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(For all communication with the Guild of One Name Studies)  
(To be sent new applications and all renewals of Society membership, complete with subscriptions)

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(To be sent all items for publication in the Witheridge Times - family news, articles etc.,  
and all requests for copies of the certificates held by the Society)

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## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers - As this is the Autumn edition of the magazine, perhaps I should be painting a picture of falling leaves, but after a thoroughly miserable and wet July, we are experiencing a heat wave. "Global warming" - say some experts. Certainly our seasons seem to be turned upside down

As we try to peer back into the past, will it be more difficult to picture our forebears deep in snow in icy winters, picking May blossom on balmy spring days, harvesting in hot and dusty fields, and coping with November fogs - especially London 'pea-soupers'? Thanks to the Clean Air Act which forbade the burning of all but smokeless fuels in towns, we don't have those any more - but what will our future climate be?

We are considering the future in other ways - after a suggestion from Kathy and Paul in Ontario, we are considering the possibility of the Society having a Web Site on the Internet. This is not an easy decision to make. It would bring us to the attention of a wider public, and might attract new members. On the other hand, there is a question of cost, and time consuming effort for some people. I am sure that all sorts of pros and cons will come to the minds of members, and we would be glad to hear of them. If you would like to make a comment, please write to me, or to Graham, address on front cover or telephone: Luton (01582) 729573. We would like to hear from you.

I would also like to hear from you by way of contributions to the magazine. You must have noticed that the same names of contributors keep appearing. We could not continue without their efforts, but it would be nice to have articles, letters, 'profiles' of family members, and requests or comments from all the membership. It is useful and helpful to know of any searches which have been made, even if the results were negative, or the name being researched was not Witheridge, but some family connection.

Comments on the magazine can be helpful. Our aim is to assemble and disseminate information.

It only remains for me to wish our readers a 'happy read' of this edition's mix of articles. They cover a wide range and we send our thanks to the authors.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joyce", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

## FAMILY NEWS

Our representative for North America, Kathy Witheridge has reported the death of Estella Mary Oyos on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1998, at Devil's Lake, North Dakota. 'Stella' was the granddaughter of John and Miriam Witheridge, of the Bradworthy family, and the daughter of Ida Witheridge and Marwood Oke. She was Aunt to Paul Freed and Marcia Taylor, being particularly close to Paul. Stella was active in community life, an organist and accompanist at her local church, and a volunteer in community care projects. Born in 1905, at her death, she was probably the oldest Witheridge descendant in America. A son, two daughters-in-law, six grandchildren and seven great grandchildren survive her. We send our condolences to all.

### **STELLA M. OYOS**

#### **BORN**

February 13, 1905  
Bowmanville, Ontario, Canada

#### **DEATH**

April 22, 1998  
Devils Lake, North Dakota

#### **SERVICE**

Peace Lutheran Church  
Devils Lake, North Dakota  
Saturday, April 25, 1998  
2:00 p.m.



Kathy herself has not been too well lately as she has been battling with the effects of diabetes from which she has suffered for some time. As we know, Kathy is a very plucky lady, and has never allowed her problems to stand in the way of her work! We send our very best wishes!

The health of our President, Kim Cook, has been undermined recently by an attack of shingles, which resulted in Kim spending six days in hospital. I am glad to report that she is now at home and recovering from what is a very unpleasant malady.

A more cheery report is that on our friend Tom Jewell, who is now making much more rapid progress from the road accident in which he was seriously injured.

We were pleased to receive the news of the birth of a granddaughter for our Vice Chairwoman, Joyce Stephens, and her husband Terry. The baby, Eloisa Jane, was born to their daughter, Coreen and her husband Neil Barnett of Ferndown, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1998. All seemed to be well, but owing to what I will describe politely as a medical 'mishap' there is now some concern about the health of Coreen, and more particularly of the baby Eloisa. We can only send our congratulations with hopes that we may have news of better progress later.



**A SMALL STONE TURNED** - by Joyce Browne

The January 1998 issue of the Family Tree Magazine carried an announcement in the 'Pass It On' section from a Mr. Michael Kennedy of Kingswood, Bristol. This said that he had recently acquired a List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, 1862 - 1914, and what interested me more, Sun Life Inventories 1726 - 1770 of the merchants and manufacturers in the cloth industry throughout Devon. For a small fee he would search these inventories for specific names.

I requested a search for the names Weatheridge, Wetheridge and Witheridge, I received a courteous and prompt reply to the effect that none of those names could be found, and a photocopy of the relevant pages where they would have occurred if they had been noted.

This is negative information but it may assist someone who was thinking of replying to this paragraph in the Family Tree Magazine.

Mr. Kennedy told me that he has a collection of nineteenth century Trade Directories including areas of Bristol, London, Somerset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Isle-of-Wight and Dorset. He would welcome enquiries accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. His address is:-

Mr. Michael Kennedy,  
78A Cock Road,  
Kingswood,  
Bristol,  
South Gloucestershire, England  
BS15 2SG

## PLANTING MEMORIES

*Some novel thoughts on how to celebrate friends and occasions* by Kim Cook

People who are strong on family ties usually take great joy in keeping mementos of loved ones. We have our favourite photos, souvenirs, inscribed books, and all sorts of other memorabilia. But I wonder how many of you have ever thought of your garden as a place for memories?

If you just like plants for the look, or the scent of them, you may not be aware of the names of some of our beautiful garden flowers and shrubs, and how an appropriately named plant can be a permanent reminder of a person, a place or an occasion.

In our own, rather small garden, we have a number of plants and shrubs that provide special memories. For our silver wedding anniversary we were given a number of *rose* bushes including ***Silver Jubilee*** and ***Blessings***, both a beautiful pale pink.

For those who have achieved more years than we have, there is a glorious golden *rose* called ***Golden Wedding***, while newly weds might consider any one of a number of plants. There is a pale creamy-white *rose* called ***Wedding Day***, and two very different plants that rejoice in the name of ***Blushing Bride***. One is a *tulip*, pale creamy yellow edged with a red blush, the other a *gladiolus*, white with red flecks. However, for those who find the traditional *gladiolus* a little too stiff and formal, there is a hybrid variety, *gladiolus nanus*, that is smaller and early flowering, with more supple stems and softer, star like flowers. One of these, a classic ivory white is called simply ***The Bride***.

Names of people can also be recorded in plants, and it is a lovely thought to remember someone, living or dead, by planting something that bears their name. In our own garden we have a number of plants in this category.

For much of my childhood I lived with my aunt Eva, who had a large productive garden, and who first introduced me to gardening. Recently I discovered a lovely plant that bears her name. It is a perennial *phlox* of the *douglasii* group. Unlike the more familiar upright varieties, it forms a low growing mat like an alpine. ***Eva*** has a mass of pretty, deep pink flowers, which like to scramble over walls, or cascade down the sides of containers.

I'm still looking for appropriate plants for Roy, Jason and Adam, but I was delighted to find two plants bearing the names of my daughters-in-law. My

garden now has a pretty scented *viola*, violet and mauve with a yellow centre, which grows to a height of about 4 inches, called **Zoe**, and a half-hardy *fuchsia* with striking crimson and ivory blooms called **Anita**, excellent for patio tubs and hanging baskets.

Growing up a north-east facing wall, around the kitchen window, we have a beautiful *clematis montana*, **Elizabeth**. It has pale pink scented flowers, and foliage that can turn a striking dark brown colour. It was planted just two years ago, in memory of Elizabeth Witheridge of Minneapolis. In its first year it produced over fifty blooms, and we were delighted that David, during his visit to England for the Witheridge Society 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, was able to see it and photograph it. This year the blossoms are too numerous to count, smothering an otherwise dull stucco wall.

Other plants bearing the name **Elizabeth** include the glorious tall pink *rose*, and a small crimson *rhododendron* which is very free flowering. Another *rhododendron* that might appeal to some of our members, including Richard and Maureen, is a lovely lavender blue hybrid called **Susan**. The same garden would also be a suitable place for a dwarf red *aster* called **Jenny** and a deep velvety purple *clematis* hybrid called **Maureen**.

Back with roses, the Rossiter family might like the vigorous salmon pink slightly scented rambler called **Albertine**. Alternatively, there is a striking deep pink evergreen *azalea* called **Betty**. An appropriately named plant for John and Mayda's new garden might be the *dianthus* **Cheryl**, a deep winey-coloured pink, and for Brenda and Ron Dixon a *pyrethrum roseum* (of the fever-few family) in bright cerise called **Brenda**.

Other names which might appeal to members of the Witheridge clan include a variety of *nerine bowderii*, a bulbous plant which produces slim, pink, finely curled flowers, up to 18 inches tall in Autumn, called **Fenwick's Variety**, and **Blackmore's Glorious**, a *delphinium* which would be appropriate for those with Blackmore ancestry. There is also a blue *scabious* (pincushion flower) called **Miss Wilmot**.

There is a general belief that plants are not named after men, but this is far from being true. Among the male Christian names are **Peter**, a deep pink decorative *dahlia* growing to 3 ft.6 inches, **Ian**, a large crimson double *dianthus* (pink) growing to 12 inches, and **Thomas**, another *dianthus*, this time with deep rose flowers with a dark centre. **Andrew** is a vigorous and free flowering *fuchsia*, creamy white, pink and purple, **Bruce**, a deep violet



*delphinium* with brown eye, which reaches 6 feet, and **Willy**, and pale pink *clematis montana* that can climb to about 8 feet. However, I'm not sure what Harry Payne would think of a miniature golden yellow ball *dahlia* called **Old Harry!**

Relationships can also figure in plant names. Anyone descended from one of the many Walter Witheridges might consider the rose **Uncle Walter**, a scarlet, slightly scented hybrid tea, growing to 6 feet, which in New Zealand can also be grown as a climber. Given that every surname has a variety of spellings, **Grandpa Dickson**, a free flowering slightly scented hybrid tea with lemon yellow flowers on long stems, might, at some future date become an appropriate choice for Ron Dixon's garden!. There is also a very pretty *dianthus* with frilly pink petals edged with a darker pink, called **Gran's Favourite**, and a white and red *fuchsia* called **Uncle Mike**.

Places are important too, and what Witheridge garden of memories would be complete without something named after Devon? One of the prettiest is a glorious *fuchsia*, **Devonshire Dumpling**. This has large, double, candy pink flowers, pale on the inside, darker on the outside, and can be grown as a bush, standard or hanging basket plant. Alternatively, if your garden has acid soil, you could choose the deciduous *azalea*, **Devon**, which has striking bright red flowers. Devonshire place names include two *dianthus* (garden pinks), a white one called **Hay Tor**, and a creamy-white one called **Widcombe Fair**.

Should Anthony and Francoise wish to plant a reminder of their time in Brasilia, there is an orange deciduous *azalea* called **Brazil**, or a scarlet and gold hybrid tea rose called **Brasilia**. *Fuchsias* provide a wealth of appropriate place names. Those who live in Australia or who have family there, could go for **Australia Fair**, with very large double red and white flowers, which flowers very freely. For Maureen and Richard there is **Beauty of Bath**, a semi-double, which is pale pink, deep pink and white. Eric Pover, on the other hand, might choose **Swanley Gem**, which is scarlet and violet, while Eve in New Zealand could plant a memory of her English home with **Brentwood**, a white semi-double which stays white in the shade, but develops a pink blush if grown in full sun. Jason and Zoe might go for **Croydon Gold**, a vibrant red, claret, violet and pink *fuchsia* with a variegated leaf edged in gold, or, if sporting preferences prevailed, could try the vibrant blue *delphinium* **Chelsea Star**.

In our own garden we found that some golden yellow *hypericum* had seeded itself. This was particularly fortuitous, as its country name is **St John's Wort**, and the church we attend, and where Adam and Anita were married, is called St. John's!

For those looking for military connections, there is a bright red *dahlia* called **Grenadier**, and an equally bright *begonia* called **Guardsman** and a brilliant orangey-red *phlox paniculata* called **Brigadier**. Graham Browne, with his interest in Nelson, could consider a deep pink *anemone coronaria*, with semi-double blooms, called **The Admiral**, or a pink single *fuchsia*, **Horatio**, which is very free flowering, trails, and does well in hanging baskets. Those with flying connections might choose **Aviator**, a striking red and white *fuchsia*, or **Spitfire**, a very striking *gladiolus*, deep salmony orange with small violet flecks.

Having recently researched the story of my great-great-uncle, Samuel John Witheridge, who served in the Royal Marines and was killed in the Boer War, I was delighted to discover a plant that might serve as a memento of him. It is a *convolvulus tricolour*, a small-growing variety of morning glory. Reaching only 6 inches high, it is a deep royal blue with a clear white centre, and is called, appropriately, **Royal Marine**.

On a happier note, I was delighted to discover that there is a pink pompon *chrysanthemum* called **Grandchild**. I am now trying to locate this particular variety, so that I can have it in bloom for September!



## **WE ARE SURVIVORS!**

Thoughts from Harry Payne (with acknowledgments to the Kea Parish Magazine and R.G. Gilbert)

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, videos, Frisbees and the Pill. We were born before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ball point pens, before dishwashers, tumble driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes and before man walked on the moon.

We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?) We thought "fast food" was what you ate in Lent, a "Big Mac" was an oversized raincoat, and "crumpet" we had for tea. We existed before house husbands, computer dating, dual careers, and when a "meaningful relationship" meant getting along with cousins, and "sheltered accommodation" was where you waited for a bus.

We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM. Radio, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yoghurt and young men wearing earrings. For us "time sharing" meant togetherness, a "chip" was a piece of wood or a fried potato, "hardware" meant nuts and bolts and "software" wasn't a word.

Before 1940 "Made in Japan" meant Junk, the term "making out" referred to how you did in your exams, "stud" was something that fastened a collar to a shirt, and "going all the way" meant staying on a double decker bus to the depot. Pizzas, McDonald's and instant coffee were unheard of. In our day cigarette smoking was "fashionable", "grass", was mown, "coke" was kept in the coalhouse, a "joint" was a piece of meat you had on Sundays, and "pot" was something you cooked in. "Rock music" was grandmother's lullaby, "Eldorado" was an ice cream, a "gay person" was the life and soul of the party and nothing more, while "Aids" just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble. "Windows" were something you looked out of and "Surfing the waves" was something you did by the seaside - preferably Newquay or Polzeath.

We who were born before 1940 must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder we are so confused and there is a generation gap today. . . .BUT

By the Grace of God we have survived!

**ALLELUIA!**

## FINDERS .....SEEKERS

by Joyce Browne

Our friend, Sheila Jewell, has sent us some interesting items of information which have given us food for thought:-

### Marriage Loddiswell Parish

25<sup>th</sup> May, 1899 - Alfred George Hine, 27 Bachelor, Gardener - Father James Hine, to Emma Witheridge, 20, Spinster - Father William Witheridge, deceased. (Both signed)

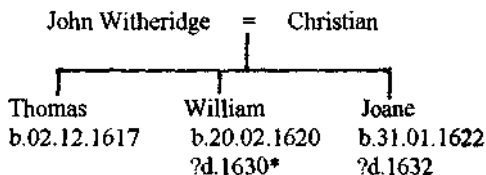
Why should this give us food for thought? The answer is in the phrase "Father William Witheridge, deceased". We had this Emma placed in the South Milton and Thurlestone family, but the William to whom we thought she belonged was not dead at the time of her marriage - so back to the drawing board! The PRO indexes show an Emma Witheridge, born December quarter, 1878, Kingsbridge 5b227, and a marriage for an Emma Witheridge, June quarter 1899, Kingsbridge 5b413. Loddiswell is in the registration district of Kingsbridge, so this seems to be the same Emma, but we would like to sort out her parentage.

An item from the South Devon district of Modbury is remarkable in that it is a very early record of apprenticeship.

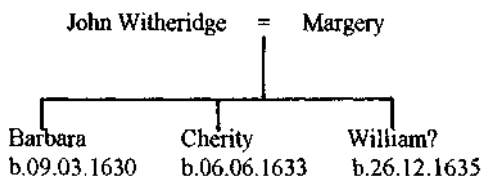
### Modbury Poor Law No. 269A PO341 Apprentices

"Phillipe Gee, a poor fatherless child, apprenticed to John Witheridge of Modbury, Blacksmith 1616"

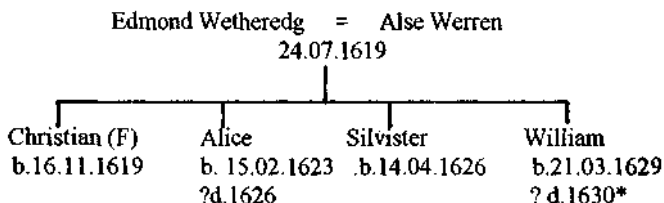
The Modbury Parish records show few Witheridges but we have, in the past, attempted to compile family trees from the Parish Registers and the IGI. These were compiled from data available in 1997.



This meagre information appears to show that in 1616, the John Witheridge whose son Thomas was baptised in 1617, would have been an adult, able to take an apprentice. The name John Witheridge appears again, this time with children from a marriage to a 'Margery', first child born 1630, but we do not know if these two Johns are one and the same.



We have tried to investigate the third tree because of the name "Silvester". This name occurs on American records, both as a record of marriage, and named as the deceased husband of Mary Buckley, who was tried as a witch in the Salem witchcraft trials, 1692/3, when she was acquitted. (See magazine Spring 1995)



\*The question mark for the date of death is because a William was buried in 1630, but we cannot be sure which William it was.

American marriage records show that a 'Sylvester Whitterage' married Mary Buckley. The record of their son's birth records him as being 'Silvester' son of 'Silvester and Mary Witheridge', born or baptised 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1688. We cannot establish that this family had connections with the Modbury family - but we keep hoping!

Neither can we establish a connection between the Silvester Witheridge of Modbury, and the Kent family who have Sylvester among their family names, but at least we now know that one of the Modbury families was a blacksmith, and the Kent families were in the iron founding trade, although more than a century later. From little acorns, mighty oak trees grow!

## SEARCHING FOR SAMUEL PART 2

The Hill of the Doves - by Kim Cook

According to his death certificate, Samuel John Witheridge, the brother of my great-grandfather Edmund Witheridge, had been killed on Majuba Mountain on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1881.

Samuel had been in the Royal Marines, and was quartermaster on the *Boadicea*, so I was puzzled to discover that he had been killed some 200 miles inland from Durban, in the first Boer War. How had he come to be there, and how had he spent those last few weeks of his life.?

I thought the answers would have to wait until I could get to Kew to look at the records, but then I had a stroke of luck. A friend who is an accomplished historian found, in our little local library, a book called 'The Battle of Majuba Hill', by Dr. Oliver Ransford. Published in 1967, and acquired in 1979, this book has been borrowed just fifteen times, so it's amazing that the library kept it!

Dr. Ransford, who spent most of his working life in Africa, visited Majuba, which is in fact a mountain some 6,000 feet above sea level, 2,000 feet higher than the nearby ridge known as Laing's Nek, and lies near the small town of Volksrust on the border of Natal and the Transvaal. He describes the signposted footpath that climbs the north-eastern face of Majuba Hill over a succession of precipitous slopes and broad flat terraces. At the top of the hill, this path opens out onto an extensive, uneven plateau, where the battle took place. Apparently this spot remains almost exactly as Samuel Witheridge would have seen it on the last day of his life. Only a small monument and a tiny walled-in cemetery are new. Samuel probably lies somewhere within that cemetery, and his name may be carved on the monument.

I had assumed that Samuel had been part of a Marine detachment transporting guns and other supplies to a military base, but this was not the case. The truth is far more extraordinary - not just the truth about Samuel, but about the whole battle. I had never heard of Majuba, nor had anyone I asked. But this long-forgotten battle was a turning point in the history of southern Africa. In the aftermath of this defeat, the British government of the day decided to take no further action, choosing instead to grant independence to the Boers of the Transvaal, on their own terms. This included the Boer's almost fanatical quasi-religious belief that natives had no soul, and were utterly inferior to whites. This in turn led directly to the policy of white supremacy that was to become known as apartheid, with all its implications.

The British held territories in Southern Africa were at that time under the control of two particularly unsuitable personalities. Colonel Sir Owen Lanyon has been described as overbearing, abrasive, high-handed and flat-footed. At a time when British forces were being withdrawn from Southern Africa, his every action seemed intent on provoking the Boers to rebellion. Later he was joined by a new superior, Sir Garnet Wolseley, competent in the field, but overconfident. Wolseley has been described as ambitious, tactless, egotistical and a braggart.

The Zulu's defeat of the British at Isandhlwana in 1879 (immortalised in the film 'Zulu'), had shown the Boers that the British were not invincible, and led them to hold the British commanders in high contempt. The subsequent British victory at Ulundi freed the Boers from the Zulu menace, and left them free to concentrate on the fight against the hated British rulers.

When, in 1880, the Boers began to attack British troops, just 3,000 fighting men were left. Most were besieged in seven widely separated and beleaguered garrisons, effectively removed from supporting their comrades now under attack. The Commander in Chief, Major General Sir George Pomeroy Colley, a man of great kindness and integrity, lacked leadership experience. Never before had he held sole military command. It was said of him that he was 'never a moment too pre-occupied to bear in mind the needs and the rights of others'. This consideration was to over-ride, with fatal consequences, his military training, and leave his troops, including Samuel Witheridge, fatally exposed on Majuba.

### Rebellion by the Boers

When the Boers rebelled, the only troops available to Colley were a few from the 58<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (the Northhamptons) some from the 3/60<sup>th</sup> (King's Royal) Rifles, and some from the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Foot (Scots Fusiliers). All were young, novice soldiers lacking experience, stamina, confidence, rifle training and *esprit de corps*. By 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1881, Colley had assembled his troops in Newcastle, in the foothills of the Drakensburg Mountains, north of Ladysmith. The following day they set out along the main road to Standerton, intent on capturing the ridge known as Laing's Nek.

The troops were slowed by torrential rain and mud, and by 26<sup>th</sup> January were still four miles south of Laing's Nek, at a farm called Mount Prospect. Here they dug in and waited for the weather to improve. The next day, in a brief period of clear sunshine, Colley made a cursory survey of the territory and decided to attack. On 28<sup>th</sup> January a disastrous attempt was made to capture Laing's Nek. Of the 480

men who took part in the battle, 150 died. Most of the officers of the 58<sup>th</sup> were mown down, and they were left in the command of a sub-lieutenant. The Boers lost just fourteen men.

Those minimal losses, compared with the heavy casualties they had inflicted on the British, inspired the Boers with a new confidence and unity. This shabbily dressed, unregimented band had, in these two characteristics, major advantages over the British. Their dowdy, baggy homespun clothes blended perfectly with the local terrain and provided them with excellent camouflage. Their individualistic attitude to fighting left each man free to move to any area of the battlefield where he felt he was most needed.

Additionally, years of stalking and shooting local game had given the Boers two further important advantages. They were excellent long-range shots, and had a thorough knowledge of the local terrain. The British commanders, however, confident in the superiority of their regimented, brightly uniformed troops, failed to appreciate the Boer advantages, and saw their opponents simply as a rough rabble who had had some lucky breaks.

By now desperately short of manpower, on 1<sup>st</sup> February Colley sent for reinforcements from Durban, and 'borrowed a contingent of 120 somewhat dazed sailors from men-of-war in Durban harbour to serve in what was grandly termed a Naval Brigade'.

These men of the Naval Brigade brought with them a battery of rocket tubes, which fired rockets from copper troughs sent up on 'flimsy bipods'. The rockets had a range of over a mile, and were light and easy to manoeuvre in mountainous countryside. There were also six heavier guns, and no doubt those Royal Marines with gunnery experience would have had some part in the transportation and care of this artillery.

Colley was concerned for the safety of these troops marching up from Durban, and with good cause, for the Boers had taken to attacking the British supply lines. On 7<sup>th</sup> February a mail escort was ambushed by the Boers.

At this point Colley himself, seeking revenge for Laing's Nek and subsequent losses, decided to lead a band of 300 men to escort a supply convoy. Having left a small party to guard the fording point, they crossed the Ingogo river and reached a plateau called Schuin's Hoogte, only to find themselves confronted by 1,000 mounted Boers. The cannon that should have subdued the rebels were wrongly



aimed, leaving the Boers free to advance with impunity. A vicious shooting match ensued which lasted until nightfall, by which time the Boers had a strong advantage. The British, who had sustained heavy casualties, were pinned down, unable to advance or retreat.

Suddenly, Colley became aware that the Boers had begun to slip away in the darkness. Heavy clouds, predicting a severe thunderstorm to those who knew the area, had banked up, and the Boers had gone to seek shelter, leaving the British exposed to the ferocity of the elements. Many of the wounded succumbed to the cold and the wet, but Colley took what little advantage he could from the noise of the storm. At 9.0p.m, the depleted British forces withdrew back across the now swollen Ingogo river. Eight men were swept away in the torrent, but the rest scrambled to safety and tramped up the five miles to Mount Prospect, pulling their guns behind them. Of 300 men, some 140 were lost, including all Colley's remaining staff officers. Eight Boers had been killed.

The Naval Brigade, marching up from Durban to Newcastle, were not involved in this debacle. Had they been, their gunnery experts might well have aimed the guns better, and the subsequent history of the whole of southern Africa would have been different.

As it was, Colley's engaging personality was sufficient to restore morale among the surviving troops at Mount Pleasant. By mid-February, reinforcements were pouring in to Newcastle. A regiment of Hussars, followed by the 2/60<sup>th</sup> Rifles, were the first to arrive. Next came Colley's close friend, Commander Romilly with the Naval Brigade, followed by the 92<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders. A further 1,500 troops were on their way via Durban.

### Peace Overtures

Colley was now ready for his revenge, but by this time the British government was seeking to negotiate for a peaceful settlement. Colley was ordered to desist from fighting, but was left with what was to prove his get-out clause. He was told that the Boers were to be given a 'reasonable time' in which to respond to the peace overtures.

On Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February, Colley drafted the peace proposals, in terms that were more peremptory than the British government had intended. The 'reasonable time' for the Boer response became a very unreasonable and, as later proved, impossible forty-eight hours.

The peace proposals were still in Colley's pocket when the General and his 1,800 troops rode out of Newcastle in the early hours of Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, heading for Mount Prospect.

'A screen of Hussars and Mounted Police rode in front and on both flanks, they were followed by battalions of both the Gordon Highlanders and the 2/60<sup>th</sup> Rifles; then came the Naval Brigade and a long line of transport wagons stretching back over two miles of road.'

As the long column tramped across the plain north of Newcastle, their route took them up the slope of Schuin's Hoogte. Here the newcomers of the Naval Brigade would have seen the graves of the soldiers who had died there just two weeks earlier. A little further on they camped by the river Ingogo for the night, again close to the site of one of Colley's earlier defeats.

Colley's plan had been to launch a major frontal attack on Laing's Nek, but at Ingogo he learned that the Boer defences had been greatly strengthened in the past few days. Reluctantly, Colley realised that the main British attack would now have to come from Newcastle towards Wakkerstroom, leaving his own troops at Mount Prospect in a subordinate role. Accordingly, on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, he ordered the 2/60<sup>th</sup> and most of the Hussars, to return to Newcastle.

The remaining troops marched on in glorious sunlight, with the theatrical silhouette of Majuba, the hill of doves, towering in front of them. Was it at this point that Colley realised the military significance of Majuba, and decided that the capture of this 6,000 ft. eminence would be more effective than any attempt towards Wakkerstroom?

At first he intended waiting until reinforcements arrived, but as they marched on, Colley saw that Boer entrenchments were already beginning to extend from Laing's Nek to the slopes of Majuba. Any attack would have to be undertaken promptly, before the Boer positions became too secure.

The British troops marched into Mount Prospect that afternoon, and next morning, Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February, Colley finally despatched his peace proposals, with their 48 hour ultimatum, to the Boer deputy leader, Smit. By this time, their leader Kruger had left for Heidelberg 120 miles away, and could not respond in less than four days. Smit informed Colley in writing of this, and assumed that the British commander would accept the delay.

## Majuba Hill

Colley had no such intentions and, having despatched his message to the Boers, he set out on a reconnaissance foray. With a small escort of Hussars, he rode round the left flank of the enemy position, in order to study the north-eastern face of Majuba. He came to the conclusion (wrongly, as he was to discover to his cost), that this side was as steep as the other, and that once three or four hundred soldiers had taken possession of the hill, their position would be impregnable. The Boers would then have to abandon Laing's Nek, and Colley's revenge would have been achieved.

Any military strategist should have seen the flaws in this plan, but by now Colley was obsessed with the idea of revenge. Indeed, some of those around him later questioned his state of mind, believing him to be beyond reason, having been goaded by failure and criticism to the point where revenge and the restoration of his reputation outweighed all else.

On Friday 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1881, the troops, including the Naval Brigade and the Gordon Highlands, were resting easily in their camp at Mount Prospect, three or four miles away from Majuba. None of them knew anything of Colley's plans, for his only confidant had been a Colonel Stewart. Majuba was known to be a Boer lookout post, new fortifications had been constructed by the Boers, and around the lower slopes were a number of Boer farms and encampments, but Colley was unsure whether any armed Boer units were encamped at the top of Majuba. After their secret deliberations, it was decided that an overnight attack would be made, as soon as the 48 hours of the ultimatum had expired.

Early on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>, the summit of Majuba was shrouded in mist, but presently the winds scattered the mist and clouds, and Majuba stood clear in the bright sunlight. The slopes on all sides seemed then, and apparently still seem, to be equally steep, but this is an optical illusion, as Colley and his troops were soon to discover. The northern flank has more gentle, grassier slopes, while the southern climb, from Mount Prospect, is extremely steep and rugged.

At Mount Prospect, in blazing sunshine, the regimental band of the 58<sup>th</sup>, together with the Gordon Pipers, accompanied a general sing-song, while some of the men played cricket, using pick handles for bats and ammunition boxes for wickets. I doubt whether Samuel had ever learned to play cricket, but, like many sailors, he would probably have enjoyed a good rousing sing-song.

Not until nearly 8. 0p.m., did the men receive their orders. Three companies of the Gordons, two of the 3/60<sup>th</sup>, two of the 58<sup>th</sup>, and a section of the Naval Brigade under Commander Romilly, were commanded to parade at 9.30p.m., in full marching order. 'Each man had to carry three days' rations, full water-bottles, seventy rounds of Martini-Henry ammunition, rolled greatcoat and water-proof sheet.' Additionally, each company had to carry a full complement of entrenching tools, make no noise, and strike no lights.

Conspicuous by their absence were all forms of major artillery. There was no way the heavy mounted guns could have been manoeuvred up the steep, narrow sides of Majuba, and certainly not in darkness. But the rocket tubes could have been man-handled up the mountain, particularly by Royal Marines like Samuel Witheridge, who had been trained specifically in the transportation of these weapons. One journalist who accompanied the march claimed that the Naval Brigade had pulled a Gatling gun along for the first part of the march, but had been forced to abandon it before they had gone very far. However, none of the other journalists, and none of those who survived the battle, mentioned this Gatling gun, and it would be surprising if the naval gunners, with all their training, had indeed abandoned a gun during the earlier, and much easier part of the march.

#### The British Force and its advance to the summit

In all there were some 600 men, 'a scratch lot of soldiers and sailors' as Lieutenant (later Gen. Sir) Ian Hamilton subsequently recalled. There were four units. About 170 men were redcoats of the 58<sup>th</sup>, the Rifles and Gordons mustered a further 170 between them, and 'at the rear stood Commander Romilly with 64 blue-jacketed sailors from the *Boadicea*'. Samuel Witheridge and 63 of his ship-mates were now nearly 200 miles from the familiar environment of their ship. Even if Samuel, in his Devonshire childhood, had ever rambled on Dartmoor, he could have experienced nothing like this.

This motley force had no hierarchy of officers to assume command in the event of casualties. There was no single commander known to all the troops, around whom they could rally and reform if necessary. Only the Gordons were fresh, tough and battle confident. But even they had no idea of what was in Colley's mind as, at about 10.0 p.m., he led the troops out into the night, moonless but still bright. He had said nothing to the officers left in charge at Mount Prospect, and only two others had any idea of Colley's plan.

En route, some of the troops were deployed in two makeshift laagers below the hill, and later a further company of Rifles left Mount Prospect and set out for Majuba.

Part of the uphill trek was along a path so narrow that the troops were obliged to move in a single file, with a deep precipice on one side, and a rock face on the other. By 1.0a.m., a keen north wind was blowing, and the barking of dogs from a nearby farm set everyone's nerves on edge, fearing that the alarm had been given.

Eventually the Highlanders were detached on a spur with instructions to dig themselves in, and the remainder of the force, including the Naval Brigade, began the terrible climb to the summit of Majuba. Their path up the south west flank of the hill was so steep that the men had to stop every few steps to regain their breath. Later, one of the Gordons wrote 'It is a perfect mystery to me how men with pouches full of ammunition, carrying rolled blankets and great-coat, and three days' rations could have got up... on a pitch dark night'.

In some places they had to crawl on hand and knees, hauling themselves up by tussocks of grass. They stumbled over rocks, and occasionally someone would fall with such a clatter that they all froze in their tracks, expecting to be fired on by the Boers. Tensions rose as trees and boulders loomed out of the blackness, looking like enemy snipers, and then the two Zulu guides confessed that they had lost their way. Finally, just before 4. 0a.m., in the last hour of darkness, one officer scrambled his way to the summit. It was at least 5. 0a.m., with dawn already breaking, before the last panting Highlander reached the top and the ten-acre plateau was secured.

The officially accepted strength of the party that set out is 728 officers and men. How many of them reached the summit of Majuba isn't clear. Lieutenant Hamilton reported that there were 365, and a war reporter who accompanied the march also came up with a similar figure, but another report gives the figure as 414. However many there were, the capture of Majuba Mountain was a remarkable achievement.

The British troops seemed to be on an impregnable natural citadel, with the enemy below at their mercy. The men were deployed at regular intervals around the rim of the plateau, but no orders were given for them to dig themselves in. One report claimed that 'the men were too exhausted to entrench, ...and hardly fit to fight'. But Colley himself did not seem to be tired, and Lieutenant Hamilton insisted that his Gordons 'were too excited to feel fatigue'.

Colley's failure to order the men to dig in was later accounted as criminal. Some of the men did begin to build protective stone *schanzes*, but most were left to rest, or to enjoy an aimless Sunday morning stroll, some staring down at the Boer laagers thousands of feet below. And still Colley said nothing of his plans to the men.

Nor was there any word of praise for the capture they had achieved, no explanation of what was to come, what needed to be achieved, and no rallying call to revitalise and inspire them. In short, they had no idea of what they had achieved, nor of what was expected of them. Colley, formerly known as a personable and well-liked commander, good at communicating with his men, was withdrawn and broody. His only concern was that his men should get some rest.

By daylight the men were beginning to relax. Some of the Highlanders began to jeer at the Boers below, and one man loosed off a round at an unsuspecting Boer patrol. Even then, Colley remained withdrawn, and exercised no discipline, despite his previous demands for quiet and secrecy.

After some prompting from junior officers, the army erected a few more perfunctory *schanzes*; but nothing more was done to secure the plateau. Only the sailors from *Boadicea*, on their own initiative, set about formidable stone defences, known as *sangars*. These stretched along the whole of the southern and south-western section to which they had been appointed, overlooking the ascent route. Samuel Witheridge would undoubtedly have had a hand in this, and as quartermaster he may have directed part of the operation.

When two of his officers suggested to Colley that more of these defences should be built, Colley dismissed the idea, claiming that the men were too tired, and that anyway, the Boers had no substantial weapons, only rifle fire, so no strong defences were needed. Nor were any forces or lookouts posted on the lower slopes, and no scouts were even sent to reconnoitre other possible approaches.

As the men (apart from the industrious Naval Brigade) rested in the hot morning sun, with just an occasional salvo to disturb the peace, they were blissfully unaware that below them, the enemy was already advancing. Hours earlier a Boer fanner's wife had spotted the British from her farm below Majuba, had saddled her pony and ridden through the darkness to the Boer encampments. At first the local Commandant General Joubert thought the moving figures on Majuba were goats, but in the lightening dawn, the red coats of the soldiers put him wise. This was to be the last battle in which redcoats were used. The stray shot and the Highlanders jeering over the skyline confirmed the British presence. To the injury of the capture and the jeering, was added the insult that it had been done on the Sabbath. The pious Boers felt that this was tantamount to sacrilege.

At first the Boers prepared to flee, fearing that they would be fired on at any minute. But as the minutes wore on, and no attack came, they gathered to prepare

their counter attack. A small contingent of horsemen was positioned to prevent British reinforcements getting through from Mount Prospect, and to cut off any retreat from Majuba.

### The Boers Attack

Next, eighty or ninety young horsemen, in three commando groups, rode swiftly and silently up Majuba as far as they could, then dismounted and worked their way upwards, getting as close to the summit as possible. Meanwhile, the older men who were expert marksmen, fanned out around the base of Majuba, ready to unleash a barrage of rifle fire.

As early as 6.0a.m, there was occasional sparse firing from the Boers, and by 7.0 a.m, the assault began to increase. One of Colley's men received a small leg wound, but other than that there were no casualties, and Colley was little bothered. He was of the opinion that the Boers were just wasting their ammunition.

For the next five hours the Boers slowly and methodically worked their way upward, when necessary covered by fire from all angles. As it became clear that no further troops were being sent out from Mount Prospect, more and more Boers joined the force. By 11. 0a.m., one commando group had reached a point below the plateau held by the Highlanders, and within a couple of hours, some 60 Boers were concealed there, ready to attack the Scots. By 1.0p.m, a total of about 450 Boers were poised to attack the summit of Majuba.

To be continued



### MEMORIAL TO A BABY

Research report by Kathy Witheridge via Joyce Browne

The memorial to this particular baby, who lived for less than a day, set Kathy off on a piece of research which has been ongoing since 1996. It began when Kathy discovered a grave stone in the Ebenezer Cemetery of Darlington Township, Ontario. The stone read:-

"Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"  
In Memory of Thomas Witheridge  
son of  
John and Elizabeth Jane Foster  
born and died June 21<sup>st</sup> 1853

After looking for all the possible John Witheridges without success, Kathy decided that maybe Elizabeth Jane Foster was the Witheridge. From a census return Kathy found that an Elizabeth Jane Witheridge was born in England in 1828, the daughter of Thomas Witheridge and Susanna. Where did this couple originate?

Kathy found no record of a marriage between a Thomas and Susanna in her Bradworthy records, but there was a record of a marriage between a Thomas Witheridge and a Susanna Harris at Combeinteignhead, Devon in 1826, but on investigating other notes on this couple, it appeared that they were not the parents of Elizabeth Jane.

The IGI gives the baptism , at St. Paul's Exeter, on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1830, of an Elizabeth Jane Witheridge, daughter of Thomas Witheridge and Susan.

I was able to contribute the information from the 1841 Census of St. Mary Major, Exeter-

Folio 7A	Witheridge Court :	Thomas Witheridge	40	Poulterer	Yes	(born in County)
		Susanna	"	45	Yes	
		Elizabeth Jane	"	10	Yes	

This early Census does not give the exact place of birth, only whether born in the County place of census, and the ages given are unreliable, being rounded up or down. The family does not appear on the 1851 census, so it would seem that they had left Exeter, if not the country by then.

Kathy did considerable research on the Foster family and reported:-

"I looked in the 1851 Census for Darlington Township, and found that John Foster was living with his parents, Elijah (54) and Mary (56) Foster, who were from the U.S.A. At that time John Foster was 16 years of age, born in Canada, an Ep. Meth., and a labourer.

The 1861 Census for Bowmanville. showed the following:-  
 FOSTER, John (33) born in Canada, Bible Christian, Farmer  
 FOSTER, Elizabeth (32) born in England, Bible Christian,  
 FOSTER, H.W. (7) born in Canada, Bible Christian  
 FOSTER, George (5) born in Canada, Bible Christian  
 FOSTER, R.B. (3) born in Canada, Bible Christian



The 1871 Census for Bowmanville:-

FOSTER, John (40) born Ontario, Bible Christian, Farmer  
FOSTER, Elizabeth (40) born England, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Henry (15) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, George (13) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Robert B. (11) born Ontario Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Ellen (9) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, John (4) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Frederick (3) born Ontario, Bible Christian

The 1881 Census for Bowmanville:-

FOSTER, John (52) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, E.J., (50) born, England, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Henry W. (24) born Ontario, Bible Christian, Farmer  
FOSTER, G.C.,(21) born Ontario, Bible Christian, Farmer  
FOSTER, Robt. B. (19) born Ontario, Bible Christian, Farmer's Son  
FOSTER, Hellen (17) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Jno. (15) born Ontario, Bible Christian  
FOSTER, Fred (13) born Ontario, Bible Christian

The 1891 Census for Bowmanville:-

FOSTER, John (60) born Ontario, Methodist, Farmer  
FOSTER, Elizabeth (61) born England, Methodist  
FOSTER, Ellen (23) born Ontario, Methodist  
FOSTER, Frederick (21) born Ontario, Methodist, Farmer

The 1901 Census for Bowmanville:-

FOSTER, John (73) born Aug 15 1827 in Ontario, Methodist, Farmer  
FOSTER, Elizabeth J. (72) born Dec. 10, 1828, in England, Methodist

FOSTER, Fred (29) born Aug. 28, 1871 in Ontario, Methodist, Farmer  
FOSTER, Mabel A (22) born Sep.20, 1878 in Ontario, Methodist, Daughter in Law

(Note the differences and discrepancies in ages in these census records. Also note that between 1881 and 1891, the family had changed their religion from 'Bible Christian' to 'Methodist'. English censuses do not show religious persuasions.)

The Bowmanville Cemetery records revealed Foster names and grave locations:

Foster, Elizabeth Jane	Section K	Foster, John	Section K
Foster, Frederick	Section E	Foster, John	Section P
Foster, George C.	Section P	Foster, Mabel A.	Section E
Foster, Helen	Section P	(Tremeer)	
Foster, Henry W.	Section P	Foster, Maggie (Reid)	Section P
		Foster, Robert B.	Section P

The Bowmanville newspapers gave some additional information: -

Mar. 11, 1891 Henry W. Foster married Maggie Reid, daughter of Alexander Reid, Crowlands, Welland.

Jul 19, 1891 Herbert Foster, son of John had leg amputated

Mar 08, 1893 George Foster, second son of John, married Mrs. Jane Hoover of Maple Grove.

Oct 26, 1901 Helen, daughter of John Foster, died aged 40, wife of James Bray, at East Toronto

Aug 24, 1902 John Foster, senior died, aged 77 years

Mar 19, 1908 Elizabeth Foster died, aged 79 years

Nov 14, 1920 Robert B. Foster died in Mariposa, aged 62 years"

Kathy and Paul visited the cemetery at Darlington, Ontario, and found , not far from the grave of baby Thomas Witheridge Foster, the grave of Thomas Witheridge and his wife Susanna. The gravestone reads:-

In memory of Thomas Witheridge/died in Darlington Dece 1843, aged 50

Susanna his wife/ died in Darlington April 4 1859/ Natives of Devon, England

This means that Thomas was born c 1793, his wife Susanna was older, born c.1787 This corroborates the 1841 Exeter Census record, confirming that they were the same couple.

The Bradworthy records show that Thomas was the son of George Witheridge and Jane Oke, baptised on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1795, at Bradworthy, Devon. Thomas could have had only a brief time in Canada. He was in Exeter in 1841, and died in Darlington, Ontario in 1843.

The Foster records show that other children were born of the marriage between Elizabeth Jane Witheridge and John Foster, but Elizabeth Jane named her first child after her father, Thomas Witheridge, who had died nearly ten years before the baby's birth.

Still eluding Kathy is the marriage between Thomas Witheridge and Susanna, but I am sure that this piece of the puzzle will be fitted in eventually.

## DEATH CERTIFICATE, TAKEN FROM ONTARIO DEATHS

### County of Durham, Division of Bowmanville

Surname of Deceased	Foster
Full Given Name	Elizabeth J
Place of Death	Liberty Street, Bowmanville
(a) Sex (b) Single. Married. Widowed	Female Widow
Age	79 years
Place of Birth Date of Birth	England
Trade or Occupation	Housekeeper
Name of Informant	Fred Foster
Relation to Deceased	Son
Religion	Methodist
Name of Physician	Dr. Alex Beith
Cause of Death	Paralysis - 7 weeks
Date of Death	March 19, 1909

# DEATH CERTIFICATE, TAKEN FROM ONTARIO DEATHS

## County of Durham, Division of Bowmanville

Surname of Deceased	Foster
Full Given Name	John
Place of Death	Liberty Street, Bowmanville
(a) Sex (b) Single. Married. Widowed	Male Married
Age	77 years
Place of Birth Date of Birth	Adolphustown
Trade or Occupation	Book Keeper
Name of Informant	Fred Foster
Relation to Deceased	Son
Religion	Methodist
Name of Physician	Dr. A. Beith
Cause of Death	Senile Decay - 14 weeks
Dale of Death	August, 1902



*Ebenezer Cemetery, Darlington Twp.,  
Gravestone of Thomas and Susanna  
Witheridge*



*Paul Witheridge looking at  
the grave of Thomas and  
Susanna Witheridge*

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