopher there in the Spring of 1919. It is likely that there would have been a delay in the bureaucracy catching up with this move to Ringstead which was in 1918.

Unfortunately, there is the same lack of information about his army career. He was not entitled to the 1914/15 Star so would have not entered the warzone until 1916 at the earliest. We also know that he was first with the South Lancashire Regiment with Regimental Number 45251 before being transferred to the Army Service Corps (255462). He was then moved again to the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (28404). While serving with this unit he was wounded. The report was on the 2nd July 1918 but probably happened in May or June. The next of kin are shown as living in Ringstead.

Creaton Sanitorium
Before antibiotics became available in the 1950s the main treatment for T.B. was fresh air, sunshine and a good diet. The huts appear to have beds in for patients to "take the air".

We later see from his Pension Card that he had suffered from multiple gunshot wounds. It appears that he recovered and was posted to the Royal Engineers (366959) and was discharged on the 23rd February 1919. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

There is one last confusing Pension Card which is almost certainly for Christopher which shows that he had spent time at Creaton Sanitorium, some ten miles north of Northampton. It had been opened in 1910 as the first sanitorium in the county for Tuberculosis patients. We know that he had suffered from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. The confusion is that he is shown in the Royal Garrison Artillery with service number 160199 which may be a mistake.

I suspect that his time in most of these military units was brief and crammed into the last months of the war and its aftermath but, without more information, it is not possible to give a clear idea of his service.

Christopher returned to Alice in Ringstead with a small pension, because of his wounds and T.B., which were "attributable to his service". The couple took over the licence of the *Axe and Compass* public house in 1924. They were not there for long for, by 1928, they had taken up the licence of the *Melton Arms* in Melton Street in Kettering.

They were still there when Christopher died, aged 49, on the 29th January 1932 and was buried in London Road Cemetery. Alice kept on the licence for a few years but in November 1936 it was transferred to Charles Reuben Panter. In the *1939 Register* she was shown living at 34 Paradise Lane in Kettering and described as a "Licensee Retired". The following year

she married Frank Holland. He was a single man living with his two sisters and was a boot manufacturer. The marriage may have been one of friendship and comfort but it was not without incident.

On the 2nd March 1943 he was fined £10 for "importuning male persons at York Way in Kings Cross". He had pleaded not guilty and said that "he had trouble with a surgical belt". In July 1946 Alice, who was driving, parked on the Leicester Road near Market Harborough so that Frank could buy an ice cream. An RAF lorry and trailer, part of a convoy, skidded and ran into the side of the stationary car. Alice received slight injuries and Frank's two sisters in the back were unhurt.

Alice died on October 15th 1967 and is remembered on Christopher Baseley's gravestone.

Charles Leonard Bedford (1890-1960)

In the life story of John Harold Allen, we saw how it was the railways that brought him to the Ringstead area. Charles Leonard Bedford was some four years older than John but his early life followed a similar course. He had been born in Cogenhoe (surprisingly, to the outsider, pronounced "Cuckner") on the 29th July 1890 and was baptised there on September 7th. His father, Thomas, was a labourer and we see in the 1891 Census that he was fifteen years older than his wife, Sarah, and besides baby Charles, they had four older siblings.

In the 1901 Census Charles, along with his younger sisters, Hilda and Kathleen, were in the Fever Hospital in Hardingstone near Northampton. They were the only patients, being looked after by the Matron, Susan Mills. and her husband, George, who was the caretaker. Looking at the local newspapers at the time it looks most likely that it was Scarlet Fever that had taken the children there. The next year it was smallpox that caused most concern, but it was a time of many epidemics, with greater world travel and few effective treatments. We see the same concern about the need for separate isolation hospitals, the listing of annual cases and deaths from the various fevers and the concern by an affected community that it would not be avoided by others that we see in 2020 with the Corona Virus Pandemic.

All three children survived and in 1911, Charles was twenty, still at home, and working as a "Courier's Carter". Soon after that Charles joined the *London and North Western Railway Company.* He was employed on the 16th May 1911 and became a porter at Ashley near Market Harborough. On the 17th November 1913 he moved from Ashley and Weston to Ringstead and was now shown as a signalman and porter.

War came, and Charles volunteered for the army. We do not know his first training regiment but, on the 4thOctober 1915, he landed in France as part of the Royal Engineers. He was given Service Number 105822. He seems to have been a reliable Sapper and was promoted to Corporal. The *Long Long Trail* website lists the many ways in which the work of the Royal Engineers underpinned everything else in the army.

The war of 1914-1918 relied on engineering. Without engineers there would have been no supply to the armies, because the RE's maintained the railways, roads, water supply, bridges and transport. RE's also operated the railways and inland waterways. There would have been no communications, because the RE's maintained the telephones, wireless and other signalling equipment. There would have been little cover for the infantry and no positions for the artillery, because the RE's designed and built the front-line fortifications. It fell to the technically skilled RE's to develop responses to chemical and underground warfare. And finally, without the RE's the infantry and artillery would have soon been powerless, as they maintained the guns and other weapons. Little wonder that the Royal Engineers grew into a large and complex organisation.

At some point he was posted to the Waterways and Railways section of the Royal Engineers. Considering his previous career, he was almost certainly in the railway section. There were a number of different types of company within this heading. Some engaged in the construction of standard gauge lines so that goods and men could be taken as close to the Front Line as possible straight from the ports. There were also temporary light, narrow-gauge, railways to take arms and men on from there. Of course, the Front was not completely static, even in the years of comparative stalemate, and the enemy artillery were intent on destroying these lines of communication.

It is possible that Charles Bedford did not join the Railway Companies until the end of the war and was concerned with repair and salvage work. In the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he was shown in the High Street and his Service number was 105822. This shows that he was posted to the RE's Railways Section late in the war.

After the war it seems that for a short time he returned to Ringstead for he was still in the High Street in the 1920. He had returned to his work for the *London and North Western Railways*. By the following year he had moved back to Cogenhoe. I do not think that he ever married and he continued to live with his family. By 1939 he was working as a Railway Signalman. Living with Charles in 8, The Council Houses in Cogenhoe were his widowed mother, Sarah, and sister, Kathleen, who was a shoe machinist.

Charles died in 1960 in the Brixworth District.

Thomas Charles Garland (1891-1970)

Thomas Garland is one of the men who appears in the Ringstead *Absent Voters' Lists* because his wife had returned home while her husband was away during the war rather than because of his own residency. He was born on the 27th October 1891 in Leighton Buzzard, son of Henry, who became a grocer is Linslade in Buckinghamshire, and his wife Minnie (née Bugg). By the 1911 census, Henry had moved back to Leighton Buzzard. He and Minnie were living at 48 Dudley Street and he was now a "Musical Instrument Merchant".

Minnie is shown to have had four children, three of whom were still living but only Henry James was still at home. He was 23 years old and a student working towards a Wesleyan

Ministry. In the same Census, Thomas was boarding with Henry Littlewood, a labourer in a blast furnace, and his wife Alice, in Asfordby near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. He was working as an assistant in a Grocery Shop.

At the same time, some fifty miles due south, in Upton Hall near Northampton, Frances Roberts and her older sister Eleanor were working as maids. These two young women had been born in Ringstead, the daughters of Benjamin and Ellen Roberts. Their younger brother, Alfred, also become a grocer in Grantham in Lincolnshire.

Thomas enlisted on the 7th September 1914 with the East Surrey Regiment at Harringay and was given the Regimental Number 1915. From his Army Medical we see that he was 5ft 7½ inches tall, weighed 132 pounds with a 35½ inch chest. Soon after he enlisted, on the 23rd September 1914 he was diagnosed with Cowpox and spent four days in Dover Military Hospital.

It appears that he first became a drummer. Was he part of the recruitment drive for volunteers to fill the depleted ranks of the British Expeditionary Force? We cannot be sure but, at some point, his and Frances Roberts' paths crossed for they were married in Upton village church on the 23rd February 1915.

He remained with the Dover command until the 18th May 1915 when he was posted to Purfleet and he remained there until the 21st September 1915. These movements seem to indicate that he was in the 10th (Reserve) Battalion. This had been formed in Dover as a Service Battalion. On the 10th April 1915 it became a Reserve Battalion and moved to Purfleet. Then, it appears, Thomas moved with them to Shoreham on the 21st September and remained there until the 20th January 1916.

The Medal Card only shows the units in which a soldier served in a warzone and in Thomas's case this was the 9th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. They had first arrived in France at the end of August in 1915 but he would not have joined them in the field early 1916, possibly after crossing to France on the 20th/21st January. The War Diary does not record any drafts of men arriving but the diaries are quite different in the information that they report. This one does record, for much of the war, the names of all the soldiers who are killed or wounded, not just the officers, as was usually the norm.

In the early months of 1916, the Battalion was in and out of the Front Line in the Zillebeke dugouts and Hooge trenches, a mile or so apart and a similar distance East-South-East of Ypres. We see the reports of whizzbangs, shrapnel and H.E, shells and the continual drip of casualties.

The *Diary* on the 21st February records, whether with glee or sadness, the death of one of the enemy:

> *Our snipers killed a German who was waving his hat.*
> *Enemy shouted several times from his trenches "Tommy" and "Friend".*

There was also the provision of working parties to repair damaged trenches. On the 30th March the Diary records:

> Our artillery retaliated making some excellent practice at enemy front line trenches opposite D.4. Groans were heard by our detached post in that trench. Sniping was fairly brisk during the night.

They had moved to near Wulverghen and were, once more, sometimes in the Front Line trenches and sometimes in Reserve at Dranoutre. This continued through May with a relentless daily exchange of fire and men being killed and wounded. By the beginning of June the Battalion was in Brigade Reserve but also sending out men for working parties, a job that was not without risk. It was on the 3rd June that Thomas Garland was wounded and it seems likely that he was part of one of these working parties.

He had received a gunshot wound in his left side. He would have been first examined in the Aid Post or Field Ambulance (a unit not a vehicle) and then sent through the casualty evacuation chain to the coastal hospitals and back to England. He finally arrived at the 2nd Western General Hospital in Manchester on the 19th June 1916. The bullet was extracted but the operation wound became septic and he had to undergo another small operation to clean the wound area. In all he was in the hospital for forty days.

Following his operation, he probably had some home leave for his first child, Edward Charles was born to Frances on the 11th April 1917. It is not clear when he returned to France but we do know that on the 2nd May he was admitted to the Beaufort Hospital in Bristol with "enlarged tonsils". When the Bristol Hospitals could not cope with the influx of war casualties the Bristol Lunatic Asylum had been converted into a Military Hospital. Some of the male patients stayed and worked in the gardens. In 1915, the artist Stanley Spencer spent a year there as an orderly, and incorporated scenes from the hospital in the panels of the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Hampshire. Thomas's tonsils were extracted and he was declared "cured". He was a patient for 35 days, leaving on the 5th June 1917.

On the 12th August 1917 he was again in France, at the 39th Infantry Base Depot, which, like many of them, was at Étaples. From there he was posted to the 8th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. They were in camp at Dicklebusch as part of the Divisional Reserve and the Battalion was, as usual, having spells in the Front Line and in Reserve. They were in the Front Line near Zillebeke, an area that would have been familiar to Thomas and his unit. The routine continued after the move to Beaulincourt and Vendelles.

On the 8th October 1917, he was sent to the "55th Trench Mortar Battery School" in the field. As the 55th Trench Mortar Battery was in the same Brigade as the 8th East Surreys, he would have still retained his Regiment and number. The 3-inch Stokes Mortar and its larger brothers were simple but potent weapons designed to match the German "minenwerfer". In the hands of a well-drilled crew, it could deliver mortar bombs at a very fast rate, taking out a machine gun or sniper post, or deliver a coordinated barrage. It appears that soon after his training he returned to England on leave on the 19th December 1917.

It may be that he served with the 13th Battalion as this is shown on his records but it was probably brief because he was with the 8th Battalion when, on the 11th April 1918, he was first reported as missing. On the 6th May he was "presumed dead" and his wife Frances, living in Carlow Street, was recorded as his widow.

A List of Prisoners-of-War was received from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Thomas was on the list. It shows that he had been captured at Fort Vendeuil, south of St Quentin in France, on the 22nd March 1918. This was in the chaos of the Allied retreat in the face of the Michael Offensive, Germany's last big throw of the dice before the Americans came into the war in force. The Germans largely destroyed the fort when they had to abandon it as they withdrew before the later, decisive, Allied counter-attack.

We cannot be sure when Frances received the news that her husband was alive but the page from the Red Cross form was stamped (in France) 22nd August 1918. POWs were not supposed to be used for work directly connected to the enemy's war effort but this was not always adhered to, and Thomas was one of the men who were used for labouring work behind the lines.

In the last months of the war, the Germans were almost on starvation rations as the Allies' net tightened, and their POWs suffered badly. On the Imperial War Museum website are transcribed conversations with WW1 soldiers, including the POWs. Private H Turner, a POW, who laboured for the Germans near the Front Line recorded:

> *We worked from early morning 'til dusk and were then marched back to the compound and given our daily ration of bread. A small loaf, but this was for three men. The bread we thought was made from potato meal and probably a little flour added. We prisoners used to say it was 90% sawdust. Daily, we became weaker and weaker. By this time, we were seeking other sources of food supplies than that issued to us by the Germans and which appeared to be getting less and less. We found in the early morning a snail-like creature, stuck to the bark on the willow trees. We gathered these, and also some nettle leaves. On getting back to the camp at night, we would boil the snails and chop them up with boiled nettle leaves, making a sort of paste to spread on our bread. I can't say that the snails had any particular taste, but they did at least supplement our scanty rations in some small way.*

When Thomas was finally liberated, he recorded similar treatment, which had been the cause of his dysentery.

> *Semi starvation. Bad food and treatment while working behind the German lines.*

He had had some treatment in a German hospital. His military records show that he had been nineteen months in the line and nine months a prisoner-of-war. We see that it was not for some time after the Armistice that he was liberated. On the 23rd December 1918 he arrived back in Dover and was posted to the Regimental Depot. The records are not clear but he would have been treated for the dysentery that he had contracted as a result of his bad treatment and also had some convalescence time.

He was finally discharged on the 28th March 1919. On the 3rd August 1919 he was assessed, at the 5th Northern General Hospital in Leicester, for an army disability pension and he was stated to still have:

. . . post dysenteric diarrhoea at intervals of about three weeks.

He had "some debility and anaemia" and was assessed for a 20% disability pension. He was also entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He returned home but, either immediately or soon after his return, "home" was Asfordby not Ringstead. His children Kenneth (1919) and Doreen (1922) were born there. They were first living at 3 Church Lane but by 1930 had moved to Ivy Villas in Main Street. Thomas became the Sub Postmaster for the village. Their eldest son, Edward attended Melton Grammar School and in 1935 was admitted to St Mark's, a religious college, in Chelsea. By 1939 he had gained an B.Sc., having studied at University College and the London School of Economics. His cousin Margaret Hilda Roberts, daughter of another shopkeeper, graduated in Chemistry in 1947.

In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, Edward was a student and telephonist, Kenneth was a clerk and telephonist and Doreen was a shorthand typist. Thomas was still a Sub Postmaster and one suspects that his wife, Frances, also helped in the business, as well as carrying out her "Unpaid Domestic Duties".

Frances died in 1964 and Thomas followed on the 11th March 1970. At the time of his death he was living at 87 Thorpe Street in Melton Mowbray.

George Thomas Green (? - ?)

George Thomas Green is in this account of the men of Ringstead who served in WW1 but I am not certain that he ever lived in the village. He was an "Absent Voter", with his army unit and number given in the 1918 and 1919 Lists. I think that he may be included because his wife, who came from the village, and their child were living there while he was serving.

On the 23rd June 1917 in the Wellingborough Register Office, he married Jail (Jael) May Bull, the daughter of William Samuel (deceased) and Emma Bull. Jael was an unusual name but came from the Old Testament and refers to a woman who killed an enemy of the Israelites by inviting him into her tent and, when asleep, she drove a tent peg through his skull with a mallet. I wonder if her mother Emma (nee Titman) chose the name. She was William Bull's second wife after the death of his first wife, Susannah. The first marriage appears to have been childless but Emma had six children, five of whom survived infancy. It was not a happy marriage, however, and in 1896 William was accused of assaulting his wife. He had kicked her and she alleged:

I have been married eight years and he has ill-treated me on and off all the time.

William in his defence replied that:

. . . he had led a married life for thirty-five years and this was the first time he had been brought up for cruelty. His first wife never charged him and the present one would have no cause if it was not for her violent temper.

Did Emma choose Jael as a name, and did William sleep easy at night? William, who had taken over his father, Isaac's, tinplate business, also worked as a pub landlord and had an off licence and grocery shop, at the bottom of Chapel Road, which Emma probably ran. When William died in 1913 the licence had been transferred to Emma and, when she died in 1917, her daughter, Annie, took over the business.

In 1911 May who, unsurprisingly, seems to have used her second name was fourteen years old and still living at home but working as a domestic servant.

If we return to George Thomas Green, we know that he joined the Bedfordshire Regiment with Regimental Number 21470. Few of his records remain but he would first have been sent to a Bedfordshire training battalion before being posted abroad, This was to the 1/5th Battalion and we know this partly because men with similar numbers died while with the unit but also because he contracted malaria and the 1/5th were the only Bedfordshire Battalion who fought in a region where malaria was endemic.

The 5th (Territorial) Battalion had left Devonport on 26 July 1915, bound for 'somewhere out East' and, after a brief stop-over in Egypt, disembarked at Gallipoli, serving there between 10 August and 4 December. The online history of the Battalion tells that:

During their assault against the Kiretch Tepe Sirt on 15 August 1915, an observing Staff Officer observed their progress through his binoculars and saw the battalion's metal flashes glinting yellow in the sun as they doggedly advanced. He remarked "By Jove! If only we had one or two more battalions of those yellow devils we should be across the peninsular by tomorrow". With that, the battalion's nickname - the 'Yellow Devils' - was born. A pitifully small number of them remained by December 1915 and they were moved back to Egypt to be rebuilt between January and March 1916.

It may have been that during this "rebuilding" in Egypt that George joined the Battalion. The *War Diary* for the 12th February 1916 records:

Draft of 1 Officer Capt Miskin & 420 O.R.s arrived from ENGLAND. Men not very fit, suffering from old wounds etc. Mostly 1st & 2nd Battn Bedford Regmnt. Men.

For the next year the Battalion regrouped and guarded the Suez Canal. In March 1917 they, as part of the British and Commonwealth forces, were involved in the advance through Gaza and into Palestine. By the end of the war they were stationed in Beirut. This was not a soft posting. As we have seen in the biography of William Warren Weekley, intense heat, sandstorms, disease and lack of good drinking water made it an unpleasant and dangerous experience for most of the soldiers, even without the occasional bouts of fighting. Many more men were lost to disease, to which the men had little immunity, than enemy fire.

It was in October to December 1918, when the Battalion was in Palestine, that many soldiers were struck down with Pneumonia, but more often with Malaria, and it may be that

it was then that George contacted the disease. We cannot be sure when this occurred and it is possible that it was in 1917 and he returned to England for treatment and it was after this that George had home leave during which he married in June 1917. Certainly, his address when he married was Oxford Street in Wellingborough, but he was a Private in the Bedfordshire Regiment.

Among the uncertainty we do know that, on recovery, he was posted to the 804 Area Employment Company (AEC), a unit of the Labour Corps based in Cairo and given Service Number 622668. The AECs were formed to do salvage work and any general duties assigned to them.

George was not discharged until the 24th April 1920. He was assessed as having disablement because of his Malaria and received a pension of 16 shilling with an additional seven shillings for his wife and possibly one shilling for a child (although this is not clear).

There is, somewhere, at least one twist in this story that I have been unable to find. At the marriage of George and Jail on the 23rd June 1917 there were two witnesses, William and Samuel Barratt. On the 7th August 1917, at the Thrapston Divisional Sessions, shoe operative William Barratt, was accused of stealing on July 23rd, money, gold rings and a purse from May Green. He was lodging with May and her sister Miss Bull in Ringstead. He was caught trying to pawn one of the rings in Northampton and had already pawned another. May is referred to as Miss Green. Was this the same William Barratt and should May have been referred to as Mrs Green? What happened to Thomas and Jail May Green after the war?

We must leave his story there because I have been unable to positively locate George's background before the war, although there are a number of possibilities, or for the couple after the war. A later member of the family believes that she visited her aunt, May Green, and her husband had the Christian name Donald. There are again a few possible explanations and it may be that others will unravel the puzzle.

It is with this unsatisfactory final biography that we must finish our stories of the men of Ringstead in the Great War.

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Chapter 1 The Abbott Family

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