



IN TIME

Ely U3A History Group Members'
Newsletter



Edition 7

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We have an interesting selection of topics this week and it is good to see the article on the Parachute Regiment sent in as a response to our VE Day article last week. We also have more family history, an insight into how our mail used to be delivered and a different look at beehives as well as our regular Petty's Pick of the week

We still very much need your articles - please send them [REDACTED]

[The Parachute Regiment - Cassandra Rogers](#)



This piece has been going through my head since last Thursday's VE celebrations. This is a personal account of the bravery of the men in the Parachute Regiment in WW2

The Parachute Regiment was started in the early years of WW2 with the intention of creating a fighting force of officers and men willing to throw themselves out of an aeroplane to land precisely on the area to be captured. Precision was not always achieved, but my husband was lucky during these times - or blessed with good

navigators and pilots. When we first met, he was still studying at Magdalen College, Oxford, but very soon joined the army. After a while, finding the infantry dull (for him) he volunteered for the Paras, who were just starting up their search for volunteers. He was soon at Ringway, outside Manchester, learning to jump from a height and land safely without breaking anything vital.

By 1943 he was in specialised training to be a Pathfinder; a group of men who landed in Normandy before everyone else, with the means to light up the landing zone for the main body of men following on. This all happened near Pegasus Bridge, where all the men collected, including the ones from the gliders full of armed men who landed the other side, pictured in several films about the battle. After a lot of fighting, and of course the main landing on the beaches, the soldiers in the Paras became infantry and pushed their way through France.

The next jump was over the Rhine in Germany itself and also an important battle through the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. Hard fought but achieved. I am hazy about the details but I do remember receiving many letters from my friend (and future husband), who finally turned up again in Oxford, where I was working, together with a young dachshund puppy who he had found wandering in a farmyard in northern Germany. We kept her for many years, and she spent some time with my mother who enjoyed the company.

In 1946 my friend was de-mobbed. We were married in 1947 and he wore his original regimental uniform proudly, including the Parachute wings on his arm. The Parachute Regiment has ever since been a fixture in the British Army.



Family History - Just One Line! - Virginia Divall

My interest in researching my family history was sparked when I inherited some family Birth, Marriage and Death certificates. I already had some information on different branches of my family tree so decided it was time to start piecing it altogether. We set up the Ancestry family history template on the computer and typed in all the family history details we knew. This included members of my American family descended from my Great Uncle Frank Pritchard who immigrated to the USA settling in California in the early 1900's. A generation of them have now died so I feel privileged to have met them, one of whom I was named after.

I have come to a halt tracing the Pritchard line back due to an extremely fragile marriage certificate in the name of Thomas Pitcher 1820-1881 who married Elizabeth Corp 1830-1894 on 20th May 1850 at Parish Church Bruton Somerset. In a letter my grandfather Thomas Pritchard wrote in September 1940 one line mentions 'There is a Mrs Pritchard in Westminster Abbey'. On looking at the Westminster Abbey website they list all their memorials in alphabetical order where I found Hannah Pritchard (28 October 1709 to August 1765) an actress and singer. Her memorial was originally next to Shakespeare's and near the grave of David Garrick in Poets Corner (her tablet was moved to make way for Dr Samuel Johnson's bust whose grave is nearby) as she was considered the greatest Lady Macbeth of her generation, who worked with a young David Garrick at Drury Lane Theatre London. The citation on her memorial was written by the Poet Laureate William Whitehead. She married William Pritchard in 1730 and they had five children four daughters and a son who died in infancy. She was buried at St Mary's church Twickenham. Her monument can now be viewed in the new Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries in Westminster Abbey. I discovered recently that she had appeared at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds.

It was fascinating to learn all about 'Mrs Pritchard' from just one line in a family letter. If anyone has a family name of any of the following please get in touch as we may have connections:

Pritchard, Potter, Stubbs, Corp, Clasby, Divall, Muscroft, Gallop, Forbes, Rudd, Whiteman, Woodmansee, Stanhope, Coughlan, Gardiner, Jewitt and Robb.



Beehives - not what you think - Maggie Haverson

It is amazing what kinds of information you discover when working on your family history. I often think that it is these little snippets that are more interesting than the main project. I have recently been learning about beehive coke ovens, this is because my investigations into a prominent Victorian, Charles Attwood, who used to live in the village where I was born became a major player in the iron and steel industry in the North East and employed the use of beehive ovens to produce the quality coke needed for smelting in the iron and steel industry.



The remains of seven rare beehive coke ovens built in the 1850s can be seen in the village of Tow Law in Co Durham.

There were originally more than 20 of these ovens at the Inkerman Colliery in Tow Law and they were among the staggering 14,000 ovens in the county at the time, producing over four million tons of coke each year to respond to the growing demand for smelt iron ore for steel. The ovens were built on a circular plan with a domed roof - hence the name beehive. They were charged with coal through the top hole or through a main front opening and then sealed except for some small air holes. The coal was then lit and the air holes sealed. The gases produced were collected through small openings at the back of the oven and burnt off. The oven was opened after three to four days and the coke would be quenched inside the oven.

The coke produced in these ovens was then used in the iron and steel works owned by Charles Atwood. From these works came cannon balls used in the Crimean War and girders for the building of the London underground.

Mail Coaches in Ely - John Carruth



I mention Ely to get your attention, however there are few details about mail-coaches in Ely. We know that the Lamb Hotel and the Bell Inn on the High Street were “coaching” Inns and many of you will know of the painted poster above the Stage Coach Inn (now the Sylhet restaurant) on market street.

On an original route map, Ely is shown as the northern terminus of a branch from Cambridge, then a mail-coach hub. So it may be that the Ely mail-coach was a “feeder” service or perhaps ran on to London via Epping. The delivery of mail started as early as Tudor times and became more formalised during the protectorate through various parliamentary acts. It became the Royal Mail at the restoration.

The mail was carried by post boys, on foot or riding “old Nags” unfortunately these boys were vulnerable to ambush and robbery. In the 18th century, John Palmer

became the manager of the Theatre Royal in Bath. He travelled extensively and knew that stage-coaches (and mail) were uncomfortable and slow and took several days to travel from Bristol to London. So he came up with the idea of a National Mail Coach Service which would carry mail and people far faster. In

1782, Palmer became the surveyor and Comptroller-General of the Post Office. His

fast mail coaches (8mph), meant that mail would leave Bristol at 4pm and be in London at 10 a.m. the next morning. Not bad, compared to to-day!

John Palmer thought that the armed guards on mail coaches should be provided by the military, the soldiers being quartered at Inns along the route however the government feared that as ale was freely available this wasn't a good idea; in any case these soldiers were needed for the wars! So civilian guards were appointed, and armed with weapons provided by the Post Office. These guards usually carried a blunderbuss, two pistols, and a post-horn; blown to clear the



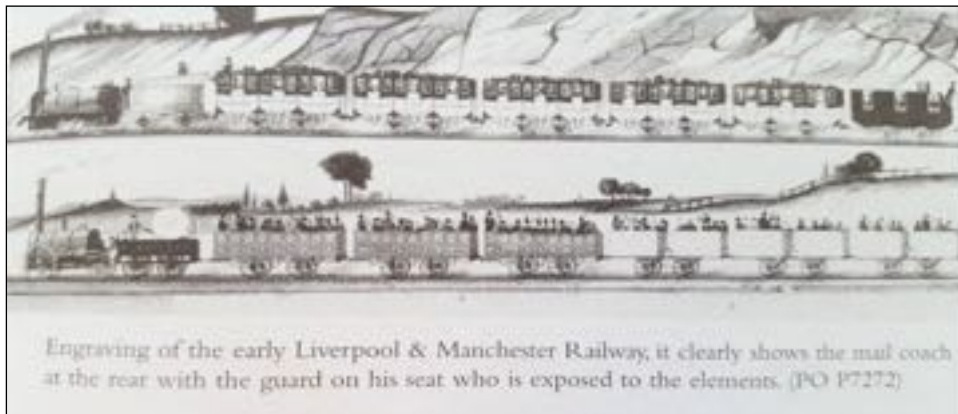
road ahead and to alert Toll-keepers, who faced heavy fines if the Tollgates were closed when the “mail” arrived. Good punctuality was paramount and so the Guard also carried a timepiece in a sealed pouch.

Guards would get bored and often take “pot-shots” at Inn signs and such like.

Firearms were lost or stolen, coaches could be involved in collisions or could overturn in ruts, spilling the contents of the roof, including passengers, the mail, and the guard with all his equipment into the ditch, causing injury and fatalities.

Rest stops were 15 minutes, to change the 4-horse team (called 4-in-hand) and allow passengers to take refreshment. The food, however, though paid for, was often delayed and when the “ALL ABOARD” was sounded the passengers were forced to depart still hungry! No doubt their missed meal would go back into the pot.

From 1835 trains superseded the mail-coach, they also took rest stops at the main stations, where the locomotive would take on water and passengers take refreshment. The providers of these



Engraving of the early Liverpool & Manchester Railway, it clearly shows the mail coach at the rear with the guard on his seat who is exposed to the elements. (PO P7272)

refreshments were the same people who had provided the food at the coaching inns and so as the whistle blew “ALL ABOARD”, the passengers would be carried away.

[Petty's Pick of the Week](#)

Every day Mike Petty posts on his Facebook group “Fenland History on Facebook” a number of newspaper clips from his massive archive of local events reported “on this day”

www.facebook.com/groups//1026849820769556/



Wet peat - Past Snips May 9th 1913 This story appeared in a Cambridge newspaper on this date.

Wicken peat digging. It is to be hoped that the new turf digging season will prove more successful than last year when, owing to the continuous and torrential rain, hundreds of tons of turf were dug and no opportunity was afforded for drying. In fact some of the turf dug in July last is still unfit for burning.

A great deal was also lost through the floods in August. It was feared a late start would have to be made this year owing to the rains in the latter part of the winter, but thanks to the high and drying winds, the work was proceeded with and will be continued throughout the summer