

Newsletters 26-30

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Family History Research Group

Newsletter Twenty-Six



TIP OF THE WEEK

Janice Parr

In a novel by Peter James, the detective Roy Grace told a junior colleague that he always applied a rule of A.B.C. to all his cases –

- **A**ssume nothing
- **B**elieve nothing you are told
- **C**heck and cross reference everything

How true this is of family history research; it is so easy to be led down the wrong track or end up barking up the wrong tree. Once a mistake has been made it is so difficult to unpick hours of research and put records straight. It is always best to start with what you know is correct and then work back in time from there. Everything you see entered on someone else's tree should be treated with great caution, so often mistakes have been made and it is much safer to do your own research.

Our Virtual Museum of Curiosities



When Anne sent the photograph of the black box she told us about in last week's Newsletter, I remembered that I might still have a black papier-mâché box somewhere in the house. I found it at the bottom of a sewing box I now use for keeping all sorts of interesting but fairly useless items. My mum always claimed that it was bought for her when she was born and never doubted or questioned this. Information fed to me by her has nearly always been accurate so I wasn't at all

surprised to find several similar boxes for sale on the internet most of them claiming to be powder boxes.

After seeing the picture of my box, Christine sent me this photo and this message, "I have something similar. It belonged to Grandma and held a couple of brooches and pins. I never knew its origin but it has an oriental look about it."



Jet Mourning Jewellery

Anne Sheppard



This necklace and brooch belonged to my great, great, great grandmother (there was a pair of earrings but my sister in law having pierced ears has them). Her name was Ann Watkins (I think) and she was born around 1796-1798 in Torrington Devon. Sometime around 1830 I think (no record of marriage found) she married Peter Ayres who in the 1851 census is described as a thatcher and was living in Bere in Devon. Her husband appears to have been born around 1791 in Bere Ferris Devon and he died in 1865. As often happens the dates are pretty fluid. In the 1861 census he is down as aged 72 and his wife 63 which doesn't match at all with the birth dates! He died in 1865 and she went to live with her married daughter Emma Trevena in Bere Ferris. Emma by that year already had two children and as her husband worked away as a miner, she would have been a help to Emma. She is also described in the census of 1871 as an annuitant which seems to have indicated that she had a regular and worth recording annual income. As Queen Victoria had

popularised jet mourning jewellery after the death of Prince Albert in 1861 I suspect Ann could afford to buy some for herself.

I wear the necklace quite regularly. It isn't very long so I think Ann must have had a slender neck. It's a nice way to remember my relative from so long ago.

Great Aunt Evaline's Sewing Box

Janice Parr

The sewing box I found Mum's baby powder box in was given to me by my great aunt Evaline during a visit to the dairy farm she owned at Carnforth, it was called Carnforth House. Her sister Annie lived with her in later life until she passed away 5/10/1956 at the farm. I can remember visiting several times while Annie was still alive so the box must have been given to me when I was six or younger. In the box I now keep old jewellery and some of my smaller curiosities.



On the same day of the visit I was also given this little painted wooden box and my little brother John was given what I now realise was a Steiff cat (it had a little button in its ear) and a box of lead soldiers. The visits were always an experience, the yard was full of free-range chickens but I don't think she still had cows. The two ladies seemed to me to be extremely old and the house was certainly full of curiosities.

This photograph of Evaline was taken 24/11/1905 and I think she is probably wearing mourning clothes, her mother died 10/8/1905. When did the tradition of going into mourning stop? Could it possibly be WW1 related?



A photo of Carnforth House taken in 1903



A photo of Mum on a visit to the farm in the early 1920s

Cows looked rather different then!



A more recent photo of Carnforth House

The following year Evaline was brought down to Leyland when she became unwell and spent the last few weeks of her life in a bed which had been placed in Auntie Annie's dining room. After her funeral all the family gathered in the same room so

that the terms of the will could be discussed, Uncle Bill was the executor. Carnforth House and the farmland had been left to Mum and her sisters. It was decided that the females should take turns to choose pieces of jewellery starting with the oldest working down to me the youngest. My choice was a gold locket which sadly I no longer have; I think the clasp must have failed while I was wearing it.

Inside her locket was a copy of this photo of Bennett Douglas Brearey my mum's oldest sibling. He was born on Walney Island in 1903 and sadly died from injuries received in a motor accident as the car he was in was coming down Fishergate Hill Preston in 1927. This is all I was told but curiosity got the better of me so went to the Harris library where the local newspaper archive was kept so that I could look through the micro film records. I ended up weeping as more of the story was revealed. What I discovered was a story of stupidity leading to the death of a young man and the horror of the next few days my grandparents, my mum, her two sisters and the extended family lived through.



I suspect this photograph was distributed through the family soon after his death

Mystery Objects of the Week



So what could these be and what were they used for?



Where can this building be found and what was it used for?

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Twenty-Seven



Our Virtual Museum of Curiosities

Janice



Yes, this building does look rather like an electricity substation as some people thought, but it was built for quite a different purpose. I took the photo last Thursday after being told about it by a neighbour. It has been refurbished and is now used as a small commercial store. What is not obvious is that it was originally built as a mortuary and is on Marsh Lane Hesketh Bank opposite the clematis nursery. It was built by West Lancashire Rural District Council on land owned by Lord Hesketh for which they took out a 99 year lease in 1910 at an annual cost of 10 shillings (50p). It ceased to be used when improved transport and communication allowed for the more timely transport of bodies to the mortuary at Ormskirk Hospital.

The mortuary was often used to place bodies following drownings which were washed up on the banks of the River Douglas. This often happened at Wratch Corner where the river makes a sharp turn west towards the Boatyard.



Yes, these do look a bit like a pair of feet but I can still only guess what they may have been used for.

In the following article Christine explains that it is too complicated to put an explanation into words but will attempt to do a demonstration at one of our meetings. Perhaps we could also persuade Joy to play a tune on her whistling mug, a meeting not to be missed!

Village Life

Christine Garrity

Throughout my childhood there were three annual highlights on the village calendar - the Sale of Work, the Sermons and the Social. All were centred around the Methodist Chapel and School.

The first big event of the year was the Sale of Work, held in the school hall each spring. Throughout the winter months, the ladies of the village would have either knitting or

crochet work on the go, producing intricate mats, dressing table sets, and various hats, scarves and gloves. Others would be sewing tea cosies, bags or perhaps something referred to as an antimacassar, which consisted of an embroidered linen cloth used to protect the back of a chair or sofa. Then there were the jars of marmalade, jam or chutney produced from the fruit picked during the previous autumn. Plants were potted up for sale, often in pots which had been hand decorated and cakes, scones or biscuits were baked.

It would be all hands on deck on the Friday evening before the big day. Husbands and fathers would be called upon to set out the trestle tables and we children were allowed to help by putting out the folding chairs, all under the watchful eye of Miss S and Mrs R (our version of Ena Sharples and Margaret Rutherford, with a bit of



Joyce Grenfell thrown in for good measure). Preparations would go on well into the evening as ladies would set out their stalls and display their wares ready for the big event which would take place on the Saturday morning.

If truth be told, much of the produce was probably bought by the people running the stalls, but there would be an influx of customers during the course of the day and the event was generally considered to have been a tremendous success.

The next big day on the calendar, the Sermons, was always on a Sunday in early June and was to commemorate the anniversary of the Sunday School. Every girl taking part would have a new dress for the occasion and the boys would wear smart shorts. In the morning, mums, aunties and children would meet in front of the Methodist Chapel, where several men erected a banner and we would sing a hymn. We would then walk behind the banner down to the Royal Hotel where we sang another hymn and finally up to the Hare and Hounds for the last rendition of the morning. It was only later in life that I began to wonder what the people drinking in the pubs thought when we burst into song outside.

The photo from around 1912 shows that little had changed in 50 years, apart from the hats!



We would go home for lunch before heading back to the Chapel for an afternoon service. The highlight of the day was a family tea at Grandma's, where we were joined by my uncle, another auntie and cousins, all 10 of us squeezed round an extended table in her tiny kitchen. Tea usually consisted of salmon, ham and salad, followed by trifle, made using tinned fruit cocktail and of course home baked cakes.

The third event in the calendar was 'the Social' which was again held in the school hall, where there was a stage with velour curtains and a grand piano. Chairs and tables were set out around the room, leaving space in the middle for games (such as musical chairs) and dancing, with a long table at the end of the room for the buffet supper. (There was no bar of course as this was a Methodist Do!).

It was usually the ladies and children who danced and I remember my auntie and I doing the Barn Dance, the Gay Gordons and the Dashing White Sergeant to music played on the piano.

At some point in the evening there was a 'Turn' with the objects in the photo playing a key role. I won't even try to explain how they were used but I will attempt to give a demonstration when we are next able to meet together.



These village events were community affairs with children, parents and grandparents coming together to enjoy themselves along with neighbours and friends. Sadly, such traditions seem to have almost disappeared over the years, but perhaps one positive outcome of the current pandemic is that we are starting to rediscover the value of community.

Mystery Object



This building can be found within a 35 mile radius of Mawdesley, where is it, why was it built and what is it used for now?

Family History Research Group
Newsletter Twenty-Eight



Our Virtual Museum of Curiosities

Clues to both the past and present use of last week's mystery item were cunningly masked!

Singleton Old Fire Station

Joan Quinlan (My Mum's family were from Singleton.)

My photograph is of the 'Fire Station' in the pretty village of Singleton on the Fylde. The second photograph gives the game away.



It was built by the Miller family in 1882 to house a horse drawn fire engine. It was manned by local volunteers. In the event of a fire the first job was to catch the horse that was grazing in a nearby field! Now a Grade II listed building, the Fire Engine House became redundant in 1946.

Watch the video you will find on the link below for more information about the building.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6CUVSR_eGc

For more information about Singleton follow this link [https://www.visitpoulton-le-](https://www.visitpoulton-le-fylde.co.uk/recreation-entertainment/explore/singleton/)

[fylde.co.uk/recreation-entertainment/explore/singleton/](https://www.visitpoulton-le-fylde.co.uk/recreation-entertainment/explore/singleton/)



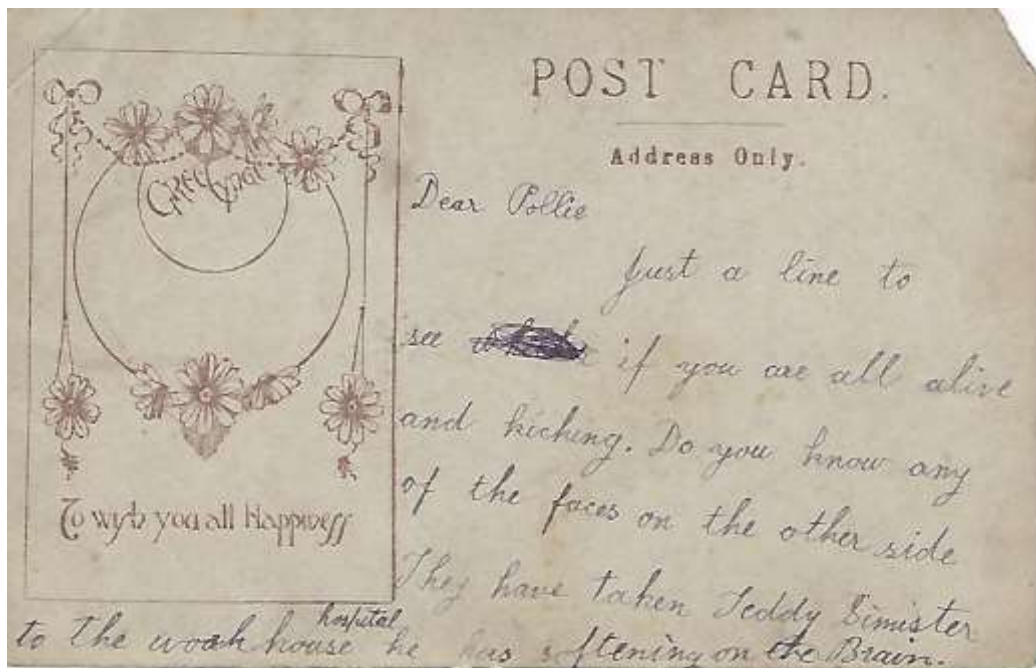
Singleton Fire Brigade 1906

(This photo appears in an article in the Blackpool Gazette about the brave Fylde Coast fire-fighters)

A Collection of Curiosities

Janice





Why do you think I have grouped these items together? I will leave you to ponder over this until after Christmas. Let me know if you have any thoughts.

Mystery Object



Dianne Rawcliffe passed on this photo for our Museum, what do you think it was used for?

Dianne recognised the Singleton Fire Station and informed me that Thomas Horrocks Miller had it built.

Anne also recognised the fire station and can remember being told about it when taken to buy her first second hand bike. She was only about nine or ten at the time and more interested in her bike!

I have since found out that Thomas Horrocks Miller's father was Thomas Miller. He was the partner of John Horrocks who established the Horrocks Textile Company in Preston. He purchased the Singleton estate for £70,000 in 1853.

Henrietta the wife of Thomas Horrocks Miller was the niece of John Horrocks.

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Twenty-Nine



Christmas Greetings

A Seasonal Mystery Solved!

(Something that would have been useful at this time of year)

Dianne Rawcliffe

It is an original hot water bottle. We inherited this when we moved into our present house. It sat on a shelf in the garage until an elderly lady told me what it was.



A Disaster at Christmas!

Janice Parr

One of many stories told by my mum is of a Christmas in the 1930's which was spent in Bolton with Dad's sister Jenny and the rest of the Snaylam family. They would

have driven through Brindle, Abbey Village and Belmont to get there. Jenny's husband Fred and my cousins Joan, Dorothy and young Fred took part of the celebrations. I don't know if Adeline (Granny Parr) was with them, perhaps she stayed in Leyland with her many spinster sisters. The table was full of wonderful festive food and the adults were all ready to eat but the children insisted on using what was promised to be a great entertainment. The thing was some sort of Christmas indoor firework; the instructions promised that all sorts of festive items would be revealed. The touch paper was lit, everyone waited with great expectation but then disaster! There was a bang; novelties flew high in all directions accompanied by great clouds of sawdust and wood shavings. All sat in stunned silence as the mess settled over the feast!

A modern version was available online from a company called Brand Alley but at the moment is out of stock even if you felt inclined to spend £17 on one.



Product Description

The perfect addition to any big Birthday, Wedding, Anniversary or New Year's Eve party. Our show stopping Christmas Entertainment red glitter table bomb will make your party go off with a bang! Simply light the fuse, sit back and enjoy a sparkly shower of flutter foil confetti and amusing party pieces like paper ball blowouts. Other party essentials like paper masks and rocket balloons are also included to complete the explosion...

How the Victorians Reinvented and Commercialised Christmas

The link below will take you to part of an online presentation given by the National Archive; it lasts about 8 minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl6un7k2CFI>

A Seasonal Family Tradition

My Douglas and Lowden ancestors came from Cumberland and I suspect traditions from there continued in my family.

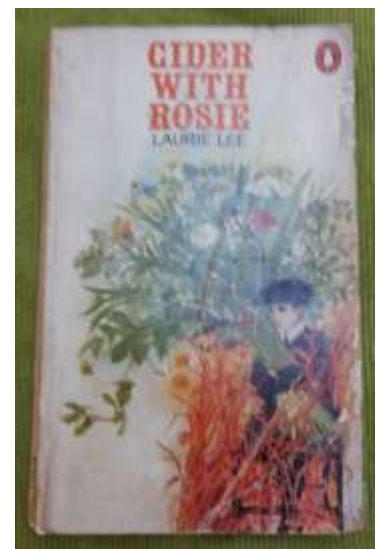
Something Auntie Annie did as Christmas approached was make a huge bowl of rum butter just as she remembered her dad doing. This was then put into smaller dishes (these had to be given back to her for the following year) and distributed through the family. Our favourite use of it was to lift the lid of warm mince pies, put a dollop inside and then replace the lid. Rum was added to white sauce to go with the Christmas pudding and was added to the Christmas cake.

In previous centuries rum, spices and sugar were imported from the Caribbean into Whitehaven and then the goods were transported to Papcastle where my great-great-grandparents lived.

Perhaps this year, I will revive the tradition of making rum butter and mince pies for when I am allowed to have family round again. My plan is to have a garden party in the summer but it might be fun to do a belated Christmas experience. I will have to find the rules for the Victorian parlour games we used to play in the 1950s; they involved a lot of silliness and laughter.

A Christmas Present

I gave this book to my dad one Christmas in the early 1970s it cost 30p; full price for a new copy is now £8.99. Many parts of the book reminded him of his childhood.



There is a wonderful seasonal piece in it; I have copied the extract below from the Penguin website, I hope you enjoy it.

Cider with Rosie 'Carol-barking' by Laurie Lee

A blizzard was blowing, but we were well wrapped up, with Army puttees on our legs, woollen hats on our heads

One by one they came stumbling over the snow, swinging their lanterns around their heads, shouting and coughing horribly. 'Coming carol-barking then?'

We were the Church Choir, so no answer was necessary. For a year we had praised the Lord out of key, and as a reward for this service – on top of the Outing – we now had the right to visit all the big houses, to sing our carols and collect our tribute.

To work them all in meant a five-mile foot journey over wild and generally snowed-up country. So the first thing we did was to plan our route; a formality, as the route never changed. All the same, we blew on our fingers and argued; and then we chose our Leader.

This was not binding, for we all fancied ourselves as Leaders, and he who started the night in that position usually trailed home with a bloody nose.

Eight of us set out that night. There was Sixpence the Tanner, who had never sung in his life (he just worked his mouth in church); the brothers Horace and Boney, who were always fighting everybody and always getting the worst of it; Clergy Green, the preaching maniac; Walt the bully, and my two brothers. As we went down the lane other boys, from other villages, were already about the hills, bawling 'Kingwenslush', and shouting through keyholes 'Knock on the knocker! Ring at the Bell! Give us a penny for singing so well!' They weren't an approved charity as we were, the Choir; but competition was in the air.

Our first call as usual was the house of the Squire, and we tramped nervously down his drive. For light we had candles in marmalade-jars suspended on loops of string, and they threw pale gleams on the towering snowdrifts that stood on each side of the drive. A blizzard was blowing, but we were well wrapped up, with Army puttees on our legs, woollen hats on our heads, and several scarves around our ears.

As we approached the Big House across its white silent lawns, we too grew respectfully silent. The lake nearby was stiff and black, the waterfall frozen and still. We arranged ourselves shuffling around the big front door, then knocked and announced the Choir.

A maid bore the tidings of our arrival away into the echoing distances of the house, and while we waited we cleared our throats noisily. Then she came back, and the door was left ajar for us, and we were bidden to begin. We brought no music, the carols were in our heads. 'Let's give 'em "Wild Shepherds",' said Jack. We began in confusion, plunging into a wreckage of keys, of different words and tempo; but we

gathered our strength; he who sang loudest took the rest of us with him, and the carol took shape if not sweetness.

This huge stone house, with its ivied walls, was always a mystery to us. What were those gables, those rooms and attics, those narrow windows veiled by the cedar trees. As we sang 'Wild Shepherds' we craned our necks, gaping into that lamplit hall which we had never entered; staring at the muskets and untenanted chairs, the great tapestries furred by dust – until suddenly, on the stairs, we saw the old Squire himself standing and listening with his head on one side.

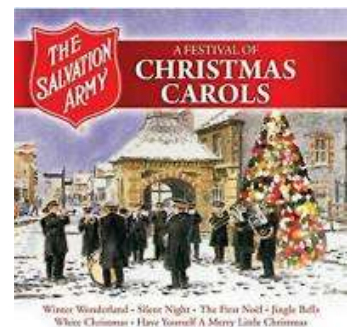
He didn't move until we'd finished; then slowly he tottered towards us, dropped two coins in our box with a trembling hand, scratched his name in the book we carried, gave us each a long look with his moist blind eyes, then turned away in silence. *The link below will take you to a reading of the first paragraph from Cider with Rosie and a virtual visit to Laurie Lee's childhood home, it last about 3 minutes.*

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0370nk0>

It is worth looking at the other clips which appear on the same website.

Knowing that Linda's dad was keen on the Salvation Army, I have included the link below; it lasts just over two minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwbwsy5vNZk>



**Wishing you a very happy Christmas and a safe, healthy
and sociable 2021**



Family History Research Group

Newsletter Thirty



Our Virtual Museum of Curiosities

A Mystery Solved!

Linda Mogg

The figure of the footman is 21cm in height, he is made of felt and fabric, part machined and hand stitched. My great aunt gave him to me in the early 1960s. I still have no idea of his origin as Google has not revealed anything similar.



Linda brought her little man to our meeting last January; it has been very neatly put together and made to lie quite flat. We were all very puzzled by the item and nobody had a clue what use it could be put to.

Janice

When Linda emailed the photo, it brought back a memory from the 1950's of Auntie Annie showing me some of the things she kept in a little dressing table drawer. One of the objects was a small figure dressed in a fancy red beaded bonnet and cape. The long skirt was made of layers of black material and the body out of a chicken's

wishbone; it had a hand written label attached to it revealing what it was. Auntie Annie explained that it was made to be a pen wiper (the underskirt was certainly very inky) by one of our ancestors. I simply can't remember who she said it was; if only I had the item now as I have samples of the writing of many of these people so could possibly work out who was responsible. I found the thing rather spooky and couldn't understand why anybody would go to all that trouble to make it when a piece of rag would have been just as effective.

I wondered if Linda's little man was also a pen wiper (she informed me that under the jacket there were layers of dark fabric) and this set me off on a hunt using Google.



I found many pictures of Victorian wishbone pen wipers on the internet. This is the one that most resembled the one I saw and was told about. It hasn't been so carefully put together, some of the colours are different and it isn't intricately beaded.

I found these examples on American antiques auction sites. They are both claimed to be Colonial Gentleman pen wipers.



Linda's comment on what I had discovered was, "What a brilliant piece of detective work! I have never heard of them before. My Great Aunt Margaret also gave me a needle case in the shape of a hat with a thimble in the crown."

Further research found that in the first half of the 20th century, replicas of pen wipers were made and used as novelty pin cushions and needle cases.

Linda found a great article by Geri Walton on the history of pen wipers

<https://www.geriwalt.com/pen-wipers/>

After reading it she commented “I feel in excellent company if Jane Austen is likely to have used one.”

The rest of the objects I included in newsletter 29 are things I gathered from round my house. In the photo below I have added two more items and along with Linda’s man are all reading and writing related. Who wouldn’t enjoy a cup of tea while sorting out correspondence?



The hand is a Victorian letter clip. I remember it always being in my dad’s bureau, I don’t know where it came from or who the original owner was probably Granny Parr. I still use it to clip receipts together.

I will tell you the story of the other items in future newsletters.

Tip of the Week

I intend making a record of things inherited and adding notes on what I know about each item. I will add photographs to the notes and then combine these with my research. There will then be something to pass on to future generations even if objects themselves are lost or thrown away.

To my list I will be adding things that I can remember seeing. Items that immediately spring to mind are a fine lacquered inlaid oriental modesty screen and two grandfather clocks - one had blue birds flying round the dial and the other showed the moon and stars at night and the sun during the day. They all fascinated me as a child and were in the house of Aunt Florrie (where my great-grandparents had lived and next door to where we lived). I had assumed that the modesty screen was for getting dressed behind but I rather think it was also to hide a commode, I am pretty sure there was no bathroom in the house. The outside toilet was an experience; when the chain was pulled water splashed out of the overhead cistern, it smelled of damp lime wash and there was always a spider infestation. Auntie Florrie cut newspaper into squares and threaded them onto string.

How many of you remember Izal toilet paper? Auntie Annie's 1930's house had a special holder for putting boxes of it in.

Mystery of the Week



This item is still extremely sharp and was used in a local industry. What do you think it is?