



Volume 6

Number 1

Spring 1992

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E D I T O R I A L

Greetings to all our members, and greetings with apologies for not mentioning him previously, to Mr. Mark Witheridge of Sparkhill, Birmingham. We are very pleased to welcome a new member, Mrs. Albertina Rossiter, whose family tree is in this magazine.

This issue includes three more names from the indexes of Wills and Admons at Somerset House, It is disappointing to find that from 1967, the age at death of the testator is not given, neither is the name of the person or persons to whom Probate or Admons is granted. This does limit the usefulness of the information, but we will continue to search the indexes as time permits.

A most useful piece of information has been sent to us by Mrs. Billings of Leicester. She was searching the Army Records kept at Kew and came across two Witheridge names which she kindly sent on to me. One interesting aspect is that both these records have some inconsistencies with the facts as we thought we knew them to be - back to the drawing board?

As far as I know, none of us has made use of these records at Kew. Apparently they contain War Office records, many of them with details of the soldier's medical history as well as the ones we would expect to find - date of birth, next of kin, date of discharge, etc. The address is: Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey. TW9 4DU. It may be that there were more Witheridges who had a career in the Army than we think.

Before our next magazine appears we hope to have held our 'family re-union' and Annual General Meeting at Alderton, on Monday, 4th May, details of which and invitations are sent with this issue. Please do give a thought to the election of officers which takes place at the meeting. Every officer comes up for re-election, and as no one can serve for more than four years in the same post, our valued secretary, John, must be replaced. Volunteers one pace forward, please! If you feel that you can help in any capacity, (or if you can twist someone else's arm) please make it known.

We hope that as many of you who possibly can will make the journey to Alderton.

Joyce

FAMILY NEWS

Condolences

We are sorry to report the death, which took place in June, 1991, of Mrs. Lillian Mabel Hookway, mother of our member Philip Hookway. Lillian was the daughter of Dorcas Mary Witheridge and James Cole, and the granddaughter of George Witheridge and Dorcas Mary Hammett, of the Kingsbridge branch of the Witheridge family.

Those who knew her say that she was a quiet and unassuming person, who always put others first. She regarded home life as of supreme importance and created an atmosphere of love and stability which will be remembered with gratitude by those who knew her. Our sympathies go to Philip and his family.

REFERENCES TO THE SURNAME WITHERIDGE FROM THE PRO, KEW, 1991

Extracted from WO97 (Soldiers' documents)

WO97/4200 (Period covered 1883 - 1900)

ARTHUR WITHERIDGE, Dorsetshire Regiment, Attested 16th January, 1882. Born Plymouth, age 20 yrs. 2mths.

Carpenter. Height 5ft.4½ inches. Weight 135 lbs.

Fair complexion. Grey Eyes. Brown Hair. C.of E.

Next of kin - Father, Robert Witheridge, Winton, Hampshire.

Discharged:- January, 1894

WO97/6282 (Period covered 1900 - 1913)

ALBERT GEORGE WITHERIDGE, Royal Artillery, Attested Woolwich, 22nd Jan.1891. Born Aberban, Brecknockshire, Labourer.

Age 18. Height 5ft. 3¼ inches. Weight 126 lbs. Chest 33/35. Fresh complexion, Hazel eyes, brown hair. Wesleyan.

Next of kin - Mother Mrs. M.J. Offer, 9 Wellington Street, Lawrence Hill, Bristol.

THE WANDERER RETURNS

Yes, I'm known as the Witheridge Widow,
For writing that poem, a short while ago.
It's something that I often do
When the time goes so terribly slow.
While waiting for divine inspiration,
Within a world of rhythm and rhyme,
Putting words into verse, in sheer desperation,
And it does not work, every time.

So many hours do I spend on my own
I toy now with another string to my bow.
I'll take up some other relaxation,
Perhaps a musical diversion, and so,
To play second fiddle I feel fitted,
By squealing and plucking my strings.
There's one consolation, see, I'm acquitted,
You see, I get him back this Spring.

Next year he becomes my secretary,
You can all jump into the lake,
The hours that he gave you were necessary,
But nevertheless, hard to take.
So I am putting my foot down,
With all my will and a firm hand,
I hope that you'll see and not frown
On this last and immovable stand.

So I hope that there may be someone
To take up where he must leave you,
Be ready to cope with your problems,
And spend all those hours there, too.
I will willingly forego those large wages,
For money is not what it's all about,
I long to recall what seems ages,
And raise up my face with a shout!

He's mine, and I'm not a widow,
I'm sorry you're left in the lurch,
But this was the reason we married,
Like two love birds - we'll share the same perch.

Heavenly! Mayda Witheridge

DON'T JUMP YET - I'M ONLY KIDDING!

RESEARCH REPORT

By John Witheridge

The Bristol family has grown as a branch from the Combemartin and Berrynarbor family, which was researched and reported on, with the family tree, in the summer of 1988, magazine volume two, number two. We begin our journey through the last two centuries with Edward Witheridge who married Mary Gear and fathered six children, starting two distinct family lines (maybe more). The first line was through John, his eldest son, which spread to many areas, including Wales and America. It is the second family line, through Edward's younger son, Edwin, that we are concerned with here, and in many ways it is a very interesting subject in its progression through the years.

After their wedding, a journey from Combemartin, where he was born, took Edwin and his new wife to Bristol. It may be assumed that the journey was made by land (not that we know this as fact) but in later life Edwin was known to be a haulier. He may well have been carrying out that occupation before he married Matilda Thomas. They settled in the Clifton area, where his son was born, and sadly, his wife was to die. Records show the birth of a William Thomas in Clifton during the last quarter of 1860, and the death of Matilda in the same quarter. It would appear that the baby, William, died approximately six months later, in 1861.

It may have taken some time for Edwin to come to terms with his double loss, but four years on we see that he has married his second wife, Albertina. Records which have come to light recently give her name as 'Elbertina'. We do not know a lot about her, but it is possible that her parents came from the Edinburgh area. In fact the members of the more modern family thought until recently that Edwin's family had been living in Scotland. To corroborate this they told me of a family photograph which had hung over the mantel piece at the home of Joseph Edwin (Edwin's son), at The Nest, Hewish, Somerset. The subjects were all clad in Highland dress, but over the years the story had become distorted, and it was evident that the children had been attributed to the wrong parents. Even to this day, we do not know what Elbertina's surname was. Her Christian name has a Scottish ring to it, and I am told by one member of the family, now living in Sweden, and also borne out by others, that it is a name used very much in Scandinavian countries.

Elbertina must have been a remarkable lady, not only did she bring up quite a large family, all boys, she lost three children each within a year of being born. Then she lost her husband after eighteen years of marriage, while her four sons were still under the age of eight. She must have endured hardship unless Edwin left her comfortably well off, but there are signs that he did not.

Having remained a widow for eleven years, until her children were old enough to earn their own living, Elbertina re-married. This seemed to make life worse for the unfortunate Elbertina. Maybe her family did not approve of the marriage, or of her new husband? We shall never know. Her fate? - to die in Stapleton Workhouse on June 30th 1903. aged just 57. She was buried, unmourned, in Greenbank Cemetery, Easton, Bristol, in an unmarked grave.

You will be pleased to know that now she does have two people who care and plant flowers to her memory - her great granddaughter and namesake, Albertina Rossiter, and her great great granddaughter, Jill. Albertina Rossiter's words sum up her feelings on the past situation. "I would like to hold a family Court Martial, but the players in that scene are all gone, anyway".

Whilst Elbertina was in the midst of her troubles, Joseph Edwin and his wife Mary Ellen were raising their own family. Joseph worked in the building and construction industry. His main interest in life, other than his work and his family, was his religion, which he shared with his wife. They were very ardent Salvationists, a faith which has continued down the years to this present day. Through all the distressing happenings which befell his mother, Elbertina, to whom he was devoted, Joseph Edwin was in hospital undergoing awesome brain surgery.

Joseph had been working as a Foreman on the building of the Vauxhall Bridge at the Cumberland Basin, Bristol. He either fell or was knocked off the top of the construction. This resulted in a very long stay in hospital and an even longer convalescence, and so he was unable to go to his mother's aid, which he probably regretted for the rest of his life. When he received compensation for the injuries he sustained he bought a coal merchant's business at 171 Hotwells Road, Bristol. The property consisted of stables, a ten roomed house, with a flat and a shop. He was a very generous man, not only giving away a large amount of money, but the flat was always at the disposal of relatives, or others who might be in need. He retired to the house already mentioned, The Nest, at Weston-Super-Mare.

We have knowledge of some of Joseph's brothers. Reuben William was head ostler at Temple Mead railway station during the last war. He was presented with the OBE for braving the flames and leading his horses to safety from a fire at the stables during the blitz on Bristol. He was in his early sixties when this happened. Henry Albert, another brother, was married to Elizabeth Brodribb, or Broadribb, who uncle was Henry Brodribb, later to be known as Sir Henry Irvine, the actor.

In the last few weeks we have become aware of a name which appears to be an amalgamation of the names of two brothers. I refer to an item sent to us by Mrs. Billings, Secretary of the Leicester Family History Society. It is an extract from WO97, Soldiers' Documents. It records an Albert George Witheridge, born Aberdan, Wales, giving a Mrs. M.J. Offer (mother) as his next of kin, residing in Bristol. The soldier was attested in January, 1891. Elbertina was not Mrs. Offer until 1892. The initials do not match those of Elbertina or her husband, William. Neither of the names used match up to any one person in that family, the nearest being Alfred George Witheridge, born 1873, died 1908. The service duration is stated to be 1900-1913. What answer, I wonder will emerge from these inconsistencies in the records?

The next generation of the Bristol family had its share of characters and heroes. Edwin William Witheridge served as a Sapper in the South Midland Royal Engineers during the Great War. He was wounded in the leg while he was serving in France, and had to wear a leather support for many years after. Ellen Catherine, sister to Edwin William, married a Salvationist, and their family is remembered by a foundation stone in memory of CM Coulstone, Ellen's father-in-law, which was laid at the Weston-Super-Mare Salvation Army Corps Headquarters.

John Laurence Witheridge spent most of his working life within the aircraft industry. The last sighting of him was in London, working for BAOC at London Airport.

From this Salisbury and Bristol family tree it is again very obvious that in the last generation there are not many male members of the family to carry the Witheridge name into the future.

It seems, as is the case in most of the Witheridge families, this family has had many strong willed women. One such was Polly Witheridge, nee Maggs. It was reported that at one stage during her children's years at school, she felt that

one teacher was taking liberties by caning one of her children unnecessarily. The very next day she stormed into the school and dragged the teacher to the front of the class and thrashed him in the same way as he had treated her child the day before. It also appears that she heard no more about it from the authorities.

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Albertina Ethel Rossiter, nee Witheridge, and her family. This article would not have been so full of detail were it not for her co-operation and her wonderful memory. With her late husband, Frank Charles, she has raised a family of artists and artistes. I once suggested to her that the family, children and grandchildren, could find enough musicians to occupy half the seats in the London Philharmonic Orchestra! It seems that the musicians do not have it all their own way, for the artists in the family can combine art and music. Albertina's third son, Gordon, is an example of this. He lives in Sweden with his wife, Britt Marie, and his daughter Helfrid Maria Albertina. They carry on the family tradition in the Salvation Army to the fourth and fifth generations, Both Gordon and Helfrid play in the bands of the Salvation Army, and Gordon earns his living as an artist. I hope to show some of his work at our next May Day meeting.

I think my last remarks should be about Albertina. My mental vision of her will always be of a modest lady, church organist, leader and conductor of a choir, and social worker - a lady with a big heart bearing a trowel and potted geranium, planting a memorial to a namesake she never knew, with a prayer and a tear for an injustice of which her long lost relatives may, or may not, have been guilty.

PPR WILLS AND ADMONS

1964 Witheridge, Arthur John, of Woodlands, Ivybridge, Devon, died 14th October, 1964 (age 60). Probate Bodmin 18 December, to Marjorie Witheridge, widow.

Witheridge, Catherine Emma, 78 Fore Street, Salcombe Devon, spinster, died 19 May 1964 (age 103). Probate Exeter 20 July, to Gladys Cranch, spinster.

Witheridge, Florrie, otherwise Florence, of Stanbury Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol, wife of Reuben William Witheridge died 4 December, 1962, (age 81). Admons Bristol 17 January to Elizabeth Lilian Thomas married woman.

THE HOME FIRES

By Joyce Browne

The furore in Britain at the introduction of the Community Charge, or 'Poll Tax' is by no means the first upset to be caused by an unpopular tax. There was a Poll Tax imposed in 1222, levied on every person over the age of 14, and its re-imposition in 1377, 1379 and 1381 led to the uprising known as the Peasants' Revolt.

By the year 1662 the old feudal methods of obtaining revenue were breaking down, and someone had the idea of taxing every householder on the number of fire hearths in his house. Though highly unpopular, this tax did not have the drastic effects of previous ones, and lasted until 1698 (1690 in Scotland). It was levied at the rate of 2s.0d. for every hearth, collected in two instalments at Michaelmas and Lady Day each year.

Parish Constables were empowered to enter houses to count the hearths, but were not supposed to make search unaccompanied. Even poor households were recorded and assessed, but were not necessarily charged.

The houses of labourers and poor artisans usually had only one hearth, 'husbandmen' and some tradesmen might have two. The Vicar might have three or four, and anything above six usually denoted a landowner, an 'esquire' or 'gentleman', or a wealthy merchant.

What is interesting to the family historian is the large amount of paper work generated by this tax. Lists of names are grist to the mill of the researcher, and lists of names abound for the Hearth Tax, not for every year, and not for every district, but sufficient to be worth looking at. Some lists are of those assessed, some of those who actually paid, and some of those who failed to pay.

To find an ancestor on a Hearth Tax list can confirm his presence in a particular place, but the absence of his name is not conclusive evidence that he was not there. To gain an idea of social status we need to compare assessments with others on a list, and it helps to have some idea of living conditions of the period.

Some tax lists for Devon survive from the year 1674, and by that time nearly all country habitations had evolved from one 'hall', with a hearth in the living section and a hole in the roof to let out the smoke, to a dwelling with several rooms, but which still may have had only one hearth.

The style known as a 'cross passage' house consisted of a rectangular structure, under one roof, but intersected by a passage which allowed the animals to be kept in one section, while the humans ate, lived and slept in the other.



The 'longhouse' was the dominant style for West Country dwellings, although by 1674 many had been extended and improved, and the animals moved out to separate buildings - 'byres' or 'shippons'.

Chimneys had come into use by the 15th century, and in Devon and Cornwall where the main building material was 'cob' (soil, dung, straw and water compressed), or stone, or a mixture of both, it was practicable to build the chimney on an outside wall, and this is a feature of many Devon houses. Sometimes, as rooms were added, they were built over the chimney wall, thus the house still had only one chimney but two hearths.



The advent of chimneys made it possible for fireplaces as we know them to come into being. Where the hearth was situated on an interior wall, smoke hoods were devised. Where they were on exterior walls it was easy to make a recess where the fire could blaze away with the smoke drawn up the chimney flue. The interior wall of the chimney had to be supported above the fireplace opening, usually by a massive beam, sometimes eight to twelve feet long.

In the dwellings of the more affluent, where there were more rooms, the fireplaces away from the kitchen were smaller and supported by stone lintels, or by bricks in decorative patterns, but they were flat fronted, the mantel shelf being a much later innovation. (Except in the houses of the wealthy and the aristocracy where show was everything and fire places in the state rooms were massive.)

The burning fire was raised above floor level by bricks, or was laid on a grid of iron bars, or enclosed in an iron basket. Iron fire backs were used to protect the wall, and to reflect the heat.

With installation of the fireplace, or the recess called the ingle-nook, all kinds of domestic refinements became possible. Cooking pots, which had had to be slung over the fire from a tripod, could be suspended from a side bracket, with a device which allowed the pot to be moved from side to side and raised or lowered. 'Spits' could be used, which enabled meat to be rotated in front of the fire, either by hand or by a mechanical device, and drip trays could be placed to catch the juices.

Many fireplaces incorporated a bread oven, a separate recess which ventilated into the main flue, but with a door of its own. This was heated by filling it with brushwood. When the oven had reached the required temperature, the brushwood was raked out, sometimes down a chute which pushed the embers onto the main fire. Another recess was often made to provide a salt cupboard. Salt was a precious commodity which was difficult to keep dry in 15th and 16th century houses.

Ingle-nook fireplaces are often pictured with a seat or a bench. I feel somewhat suspicious of this, as to sit so close to the fire in long skirts must have been a dangerous proceeding. The danger of fire was ever present. Roofs were mostly thatched, and special long handled rakes were kept handy so as to be able to drag burning thatch from the roof in an emergency.

The main fire was hardly ever allowed to die out - imagine the difficulty of lighting it every morning without matches. It was covered each night by a metal hood with some holes for ventilation, or damped down with clods of turf.

The Hearth Tax list for 1674 shows twelve Witheridge names:

			No. of Hearths
Barnstaple Parish	Witheridge	1
Berrynarbor	Thomas	"	5
	Nicholas	"	1
Langtree	Jno.	"	1
Instow	Roger	"	1

No.of Hearths

Plympton Hundred

Wembury Paupers	Moses	Witheridge (Senior)	1
	Moses	" (Junior)	1

Plymstock (South Division)

Frances	"	1
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Newton Ferrars	William	"	1
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Ermington Parish (Some names other than Witheridge shown for interest and comparison)

Thomas	Pearse (Senior)	5
Robert	Edgecombe	6
John	Edgecombe	2
Henry	Edgecombe	4
Emilen	Gill	1
Olliver	Edgecombe	1
Sir Peter	Fortescue	4
Parsonage House		2
John	Elleott	1
William	Elleott	2
Arthur	Prideaux	7
Joseph	Witheridge	3
Francis	Edgecombe	1
Viccaridge House		2

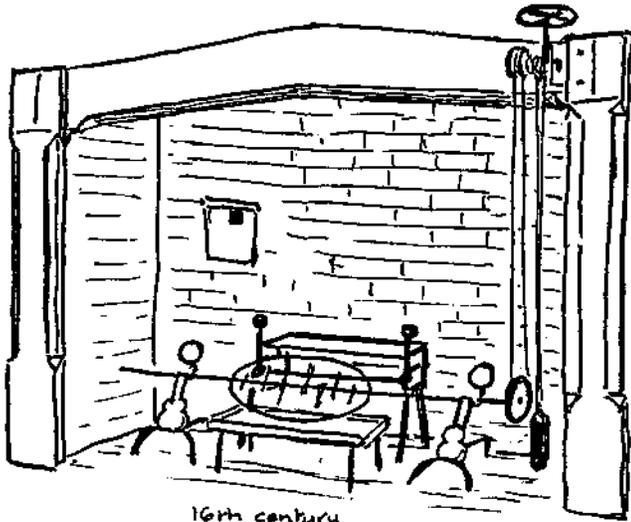
(It is known that other Witheridges were in the area at the time but they do not appear on the lists)

South Milton Poore	Andrew	Witheridge	2
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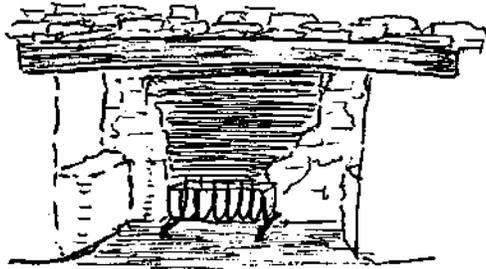
Woodleigh	Thomas	"	2
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At Strode Manor Farm, in Ermington, the three hearths assessed for 1674 can still be seen. One has had the opening lowered and rendered with plaster, and a modern wooden mantel shelf inserted. The second retains its original shape, although rendered over, but the third, complete with bread oven still looks much as it must have done when it was built, possibly a hundred years before Joseph Witheridge was paying his tax.

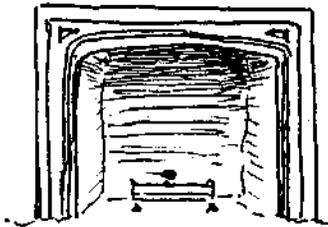
By 1690 the Hearth Tax had been dropped, and in 1696 a tax on windows was imposed, but that does not shed as much light on our ancestors (forgive the pun) as one might hope.



16th century



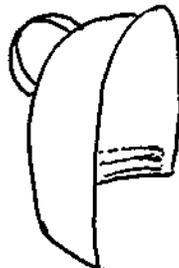
Late 16th century



Early 16th century



Early 16th century



Couvre feu (Cover fire)

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Tuly Street, Barnstaple, Devon.

Devon Family History Society,
Membership Secretary, Mrs. P. Witwicka,
4a Cookworthy Road, North Prospect, Plymouth, Devon
PL2 2LP

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