



THE JOURNAL



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CAMBRIDGESHIRE & HUNTINGDONSHIRE

FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

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HONORARY VICE-PRESIDENTS: NED WAYNE & CAROL NOBLE

A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HISTORY FEDERATION

REGISTERED CHARITY No. : 278815

The Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Family History Society exists to encourage the study of genealogy, heraldry and family history within the old counties of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, and Huntingdonshire. We reformed on 1 January 2020 when the separate family history societies representing Cambridgeshire (est.1976) and Huntingdonshire (est.1984) amalgamated into a single organization.

We actively support established guidelines for good practice and aim to promote considered, informed and quality research. Our projects teams continue to work to scan, transcribe and index name-rich resources of genealogical interest, to enable researchers to pursue their county ancestors wherever they happen to now live. Volunteer researchers will offer their collective opinion on almost any query.

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At the time of writing, we've been unable to reopen all public meetings and research surgeries as we'd hoped to do—please look out for updates—we will see you soon

In the meantime, stay safe—carry on researching, keep in touch, follow us on facebook & instagram, and contribute your progress, thoughts & queries to the journal

For latest news, and updates as the situation further evolves (& resolves)

WATCH THE WEBSITE & NEWSLETTER & FACEBOOK

CONTACT US (for additional contacts/services see p55-6)

All general correspondence via the Secretary, please :

secretary@cfhs.org.uk or by post to

CHFHS Secretary, 15 Castle Hythe, Ely, Cambs., CB7 4BU

(we also have an answer phone 01223-853273—& leave a message)

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CAMBS & HUNTS FHS JOURNAL

VOL 28 : 4

WINTER 2022



Welcome to the Winter edition of the CHFHS Journal—gosh, what a lot has happened since the last issue! A page has turned and with it, the second Elizabethan Age has passed into history. New stamps, new coins, new post boxes, KCs instead of QCs, OHMS *His Majesty's Service*, Send *Him* Victorious . . . a whole new language!

This issue opens with an insight into our new updated website which is to be launched in the not too distant future. Do keep an eye on the CHFHS facebook page for the latest news. Most of the feature articles in this issue are very topical in light of recent events and anniversaries. With 8 Sept in mind, CJ takes a look at how news spread in earlier times; and, at a poignant commemoration of a tragic event in Burwell some 295 years ago. The full identity of a lone WWI soldier in the Fulbourn Hospital Cemetery has finally been uncovered, just in time for this year's Remembrance Day. We include responses to a couple of articles in previous issues.

NB: Cambridge meetings have now recommenced (note the new venue—see p34)

All the regulars features are to be found dotted throughout—projects updates, research surgeries and meetings' diary (zooming of talks is to continue, to enable a wider participation at meetings); reports of talks; book reviews—& much more

Print too small ?? Try the e-journal—it can be enlarged to suit all vision !!

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cover photo : Remembering The Burwell Barn Fire of 1727 (see p.22)

Cambs & Hunts Family History Society

~ updating our website ~

CHFHS is in the process of upgrading our website to, in particular, provide improved access to the society's database of millions of records for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire research and to introduce a number of new features.

We will also be taking the opportunity to adapt the web address and emails to reflect our name since 2020.

In the near future, we will be launching our new website.

Although the current web address and emails will continue to remain live for a period of time, we ask you to note that going forward

from later this year new website / emails will be in use :

www.chfhs.org.uk
<email>[@chfhs.org.uk](mailto:)



**a review the features & user guide
will appear in the Spring 2023 Journal**



A WORD FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN



Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire parish register images

I am delighted to confirm that both the County Archives service and the Society have now signed separate agreements with Ancestry to digitise the parish registers held in the Archives collections at Ely and Huntingdon and link them to our transcripts. Ancestry have considerable experience of this type of work, and have therefore been able to draw up a timetable based on the numbers of images and the number of records.

The image taking work is scheduled to start this month (October) and should be completed by Spring 2023, so matching can begin. This means that any outstanding transcription work needs to be completed by the Spring in order to be included in the project. Although almost all of the Cambridgeshire parishes have been completed, there is still considerable work to be done so that the Huntingdonshire parishes can be compatible with the Ancestry processes. This will therefore be our priority for the next few months – the more parishes we can transcribe, the more complete the matched data will be. Please contact Terry Garner, projects@cfhs.org.uk if you are able to give some time to this key work for the Society and join those who are already working through parish by parish.

Ancestry have indicated that the matched images and transcript work is likely to be completed by Spring 2024, and, so, for the first time, you will be able to make your own mind up about events without having to visit either Archives Office to see these core documents.

We often receive enquiries asking us to check our transcripts as the information we have extracted does not fit with what some people hope and expect. As with any other form of record, the parish register is based on the information given by the informant, the recorder's understanding of what that information is, and their ability to then record this correctly. I have written before about the importance of taking a wide view of all the sources of information to aim for a consistent approach, and to inform the decisions we make as family historians. I hope this new project will stimulate your search for robust evidence and widen your knowledge and understanding of our family.

Meetings and surgeries

Everyone with a declared email address will have received from me a request to comment on what we are doing with pattern of meetings, talks and research surgeries. I am very grateful to the more than 130 members who have so far replied to my plea for guidance so that the decisions we need to make fit what our members want. If the journal is published before the end of October, you will still have the opportunity to respond by the deadline, but we need to make decisions at our committee meeting in early November.

The family history world in late 2022 is very different from that pre Covid in 2019 and changing patterns of behaviour have been experienced by every organisation. What is clear from the replies so far, is how much more involved our distant and overseas members feel since we started to use zoom. Although the analysis of your comments is only just starting, many people are still wary of zoom, and others are still unsure about going out. Wherever possible, we record talks so you can watch the talk and the questions without having to use zoom or go out; just follow the link on the members' section of our website. The process is very similar to pressing the play button on your television to watch programmes you have recorded or want to watch through a catch-up process. There is considerable evidence that family history has a positive impact on quality of life and using more of the resources we provide should stimulate our thinking as well as contributing to our health. It is also very similar to speaking and seeing your friends and family through skype and telephone calls. If you are still unsure, why not give it a go, and if you are not certain about anything, please contact a committee member.

We have received many suggestions for topic choice, and also requests to hold zoom surgeries. Some people clearly value face to face meetings near to their home and the chance to meet others, but I get the sense that the response rate has been higher from our distant and overseas members than from those who live locally. All in all, plenty for us to think about, and to make informed decisions based on what you have told us.

I will share the decisions we make about 2023 events as soon as I can.

New website

The launch of our new website built by Beachshore in liaison with key committee members is now very near. The Society will have a different website address and the email addresses of committee members will also change. Please keep a look out for imminent developments.

It is clear from the recent responses to my meetings email how much you enjoy receiving and reading our journal, but there are still more than 400 members who do not receive our monthly newsletter. This gives an

opportunity for us to tell you about developments and events that happen in between each quarterly journal. If you do not yet receive the newsletter, you can amend your membership entry online so you are notified each month. If you are not sure how to make this change, please contact me.

Making a choice

The three major events in family history research are birth / baptism; marriage; and death / burial. Of these, the one where the majority of people have a choice is marriage, notwithstanding adult baptism and funeral preparation. I am reading a book about the reasons people decided to marry or not to marry in the late 18th and early 19th century. Apart from an insight into social attitudes, it has set me thinking about why my own family decided to marry or not. Sometimes the reasons are fairly clear, including pregnancy, a young family to support through widowhood; money or lack of it. When someone decides not to marry, no official record is generated, although banns may give some clues. Such things as biographies, diaries provide evidence of the thinking of many people, and I belong to the local public libraries in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk as well as the University library, in order to give me as wide a selection as possible. The more we can piece together evidence about our families, the greater our understanding and satisfaction. New records are becoming available every month, and it is well worth revisiting research you undertook several years previously when there were far fewer online sources.

As you will know, I have no ancestors from either Cambridgeshire or Huntingdonshire, but I am in correspondence with another CHFHS member about a shared family name, and shared events in the same parish at the same time in a neighbouring county. It is always good to discover lost cousins, and our correspondence may show this is the case. Whatever the outcome, it makes both of us think, and I hope you are doing the same.

David Capsey

The Society offers condolences to the families of :

Roderick Howes	2497
Glyn Hall	5121
Peter Pryke	6488

**1921 census for Scotland
to be released “latter part of 2022”**

... And Here Is The News

by CJ

September 8 2022 will forever be a date etched in all our memories, as will be where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news that evening.

24hr rolling news programmes on TV, social media such as facebook, twitter, tiktok, plus news feeds on our mobile phones and computers meant that an unprecedented number of people were to discover “something was going on” way ahead of any official announcement. Early that fateful afternoon, word began to spread that members of the Royal family were suddenly seen to be heading for Scotland from all directions, and despite there having been photographs of Her Majesty greeting the new PM just a couple of days earlier, clearly something had happened that morning. The official announcement was released at 6.30pm.

How might important news have reached our ancestors in times past? CJ takes a look at how communications and the “news media” evolved:

In an age when many people carry internet linked devices which can give information and pictures about global events as they happen with just a few touches on a pocket device, the idea that news may not actually be NEW is a difficult concept to understand for some. So what constitutes news and how did people cope in the past?

“The news from the Palace was anticipated with some trepidation but how soon would people in the rest of the realm learn what was happening?”

No, not the sad death of her late Majesty Elizabeth II, but the announcement of the birth of Queen Victoria’s second son, Alfred Ernest, at Windsor on 6th August 1844. *The Times* newspaper was out on the streets of London with the happy news less than 40 minutes after the birth announcement.

What had made this possible was the use of the new-fangled electric telegraph, up to then dismissed as an entertaining scientific novelty, which together with the continuing spread of the new railways fundamentally changed the way information could now be disseminated to the wider public and rewrote the definition of news to something we might recognise, an event that had recently occurred – as long as it was within the reach of a telegraph station anyway.

Those of us of a certain age may have their first childhood experience of

watching television on a parent's or quite often a neighbour's new little black and white set bought for the occasion when the Coronation was shown in 1953 (I was around, but in my pram, so I can't claim first-hand knowledge!). Before that, reporting of national events was the province of the radio (oops, wireless), specifically the BBC. The visual reporting of an event would follow a few days later in the frequent newsreels shown as part of a programme in cinemas. Newsreels as a means of conveying news and current affairs had come on the scene as early as 1910, but were phased out as television ownership accelerated during the 1960s.

So, before the television service, there was "the wireless", but broadcasts themselves had only started in 1923. Many people watching the Coronation would have grown up in an age when people first learned of major events from the banner headlines of street newspaper sellers. A few wealthy people may have had telephones and could spread news within their own circle, but generally the national newspapers, distributed by the railways network were for many the main source of information about important national events. It is said that King George V's death in 1936 was expedited by a physician so that it would be covered by the morning national dailies, rather than being announced in the less prestigious evening papers which covered more limited areas!

These local newspapers were the means whereby the ordinary people in a locality spread *their* important news. The columns colloquially known as Hatches, Matches and Dispatches (Births, Marriages and Deaths) announced family news to the wider public. People in the smaller villages tended to know each other's business and general gossip would spread information, but the increase in urban living during the Industrial revolution now led to relatives living much further apart. Letters and later postcards could be sent to those at a distance. Fortunately, one of the by-products of the wide rail network was the introduction of the penny post (paid by the sender rather than the recipient) in 1840 which made it cheaper and more convenient to keep touch.

All well and good when letters could be expected to arrive in a day or two within the British Isles. but what of those relatives living far way, people who had emigrated (hopefully willingly) from, say, a small Cambridge village to Australia? (There were widespread emigration schemes to encourage rural Cambridge folk to move to South Australia in the mid-19th century – covered in previous Journal issues). Any letters posted would take as long as a ship took to reach the remoter parts of the world. By sailing ship, a trip to Australia might take around 100 days, with luck and favourable weather. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the associated use of steam ships this might be cut to 50 days. Still a long time if you had important news, or

wanted a reply which, of course, would take at least another 50 days.

Nationally important and government news could be sent via the new telegraph network but using it could be prohibitively expensive to the average family. Undersea cables started to connect up the world, the USA (first in 1858 briefly, before it failed after a month, then properly in 1866) and progressively throughout the empire, India and Hong Kong 1870, reaching Australia in 1871 – all well and good for important government communications later to be passed on to the newspapers, but still too expensive for everyday public use.

Sending letters of course implies literacy, but shockingly it was not until as late as 1880, seven years before Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, that all young children in the United Kingdom were actually required to attend school and 'learn their letters'. The Education Act in 1870 had been designed to do this following the realisation that Britain was falling behind compared to some European neighbours, but it took another decade to enforce it. Voluntary and religious schools had long existed but provision had never been made to cover every child, especially the children of the poorest agricultural labourers, who had often been neglected in the past. Most of us have seen the old marriage entries in parish records with their (x) symbols showing that the participants had 'made their mark' rather than signing their name. Quite a few people of the latter who did sign had only learned to sign their name in the graphical equivalent of 'parrot fashion', rather than actually being able to read and write - which may mislead their descendants' assessment of their ancestors' abilities. The illiterate in society were thus reliant on the goodwill of their more literate neighbours to read and write letters on their behalf if they needed to communicate with distant relations.

Assuming someone was literate in the mid-19th century, what would they actually find in their newspapers? Most newspapers at this time tended to cover a limited geographical area and outside news only appeared when more distant papers were physically acquired from those parts. Anything happening abroad would take weeks to be known as ships slowly carried copies of the foreign newspapers with them. New York news for example was received around 5 weeks later in London. Australian news might be 3 or 4 months old.

Some local papers had been around for a considerable time. In this area was The *Stamford Mercury*, a weekly newspaper which claims to be the oldest in existence, was founded 1712, and the *Ipswich Journal* in 1720. In the 18th century, long distance travel was via the coach. Stamford being a major coach stop on the main Great North Road from London to Edinburgh, through Cambridgeshire/Huntingdonshire, would thus have copies of its

particular paper carried extensively northwards and southwards along the road by passengers.

Local papers unsurprisingly carried mainly local stories, but they would reprint news from out-of-area if of possible interest to readers. This outside news was copied word-for-word, and reprinted freely from the pages of other papers which had been received sometimes several days after its original publication. What was considered 'News' moved so slowly that there was no real danger that one paper would steal another's story and ever be in competition with the original report. The idea of the journalistic 'scoop' had yet to arrive. A newspaper tax (introduced by the Stamp Act of 1712) kept the price of a newspaper artificially high. This tax on knowledge, as many opponents called it, was eventually repealed in 1855 which led to an increase in cheaper popular papers, which with advantage of distribution by the new railways, led to more national events being reported.

The general mail was carried by specified Mail coaches. The Royal Mail coach service ran to an exact and demanding schedule. It required a regular quick change of horses so the coach only stopped for collection and delivery of mail and never for the comfort of the passengers. Turnpike gatekeepers were warned by the sound of the post horn as the coach approached and faced a big fine if they failed to open their gates in plenty of time before the Mail coach arrived as they had the absolute right of free passage. The Mail coaches were slowly phased out during the 1840s and 1850s, their role eventually replaced by trains as the railway network expanded. On a local level, networks of carriers routes fanned out into the villages surrounding market towns, and undoubtedly would have been an important means of spreading news by word of mouth.

Originating in France and although relatively short-lived around 1800+/- (the Napoleonic War era) in this country, the optical telegraph system of semaphore towers enabled information to be rapidly transmitted over great distances in relay, but was largely restricted to military/naval use. Under optimum conditions, messages could get from London to Portsmouth in less than 15min. The London-Gt Yarmouth route passed through Cambs with towers at Royston, Gogmagog and Newmarket.

Going back in time a little further, starting in the Elizabethan period, there were no turnpike roads and most roads were often in a very poor condition, just badly rutted if lucky and full of potholes and quagmires if not. Regular coach traffic was not feasible. Sending information and any post in general thus depended on what a man on a horse could carry. Horses could travel about 20 miles a day, 30 miles at most but required a rest afterwards so for a speedy transmission of post it required a new supply of horses to be readily available at intervals on the main roads. This would be an expensive system

as huge number of horses would be needed to run this sort of operation.

It was in England, during the Elizabethan period when this 'post rider' system was introduced. Each 'post' stage was only about 10 miles, after which a fresh horse was used. In most cases the horses were kept at inns or hostleries. The post began to serve all-comers instead of being limited by the original restrictive policy of the Government against any public use. Merchants, farmers and innkeepers all started to use it as well as the government officials and the military. These networks included predefined routes known as post roads complete with distance markers and waypoints. Unlike other forms of mounted courier, post riders collected and delivered mail over the course of their route, meeting with other riders at scheduled times and scheduled places to exchange forwarded items. In this way correspondence could pass reliably from rider to rider and cover a considerable distance in a reasonable time at reduced cost.

Earlier still, in a medieval England long before the introduction of the printing press and with many people illiterate anyway, the primary means to communication news was the Town Crier. These days a post most often treated as a quaint if not humorous throwback but then a position of considerable standing in the medieval world. Royal proclamations, local by-laws, market days, and even early advertisements were all proclaimed by a town crier. Town criers were protected by law – sometimes necessary when he was proclaiming bad news like tax increases likely to rile people. However, as anything done by the town crier was done in the name of the ruling monarch, harming a town crier was considered to be treason – something you really didn't want to be accused of in the medieval period as it led to an unpleasant demise.

Mutatis Mutandis – and this brings us bang up-to-date.

On 10 September 2022, we saw the traditional form of the proclamation of King Charles III's accession to the throne at St James' Palace—televising the Garter King of Arms, Royal Heralds and trumpeters in Tudor dress using the age-old performance of medieval communication in reading from a piece of paper to an assembled crowd—and, in 21st century style, also shown to a worldwide audience, instantly. A tradition further played out across the Commonwealth and in cities, towns and villages up and down the land by County High Sheriffs and Mayors accompanied by Town Criers—no less so than in Cambridge and Huntingdon, March, Wisbech, Ely and villages across the county—and undoubtedly witnessed by many of us.

We were there as history was being made ...



SOHAM : received from Bob Adams (Cambs FHS Member No.1)

I have just received my latest copy of 'The Journal', which I always read through, even though many of my connections with the Cambridgeshire region have faded after more than 40 years after leaving the area in the early 1980s. Today, in the Autumn 2022 issue I spotted in the 'Letter – re Soham' which reminded me of CFHS and my very first venture into Family History.



After being posted to Cambridge and moving house to Gt Abington in 1975, I remembered that my father Stanley Adams (1889-1983) had told me that in 1916 he had visited his uncle William Adams (1848-1940) who had lived at 'Shrublands', Soham. Dad suggested that maybe I would like to see if I could find the house. So I started on my first evening venturing into the world of Family History.

First problem: the house was no longer called 'Shrublands', but nevertheless, I found it. (photo to left : c1977, with Stanley).

Can anyone recognise the house?

Hint, the Mill stone, so what is it called now? (unless that is it has changed name again).

Being present at the first meeting and hence a Founder Member (No. 1 because my name started with an 'A'), I was asked on the occasion of the 21st Anniversary (see Cambs FHS Journal Vol 11 No 5, pp 158-9, Feb 1998) to retell the somewhat amazing and successful results of my 'beginners' luck' experience. As I guess only a few of the current members were at the anniversary, perhaps they might be interested in my retelling the story in an article for a future Journal, And perhaps also a bit about of the family association with 'Beechurst' (later to become Soham Village College but once, I am told by Hilary, William's gt grand-daughter, was known to the locals as 'Morbey's Folly').



Looking through my past journals I see that in Vol 13

No 4, p 136, Nov 2001, there is a list of the 24 founding members, but at that time after 25 years since the founding, only 10 of these were still current. I wonder if any of these are still members, or am I the only one left !!?

Regards and best wishes to all our current members.

[Muriel estimates that just 6 of the original 25 are still on the membership list]

Percy Salmon—from a family perspective

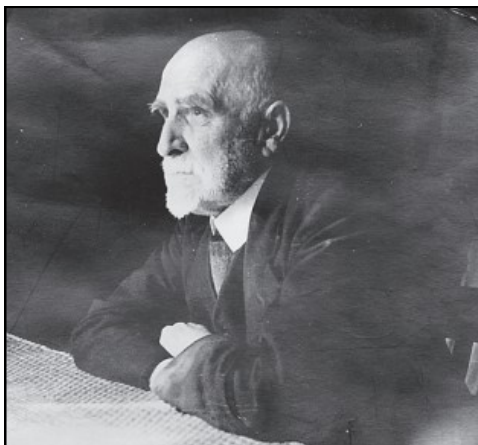
The Summer issue of the journal featured a small piece noting the celebration of the work of local photographer, Percy Salmon, by The Royal Photographic Society and an exhibition at The Cambridgeshire Collection; a few biographical notes compiled by the editorial team were appended.

We are please here, to publish extracts from e-letters recently forwarded to the editorial team from Stephen Martin., Percy's only living relative—who happens to be a member of CHFHS.

Firstly, written coincidentally in the spring (but, unfortunately, not received) :

“I was recently prompted to compile a brief biography of my gt-uncle, Percy Salmon (1872-1959) as 2022 will see the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Percy was a photographer and journalist, born in Waterbeach. He travelled in the Middle East at the end of the 19th century and recorded his travels in diaries and articles that were published in the Cambridge newspapers. He became an editor of photographic journals, living in London for a number of years before he moved to Melbourn in 1927, where he continued to write articles for the Royston Crow, as well as giving lantern lectures. There is information about him, and copies of some slides etc in the Cambridge Collection.



A distant relative by marriage, David Barber, has carried out research into stereoscopic photography and a copy of his MA thesis, which describes some of Percy's work is now in the Cambridge Collection. David has contacted the Royal Photographic Society, who have agreed to host a lecture, and the Cambridge Collection, who are interested in staging an exhibition relating to Percy to commemorate the anniversary. This prompted me, as the only living relative, to compile a brief biography, which includes some family memories.”

Stephen later added:

“Further to my earlier email, you may be interested to know that brief articles about Percy Salmon have appeared in the Melbourn Magazine [Spring 2022 No.109] <http://melbourncambridge.org/magazine/> and also Waterbeach's Beach News [Spring 2022 No.269] <http://www.waterbeach.org/index.html>.

The Cambridge Collection ran a small display in the Central Library, and the talk by David Barber is available on the Royal Photographic Society's YouTube - <https://rps.org/Salmon>

I think these may be of some interest to some members of CFHS."

And more recently, Stephen also writes :

"Thanks for the Spotlight on Soham in the latest newsletter. Glad to see some information about my home town and where my family have lived for several generations. Perhaps some members are unaware of some of the distinguished residents of the past - including Olaudah Equiano and William Case Morris - as well of course of being aware of the rail disaster in 1944. See the Wikipedia page for some further notes."

Links for further information added by the CHFHS editorial team

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soham_rail_disaster

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olaudah_Equiano

http://www.sohamgrammar.org.uk/case_morris_mowforth.htm

WHITTLESFORD WAR MEMORIAL (WW2) :

received from our friends at CALH

Announcing the publication of the Whittlesford War Memorial leaflet, written, by Karan Wright during the last summer, as part of the 1000 year celebration of a church in the village.

Karen writes: "I found it really interesting to research the WW2 men, not so easy as WW1 which I did for my book 'Whittlesford Men at War 1914-1918'. It was interesting that only half of the men had been born in the village and particularly interesting to discover that the Cambridgeshire Regiment had been in Singapore when the Japanese invaded. There was a lot of information online and I even discovered a card in Japanese about one of the men. Fortunately, my grandson had a Japanese friend so his father was kind enough to translate it for me. The man was described as a "worker with an implement" (best Japanese translation available), and as he died on the Burma railway, I can see how that could be interpreted.

The most intriguing part of the research was that the memorial in Ely Cathedral has an additional name on it for Whittlesford, Mostyn Oliver. I have researched this young man who was in the RAF, and lost during a flight to Norway where they were due to drop two SOE agents into the country. I have found him on the memorial at Sawston Village College and have now discovered that he is commemorated in the church at Little Shelford which I need to pursue. CWGC give his place of residence as Whittlesford, but I cannot find him or his mother, who is shown as his next of kin, on any records. I do know that he was born in Hull.

Karen adds that if she does solve this mystery, she will update us.

FINDING PTE J GIBBONS

*the final piece
of the jigsaw*

by Caz

This is a piece of research which has been on-going since the WW1 Commemoration, and has been dipped into several times since. The search stalled several times, and has become something of a hobbyhorse. The final piece of the jigsaw has, however, at last dropped into place to complete the story as best as can be told ...

When the WW1 Commemoration began back in 2014, I, like many others, took an interest in WW1 casualties on war memorials and grave stones and began looking into their stories. Several issues of The Journal during the Commemoration period carried listings of those buried in the county as derived from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). Whilst extracting these listings, the editorial team noted that a number of casualties buried in the county had no biographical details accompanying their CWGC citation, and set out to identify their families and “Restore Their Memory” (the slogan we coined at the time). I think it can be said that virtually every name we took on was subsequently identified in the context of their family—all, that is, except for one Pte Gibbons. We were not going to be beaten, and the final piece of the jigsaw enables it to be said that he is the “son of George and Ann Gibbons; husband of Ann Jane”. This is how his story unfolded



In the far corner of the car park at Tesco Cherry Hinton, is a path which leads to an open grassy park maintained by the Council. Closer inspection reveals a number of old fading gravestones scattered among the bushes—this is the cemetery of the former Fulbourn Asylum. Backing against the side fence by the railway is an isolated headstone—to one “Pte J E Gibbons”, also listing his date of death in December 1918, and that he served in The Liverpool Regiment.

Pte Gibbons’ CWGC citation adds no more—no age,

PRIVATE J E GIBBONS

Service Number: 37457

Regiment & Unit/Ship

The King's (Liverpool Regiment)
23rd Works Bn.

Date of Death

Died 04 December 1918

Buried or commemorated at

FULBOURN HOSPITAL CEMETERY
1340. Spec. Mem B.
United Kingdom

no parents or spouse, no indication of “home”— and from the outset, the search was thwarted by brick walls and red herrings. Red herrings, the bane of a family historian’s life—those annoying inconsistencies (whether real or clerical in origin) where things just don’t add up, and either hinder progress completely or send us off on the wrong tack. It sometimes pays to step away, and come back to the work at a later date, review what has been found and look at the search anew with fresh eyes. Of note, and very relevant here, is that it was later to turn out that many of those without CWGC biographical details were not as “forgotten” as might first be imagined through the absence of personal information. Having researched many similar burials across Cambs, time and again it has been found that once a “home” area has been identified, the men are often found to be well remembered locally, in newspapers and on war memorials. For some individuals, it appears that for some reason, now unknown, no personal information was supplied/collected/available at the time the CWGC was compiling their records.

So, who is Pte J E Gibbons—*where was he from, who were his family and how did he come to end up in Fulbourn following the end of the war??*

Very many of the, similarly, “biography-less” CWGC casualties buried in this country can be identified through collating information found variously in civil registrations, local newspapers, probates, censuses, parish registers, war memorials—resources for which are quite widely available online, as is a collection of military records through Ancestry. Enough can often be teased out of a selection of these records to conclusively identify a man’s family, and costs only the time and effort to make the searches. On reflection, the search for Pte Gibbons fell into several phases, each of which ground to a halt until renewed effort enabled further progress—until the next brickwall :

i) The basic resources :

Burial in this country mostly meant their death was here on home soil, although not necessarily in the same area as the burial; burials were either where they died, or at a place connected with the family. The search therefore began with seeking a death registration, and sure enough, a “John Gibbons, aged 38y” (though without the middle initial “E”) appears in the Chesterton Registration District in the Dec Qtr of 1918 and this started the ball rolling. A tallying burial on 10 December 1918, in the CHFHS transcripts of Fulbourn Asylum registers, supports this death—and adds that he was “of

Dec	10	GIBBONS	John of Cambridge 38 [Note - 1340]
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Cambridge” (the “Note-1340” is thought to refer to a plot number).

No probate nor newspaper references turned up, neither did a military service record (several “John E Gibbons” are listed, but nothing tallies with his service number or regiment). At this stage, no progress was made over finding Pte Gibbons’ birth. The death of a 38 year-old in 1918 suggests a birth around 1880, but all the three “John E Gibbons” registered 1880+/-2yr (John Edward 1879 in Hexham District, John Ernest 1880 in Altrincham, and another John Edward 1881 in Stockport), all however, can be ruled out. Techniques of reverse genealogy can identify them alive later or elsewhere. Perhaps Pte Gibbons was registered as just “John Gibbons” but with nearly 90 candidate “John Gibbons” births registered 1880+/-2yr, and a further 70 being added if the possibility of a mis-spelling as Gibbin(s) or Gibbon is considered, that’s a lot of candidates!

ii) Could the candidate pool be reduced?

This has worked successfully on other occasions, though with far smaller numbers, and was found to get too complicated in this case. A lot of time was spent listing birth registrations (1880+/-2), tallying death registrations of that birth cohort both up to 1918 and beyond 1918, trying to find that birth cohort in 1891/1901/1911 censuses—all to try and eliminate candidates and see who remained that might be the one John Gibbons who was to become “Pte Gibbons”.

Might there be significance in Pte Gibbons having served in the Liverpool Regiment, a local, perhaps? The pool of potential candidates registered in just Lancashire reduced numbers to around 20, but still too many to work through at this stage in the absence of any other identity clues; collating between different records proved to be inconclusive.

Being the age he was, it’s quite likely that Pte Gibbons might have been married. Searches of marriage registrations again proved inconclusive as the spread was potentially over almost 20 years. Three “John E Gibbons” and a further 100 “John Gibbons” marriages took place between 1898 and 1918, any of which could have been he. Two of the three “John Es” can be shown to be “John E” births as already noted, and both can be proved not to be Pte Gibbons; the other “John E” was an older man, remarrying.

While it has been possible to conclusively eliminate a fair number of “candidates”, too many loose ends remained around too many others. To make progress, more information about Pte Gibbons himself, was required ...

iii) Specialist resources

A number of specialist resources were consulted. As it turned out, had

particular ones been consulted ahead of others, the story might well have emerged sooner—but, hey, that’s the nature of hindsight, that and the logic of exhausting more readily accessible resources ahead of those requiring additional time and effort, and of justifying any expense.

Liverpool Regiment—although no service record appears to have survived for Pte Gibbons, could there be anything relevant in the broader regimental history? A google search reveals the “23rd Works Battalion, Liverpool Regiment” was raised in May/June of 1916 at Prescott, Lancashire, and perhaps could be considered a “pals battalion” of local men. The 23rds went on to become the 1st Battalion of the Labour Corps when a reorganisation in April 1917 brought together labour units from individual regiments. It appears that the 1st Bn didn’t serve overseas, nor was the Labour Corps required to keep War Diaries; in short little survives in terms of records. Such units largely comprised either labourers or those from manual trade occupations, and generally men of “less than A1 fitness”.

Fulbourn Hospital—the hospital records database on the National Archives website shows that Cambridgeshire Archives holds a collection of records from Fulbourn Asylum for that period, including admission registers and case notes. A search of the Archives’ online catalogue on the name “John Gibbons” also turns up a couple of hits. The gist of the summaries suggests that John Gibbons had been admitted to Fulbourn only a week or so before he died. The asylum records, however, despite being over 100yrs old, were found to be still under restricted access as other material in the registers is less than 100yrs and remains confidential; all is accessible only to archives’ staff through commissioned research [see viii].

1911 census and street directories—an address of 11 Hope Street in Cambridge ** is associated with John Gibbons’ admission to Fulbourn. Hope Street is off Mill Road in the Romsey area of town, and seems to have possibly been a lodging house. Certainly in 1911, it’s a lodging house, and no John Gibbons of suitable age appears anywhere in either the town or county. Street directories only list the property owner/tenant, and no likely names appear in electoral registers.

Military records—a variety of military records are brought together under Ancestry’s Military Collection including “Service Records”, “Medal Rolls”, “Soldiers Died In The Great War”, “Register Of Soldier’s Effects”, and the index to “Pension Records”. 37457 Pte Gibbons features only in the latter two (he didn’t actually die in the war), and as speculated earlier, he was indeed married. Both sources make reference to a “widow, Ann J(ane)”, who

according to the pensions index, resided in Darwen. But that was all, and again, the work stalled.

Local history—early in this exercise, it was noted separately that a local war memorial researcher had attributed Pte J E Gibbons to being the John Ernest from Altrincham, who in 1911 happened to have a wife of a similar name, Annie. This exercise had, however, already discounted John Ernest—through reverse genealogy, it can be shown that this man was still alive well after the war.

iv) Pte Gibbons—found at last!!

The Pensions Records proved to be the real big breakthrough. One of the occasional periods of free access to this resource provided the opportunity to follow up the index “hit”, and opened up the identifying of Pte Gibbons. The record card showed a home address of 19 Queen Street in Darwen, Lancashire. Searching the 1911 census readily turned up a John and Ann Jane Gibbons at 3 Higher Lawrence Street in Darwen—“married 16yrs, no children”. A decade earlier, they’re at the same address, which happened then to be next door to Anne’s parents. In both records, John is described as a coal carter, and Anne a cotton weaver.

The biggest revelation of this whole exercise however, was also revealed by the 1911 census, in that a red herring the size of a whale had been in play right from the beginning!! Somewhere along the line, Pte Gibbons’ age had been wrongly recorded (presumably by Fulbourn Hospital) and then perpetuated in his death registration and burial record. He was in fact some 10 years older than was recorded in the death/burial records, and described as being 41yrs and 31yrs in 1911 and 1901, respectively. So, with nothing else to go on at the start of this quest, we could only work with what we had at the time, and all the effort in speculatively searching births and censuses had been way off the mark!!

By 1911, the couple had been married for “16yrs”, and in 1894 the marriage registration of a John Gibbons and an Ann Jane Clegg appears in the Blackburn District (the district includes Darwen). Unfortunately for further progress, this marriage is not among records accessible online, and it can be assumed to have probably been a Register Office or a chapel event.

The remarkable thing is that from the 1911 record “hit”, Ancestry’s algorithm does have a number of relevant interlinked. But, while all the key records for Ann Jane’s life are laid clear, the similar is not true for John. Apart from the marriage registration index, there are no conclusive linkages in censuses prior to 1901—nothing to help attach John to his own family. Another

brickwall to be scaled!!

v) What did become of Ann Jane ...

Whether Ann Jane ever actually lived in Cambridge while John was here, cannot be known. What is clear, however, is that she was in Darwen in 1921 (the census has her apparently living alone), and is around the date of the pensions' record which, as already noted, has her residing at 19 Queen Street. She was still there, and still alone, nearly two decades later, in 1939. A death registration in the Darwen District in 1948 of a 79 year-old Ann J Gibbons is undoubtedly she—and confirmed by a tallying probate for “Ann Jane Gibbons, widow, of 19 Queen Street Darwen”, who died “18 Feb 1948”.

vi) Darwen remembers ...

The curious thing about this whole exercise is that, in Darwen, John Gibbons is remembered among the young men of the town who went off to war, a memory no doubted kept alive by his widow who continued to live in the same house in Queen Street for the rest of her long life. However, with no descendants of their own, it can only be speculated how well he is now recalled among descendants of his and Ann's siblings.

GIBBONS.—On December 4th, 1918, John, the beloved husband of Ann Jane Gibbons, aged 48 years.
“Deeply regretted.”
3, Higher Lawrence-street, Darwen.

from “The Darwen News” 14 December 1918
with thanks to Darwen Library

Correspondence with the Local Studies Library in Darwen and a search of local history websites in the area revealed more: a death notice from the local paper, and an entry on the digital Roll Of Honour

(compiled to mark the WW1 Commemoration). He's listed on the latter as “John Edwin” (the only place his full name seems ever to appear) and is noted to have died in Cambridge. No mystery about Pte Gibbons in Darwen!!

GIBBONS, John Edwin
Rank: Private, 37457. Regiment: The King's (Liverpool Regiment).
Died: 4 December 1918.
Memorial: Fulbourn Hospital Cemetery: Ref: 1340. Spec. Mem B.

from Darwen Digital War Memorial
provided by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for use in the Cotton Town digitisation project: www.cottontown.org.

vii) Finding Pte Gibbons' family ...

Having simply finally found Pte Gibbons' own home is not the end of the story. The aim of this exercise was to restore him to the context of his family, but here yet another brick wall was to block the path. Thus far, John Gibbons has no history prior to his marriage in 1894—a revised birth to around 1870 still turns up some 30 or so candidates, and with his census birthplaces

stated as “Darwen, Lancs” (1911) and “n/k, Cheshire” (1901), he can’t be conclusively identified in earlier censuses on the strength of known information; his marriage registration doesn’t link to an accessible online record. After exploring all other readily available avenues, the last resort to try and make progress, was to obtain a copy of the marriage certificate to, hopefully, identify his father and go on find both his family and origins.

As predicted, the 1894 marriage of John and Ann Jane was non-Anglican, the certificate shows the Belgrave Square Independent Meeting House, Over Darwen, and details “*John Gibbons, 25yr, bac, carter, of 2 Richmond Terrace, Over Darwen, s/o George Gibbons, journeyman blacksmith*”. At last, something else tangible to work with. But even with this lead, the trail had to be pieced together from exploring the wider Gibbons family over a couple of generations using censuses, parish registers and BMDs

The wider Gibbons family are quite interesting in their own right as a dynasty of blacksmiths from Marbury near Whitchurch, Cheshire. Confusingly, John’s father, George Gibbons, had married an Ann Gibbons—coincidence or what? Ann turned out to be his cousin from Whitchurch, the daughter of his blacksmith father’s blacksmith brother. Despite starting out as a blacksmith himself, George seems to have had less success, and is recorded in later-life censuses as a labourer. John lived with his parents as a child/teen in Marbury, one of a family of six, worked as a labourer/carter and ended up at Darwen, some 50ml away the other side of Manchester. Here he married a local lass, and had the war not intervened, would no doubt have remained there for life. John would have been 46yrs-old when he joined up in 1916, but was probably part of a conscription drive aimed at providing experienced men for labouring roles in dedicated works units to support front line troops.

viii) One final clue ... perhaps ...

The Fulbourn records are only available through commissioned research by Cambridgeshire Archives, but might just hold some detail to explain John’s presence in Cambridge—perhaps he had been a patient of The Eastern General Hospital and then transferred to the Fulbourn Asylum. Men from all over the country ended up at the EGH, a number of whom are buried in the CWGC plot at Cambridge City Cemetery in Newmarket Road. Having come this far, we couldn’t let it go, and paid the fee to commission research in the hope that some detail in the Fulbourn records might close the loop. But, no—there was just an account of facts in connection with his “case”. John had seemingly come to the attention of the authorities just a few days earlier; his case history describes him as a resident of Hope St, and a “cement worker”. Essentially, his landlady stated that John had seemed “strange”, and he was

then found wandering in Cambridge in an incoherent daze on 2nd December. Admitted to Fulbourn with a diagnosis of “TB of the lungs and meninges”; John Gibbons died just two days later. No clues, however, to the million pound question as to why he was in Cambridge, although it can’t be discounted that early symptoms of his illness had led to him randomly wandering away from home in Lancashire, and becoming itinerant.

Post Script : this started off as somewhat of a wild goose chase as there were no clues whatsoever at the outset, to indicate where the trail might lead. Progress kept stalling as red herrings and brickwalls cropped up at every turn, but “following the paper trail” did, in the end, lead to conclusive findings—just in time for Remembrance Day 2022.

One final “key record” of John’s life was still missing, however. His early life at home, and later with his wife, had been uncovered, but where was he in his early 20s in 1891? Typically, it’s acknowledged as notoriously difficult to find someone alone and away-from-home as John was presumed to be. A lot of creative searching did eventually find him after following his siblings. A married brother, Henry, was identified living at Berwin, east Manchester, in 1891—by chance, 2-doors away, was a John Gibbons of the right age and birthplace, with a wife, Hannah (who died later in 1891). Essentially, despite listing as bachelor when (re)marrying in 1894, John was in fact a widower. What’s more, John had not been alone in his going to Darwen as presumed, as Henry and family turn up in the next street to John in later censuses!!

So, while there appears to be no doubt over what became of John Gibbons from the “home” perspective in Darwen, the reverse, as we have now seen, cannot be said to be true. Research is not always a linear process with one record leading to the next across a lifetime—often they do, but sometimes we have to step back from the individual being sought and build a body of evidence about the wider family. Anomalies come in many shades of grey, and the uncertainty needs to be resolved, one way or the other. Resolution can find that while many instances are conclusive, others remain at odds, or leave the researcher hanging over a void as to where to look next—as was the case several times with Pte Gibbons. Being creative, and taking time to challenge brickwalls by drawing on traditional research techniques to help collate mis-matching information can get a positive result.

The story of the “Pte J E Gibbons” in the CWGC can now be told to a point. Was he really “John E” / “John Edwin”, he’s just John in all the personal earlier-life records—perhaps it was another clerical error, like his age?!? The one big mystery is likely to remain unanswered with any certainty—

—*just why was John Gibbons in Cambridge in the first place???*

A Local Historical Tragedy Revisited

by CJ

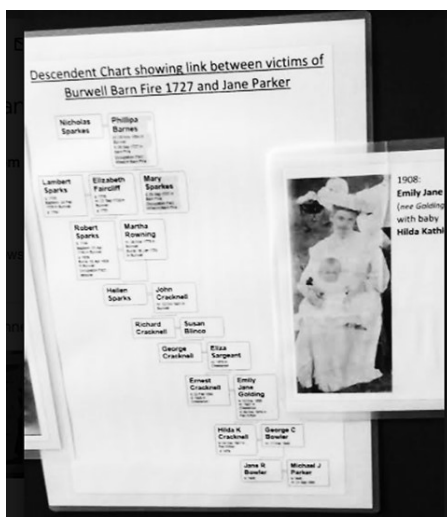
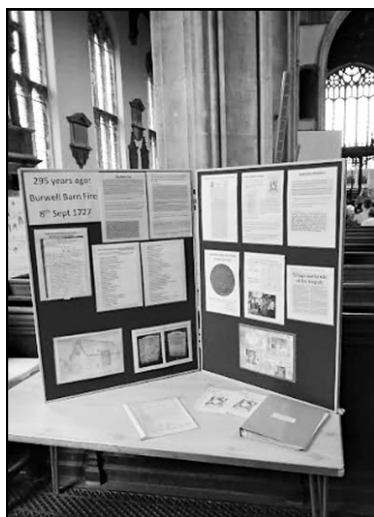
The Burwell Barn Fire 1727

Reported by CJ, who attended the commemoration on behalf of CHFHS at the invite of CHFHS member, Jane Parker.

Note: some of the contemporary accounts drawn on are quite graphic in nature.

A remembrance service was made recently to mark the 295th anniversary of the tragedy known as the Burwell Barn Fire which occurred on September 8th 1727. In terms of the death toll from one event, it still ranks as the third worst building fire (i.e. not an accident caused by an explosion in a coal mine or North Sea oil platform) to have occurred in British history. In the last few centuries only the Theatre Royal fire in Exeter in 1887 had a worse death toll.

The ceremony which consisted of wreath laying, a church service, a poetry reading and music was attended by around 60 people. The event was organized by Jane Parker (a Cambs and Hunts FHS member) whose research into her family tree had uncovered a direct ancestor who was one of the victims of the Burwell fire – her six times great grandmother Philippa Sparks. Philippa’s daughter 17 year old Mary died. Jane is descended from Mary’s older brother, Lambert. The link had come as a surprise as Jane had moved to Burwell from elsewhere and was unaware that her distant ancestors had also lived in the village.





The basic facts about the tragedy are well known. Just 3 months after a new King, George II, came to the throne a fire broke out inside a packed barn in Burwell which was being used as the venue for a puppet show. Panic ensued as people rushed to the one and only door which had been nailed shut and which was also obstructed by a table moved there to make room for the show. In the crush and fire over half the audience and the showman himself were killed. As if that wasn't tragic enough the fire then spread to nearby cottages and caused other

fatalities when they were burned down. At least 78 people were known to have died, reportedly many of them children.

The story begins with a man who owned a family-run puppet show named Robert Shephard. As he was passing through the village of Burwell, about 10 miles north-east of Cambridge, with his wife, his daughter, and two servants, he decided to put on a show and rented a barn for the occasion (a building which was just 45 feet by 17 feet with thick stone walls and a thatched roof). The barn roof was contiguous with a stable, of which more later.

Word quickly spread that Shephard was going to perform a puppet show that evening. Attendance promised to be high because people would not have to travel far and because Shephard was charging an entrance fee of just one penny. Indeed a large crowd arrived that evening all hoping to see the puppet show. However space was limited as the hired barn was already two-thirds full with trusses of straw and the barn could barely accommodate the 140 people who did manage to gain entrance.

Among those who wanted access to the puppet show was an ostler named Richard Whitaker of Hadstock, near Linton. He thought that he should get in for free as he worked for the farmer who owned the barn. However Shephard, the showman, told him at the barn door that he had to pay just like everyone else.

The crowd eventually became so great and space so limited that some of crowd became unruly. Those in charge of controlling the crowd became worried. They decided that the best way to prevent further trouble and stop more people from trying get in was to bar the only door that allowed access.

As there was no means of locking or barring the door, it was decided to nail the door shut, which was done from the inside. The show then started at 8pm with opening performances by a conjuror and a two-handed piece performed by the Shepheard's.

Whitaker, in the meantime, was still determined to see the show, and so after he fed and tended to the two horses belonging to Shepheard in the adjoining stable, he used his personal acquaintance with the buildings and climbed into the hayloft of the stable and over a partition which separated the stable and barn to a perch from where he could look down on the show. To see where he was going he had lit a lantern with a short candle. The hayloft contained a stack of dry hay and Whitaker soon found a gap that allowed him to watch the performance. The weather that summer had been particularly warm with little rain, consequently the contents of the hayloft and barn were both tinder dry as was the thatched roof that covered both the barn and stable. The next thing anyone knew was that a fire started. It spread quickly through the hay and then to the thatched roof.

When people in the audience realized there was a fire, they made a mad rush towards the door, but no one could exit because the doors were nailed shut. Even worse a table that had been used in the conjuror's act had also been placed in front of the door to make room elsewhere. People became hysterical and tried to break down the door. As is the way with panics, people at the front were getting crushed by those pushing from behind and bodies started to pile up several layers deep.

When people outside realized that a fire had erupted and that the people inside were trying to escape they attempted to open the nailed shut door. An opening was eventually created in the door (1) large enough for individuals to crawl out of, or be grabbed and dragged out by the people outside.

People inside the barn fought their way clear of the fire by literally clambering over the other unfortunates who were being crushed underfoot. It is noticeable that not one woman or girl in the barn was able to escape. Younger men and boys, more agile, stronger and not hampered by long dresses found it easier to wriggle free.

One description of the devastation stated:

"When the roof fell, which was scarcely half an hour from the commencement of the fire, the shrieks and anguish of the helpless sufferers were momentarily ended in universal silence and death. The bodies, reduced to a mass of mangled carcasses, half consumed, and wholly indistinguishable."

Newspapers also provided details of the horrific scene. For instance, the

Ipswich Journal reported:

“Men, Woman and Children, ... perished in the Flames, some had their legs, some their Hands, and some their Heads burnt off, and others burnt to Ashes. ... They are taking the Bodies out of the Ruins.”

The fire was so devastating journalists reported that it was “melancholy” work for relatives and families to find and remove the mangled and burnt bodies of their loved ones. This was noted in the following account:

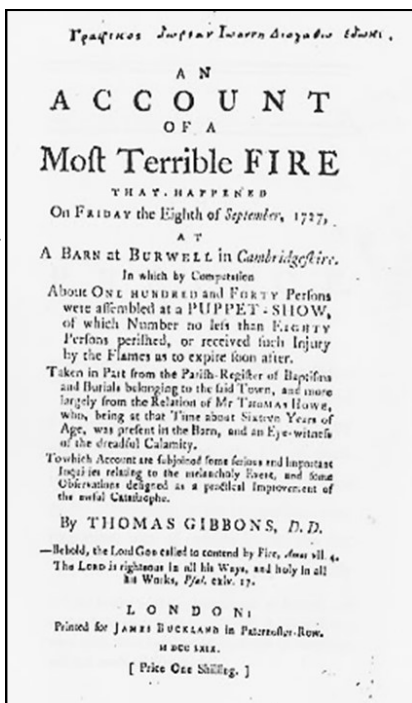
Besides the barn and stable burning, there were also some outhouses and four to seven houses in town that also caught fire. In fact, the Ipswich Journal reported that “an ancient Woman and child were burnt ...” (2).

The Ipswich Journal also discussed the clean up efforts that ensued after the devastation and reported on some of those who died:

“The dead bodies taken out of the barn were carried in carts and put into a hole in the Church Yard; there was among them several young women of considerable fortunes, and ... Mr. James Brinley, a wholesale turner, and Elizabeth his wife, who had been married but that morning.”

The victims were buried in a mass grave located in the church yard at St. Mary the Virgin Church. A memorial with a flaming heart and angel wings was also constructed, and on the back of it the following words were inscribed:

“To the memory of the 78 people who were burnt to death in a barn at Burwell on September 8, 1727”.



Later accounts noted that 51 children and 27 adults died. Whitaker was tried about six months after the fire, on 27 March 1728.

A newspaper reported::

“At the Assizes at Cambridge, held at the Castle for the Count of Cambridge, before Mr. Baron Hale, ... one Richard Whitaker, committed by Sir Roger Jenyne, ... and charged upon Suspicion of setting Fire to a Barn in Burwell, in which about 125 persons that were in it to see a Puppet-Show, were burnt, or otherwise destroyed, was tried and acquitted of the Fact.”

The eye-witness account

The principal account we have which describes the circumstances surrounding the tragedy was a booklet (3) written by a clergyman, Dr Thomas Gibbons in 1769, i.e. 42 years after the event. Dr Gibbons had spent some of his childhood living in nearby Reach and Swaffham Prior and was familiar with the story as part of the local folk memory. Various stories had grown up about the fire in the intervening years and wanting to get the facts he talked to a survivor of the fire, Thomas How, a boy of 16 at the time. Thomas, his brother and a sister had all attended the puppet show. He and his brother managed to escape but his sister was one of the many girls and women who died.

Aftermath

There still seems to be a wide variation in how many people died. The Burwell parish record for Burials give the names of 78 people known to have died in the fire or immediately afterwards of their injuries and buried in the churchyard. Dr Gibbons' account quotes Thomas Howe as saying there were two others, names unknown. Early newspaper reports (Ipswich Journal) claimed up to 160, but there only thought to be 140 in the barn during the performance and some had definitely escaped. The trial at the Cambridge Assizes claimed around there were 125 victims. Were there people so burned they could not be identified? If so they would only be recognised by their subsequent absence. If they were not local to Burwell would they ever be known?

There are a few questions arising from the newspaper accounts. Where did the married couple – the Brinleys, said to have married that morning come from? There are no burial records for them and no marriage records for them in the Cambridgeshire county records. Did they actually exist or was it a journalistic fancy, repeated down the years?

Several reports write about many children being caught up in the fire as inferred from the parish record entries stating “son of” or “daughter of” but checking the burial records against baptism dates show that many were over 16 if not over 21. The “son of” etc description being used as an identifier to distinguish between people of the same surname.

This statements in the parish records also require further inspection. For example, over the years 1715-1726, the average number of burials in the Burwell church had been between 22 and 46, averaging around 34 per year. In 1727, with the fire tragedy this leapt to 150; in 1728 to 66 and for 1729 to 51. They only to return back to the previously 'normal' levels in 1730. So over a 3 years period there were 267 burials – around 165 more than the expected figure. If around 80 died in the fire does this indicate that the after

effects of the fire were more long lasting than people have calculated? Was Burwell hit by an outbreak of disease? Possibly, but the neighbouring parish of Swaffham shows no signs of it.

Notes:

1) *Much credit was given to a Mr Thomas Dobedee of Wicken in Cambridgeshire who happened to be in Burwell that day. He was able to break up part of the door and then, assisted by others, dragged out several of the trapped people even as his own hair was being singed in the heat.*

2) *“Mary Woodbridge, burnt in a house to which the flames spread themselves, being an ancient woman and confined to her bed”*

3) *“An Account of a Most Terrible Fire - That happened on Friday the Eighth of September 1727 at Burwell in Cambridgeshire. In which by computation about One Hundred and Forty Persons were assembled at a Puppet Show of which Number no less than Eighty Persons perished or received such injury by the Flames as to expire soon after. Taken in Part from the Parish Register of Baptisms and Burials belonging to the said Town and more largely from the Relation of Mr Thomas Howe who being at the Time about Sixteen Years of Age was present in the Barn and an Eye-witness of the dreadful Calamity.”*

HUNTINGDON

The Stamford coach, called the Truth and Daylight, was overturned on Tuesday last, in consequence of the near fore wheel coming off. We are sorry to say **Robt Sherard Esq** was thrown from the box and had his shoulder dislocated and was otherwise much bruised: a young woman who was on the roof received a serious injury in consequence of the coach falling upon her. The remainder of the passengers and the coachman escaped unhurt. No blame whatever can attach to **Clark**, the coachman, who was driving with his accustomed carefulness.

Huntingdon, Bedford, Cambridge & Peterborough Gazette 10 May 1817

HUNTINGDON

On Thursday morning last, as the Boston mail coach was proceeding downwards, it was unfortunately upset between Fenstanton and Godmanchester, in consequence of a donkey and cart travelling on the road; the horses being high-bred, became unmanageable, and upset the coach. The coachman and a female, an outside passenger, are slightly injured. No blame is attributable to the coachman.

*Huntingdon, Bedford & Peterborough Gazette
20 November 1830*

Our thanks to Mike Stephenson for these extracts from local newspapers

THE 1921 CENSUS

FindMyPast's new enhanced "Premium" level subscription

get unlimited access to the 1921 census as part of

THIS MIGHT INTEREST YOU ...

Transcribing Parish Registers

baptisms—which surname ???

As most of us will appreciate, the layout of parish registers has changed over time, and with that of course, the content. Prior to 1754 and 1813, marriages and baptisms/burials were recorded “free hand” in what are commonly referred to as “composite registers”. They varied considerably both in layout from place to place and across time in the same place, and typically, one of three broad layouts was used (ie: all entries were recorded chronologically as they occurred, or the different types of event within a year were grouped; or perhaps all the same types of event were kept to separate pages spread throughout the register). After the 1754 / 1813 watershed, pro-forma registers have been used for marriages and baptism/burials, respectively, and prompt for particular information. Baptism records, for example, variously provide at least : baptism date / surname / child’s name / parents’ names / residence.

Searching for ancestors among parish registers used to mean hours of going through register after register, page by page, entry by entry in person at the archives. To assist with research, most family history societies ran projects to produce name indexes on a parish by parish basis, and perhaps collated into county wide indexes—often produced alongside transcriptions of the records.

Parish registers, per se, readily lend themselves to being transcribed into a tabular format, and therefore ripe for digitisation and being rendered “searchable” and further widening access, especially if made available online.

All, however, is not equal. Format and content, as we well know, both vary from place to place and through time, as does what else we might find. The whims of the vicar on the day a record was made can prove to be a wonderful source of “extras”. In pro-forma registers of baptisms, for example, we might find one or more of the date of birth, the mother’s surname, a fuller address than just the place name, the child’s age especially if they were baptised later than the traditional few weeks/months of age, or when a number of siblings were baptised all on the same day. In earlier periods, parish registers were compiled “freehand”, any “extras” here can be even more useful as, in general, there are far fewer records to draw upon. Again, mother’s surname might appear, as might the father’s occupation, date of birth or age; the place of residence is generally taken to be one and the same as the place of baptism, unless stated otherwise.

Creating searchable transcriptions entails allocating each fact to a separate “field” or column, one of which would be “surname”. Family circumstances, however, do vary and the surname might not be clear as expected, even

when pro-forma registers are used—married couples, unmarried couples, or single mothers present different possibilities—as does how well the format of a database accommodates the options. Consequently, confusion can arise when searching, if the range of possibilities has not been taken into account.

1	Child	Parents [married couple]
	John	George & Mary BROWN
	John BROWN	George BROWN & Mary BROWN
	John BROWN	George & Mary
	John	George BROWN & Mary
	John	George & Mary BROWN (nee GREEN)

1. Entries relating to **married couples** are fairly clear cut despite the possibilities of how the surname is listed appears ...

2. Entries relating to **single mothers** where the space for “father” is left blank, and the presumption is that the listed surname is that of the mother.

2	Child	Parents [no father named]
	John	Mary GREEN
	John GREEN	Mary
	John GREEN	Mary GREEN

3	Child	Parents [? not married]
	John BROWN ^[i]	George BROWN & Mary GREEN
	John GREEN ^[ii]	George BROWN & Mary GREEN
	John ^[iii]	George BROWN & Mary GREEN

3. Some entries, however, appear to be ambiguous. Although both parents are named, the surnames are different and it can be

assumed that they are likely **not married**. All of the possibilities in 3 were encountered while working on relatively recent baptism registers for the CHFHS’s WisMus Project. The particular pro-forma register had only three columns: child, father, mother—with no separate column for “surname”. Here also, there appeared no consistency as to how different vicars wrote the details, with names/surnames variously listed as illustrated above. Not every transcription project accommodates the entry of more than one surname, and information might, therefore, get missed. [i] if John was birth-registered as Green, a baptism search as Green might miss him; [ii] George would turn up as an “extra” who might not be indicated anywhere else; [iii] this is the tricky one, as it’s not clear which is the intended surname (ideally, a transcription should perhaps be made under both surnames).

In addition, the birth registration of a child in 1 would be under Brown, but in both 2 and 3, the child is most likely to be found registered under the mother’s surname, Green. The listing of the father in the baptism register, as in 3, might be the only place he is ever mentioned—so it’s well worth seeking out corresponding baptisms for all instances of single-mother registrations, just in case “extra” information has been record. Also of note is that, occasionally, we find “adult” baptism—which for a woman, might be under her now-married surname, and list her parents (ie. maiden surname).

PUBLICITY FEATURE received via our friends at CALH from

John Evans, journalist & historian



200 Magazine

is a new online, free and monthly magazine that reports the news from 200 years ago as if it was happening now, and in today's language. **200 Magazine** makes use of contemporary newspapers, magazines, diaries and images from the 1820s.

The front section contains news coverage from then, and the back pages link them to now, highlighting related visitor attractions, websites, books, magazines, organisations, and TV/film/radio output. News stories in the first three editions have included the deaths of the poet Shelley and the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, a famine in Ireland,

construction under way on the Stockton and Darlington railway, a big slave revolt in the USA, and now King George IV's historic visit to Scotland.

On a lighter note, there has been news of London's first nude statue, a big cricket row at Lord's, and an awkward meeting between Beethoven and the rising star of classical music, Rossini. Other big names in its pages so far have included Wordsworth, Byron, Constable, Turner, Madame Tussaud, and George Stephenson. The magazine is featuring news from every corner of the UK and Ireland, and internationally so far from the US, South America, Australia, Spain, South Africa and the Greek war of independence.

This a link to the August edition

https://issuu.com/johnevans00/docs/200_magazine_august_1822_2022

At the magazine's website - www.200livinghistory.info/ - you can sign up to receive an alert when future editions are published.

Described on the 200 Magazine website as the “*nearest thing to time travel you'll ever experience*”, these publications certainly illustrate history from a new perspective through modern styling. The first edition includes articles incl: the commencement of building the Conway Bridge and the Stockton & Darlington Railway, the Irish Famine, Recession Hitting Hard In The Countyside, and how hard times was causing the sales of great estates. The further reading section is a bonus.

Well worth subscribing to—Editor

The WisMus & Hunts Projects— newly completed registers since the last journal

NB : the dates refer to the year of commencement of individual registers

WisMus Parishes :

Parson Drove	Mixed	1754
Parson Drove	Mixed	1791
Upwell	Mixed	1655
Wisbech St Augustine	Banns	1968
Wisbech St Augustine	Baptisms	1953
Wisbech St Peter	Baptisms	1949
Wisbech St Peter	Marriages	1989

Project co-coordinator, Terry, updates progress of WisMus

The end is in sight at last. Some 20 registers remain to be completed, of which 16 are in various stages of transcription/checking, and just 4 are still to be started. Some of these remaining registers are throwing up a few problems for our volunteers team as they are mostly “early” ones and either of poor quality and/or in Latin. But, nothing which can’t be overcome with a little more time and patience.

If any of the old volunteers, or new ones (particularly if you have skills with old handwriting and/or reading Latin) would like to help with the final push to completion—please do get in touch with me via my Projects e-mail address.

HUNTS PARISHES :

currently in progress are :

Ramsey
Alconbury
Warboys
Somersham
Gt Staughton
Woodwalton
Colne
Chesterton
Huntingdon

Elton
Alwalton
Caldecote
Eynesbury
Denton
Bythorn

Next to go live on NameSearch and AncestorFinder will be :

Buckworth
Botolph Bridge

Here To Help ...

Research Surgery Reports : *Cambourne, St Ives, Bar Hill Ely, Cambridge, March*

Word is getting around that we've restarted our research surgeries, including at Cambridge (held at meetings). We've welcomed visitors old and new with a variety of queries about the county and further afield ...

... here are summaries of a few of the problems we received

- **Ely**—an enquirer was interested in trying to uncover what her father actually did during WW2, a soldier with the Essex Regiment. She is very fortunate in that he kept a diary, in which he described daily observations made during service in North Africa and Italy in 1943. A broad outline of what was happening in these areas and activities of the Essex Regiment, specifically, can be found online. To dig deeper, it was suggested she compile a time line as derived from the diary, and to collate it with broader information about the Essex Regiment's activities and the progress of the war in both N Africa and Italy. A visit to the Essex Regiment Museum, if possible, would probably be quite useful, although their website does state that they don't hold personal records for individual soldiers. Copies of army service records from 1920 can ordered (for a fee) although, for ordinary soldiers, might not amount to much beyond a listing of postings. Postings, however, could be tied into war diaries for more specific information about what a particular unit was doing. Although a specific rank-and-file individual would probably not get mentioned by name unless doing something worthy of note (good or bad), the context of an individual's experiences can perhaps be pieced together.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-records

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/

british-army-operations-second-world-war/

- **Bar Hill**—a couple from the Wisbech area wanted to get started on their researches, but having had a go already, were in need of some help with the making sense of what had been discovered and what to do next. Based on the few specifics which were known, we were soon able to locate all the grandparents and great grandparents. Names of various aunts, uncles and cousins also emerged, as did "which side of the family" particular people belong to. It's not uncommon to be unsure how particular people, now long gone, actually fitted into the family—particularly if their proper names can't be recalled, or, perhaps were only ever know of as, say, "*Auntie Dot and Uncle Bill, from Ely*". Advice was offered on the need to keep careful notes on who's who as well as about where any information has been sourced.

***** CAMBRIDGE BRANCH *****
MEETINGS & DROP-IN RESEARCH SURGERY

RECOMMENCED AT A NEW VENUE

**St Andrews's Street Baptist Church : the back room & upstairs
 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge (just up the road from John Lewis)**

**help desk from 11.30-14.00 in ground floor room (beyond the café)
talk at 14.15 with zoom (upstairs room, lift available)**

COME ON IN & FOLLOW THE YELLOW DIRECTION ARROWS

RESEARCH SURGERIES—scheduled locations/dates/times

CHFHS volunteers hold regular help & advice sessions at society meetings and at public libraries around the county
 there are no charges for these services
enquiries : secretary@cfhs.org.uk

Ely Library	3 rd Wed alternate mths	SESSIONS RECOMMENCED Jan / Mar / May Jul / Sep / Nov	drop in between 10.00-4.00
Norris Museum St Ives	2 nd Wed alternate mths	A NEW VENUE FOR '22 Feb / Apr / Jun Aug / Sep / Dec	drop-in between 10.30 & 3.30
Bar Hill Library	3 rd Mon <u>every</u> mth	SESSIONS RECOMMENCED May / June / July / Aug Sept / Oct / Nov / Dec	drop-in between 1.30-4.30
Cambourne Library	3 rd Mon alternate mths	SESSIONS RECOMMENCED Jan / March / May July / Sept / Nov	drop-in between 1.30-4.30
March Library	1 st Tues <u>every</u> mth	SESSIONS RECOMMENCED once a month for the time being but likely to be increased	drop-in between 10.00-4.00
Cambridge St Andrews St	2 nd Sat each month at meetings	SESSIONS RECOMMENCED at the monthly speakers meetings NB : NEW VENUE	drop-in between 11.30 & 2.00

MARCH BRANCH PROGRAMME		NB: 1 st <u>WEDNESDAYs</u> at 2.00pm
Wednesday Face-2-Face Meetings		March Library, March
		enquiries : march@cfhs.org.uk
By popular opinion, the meetings will continue on Wednesday afternoons		
Wed 2 Nov	A Chip Off The Old Block	with John Vigar <i>A look at the life and work of Queen Victoria's nephew, Prince Victor—his career in the Navy, as a sculptor, and with his family</i>
Wed 7 Dec	Christmas Social	
Wed 4 Jan	Fen Ague : the malaria of the fens	with Dr Martyn Thomas <i>An affliction suffered by many a fenland resident in past times</i>
Wed 1 Feb	The Great Stink	with Don Chisholm <i>Insights into Victorian public health problems and improvements</i>

HUNTINGDON BRANCH PROGRAMME		3 rd <u>Wednesday</u> of the month at 7.30pm
		Zoom & WI Hall, Walden Rd., Huntingdon
Live & zoom (register via website)		enquiries : huntingdon@cfhs.org.uk
Wed 16 Nov	"Tales From The Riverbank"	with Liz Davies <i>A look at how the River Great Ouse has played a central role in local life of the St Neots area from pre-history through to today</i>
Wed 14 Dec	Peopling The A14—life and death in Ancient Cambridgeshire	with Don Walker <i>Some insights into learnings from the archaeological surveys conducted as part of the A14 Upgrade Project—such as how changing burial practices inform about the peoples and their changing attitudes</i>
Wed 11 Jan	to be confirmed	<i>Please see the newsletter and facebook for details nearer the time</i>
Wed 8 Feb	to be confirmed	<i>Please see the newsletter and facebook for details nearer the time</i>

**CAMBRIDGE BRANCH
PROGRAMME**

2nd Saturday of the month
enquiries : programme@cfhs.org.uk

at the St Andrew's Street Baptist Church

a face-2-face talk at 2.15 also to be zoomed out to a remote audience

PLUS : an in-person "here to help" enquiry desk 12.00-3.30

follow the yellow direction arrows to find our rooms



Fri 11 & Sat 12 Nov 2022

<https://www.fhf-reallyuseful.com>

*an online event from
the Family History Federation*

visit Cambs & Hunts FHS with your research query or just for a chat

***free access to societies & commercial booths on the Friday evening
& keynote talk on the Friday evening***

***extensive programme of talks & workshops on Saturday
(see p.36 for latest listings)***

visit the show website for further details and tickets

NB : talks will remain available to ticketholders until 19 November

December 10 Sat

14.15 Writers' Workshop

with Mary Naylor

*Another opportunity to share tips and ideas on writing about your
family history—why not try preparing a short piece to share on the day*

F-2-F & Zoom (for zoom attendance—please self-register via the website)

January 14 Sat

14.15 60 Years Of Aviation

with Terry Holloway

F-2-F & Zoom (for zoom attendance—please self-register via the website)

February 11 Sat : F-2-F & Zoom

14.15 Life, Death & Magic In Cambridgeshire

with Michael Marshall

*Stories derived from the Late Prehistoric and Roman artefacts
found during excavations along route of the A14 Upgrade*

F-2-F & Zoom (for zoom attendance—please self-register via the website)

The Really Useful Show 11-12 Nov 2022

2 great days ... what's to be on offer

- ... free Friday evening access to societies & trade Exhibition from 6pm
- ... choose from a varied selection of informative talks
- ... drop in on FHSs from your area(s) of interest country-wide
- ... perhaps ask them a question about records of your ancestors
- ... chat with commercial traders & other historical organisations
- ... book an "expert session" to try and solve that difficult problem

**CHFHS will be there to help with all your queries
drop in and chat with us (email chat or, hopefully, by zoom)**

The talks advertised on the ReallyUsefulShow website:

Connecting Your DNA Matches	<i>Diahan Southard</i>
British Army Detective—piecing together the jigsaw	<i>Paul Nixon</i>
Forgotten Staff—Victorian & Edwardian Railwaywomen	<i>David Turner</i>
Impacts On Families During The Industrious Revolution	<i>Wayne Shephard</i>
Just A Job? Revitalising research with occupational research	<i>Sophie Kay</i>
Posted In The Past	<i>Helen Baggott</i>
Making The Most Of A Will	<i>John Titterton</i>
Migration And Wales :	<i>Gill Thomas</i>
The Hidden Secrets Of The 1939 Register	<i>Linda Hammond</i>
Turning Your Tree Into A Talk	<i>Penny Walters</i>
Researching European Ancestors	<i>Julie Goucher</i>
Your Railway Ancestors	<i>Mike Esbester</i>

**NB : talks will be available to
ticketholders until 19 November**

... you can see them all at your leisure over the following week!!

MEETINGS REPORTS

*Don't forget that many of the talks
are recorded and available in the
members area of the website*

WHO GOT INVOLVED IN DRAINING THE FENS

WITH LIZ STAZICKER

(CAMBRIDGE BRANCH : SEPT 22)

Our first meeting at our new Cambridge venue, St Andrews Church, and our President, Elizabeth Stazicker, guided us through the people involved in draining the fens. She asked a series of questions – who organised it? who financed it? who did it? who were the winners? who were the losers?

Although it is a common perception that Cornelius Vermuyden was the instigator of fen draining, it was Francis Russell, the 4th Earl of Bedford, who led the start of the work to drain the fens. A project of this magnitude needed money, knowledge and particularly energy, all of which the Earl had. His previous experience of drainage at Thornhaugh gave him a good grounding. The Old Bedford River and New Bedford River are both named to recognise his importance. Work continues to this day keeping watch on the water and drainage. Liz's talk included photographs taken from her garden and other nearby places.

We are fortunate that the County Archives service in Ely has a rich collection of papers from the Bedford Level Corporation providing detailed records of the work. 14 signatories in the initial 1631 investment included both local and non-local people. Vermuyden's involvement started in 1636, and in 1649, an act employed him to do the work. Jonas Moore's map of the Great Levell of the Fens 1658 is a recent Cambridge Records Society publication with contributions by Francis Willmoth and Elizabeth Stazicker.

19th century documents name Board officers and acre men, some of whom were local, and an example from the accounts of the same period show John Owen as superintendent, sluice keeper and landowner. The Robinson map of 1758 numbers plots but only covers the Eastern part of the South level. Indexed Lot Books also list landowners and others. There are 138 indexed volumes of registers of conveyances and mortgages covering the period 1649-1920. Navvies are rarely named, but Scots prisoners from Dunbar were employed, although there is almost no evidence of their local burial; fen drainage work attracted higher earnings. People also came from Holland. The draining of the fens had a huge impact on people's lives.

This was our first opportunity to meet face to face at Cambridge for two and

a half years, and those attending clearly valued the chance to get back to attending the talks that the Society provides. A large screen provided an easy to see presentation and the wifi worked well. Questions from in the room and those attending online showed both the interest in this topic, and the research that Liz had undertaken to prepare her talk.

Reported by David Copsey

ENCLOSURE : WITH EXAMPLES FROM CAMBS & HUNTS

WITH BILL FRANKLIN

(CAMBRIDGE BRANCH : OCT 22)

For the second meeting at the new Cambridge Branch venue, the audience of 10 on site and 20 or so attending remotely, were pleased to welcome Bill Franklin for a hybrid presentation on Enclosures. We were again grateful to Joe, the Centre's AV tech, for his help in resolving the issue of audio feedback caused by having to have two zoom-linked computers in the room.

Bill began by making a distinction between “fen” and “upland” enclosure—the talk was about the latter whereby medieval open fields were transformed into the patchwork we largely see today. Variations existed across the country, but compact villages and selions (strips) in open fields prevailed in this area. Agriculture was highly regulated by the manor—dictating the types of crop, numbers of animals allowed, and usage of the commons and wastes.

Over time, distinct changes took place. A rising population by the C13th saw the need to bring additional areas into cultivation, and field names such as “stocking” and “breach” reflect newly enclosed land from this period. So-called “commons” were not public land as such, but were owned by the lord of the manor and farmers were allocated areas to graze specified numbers of animals. Cottage commons were grazing rights attached to particular houses and again, usually for a set number of animals. The Statute of Merton of the 1230s allowed areas of common to be taken into cultivation and rented out. The Black Death decimated a previously rising population (and workforce) and thus changed the relationship between lord and tenants. Across the Tudor period, lords sought to generate wealth with fewer workers, and sheep grazing become widespread; enclosure of common land continued. Between c1600-1800, many examples of enclosure by consent or Act of Parliament saw the creation of parks around country houses, and the consolidation of tenants' scattered strips into blocks of hedge-bounded fields with the potential for better management; new farmsteads appeared out in the fields.

Bill provided many examples from Cambs and Hunts to illustrate various forms of enclosure (eg: Wistow, Westley Waterless, Soham, Ely Holy Trinity, Glatton, Wimpole), and went on to suggest a range of records which might help with research into the different periods.

THE VICTORIAN WAY OF DEATH

WITH TOM DOIG

(MARCH BRANCH : JUNE 22)

Tom began by showing a picture of a room in a house with a coffin surrounded by men and one woman, also a small table with a tray of buns. The men were making bids for the deceased business helping to ensure the widow could stay in the house. The following night, the buns were eaten by people known as 'sin-eaters' who would watch over the coffin. They were there to take all the sins of the deceased ensuring they go to heaven. Under the buns on the tray would be a layer of salt to keep out the devil.

Victorian death was a general topic of conversation which children found normal. If they attended a church school then they believed the deceased would go to heaven, if it was a non-church school, opinions would differ.

More recently the Horrible Histories book aimed at children, 'Dead – The Story of Death and Dying' at one time was destroyed, now it is in schools.

Victorians talked about a 'good' or 'bad' death, a 'bad' death being when a person lingered. Sometimes a bottle of their urine would be held up to the light to predict how much longer the person may live. If a person died suddenly, they had no opportunity to confess their sins. This could be known as 'Death by the Visitation of God'. It was commonly said that people came into the world with nothing and went out with nothing. Therefore sometimes people were buried with something representative of their lives.

Tom encouraged members to look at original records as they contain so much more information than can be accessed by websites. Also family history passed down by word of mouth will not be found recorded anywhere. He gave an example of talking to his own mother just before she died. His father was born in June 1906; his grandmother had told Tom's mother his father was conceived on a golf course on August Bank Holiday weekend! Parish records contain snippets of information, for example, the burial of Joseph Whitby 27th April 1860 was killed by a train and had no chance of confessing his sins. Neither did a Miss Murrels who died in bed aged 22 years. A baby aged 1 year, George Kent of Darley, Derbyshire died as a result of drinking boiling water from the spout of a kettle. The parents were not thought to be responsible if they had left the child to attend church.

People feared being buried alive; taphephobia is a morbid fear of being buried alive. Now, nobody dies in a car accident, instead they die on the way to hospital as the death has to be certified by a qualified medical practitioner. In October 1571 Matthew Wall from Braughing, Hertfordshire was being carried to his funeral in a coffin. The pall bearers slipped on wet

leaves, jolting the coffin and reviving Matthew. He lived another 20 years. In his will he left instruction for the path on the way to the church be swept on the anniversary of his first 'death'. This still goes on today with the schoolchildren and the vicar sweeping the path. The children were given sweets but now it's an apple.

Compiling Bills of Mortality was the responsibility of the Parish Clerk in London Districts; weekly from 1592 -1595 and carried on continually. At the time of the plague, on November 9th 1665 Samuel Pepys noted '*an encrease of 399 deaths*'. 1414 deaths of plague were recorded within the infected districts; the advice was these areas '*should be shunned and avoided*'. Another cause of death was 'rising of lights', in other words vomiting.

Tom gave an example of more information on the many ways used to check if a person was still alive, such as using a mirror. Within his own family information handed down tells of filling a pipe with tobacco, the deceased being laid face down and smoke blown into their backside. If they did not jump, they would be dead. In 1829 Johann Taberger made a safety coffin with a bell pull inside the coffin and a bell above the ground. Another example, taken from written illustrated accounts shows a tube from inside the coffin leading up to a box and a flag. If the person was still alive they could squeeze a device to release the flag which would wave. This needed someone to be in the vicinity to notice.

During Victorian times a church bell would be rung to announce a death. People working out in the fields would know who has died by the number times the bell rang, one of each year of the deceased life plus one for a married man, or two for a married woman, three for a spinster and nine for a bachelor. The Sexton arranged for the grave to be dug. Curtains were closed in the house, rags stuffed into the letter box, the clock stopped and mirrors turned to face the wall. A temporary coffin was placed with the deceased in the front room of the house, with the person lying on a cloth. Candles were lit at either end of the coffin and the door left ajar. Visitors were expected to see the body. Undertakers used a piece of string to measure the size needed for the permanent coffin. First the length was measured, a knot tied, then the shoulder width and another knot tied.

Traditionally, a bride would make a shroud as part of her trousseau. This would have an open back to allow for an increase in weight with age. Tom concluded by showing a picture of a glass horse-drawn hearse known as 'The Waddington'. These were used by the middle and upper classes rather than the working class.

Reported by Linda Peckett

AMERICAN CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON POST-WAR BRITAIN

WITH JIM STEBBINGS

(MARCH BRANCH : SEPT 22)

Jim opened by suggesting that few people realise just how much of our lives today are influenced by the Americans. After Pearl Harbour, 2 to 3 million service men arrived in Britain. By that time 200,000 homes had been destroyed and 250,000 were uninhabitable. Young attractive US sailors arrived in Plymouth, staying in many English homes, as did soldiers and airmen. 70,000 British girls became brides to Americans and 220,000 babies here were fathered by US servicemen. Black Americans were welcomed but sadly mixed race babies were often placed in institutional homes.

Nylon stockings, chewing gum and chocolate were part of the US daily rations. A common expression was 'Over Paid, Over Sexed and Over Here'. Music by Count Basie, Glenn Miller and Bing Crosby entered our lives along with new dances, the foxtrot, jitterbug, swing and jive. Films such as 'Holiday Inn', 'Casablanca' and 'Gone With The Wind' were shown in cinemas. Bing Crosby's 'White Christmas' has sold over 50,000 copies, making it the most successful of Christmas songs.

Concentrated orange juice came from Florida, baked beans in 1941 became an essential food, in the 1920s they were only available at Fortnum and Masons. Other foods such as Spam (spiced ham), Kelloggs products, Kraft Dairylea triangles, Maxwell House and Coca Cola became more widely available. Kelloggs Frosties were introduced after the war. Plastic hula-hoops, yoyos, the London Monopoly board game, ten pin bowling and Saturday morning cinema for children showing cowboys and Indians all came into our lives. Songs from films and cartoons became popular such as, 'Buffalo Bill', 'Roy Rogers and Trigger', 'Bugs Bunny', 'Tweetie Pie', 'Superman', 'Tarzan' and 'Flash Gordon' were all popular. Other board games such as Criss Cross Words, Scrabble and Lexico became available. Woolworths stores headed by Frank Winfield became the 3d and later 6d shops. Supermarkets became part of our daily lives; the first was the Co-op in Manor Park, London, which opened in 1948 and completely changed shopping habits.

More entertainment influences came from musicals. In 1947 'Oklahoma' followed by 'South Pacific' and 'Carousel' all gave an insight into American life. American films in the cinema became shown throughout the county. Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman' was the first gritty film to be shown followed by 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. More lighthearted films included 'Calamity Jane' starring Doris Day.

Laundrettes were first opened in 1949; washing machines in peoples' homes

became gradually more affordable. The television revolution started in the 1950s especially for the Coronation in 1953 when only 14% of homes in the country had a TV; by 1959 this figure was 75%. Many American programmes were shown including 'Sergeant Bilko', 'Lucille Ball' and 'Wells Fargo'. Music in the 1950s and early 1960s introduced us to Bill Haley 'Rock around the Clock', Little Richard, the Everly Brothers and Elvis Presley. Rock 'n' Roll became all the rage as did skiffle, and influenced singers such as Lonnie Donegan, eg 'Rock Island Line'. Liberace came to Britain in 1956 to perform his extravagant piano playing act and soon became a hit. Other glamorous American stars to influence Britain at this time were: Marlon Brando, Gene Kelly, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and James Dean who died in a car crash in 1955. Tony Curtis was famous for his 'DA' hair style, soon copied by young men in the fifties. The images of teenagers changed dramatically during the late 50s and early 60s, 'teddy boy' clothes, blue jeans and smoking was seen to be 'cool' at the time.

In 1954 the former Lyons tea houses became Wimpy Bars making hamburgers and beef burgers readily available. In 1955 Clarence Birdseye introduced fish fingers; Campbell's condensed soup arrived here, which had been available in the USA since 1868. Refrigerators became a little more affordable; in the 1950s only 13% of the population had a fridge. The first shopping Mall in the US opened in Minnesota during 1956. By 1964 the Bullring in Birmingham had opened leading to many more shopping centers. The evangelist Billy Graham delivered messages of salvation. Jim told us that he went along to London to hear him preach. Billy Graham was given an honorary knighthood.

Products for men such as 'Old Spice' aftershave, Remington and Gillette razors and the 'Toni' perm for women were widely on sale. British stars to rival the American stars became noticed, Marilyn Monroe (US) and Diana Dors (British); Cliff Richard rivalled Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. From 1958 juke boxes were in coffee houses and , making musical entertainment readily available. The show 'West Side Story' gave a different, less glamorous view of life in New York. Parking meters were introduced here in 1958, the same time that Chubby Checker was singing 'The Twist'. 'Ben Hur' came to cinemas in 1959, the first of many American epic films. Chrome was introduced to cars as was the bench seat at the front and car paintwork became more colourful.

Kentucky Fried Chicken opened their first restaurants in Britain in 1965 and McDonalds in 1974. Two years later the first Apple computer came into our lives. All these things readily became swallowed up in our lives, mainly without even thinking about their American origins.

Reported by Linda Peckett

ONLY ONE EGG
WITH IAN WALLER
(HUNTINGDON BRANCH : JULY 22)

For the tenth hybrid meeting in the WI Hall in Huntingdon, we welcomed our speaker, Ian Waller, who presented via zoom from home. In attendance at the hall were seven members and about 28 more on zoom.

Ian is a retired professional genealogist but continues to work in the family history field as the Vice Chairman & Education Officer of the Family History Federation, and is the author of several books on the subject.

The intriguing title of his talk – Only One Egg – was soon explained: Ian's father was one of five siblings and told the story of how they had just one egg to share between them for breakfast, a far cry from today's expectations! It neatly led into his talk as he took us through the life and experiences of some of our members, and certainly our ancestors, who lived through the Second World War. This was not about the armed conflict overseas but the privations of those who were left at home facing the effects of the Blitz, food and clothes rationing and limited entertainment.

Ian also included specific descriptions of the work and extra responsibilities women took on whilst the men were away fighting and also highlighted less familiar documents, records and registers where one could find additional information to aid ancestral research.

War was declared on 3 September 1939 but the country had been preparing for war before then. For example gas masks had been issued in late 1938 and conscription began in April 1939. The 1939 Register was issued immediately after the declaration and the information was used to produce identity cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to issue ration books. Information in the Register was also used to administer conscription and the direction of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation. The ID cards were later used when setting up the National Health Service in 1948.

Ian outlined all the aspects of the war, first describing the formation of the fighting forces and the home-based organisations dealing with the danger at home and then moved onto the effects this had on people's daily lives. Conscription started with the younger men but was gradually widened so anyone up to age 52 could be called up, and in 1941 women were included. There were many reserved occupations where workers, such as railway men, were excluded from call-up whilst the miners or Bevin Boys were conscripted and through a ballot either joined the armed forces or worked in the mines. Records are available in the National Archives. Ian then

described the other organisations that were created to provide security at home, such as the ARP wardens to provide early warning of air raids, the National Fire Service to watch for and to fight fires, and the Local Defence Volunteers or Home Guard to patrol the country and offer the last line of defence against the enemy.

The effects of war were felt at home through the air raids and bombing; over 60,000 people were killed and millions left homeless. One can research the civilian war dead on the Commonwealth War Graves site and also in local churches and newspapers, and the bomb census contains records of all damage recorded, with addresses. Blackouts greatly reduced the risks from air raids but deaths from traffic accidents increased, and these are also included in the list of war dead.

Evacuation, mainly of children from the cities, began immediately and some 827,000 schoolchildren and their teachers were evacuated as well as over half a million mothers and their infants. Two million privately evacuated including emigration; in all 3.5 million people were displaced.

Ian then considered some of the aspects of daily life that had to change to enable the country to survive the hardships war had brought. People were encouraged to become more resourceful:

- Rationing of many products by using an allowance of coupons. The main one was food which was rationed from 8th January 1940 to 30th June 1954; the allowance and variety of the different foods changed over time. Clothes, soap and many other products were rationed; for instance you were allowed to buy one complete set of clothing per year.
- Reduce waste and make-do. Instruction leaflets about innovative ways to make the food allowance go further and how make do and mend clothes.
- Dig for Victory. Before the war three quarters of the country's food was imported by ship which was now impossible so everyone was encouraged to turn their gardens into vegetable plots.
- Recycle. Tins and metal recycled in the building of aircraft. Paper used in manufacture of munitions and kitchen waste for pigs.

Having touched on criminal activities during the war years, Ian moved onto entertainment. It was clear that the constant fear of bombing, the forced evacuation of children, the risks to any relatives fighting overseas and the general privations suffered by all would have a severe effect on the mental state and mood of the country so it was important to raise morale wherever possible. Entertainment took many forms, such as:

- Cinemas were closed initially by the Government for fear of being bombed but most reopened quickly and not only offered entertainment but also offered a good way for spreading information as well as offering a welcome

distraction.

- Theatre companies travelled around the country, despite the shortages, and allowed people the chance to see the well-known stars live.
- Dance Halls became very popular and many new dance crazes took off, improving the morale of both civilian and military populations.
- Radio broadcasts informed people with the latest news and maintained people's war spirit with popular comedies and programmes such as "Music while you work". Many morale-boosting songs became the hits of the day.
- Most towns had a Spitfire fund with money raised through fetes and dances. These events were also used for propaganda purposes as well as making a valuable contribution to the war effort.

Ian stressed the importance of women at home and said that by 1943 almost 90% of single and 80% of married women were working in factories, on the land or in the armed forces. These included:

- ATS – cooks, clerks, translators, drivers.
- Women's Royal Naval Service – women were not allowed on ships but were in maintenance, loading supplies, communications.
- Women's Auxiliary Air Force – flying aircraft between airfields, radar operations, parachute packing
- WVS – ran canteens, helped bombed-out families.
- Women's Land Army –women took on every aspect of running many farms

Many records of these activities are with the National and local Archives.

Ian also made comment about the 70,000 women who married US soldiers in the UK. Unfortunately many of the marriages did not last.

Ian completed his presentation by reminding us that the end of the war was a massive relief and celebration but it took many years for conditions to start improving and for life to return to normal. Ian has provided a comprehensive survey of life in the UK during the war years which evoked many memories amongst our members. Some interesting questions followed, plus anecdotes of first-hand experiences of some of the conditions described.

Reported by John Bownass

MARCH BRANCH OUTING *(MARCH BRANCH : AUGUST 22)*

About 20 members from March Branch had a very interesting visit to the (new) Cambridgeshire Archives at Ely. For many, it was their first visit. The staff put on a splendid display of March-related documents which was much appreciated by everyone who attended.

Reported by Dave Edwards

THE KING OF THE NORFOLK POACHERS

WITH CHARLOTTE PATON
(MARCH BRANCH : OCT 22)

Before the start of the meeting Margery paid tribute to the reign and service to the country of Queen Elizabeth II, who died the day after the September meeting.

Charlotte began by describing how she first became 'involved' with the poacher in 2002, a man she described as 'absolutely filthy'. Prior to this, his book 'I Walked the Night', the life and history of the king of the Norfolk poachers, had been read to her as a child.

Charlotte lived in The Old Lodge at West Bilney, Norfolk. In 2002 she and her husband received a fat bundle of house deeds. These looked intriguing so they looked through and found a wealth of information, including that it had been a game keeper's cottage. This reminded her of the book which she reread. The book is an autobiography of a poacher determined not to be beholden to the gentry. Charlotte set about to find more about this man, not named in the book. In the local museum the name Rolfe cropped up. She found John Rolfe on the census in Kings Lynn library – no internet records available then. The 1861 Census listed John Rolfe as the head, Susan wife and Mary, Rebecca and James as children. At that time John would not have 'done' for himself, as just fifty-two days after Susan died he remarried, to Elizabeth, a widow with a daughter Maria; a year later their son Fred was born.

The family, like many at the time were very poor. Fred's first spell in prison for poaching was at the age of 12. Work in the countryside was scarce; the gentry were only interested in entertaining and organizing shooting parties. Young men left and went to industrialised areas leaving an imbalance in the rural population. In 1882 at the age of 20, Fred spent 14 days in prison for poaching as he was unable to pay the fine of £1.15s.6d. After his arrest he spent the time before attending the petty sessions at Grimston Police Station. Bail was not an option at the time, and court cases were no longer held in pubs. Fred was jailed in Norwich prison which he described as a terrible place.

After Fred married Anna, he had no work and turned again to poaching. He entered competitions, on one occasion winning a gun. He again got caught by the gamekeepers. This time he went to Manchester, and Anna had to go into the workhouse. Fred spent less than 6 years in Manchester where his work was going backwards and forwards to Ireland with horses, before returning to Norfolk. Anna died of TB in 1888, at the age of 26, in All Hallows Hospital, Ditchingham, a penitentiary hospital for fallen women. At the time

she had been deserted by Fred and had a 3 year old child, Young Fred. There is no evidence that Fred provided any support for Anna and Young Fred. He was more interested in spending his time and money on pigeon and sparrow shooting, enjoying the company of the Irish, gambling, drinking and fighting.

By research facts, Charlotte concluded that Fred had given many false accounts in his autobiography, embellishing facts and making out that he was innocent and far nicer than he actually was. In his book he claims one of his dogs Tip, who Anna cared a lot about had got lost. Fred claimed that Anna thought a lot more of the dog than she did of him. One night Fred had taken the dog out with him, Anna had a premonition that the dog was dead at the foot of a tree. Fred maintained the dog was lost and went to look for him. Tip was dead. Fred claimed that he had chased a rabbit into a hole in the tree and had broken his neck, but according to the recollection of an elderly gamekeeper, he had hanged the dog. Poachers used brutal and cruel methods to train their dogs, and gamekeepers used a vicious device called a dog spear, a 3 inch long barb, placed over a hare run to impale the dog.

Whilst in Manchester, Fred had met and charmed Kitty (Catherine) Allen who followed him to Norfolk without realising the true nature of his character. Kitty, a girl used to city life arrived at a station near Pentney; it must have seemed isolated and scary. She and Fred were married in Pentney church in October 1888; their daughter Emily was born in 1889. Fred was summoned many times for trespassing in search of game and rabbits, stealing eggs.

Fred and Kitty lived at Bailey's Cottages, Pentney before moving to Marham. Kitty endured poverty, loneliness and hostility as well as suffering from Fred's bad temper and thieving. She also had to endure unpleasanties from the late Anna's family living close by. Kitty had a terrible life with Fred who was either in prison or in the pub. She had another baby, a boy named Joubert. Kitty died at the age of 56 of a heart condition in 1925.

According to Fred's autobiography, a new Gentleman bought an estate in Norfolk and offered Fred a job as under gamekeeper. He could then carry a gun legally for the first time. Fred lived in a lodge between East Winch Common and Pentney. During this time he was charged with assault, fined 2/6d with costs 8/6d; he was later charged with further assaults. Whilst under gamekeeper, at the first pheasant shoot the beaters shouted out 'Where are the pheasants?' The reply was 'Try the butcher'. Before the shoot, Fred had shot the pheasants and sold them.

At the age of 20 in 1909, Fred's daughter Emily gave birth to a daughter Bertha, at the Walsingham Hostel, Great Snoring, part of the workhouse. No

father is named on the birth certificate. Two weeks later Emily was transferred to the Freebridge Workhouse, Lynn. Later that year Emily moved back to Fred and Kitty at Toftrees, then on again to Stibbard. In November 1910 Emily gave birth to a son, David James at the Freebridge Workhouse. They are still listed as living there on the Census taken in April 1911.

Fred had a lifetime of convictions for trespass, poaching, stealing coal and fowl, stealing a double barrelled gun, uttering a threat, using a snare, and assault. His last court case was in 1928. Despite his lack of early education and upbringing, Charlotte found that Fred was well read by the number of books he had. He had been expelled from school at the age of nine but had joined a boys club ran by the local curate, and it was he that taught Fred to read and write. Fred was also influenced by Joseph Arch, an agricultural reformist.

In a dog-eared exercise book with help from Mrs Redgrave for his spelling, Fred wrote his autobiography derived from early memories. Liliias Rider Haggard came across the writings whilst visiting Mrs Longrigg. Two years earlier Fred had given the exercise book to Mr Longrigg for his amusement. Liliias used the jottings in her weekly column in the Eastern Daily Press. When she realised the amount of interest in the articles. she persuaded Fred to write more about his later life. Fred greatly embellished his personal life, and Charlotte is unsure just how much of Fred's book was written by him and how much, especially descriptions of places, was written by Liliias.

In his later years Fred lived in a lean-to, originally a brew-house at Grammers Green, Mettingham. He hanged himself at 1 Nethergate Street, Bungay, in 1938.

Reported by Linda Peckett

VISITING CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

David Copsey's insights into navigating the UL ...

In July, a committee meeting action for me was to re-test CHFHS access to the UL. Irene and I visited the University Library this week [in July] for research, our first visit post Covid after renewing our tickets. I received a new card, but Irene did not, her old card with a 2020 expiry date works well.

The arrangements are broadly similar to pre Covid. The tea room has closed as it has not been possible to recruit someone to run it. There is a pop up coffee van outside but it closes mid afternoon. Bags must be left in the free locker rooms. The UL membership card is presented at the turnstile entry and turnstile exit.

UL members can request a wifi ID and password when they join, and this

gives access to online resources through what is called Raven login. Visitor passwords can be issued from the front desk. There are three categories of user - current staff and students; former staff and students; others. Access to online resources is determined by the arrangements negotiated between the University and the owner of the resources. Licences will list those with eligible access. The first user category will get the widest access, the third the least access. CHFHS members will be in the 'other' category unless they are current or former students or staff. Although we both have the wifi access, we did not test this at home, or when we visited.

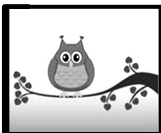
Most resources are found through iDiscover, the online catalogue, https://idiscover.lib.cam.ac.uk/primo-explore/search?vid=44CAM_PROD&lang=en_US

There are help notes on the website, and a basic leaflet in the library. iDiscover includes collections in the College libraries and other locations, but the search can be widened or narrowed as required. Each catalogue entry then makes it clear how to find the resource - those on the open shelves can be picked up from the appropriate location, there are maps and signs in the library, and a help leaflet explaining the classification system. As the shelves are quite full, many of the more modern resources will not be on the open shelves so have to be requested. The catalogue makes this clear. There are separate catalogues for Archives and some other resources.

We placed four requests. The first was from the off site store in Ely (look out for a guided visit, fascinating). I placed this the day before our visit; requests placed before 10.00 will be available from 14.00 the next day, longer when a weekend is included. I was notified by email later on the same day that the item was available, and the location to collect.

We made three requests on the day, two from the front desk, one from the main reading room. iDiscover lists where the request should be made. The time for onsite requests to be produced seems to have lengthened post Covid, users are encouraged to requests online in advance. There is an hourly request pick up, and an hourly delivery, but the process can and did take two hours. Again, an email notification. The library wasn't busy as it is vacation time. Next time, we will place the requests online before we visit, so we don't have to wait. A reservation slip placed in a book you are reading means that it will be left in the same place for three days before re-shelving, so you can return later. Up to five books can be kept in this way. Finished books are left on the desk and UL staff will re-shelve. CHFHS members cannot borrow books (unless they are students or staff), and many of the items themselves are for reference use only in the library.

Users are encouraged to ask staff for help, they "like being asked"!!



LAST WORD

Where Were They When ...

Our family history can be considered from a number of different scales and perspectives—on the one hand, the names of our individual relatives and the dates of their life course events on a tree depicting just our family—at the other end what is going on in the background, ie “history” in the making

In between is, what turns an otherwise simple list of names and dates within the bubble of “our family”, into a much more rounded “family history”. The research process largely focuses on individual lives, and it’s easy to overlook the bigger picture. They didn’t live out their lives in isolation—to varying degrees everyone interacted with “history”. People could personally have participated in or witnessed events, or, be affected by the consequences of what has happened. We might consider how they reacted to seen and unseen events and trends in society: the effects of enclosure or fen drainage, agricultural and industrial improvements, the price of corn—did they migrate to urban areas or overseas for a perceived better life or did they decided to continue with a rural life, how various epidemics affected the community, how did their religion and education affect life, work and opportunities. Broadly, what was it that moulded their lot in life and place in society?.

Another perspective on our families could consider how aware they might have been about what was happening in the wider world, how they found out or whether they even knew. This brings the question of “*where were they, when such-and-such happened ...*” and how they might have participated in events which have now become what we now consider as “history”.

Family history encompasses stories handed down through the generations about the witnessing of great events, or even about their participation as it happened. More commonly, but less well recalled for the future is where and how important news was heard, and we need to ensure that our descendants know. Take for example, the team of Grenadier Guards who were the pallbearers at her late Majesty’s funeral—their participation will live forever in their families’ history, as no doubt it still does among the families of those who performed similar duties back in 1952, & 1936, & 1910, & 1901, & ...

We’ll all, undoubtedly forever recall what we were doing when momentous events occurred in our lifetimes, no less so than on 8 September 2022

Our thanks continue go to everyone who has sent in contributions—whether as articles about your families and researches, or just shorts pieces, please keep it coming—getting something down on paper to share “the story” with others is the key. Family history is so much more than just genealogical facts, it’s the stories which we either know or have deduced from the raw facts, and these need to be written down. Apologies if your piece hasn’t appeared as yet, it’s very much a matter of doing a jigsaw to fit the material into the set number of available pages.

Remember, the CHFHS Journal is predominantly made up of your work—we just put it together ...

The Editorial Team

MEMBERSHIP

The Society offers a regular programme of meetings designed to appeal to the specialist and beginner alike; the quarterly members' journal is now available, if preferred, as a digital download. The UK subscription, due on joining and annually thereafter, is £10, and includes the member's partner. The overseas subscription is £15, which gives airmail postage of the Journal. If you chose to receive the e-Journal, the annual subscription for all locations is £7 (we also offer a life membership for £100, or £70 with e-journal). Subscriptions/renewals may be made online through the CFHS website via debit/credit card or PayPal, or by DirectDebit; alternatively, sterling cheque/etc made payable to *Cambridgeshire Family History Society*, should be sent to the Secretary. Changes of address/email, and members' interests contributions, should be sent to the Membership Secretary. All contact details can be found on p52.

SEARCHABLE RECORDS & SHOP

"CAMBS SUPERSEARCH" most of the transcribed records for Cambridgeshire & Isle of Ely (available on CDs or as downloads from our online e-shop) are name searchable via this facility on our website—**now includes** a place-name search for Huntingdonshire parishes—see which transcription products might feature your names &/or places of interest

"ANCESTOR FINDER" an online 'pay-per-view' database of our transcribed records for Cambs plus digitised images of most parish registers from the Wisbech area (the WisMus Project is nearing completion), with Hunts being added as they are reformatted. Tailor searches to meet your particular needs—view only records you select using prepaid "tokens" (typically, 25p per record or less, equivalent). 25p per record or less, equivalent).

Visit **"AncestorFinder"** at : www.cfhs.org.uk

NB: "AF" mainly features records from Cambs & Isle of Ely at present; transcriptions of many selected Hunts records are being reformatted and added as they become available (are available as downloads or CDs—check their availability via the website shop)

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RESEARCH SERVICES

The Society will undertake a limited amount of help for members who have reached a sticking point in their research. This can be done in two ways :-

- # general enquiries can be addressed to the Secretary by email secretary@cfhs.org.uk (or by post, with an SAE please)
- # more detailed requests should be sent to our Research Officer, Rebecca Bailey preferably by email, via the request form on the website research@cfhs.org.uk

We will attend to requests as our time allows. We ask that you remember we are all volunteers, so please be patient and reasonable in your requests. Please supply as much information about the topic/person as possible (such as the sources of "facts" you have and which records/resources have already been consulted (eg. census, certificate, a family tree, Ancestry, FamilySearch, etc)

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