

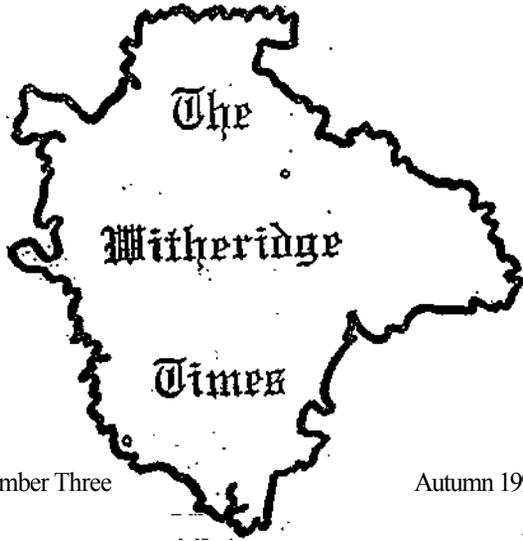


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Autumn 1999

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Continued on back cover	



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EDITORIAL

Dear readers, The British summer is said to consist of two hot days and a thunderstorm, but this summer we have had some exceptionally hot weather before the thunderstorms, which makes it difficult for me to imagine that when you read this we shall be into Autumn. This is the time when we remember the dead of two world wars, and this edition carries articles which I hope will harmonise with the season. It just happened that I received these articles and information at the appropriate time.

Kim's article, "Quaker Beginnings" gives a good sequel to "For God And Country", which was published in the summer edition.

We are always looking for articles or items of information, also we welcome any suggestions as to what you would like to see included in the magazine.

Richard is trying to finalise the programme for the special event at Tiverton in the year 2000, so if you have any thoughts on that subject, please let us know.

I have still not been able to get myself on to the Internet - I am having computer problems - (or you may think that it is I who have the problem, and not the computer!) One item of computer information is that Barbara Di Mambro has changed her e-mail address, and the new address is given below. Read on!

Loyce



CHANGE OF E-MAIL ADDRESS

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49 Addison Street,
Richmond Hill, Ontario,
Canada L4C 9N1

abns@home.com

SEARCHING THE INTERNET

Information supplied by Kathy Witheridge, Ontario

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

A few weeks ago, Kathy searched the new web site of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission, and found the following list of men who were killed in action in either World War I or World War II. Kathy writes "I am sure that this might be of assistance to you, and perhaps someone can explain to the rest of us who these men are!"

Here is the list, and I add notes in italics:-

WITHERIDGE, George - private 16812, in the 9th Btn., Devonshire Regiment, who died on Saturday, 1st July, 1916. George is buried at Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France. Grave reference Pier 1 Face C

George is the subject of the article 'Not Forgotten'. We have known about him for some time but have only recently been able to establish his parentage. He was the son of William James Witheridge and Mary Ann Walters - Plymouth family.

WITHERIDGE, Thomas - private 5688, in the 4th Btn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F. who died on Friday, 2nd March 1917, age 32 years. Son of Philomon (sic) and Mary Witheridge, of Prince Alfred Street, New South Wales. Native of Greenwell Point, New South Wales. Buried at Warlencourt British Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France. Grave reference IV B. 6

Thomas was the grandson of Thomas Witheridge, the Coastguard, and Jane Thomas, of the Porthleven and Ilfracombe families. Articles on this family appeared in the Witheridge Times, Spring 1997 and Summer 1997.

WITHERIDGE, Frederick John - leading stoker SS/112681 in H.M.S. Vanguard who died on Monday 9th July, 1917 age 26. Son of the late Harry and Annie Elizabeth Witheridge, brother of Mrs. H.H. Witheridge of 32 Cameron Street, Balmain, New South Wales. Buried at Chatham Memorial, Kent, United Kingdom. Grave N. 23.

Frederick was linked to the Bideford family, through ancestors. George Witheridge who married Mary Ann Bussell, and William Witheridge who married Fanny Causey. There is a sad story about him, told to us by George Smith, a former member. Frederick was cousin to George Smith's mother.

Ellen Witheridge, and when he came to England from Australia, they met and fell in love, and planned to be married. They were so occupied with plans for the wedding that he failed to join his ship, The Amethyst, and was sent instead to the Vanguard in Scapa Flow, where the Vanguard was sunk, and he was killed

WITHERIDGE, William Henry - private 6403 in 18th Btn. Australian Infantry, A.I.F. who died on Thursday, 20th September, 1917, age 19. Son of Annie Elizabeth Witheridge of "Staffordville", Lincoln Street, Campsie, New South Wales, and the late Henry Witheridge. Native of Balmain, New South Wales. Buried at Ypres (Menin Gate) memorial, Ieper, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. Grave reference Panel 7 - 17 -23 25- 27 - 29 - 31

Brother of Frederick. Imagine the tragedy for Annie who lost two sons in the space of two months, and also her husband. I have a note - although it is not confirmed here, that there was a third son killed in action.

WITHERIDGE, Alfred Richard - private in 32nd Btn. Australian Infantry, A.I.F., who died on Thursday, 25th October, 1917, aged 28. Son of Alfred and Polly Witheridge, of Queen's Park, Western Australia. Buried Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Ieper, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. Grave reference - Panel 7 - 17-23-25-27-29-31.

Alfred's family have links back to the Tavistock family, who earlier came from Bradworthy and Ilfracombe. Our member Mavis Witheridge is of this family, and actually still remembers Polly!

WITHERIDGE, J.F. - private 23897 in 3rd Btn. Devonshire Regiment transferred to (278699) labour corps, who died on Monday 4th November, 1918, age 40. Brother of Mrs. L. Dungey of 4 Higher Batter Street, Plymouth. Buried Plymouth Old Cemetery (Pennycomequick) Devon, United Kingdom. Grave reference General H/A 40. 22

This was Joseph Frederick, older brother of George, both sons of William James Witheridge and Mary Ann Walters. He was a Master Butcher by trade. One wonders if he suffered some wound whilst on active service which necessitated his being transferred to the labour corps, or it may have been that he had an illness which made him unfit for front line service. As in the case of Annie Elizabeth of Australia, his mother suffered the loss of two sons and her husband.

WITHERIDGE, William Henry, private 5107917 in 13th Btn. The King's (Liverpool) who died on Sunday 18th April, 1943 age 32. Husband of Grace Witheridge of Warwick . Buried Rangoon Memorial, Myanmar, Burma. Grave reference - Face 6.

This is a name unfamiliar to us. He could be the William H. noted in the GRO indexes as born December quarter, 1910 - Ref. Birmingham 6d 103. The marriage indexes give a reference to a marriage of a William H. Witheridge, December, quarter 1941, to 'Tasker' Ref. Birmingham 6d 89. The Birmingham family lines are complicated, and contain a number of 'Williams' and William Henrys' and unless we obtain the certificates we cannot begin to identify this soldier.

WITHERIDGE, James Deacon - private 7673250 in Royal Army Pay Corps, who died on Tuesday, 9th November, 1943 age 27. Son of James George and Virtue Louisa Witheridge, husband of Barbara Alice Witheridge, of Newport, Monmouthshire. Buried Pontypridd Crematorium, Glamorganshire, United Kingdom. Grave reference Panel R.H.

James was related to some of our present member families, and his ancestry can be traced back through the Newport family, then through John Witheridge and Elizabeth Harris to the Combe Martin/Berrynarbor family.

WITHERIDGE, Norman Arthur, private 5735270 in the Queen's Royal Regt. (West Surrey) who died on Sunday 15th April, 1945, age 23. Son of Harry and Mabel Witheridge of Bridgwater, Somerset, husband of Violet Elizabeth Witheridge of Bridgwater. Buried Argenta Gap War Cemetery, Italy Grave Reference - III, E, 12

Norman was related to the family of one of our Australian members, and through his great grandfather, Arthur, who married Charlotte Honey Fredrick and went to Bridgwater, was connected to the Philip Witheridge and Mary Northmore line of Ermington. How unlucky he was to have died in April, 1945, when the War in Europe was over in May, 1945!

We are indebted to Kathy for sending us this list, and as we read it we are reminded of the debt we owe to these men, and especially those who had made their homes overseas, but who did not hesitate to give their life blood in defence of these islands.

Their memory must never fade.

NEW MEMBERS

I am now able to print the membership numbers of the new members introduced in the last magazine:-

Member No. 170

Contact address

Mrs. Jean Tomlinson
2, London Road,
Bella Vista AR72714-5804 USA

Member No. 171

Contact address

Mrs. Joyce Aldrich
6555 Coleman Road,
East Lansing, MI
48823 USA

Member No. 172

Mr. Bruce Aldrich
Address as above

E-mail address:-

bjaldrich@juno.com

I welcome them again, and wish them a happy association with the Society



QUAKER BEGINNINGS

by Kim Cook

One summer afternoon in 1632, two horsemen on their way to Swarthmoor Hall, Cumbria, blundered into the quicksands of Morecombe Bay, bound for certain, death. Miraculously, both survived. One of them was George Fox, recently released from Derby Jail for interrupting church services, and for preaching that everyone had 'something of God' within them. He claimed that God had told him to go to Swarthmoor Hall. The miracle of his survival assured him of a ready hearing in the locality.

Swarthmoor Hall was the home of Justice Thomas Fell, his wife Margaret, their family and servants. George's arrival set the Hall and the local town alight. He preached that servants, as children of God, were equal with their masters, instituted prayer meetings which included all the household, and interrupted local church services with his message that God's love embraced everybody equally.

Despite the local riots this caused, over the next few weeks, Margaret Fell was amazed to find herself responding to George Fox's teachings. After Fox's departure she continued to follow George's advice, although she had many battles with him over the interpretation of the scriptures. George spoke of God's love in terms of equality, righteousness, justice and retribution for sins, while Margaret saw it in terms of active compassion, practical help, patience and forgiveness.

Despite the fierce and cunning opposition of a junior judge, John Sawrey, Margaret put her faith into practice by helping prisoners, particularly those condemned for being 'Children of the Light' as Fox's followers were then called. She wrote letters and made up parcels for prisoners, often delivering them herself to the dark, filthy, vermin-ridden cells in local dungeons.

When she discovered that little children as young as five or six were incarcerated in the infamous Lancaster Castle prison, she determined to help them too. Even in those days of appalling prison conditions, Lancaster was renowned as one of the worst, with its degrading regime, and the violence of staff and prisoners' relatives, who were known to assault and rape female visitors with impunity.

In this terrifying hell-hole, Margaret lived for a month in a cell with imprisoned children. She washed them, deloused them, brought them bedding, candles, clothes and food, and taught them. Later she recruited other women to continue the work.

Through this network of compassionate women, the small, uncoordinated local communities of 'Children of the Light' became organised into a cohesive unit, the Society of Friends, or Quakers.

To children, adult prisoners and wardens, she brought the message that they were children of God - a message that put her own life in danger. For, of all the Protestant sects in seventeenth-century England, the Quakers were the most savagely persecuted, both by the civil authorities and by the Church. They were hounded, beaten, robbed and imprisoned. Some Quaker meetings were so brutally-uprooted that all the adults were either killed or imprisoned, leaving only the

children to gather for worship. At the time of the Restoration, there were over 40,000 Quakers in England, all of them fair game for any minor magistrate or irate mob.

Margaret also carried on a relentless correspondence with those in authority, pressuring for religious freedom. She addressed everyone, including both Cromwell and Charles II as 'Dear Heart'!

Margaret and her household held out against the rising tide of persecution until the death, in 1660, of her husband, Judge Thomas Fell. Immediately, their old enemy, Justice Sawrey, swooped. The family was expelled from Swarthmoor Hall, all their property was confiscated, and Margaret and her family moved secretly from house to house in the twilight of the Quaker underground.

Then, in 1664, Margaret was caught and arrested for being a Quaker. Her sentence of six years' imprisonment was the longest ever imposed on any Quaker, and she was sent to Lancaster, the very prison she had entered voluntarily over ten years earlier. Friends did their utmost to help her, bringing her food, books and writing materials, as she tenaciously carried on her correspondence in the cause of religious freedom.

Imprisonment was not the only punishment for being a Quaker. In the 1660s many Friends were sentenced to exile in Massachusetts as 'indentured servants'. The New England Puritans then started a persecution of the Quakers which surpassed even that of the old country in its savagery. All Quakers were arrested on arrival in Boston. The captains of the vessels that carried them were fined for putting them ashore. Four Quakers, one of them a woman, were hanged on Boston Common, and many more languished and died in prison, while others were sent on to the penal colony of 'Rhoad Island'.

After Margaret Fell's release from prison, she and George Fox were married. It was, in the eyes of the world at least, a marriage of convenience. They were now joint leaders of the burgeoning Quaker movement. After her years in the dungeons of Lancaster prison, Margaret, ten years older than her husband, was a gaunt, energetic, white haired woman. George was a bulky, benign, saintly man.

For a while, persecution of Quakers eased off. During the lull, Margaret organised another team of women to help prisoners, this time at London's Brixton prison, then the worst in the country - worse even than Lancaster. To avoid the attacks

experienced in Lancaster, she dressed her helpers in bright red and green, so that they would be recognisable in the dingy corridors and thus escape assault.

In 1681, 100 Quakers, led by William Penn, sailed for America on the ship *Welcome*, to implement 'The Holy Experiment'. Their plan was to start an ideal community in the wilderness, governed according to the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. For over a year they lived in caves and huts on the river banks, while building their first settlement. They named it Philadelphia, the Greek for 'brotherly love'. Because of their fairness in business, their prompt payments to the native Indians for every piece of land they bought, and their silent Meetings for worship, in which the Indians frequently joined, the 'Holy Experiment' was a success. The colony prospered, and by the turn of the century Philadelphia had grown to be the largest port in North America.

Ten years after the *Welcome* sailed, George Fox died in London, at the age of 67. Margaret survived him by eleven years, living to the ripe old age of 88. One of the last things she did was to oversee the publication of George's journal, a book that was to become a major influence in Quakerism. During George's lifetime, the pair of them had battled for supremacy in the Society of Friends, each trying to guide the movement in its interpretation of the love of God. Only after George's death did Margaret, described as a 'mischievous saint', finally achieve her aim. She edited George's writings to remove all mention of supernatural miracles (such as his escape from the quicksands), righteousness, and retribution for sins, emphasising instead compassion, patience and forgiveness.

It was a concept that was to lead to many great things - the first prison reforms, the first humane treatment of the insane, the first school for natives in America, the first abolition of slavery and, eventually, to religious freedom. But, at the time when some of our Witheridge ancestors became Quakers, this was many years ahead. They too, like Margaret Fell, would have had to use the Quaker underground. They too would have risked property confiscation, prison and death, for their religious beliefs. I wonder how many of us, today, would have such courage in our convictions?

(Much of this information has come from 'The Peaceable Kingdom' by Jan de Hartog, himself a Quaker. This book, in two parts, covers the early years of Quaker development. The first part deals with the initial meeting between Margaret Fell and George Fox, its consequences and repercussions, while the second covers the period, 100 years later, of the 'The Holy Experiment'. Although written as a novel the book is historically accurate, and gives much insight into the lives of the early Quakers. 'The Peaceable Kingdom' was originally published in 1971 by Hamish Hamilton)

NOT FORGOTTEN

by Joyce Browne

Every evening at sunset, in the town of Thiepval in northern France, traffic stops as the sound of bugles rings out and heads are bowed in memory of the thousands of men who were killed near Thiepval in the first World War.

The ceremony takes place underneath the arch which is formed by the massive stone piers of a memorial gateway. If we were to look at the names inscribed on Pier 1 and Face C we would find:-

WITHERIDGE, George, Private 16812
9th Battalion Devonshire Regiment

By July 1916 the war had been raging for almost two years and going badly for the British and French Allies. Germany was in possession of the whole of the Duchy of Luxembourg, most of Belgium and much of northern France. The French had been fighting at Verdun, to the south of the Somme, since the winter. They were containing the Germans, but at a terrible cost to themselves in men and materials, and it was felt that a new offensive was necessary.

The Somme is a winding river in northern France, running between chalk downs. Then, there were quiet villages, farms, woods, some open marshy ground, but good road communications, and the positions of the British and French armies adjoined on the river banks. By February it was decided to mount an offensive on a particular sector with a 14 - 20 mile front, and preparations began immediately.

The preparations needed to feed and shelter 500,000 men and some 100,000 horses are mind boggling. The infra-structure needed for communications, the placement of artillery, the bringing up of ammunition, petrol, oil and all kinds of stores, not to mention the care of wounded, can only be imagined with difficulty. Nevertheless, from all accounts this was planned and carried out efficiently.

It was not until June that the Generals considered that they were ready to make an attack on the German positions around Thiepval. The plan was to mount a devastating artillery bombardment which would paralyse the German artillery, break the means of communication, and destroy the army in its trenches.

At 7.0 a.m., on the 23rd June, 1916, the order was given to fire, and the immense

artillery bombardment began. From then until the 1st July it pounded the German positions.

At night raiding parties went out to reconnoitre and cut gaps in the defensive barbed wire to allow the infantry to pass through, and the Royal Flying Corps flew hazardous missions to drop bombs, create smoke screens and observe enemy activity.

July 1st was judged to be the moment for attack, and the men were moved quietly into position. Some walked through woods, some filed along gullies in the chalk slopes, and some went 'over the top' into No Man's Land.

George was there, but even if we had known him, I doubt if we would have recognised him, festooned as he was with the accoutrements of war. He had on a steel helmet, and in addition to his rifle and bayonet he carried ammunition pouches, a water bottle, two gas helmets and gas goggles, and a field dressing and iodine. On his back he had a groundsheet, and a haversack containing a mess tin, a tinned and 'iron' ration, toilet kit, sewing kit, spare socks and bootlaces. He was also supposed to have 'the unexpired portion of the day's ration'. (Presumably he carried the usual bully beef and bread and jam in a tin)

Each man had to carry two sandbags, and in some units two grenades or a mortar bomb. No man carried less than 65 lbs and in some specialist units - 80-90 lbs!

This was not conducive to any fancy footwork, but then it was standard for the British Army, which did not reckon on taking flight.

On this 1st of July, the sun rose on a beautiful day, and at 6.0 a.m., the British and French Armies began the assault on the German positions on the Somme.

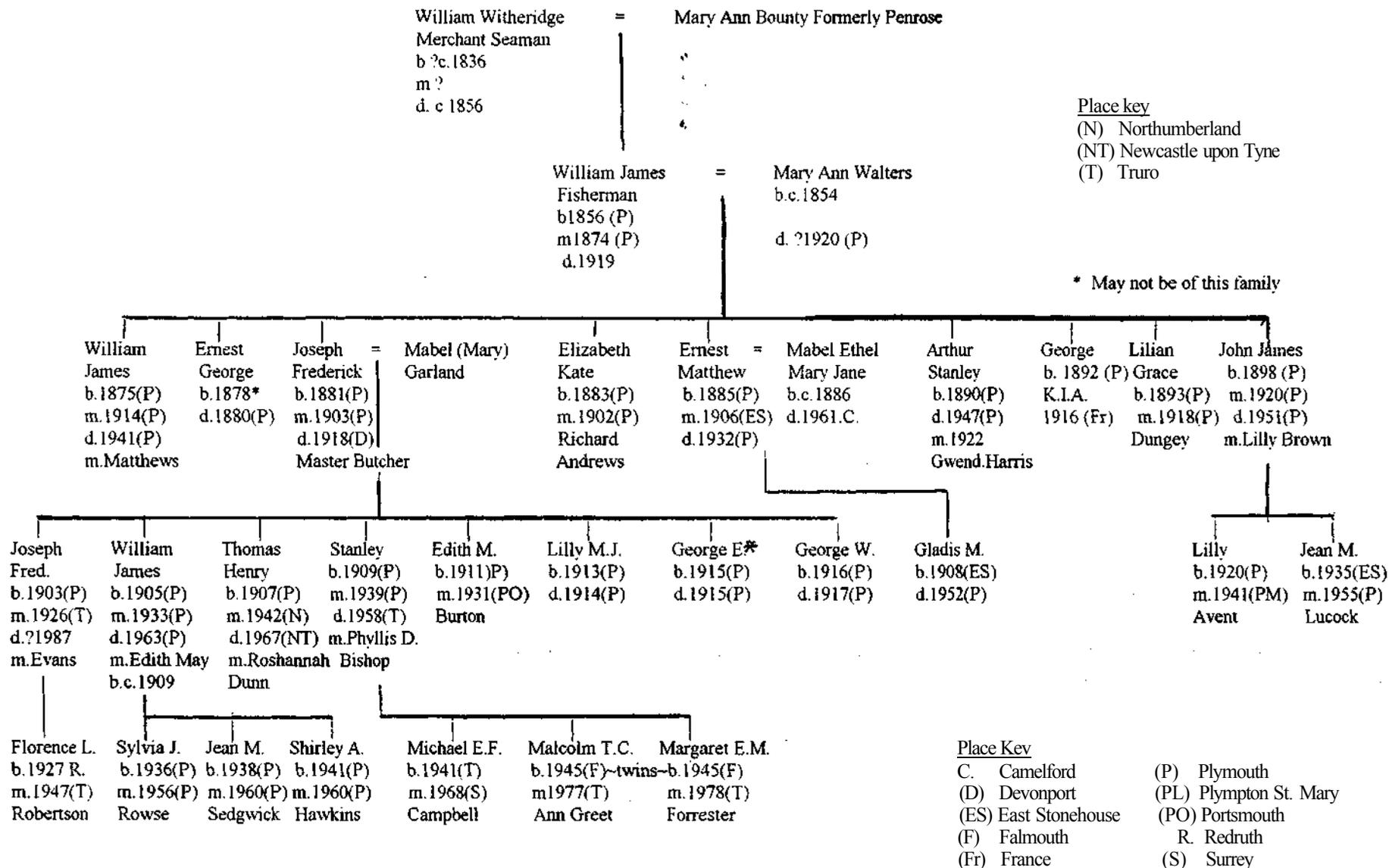
The 8th and 9th Devons were ordered in to the attack on Mametz, a village on high ground north of the river, in about the middle of the front. The fighting was furious, Mametz was taken, then lost, and then re-taken when it was nothing but a smoking ruin. Mametz was one of the successes of the day - which were few, and what a price was paid! The casualties on that day alone were enormous. The 2nd Devons lost 56% of their officers and 62% of their men.

The Green Howards, fighting at Fricourt, lost 15 officers and 336 men in three minutes.

What went wrong?

THE PLYMOUTH FAMILY TREE

From information available June, 1999



To simplify an answer one can say that the long preparation and the prolonged bombardment meant that there was no element of surprise.

The bombardment had failed to destroy the German defences. The Germans had constructed cleverly concealed fortified bunkers so that instead of trenches full of corpses, the British met fighting units with machine guns and mortars in full use.

The Germans had moved their artillery back, and could bring it into action as soon as needed.

The wire had not been cut, or the gaps made were not wide enough to allow the speedy passage of the infantry.

British shells had failed to reach their target, or had failed to explode (not the fault of the gunners)

The Generals had failed to recognise (or chose to ignore) the immense advantage of the enemy's occupation of the high ridges - enabling them to observe British troop movements and anticipate and repulse attacks as they were made.

At the end of the day, no strategic gains had been made, and the British suffered 60,000 casualties.

Did it stop there? Of course not! The British and French continued their efforts until November, when, exhausted and over a million dead men later, the British, French and German armies stood off from one another in stalemate, and the heavy fighting moved south to a place whose name became even more infamous - YPRES.

When the news reached home the British were stunned, but not bowed. Arthur Bryant the historian recalls the words of the then American Ambassador to Britain, Walter Page. He wrote of the stoicism and high courage of the people as they heard news of the casualties at the embassies and newspaper offices. "Not a tear have I seen", he wrote to a friend.

Was there anyone to grieve for 25 year old George? Yes - he had a mother and father, five brothers and two sisters alive at the time of his death, plus numerous nephews and nieces. His father and mother did not survive him for long. William James Witheridge, his father, a fisherman, died in 1919, and his mother Mary Ann Walters, died c.1920. One of his older brothers, Joseph Fred, born in 1881, a master butcher, was in the Devonshire Regiment when he died at Devonport in 1919, whether from wounds or illness we do not know.

His mother, Mary Ann Walters, had much to bear in a short space of time - the loss of two sons and a husband.

George was born on the 24th April, 1892 at 3, Looe Street, Plymouth, a street in the Sutton Harbour district. We know that the family had lived in this area at least since 1881 when Joseph Fred Witheridge was born at 16 New Street.

The family is no stranger to our researchers, as we have long sought to uncover the origins of George's grandfather and grandmother - William Witheridge, merchant seaman, and Mary Ann Bounty, formerly Penrose.

We know of only one child born to them, William James, born 1856, the father of our George. Our difficulty comes because William's birth certificate states that his father was "William Witheridge, deceased", and we have failed to find a birth, marriage or death certificate for William.

We have known about George, killed in action on the 1st July, 1916, for some time, but until we found his age at death, could not place him in a family.

Now we have, and during my research for this article, one thing has been borne in upon me: WE MUST NEVER FORGET!



FINDERS.....SEEKERS

Our 'Finder' Sheila Jewell has been busy and has sent us information on marriages recorded in parishes we may not have searched:-

- 23rd January, 1767 Mary WITHERIDGE (of Sutcombe) married Robert ROWEL of Northam, in the Parish of Alwington
{Near Abbotsham/Bideford}
- 19th December, 1768 Prudence WITHERIDGE married Richard PRING in the Parish of Awliscombe
{East Devon, near Honiton}
- 7th May, 1797 Elizabeth WITHERIDGE married William PARKER of the North Devon Militia, in the Parish of Plymouth St. Andrews
- 2nd December, 1799 Mary WITHERIDGE, married William GUBB in the Parish of Plymouth St. Andrews *(On the Census for 1851- Census place Berrynarbor- a Mary GUBB, born 1779, CombeMartin, is shown as being a widow, occupation Inn Keeper, with grand daughter Ann Creek, aged 18, servant, living with her)*
- 12th April, 1801 Ann WITHERIDGE married James HEROD, of the supply Navy transport, in the Parish of Plymouth St. Andrews.
- 7th October, 1812 Mary WITHERIDGE married John NORTHWAY - Butcher, in the Parish of Tavistock (by Licence).
{Thought to be the daughter of William Witheridge and Ann Moor. On the Census for 1851, Census place Tavistock, Mary Northway was shown as living with her husband John, born in Chagford. His occupation was given as 'Innkeeper', and the address was the Queen's Head Inn, West St., Tavistock. There were 16 persons in the household, including two sons}

Baptisms in the Parish of Abbotsham

- 24 November, 1843 Josiah of Sam and Eliza Witheridge - 2yrs old
Maria, of Sam and Eliza Witheridge, about 6 yrs.old
- 1st September, 1844 Thomas Bayley, of Sam and Eliza Witheridge
- 22nd April, 1849 George, of Sam and Eliza Witheridge

OUR JOHN - A MAN OF MANY PARTS

See Witheridge Times Summer, 1996, Winter 1996 and Autumn 1997)

by Joyce Browne

Looking back, we have many views of John Witheridge, who at Exeter Assizes in 1809, was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour, for bigamy;-

Boy born in Bideford

Sailor in Royal Navy

Apprentice farmer

Weekly Servant

Husbandman

Hostler

Husband, father, and stepfather - and a man economical with the truth - but we knew that already, so why mention it again?

It is pertinent because in our search for the real John, or at least the reality of the accounts of his life, our friend Sheila Jewell has found fresh evidence that at least one of his statements, sworn on oath, was not true.

Sheila has found the document of an Application for Settlement in North Tawton, sworn by John Witheridge on the 25th October, 1798. This was four years before his application for settlement in Halwell, dated 12th October, 1802, in which he said "he never did any other act whereby to gain a settlement to the best of his knowledge or belief." Obviously, the application for settlement in North Tawton had slipped his mind, just as the marriage to Mary Atkins in North Tawton (two weeks before the first settlement application) slipped his mind when he married Jane Emmett in Halwell.

We are prohibited from reproducing the Settlement document, but it reads:-

DEVON to wit The Examination of John Witheridge now resident in the Parish of North Tawton in the County aforesaid, husbandman, taken on oath before us whose names are hereunto subscribed two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said County this 25th day of October 1798. Touching the place of his last legal settlement. Who on his oath aforesaid saith he hath heard and believes he was born in the Parish of Bideford in the said County and was bound an apprentice to John Born of Littleham in the said County till he should be twenty one years of Age. That he served the said John Born in Littleham aforesaid about seven years and half. That his said Master then quitted Business and give the Examinant liberty to get a new Master. That he then agreed to serve Samuel Coplestone of Abbotsham in the said County for one year which Service he performed. That he then agreed

John Wetheridge who was buried in Plymouth in 1812 (see the Witheridge Times, Autumn 1997) and I am veering back to the view that he went back to the Bideford/Abbotsham area. His wife Mary Atkins and his son William were living there - maybe they took him back, after all, blood is thicker than water!

This latest revelation shows not only the actual document, but the necessity to search every available record. We may not like to think that our forebears were in the equivalent position of claiming social security, but the system of settlement made it necessary to register residence in case they became a burden on the parish.

Turn over every stone - you never know who or what may be revealed!



MEMORIES

by John Witheridge, dated Remembrance Day, 1998

Today I sit here listening to the spoken word, watching the televised broadcasts of the Remembrance parades and services, mostly ruminating about all those men and women who died in the first World War (the Great War to end all wars). I think of those who died in the second World War, followed by the many conflicts which have followed until this present time.

My mind returns in memory to those friends and associates of mine who are no longer alive, friends mostly from difficult periods since those first terrible times which we commemorate each year. I also give thought to all those who were wounded both in mind and body.

At this time each year and at many intervals in between, I suppose that I am not alone in these deep and perhaps morbid thoughts - those guilt ridden memories that separate "us" (those who have faced death on active service) from our comrades who were not lucky enough to have returned home to their loved ones. As younger men and women, it was only natural to exult in the euphoric atmosphere that centred about us upon our return home from conflict, just giving but a fleeting thought for our fallen comrades.

As we mature, and life takes on a more serious and sterner image, our thoughts return and our minds focus on the half forgotten likenesses that haunt our inner self, bringing back the times when our fallen friends were taken, even at our side.

In most cases, duty forbade that we could spare the time to attend to their needs. Also the instinct of self preservation made it impossible even to glance in their direction to take in the reality of their fate, the only sustained image being caught in the corner of the eye as we scanned horizons far, this in the moment as our friends slumped forward in death or gasped their last. In honesty, who amongst us can say "with hand on heart", and in true memory, that we did not feel some relief that it was THEIR time, and that we were spared to live for another moment or even for a lifetime - IF WE WERE LUCKY!

This brings me to the real notion behind this article. This year we see the partial culmination of a campaign for a pardon for those who were supposedly cowards - those who were shot at dawn by a firing squad - sometimes picked from amongst those who were friends of the supposedly guilty person.

We who have served will know, and will be constantly reminded that "there, but for the grace of God, go I". We each one of us know only too well, that we could quite easily have filled those same boots. We are reminded of times when we ourselves were sickened by the actions and acts which we had to perform... the times when we witnessed the actions of others who committed atrocities on behalf of our country... the times when we were all led, or sent into action to commit some act that we knew in our hearts to be wrong, which did not sit well with our religious beliefs or conscience. No, no, no - I do not wish to shift or apportion the blame. I just point out that very little latitude was given to those supposedly guilty persons who were condemned to be shot, those who were on trial, or towards those who were ridiculed for taking their beliefs to the extreme and who refused to fight at all.

In those dark days, I wonder how many of those men/women executed were actually suffering mental strain, who were not actually capable of doing their duty, of holding a rifle, let alone using one effectively? Yes, I know that there would be many malingerers, and that to make easy passage for the genuinely ill would have opened the flood gates to all those who wanted an easy life. To shoot the guilty was meant to be seen as a deterrent, and not as a solution to the problem - "That of Company morale". What a mistaken attitude!

As a youth, I worked with a youngish man who to me seemed very old, who had suffered badly from shell shock. He was, of course, a bi-product of the second World War. During the course of his daily work he would suffer greatly from the lunatic element who enjoyed seeing his agitation at loud and startling noise. I liken him to others, those who did not make it home. Could it be that many similar persons were shot? Thankfully in the war of 1939-1945 we did not have

men shot for cowardice. But just think, had this young man served in the first World War he may have been shot for failing in his duty.

If you read the Witheridge Times of Autumn 1992 , you will see that we in the Witheridge family had a similar occurrence. Before you read too much into this statement I recommend that you read this article (There are copies in stock)

Basically the article was about a young man of quite tender years who broke down under fire and ran away. No, No - please do not shake your head in disapproval - the situation was not as it appears! In this case the fault lay with the Army in its wish to acquire cannon fodder at any cost. The young man was not a man - just a thirteen/fourteen year old boy. A frightened boy who because of his wish to do his duty, as his elders were doing, got caught up in a recruitment drive, only finding in time, as possibly we all found out sooner or later, that it was no Sunday School outing.

Luckily the truth was found and the situation corrected. I wonder how many similar cases ended with the person concerned being shot?

I suppose that in more distant times, our ancestors were motivated by the need to preserve our country, and protect our down trodden neighbours - carrying out their duty with that typical stiff upper lip. This giving each following generation a spur to react to the country's enemies in a similar manner. The regimental notions of greatness then resulted in much hardship as the elements of warfare changed. Modern war does not have the same personal element as in previous times when hand combat was the only form of battle. Now a single bullet fired from a great distance can snuff out a life without any personal contact. Whether you live or die does not depend on your personal ability - just bad luck if you were in focus from your enemy's sights.

We have many families that were decimated by their losses in these two World Wars. I think that the worst affected "if Pain can be calculated so", was a branch of the Bideford family living in New South Wales, Australia, losing three sons in one war. At the same period the head of this family died, leaving a wife and several young children to be raised.

These sons, I am sure, were honoured by their country and regiments. The family no doubt mourned their loss. We here in Britain remember them with great affection and marvel at their deeds. We have always given thanks to our brothers and sisters in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, the USA and many more areas where their sons and daughters selflessly gave their youth to rid this world

of terror and hate. We give thanks also for the sons and daughters of our home families.

We, as collective mourners raise our thoughts to these young men and women, each and every year. Our remembrance, our thanks, our gratitude flowing out as love, as pride, and in some cases in bewilderment and bitterness. I ask, what of the mothers and fathers, the husband and wives of these brave heroes? Do we ever raise a monument to these, the most cruelly affected section of our communities?

Consider the feeling of daunting anticipation when a loved one goes off to war, to fight on the side of RIGHT. Consider the feelings of anguish when letters do not come, and the heart rending pain when an impersonal War Office telegram says "Missing or presumed dead", and the agonising wait for confirmation. Imagine having to explain to little ones why Mummy or Daddy will never return!

What loss! How can we expect these happenings to be regarded by the family as 'Acts of War', and yet they are, but at a much greater degree than the norm.

It is wonderful that we revere our war dead. It is great that we exult in their deeds and their memories. They gave their lives, and we can never expand on our love and gratitude or speak our thanks too often.

Remember that all those who died were the loved ones of some couple or family. No matter if categorised as a hero, or a coward, or someone just doing their job. Only God knows the truth. God and the person concerned.

It is good that the powers that be have relaxed their attitudes, so that all memories can be honoured. This is of great importance even if it is just for the one reason that those who were never allowed to bury their loved ones, brave or otherwise, can join together this one day each year to give thanks collectively.

For each and every one who never returned I give thanks for their selfless actions, for going to war to preserve truth and right. For giving the highest possible gift - Life! Thank you and God Bless you.

To each of you who lost a loved one I say "Thank you for a gift of heaven - the gift of love and life. Thank you and God Bless you!"



OVER THE GARDEN GATE

See previous articles magazines Autumn 1995, and Spring 1999

by Joyce Browne

Here I am, still at the garden gate, looking for my 5 x great grandmother, Margaret Brooking, but now I can see a house! A house with the intriguing name of 'Cowberries Ley'. It was in the village of Ermington - the Account Books record it as being in 'Ermington Town' but by our standards Ermington would never have qualified for such a description.

Cowberries Ley was not a farmhouse, but then the man who owned it in 1721 was not a farmer, but a traveller and dealer in wool, and a town house probably suited him very well. It was not the largest house in the village, but it was by no means the smallest, and it housed his wife and family of two boys, soon to be joined by a baby sister, quite comfortably. The Poor Rate levied on it was 6s.0d., collected three or four times a year as need arose, and the man who paid the rates was the owner JOSIAS BROOKING - husband of my 5 x great grandmother, Margaret Baker Brooking.

The man who determined the amount due, and was responsible for collecting it, was the Overseer of the Poor, JOHN WITHERIDGE. Three successive generations of John W's performed this unpaid and unenviable task, and the official responsible in 1721 could have been Margaret's future father-in-law, or her future husband.

We had never been able to determine the date of Josiah's death, other than it must have been before 1728, when Margaret married John Witheridge. There is no burial record for Josias either in Ermington or Newton Ferrers, but as he was a merchant his death may have been some distance from home. From a search of the Rate and Account Books of the Parish of Ermington we can now pin point his death as being in 1721/2.

Josiah paid the rates on Cowberries Ley in 1721, but in 1722 they were paid by 'Margaret Brooking, Widow'.

Another momentous event took place in the life of Margaret Brooking in 1722. Her daughter Margaret was born and baptised at Ermington on the 7th May. It may well have been that the baby was born after the death of Josiah, but whatever happened, the two events must have been close.

There is a record of a burial of a Margaret Brooking at Newton Ferrers on the 29th September, 1723.

If this was the child of Josiah and Margaret, less than eighteen months old, with no father, then she could perhaps qualify for the comment that was made:- " a pore ? pure child". To strengthen this thought - there is no further mention of Margaret Brooking, junior, in the Ermington records.

What more natural than that Margaret Brooking, senior, newly widowed, with a new baby, and boys aged five and three years to look after, should go home to her relatives in Newton Ferrers, where perhaps her daughter died?

By 1724, it appeared that Margaret had returned to Ermington, possibly bringing her oldest son, Joseph with her and leaving the younger, Robert, in Newton Ferrers. I base this thought on the fact that a Joseph Brooking appears later in Ermington, but no Robert, but a Robert does feature in the records of Newton Ferrers.

Margaret came back to Cowberries Ley, paying the rates in 1724, 1725, 1726 and 1727. By this time the 'Cowberries' name has given place to 'East Ley'.

In 1728 neither Cowberries nor East Ley is mentioned in the Rate Book, but John Witheridge paid an amount of 6s.0d in addition to the two amounts he was already paying for his properties.

John Witheridge and Margaret Brooking were married in Exeter on the 25th May, 1728, and one might have expected a woman's property to pass to her husband, unless it was entailed to her children.

East Ley never did appear as the property of a Witheridge. In 1774 it was owned by a Joseph Brooking, possibly Margaret's oldest son, and it continued in Brooking ownership at least until 1784.

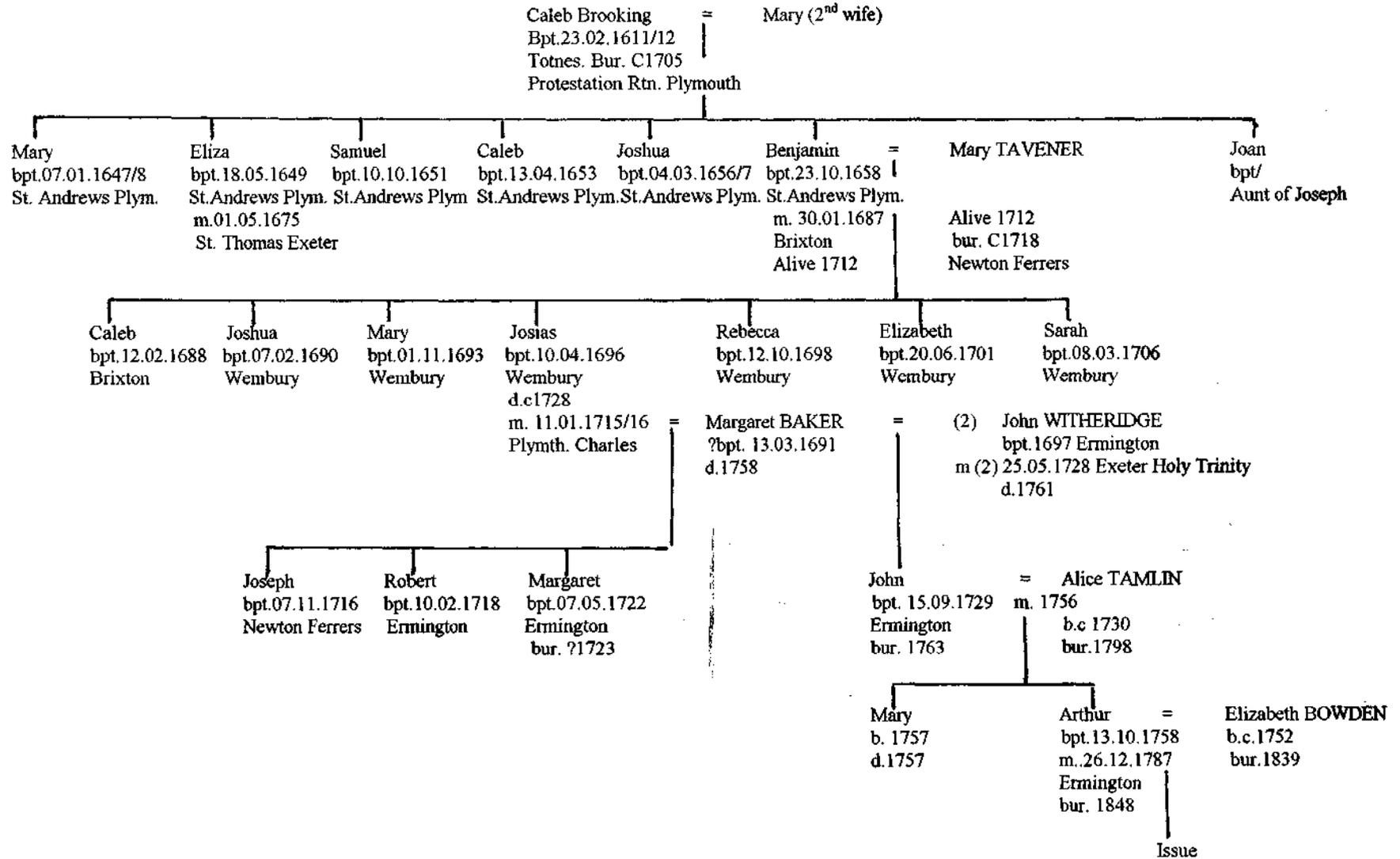
Was there a dispute about property and Brooking opposition to the marriage of John and Margaret? Certainly, instead of being married in the parish church at Ermington, as John Witheridge stated his intention on the marriage bond, signed on the 5th May, 1728, they made a dash for Exeter, and were married in Holy Trinity Church on the 25th May, 1728.

Margaret died before her husband and was buried in Newton Ferrers in 1758. This choice of Newton Ferrers mystified me until I began to unravel her history. It would not be unusual to wish to be buried near her only daughter, and be close in death to the people she knew in childhood, and close to her still living family.

So here am I, still at the garden gate, but I can see a house, and one day I might even get to look in the windows!

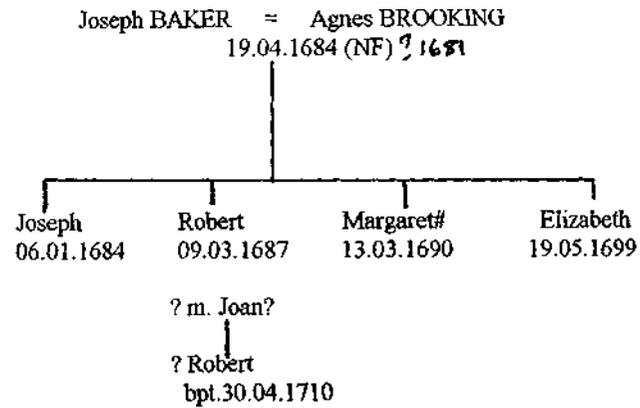
A BROOKING FAMILY TREE SHOWING THE FAMILY OF JOSIAS, HIS MARRIAGE TO MARGARET BAKER AND HER SUBSEQUENT MARRIAGE TO JOHN WITHERIDGE

Compiled by John Witheridge December, 1997

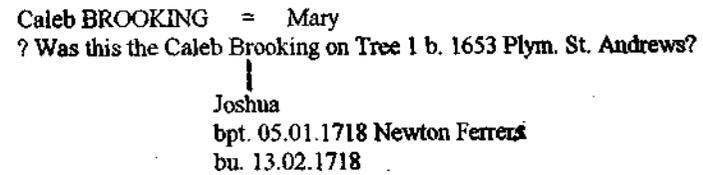
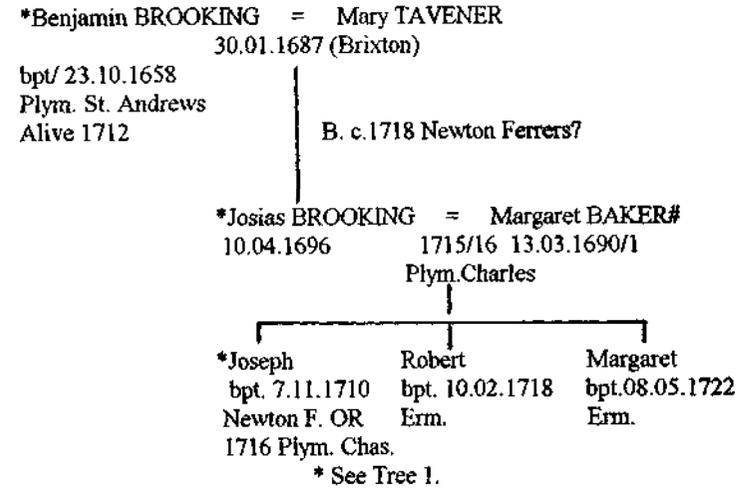


TREE 2

BAKER AND BROOKING FAMILY TREES - NEWTON FERRERS FROM INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY SHEILA JEWELL, OCTOBER, 1998



Note - A Robert Baker was buried NF. 1709 (April)



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