

F&SH group meeting Friday 10th December 2021

British Newspaper Archives provided many column inches on the activities in 1880 of the Electoral Commission investigating 'alleged corrupt practices' – according to a number of respectable newspapers, or the Bribery Commissioners, according to others – in Knaresborough. My attention was on this town because that is where my great grandfather was treasurer of the local Conservative Club, and he was embroiled in the scandal. He was 'treating voters' with beer to win them over. The losing candidate was the Liberal, the Hon. Sir Henry Meysey-Thompson, Baronet, and he was a sore loser! My ancestor was eventually found guilty, along with a handful of colleagues. His punishment was the withdrawal of his eligibility to vote in the following general election of 1886. Apart from that, he appears to have been a pillar of local society! Knaresborough Licensed Victuallers' Association, of which he had been treasurer since its inauguration, marked his death in 1893 with 'a vote of sympathy to Sarah his wife, and family', adding that 'they had sustained a great loss at his untimely death'. Knaresborough Local Health Board did something similar, recording that 'for 22 years he was a most active and useful member of the Board'. He was also on the board of the Knaresborough Coal Gas Company as well as his day job, a Grocer and Licensed Victualler.

In 1880, there were several examples of dodgy dealings which the Electoral Commission looked into: Boston, Sandwich, Gloucester, Canterbury, Oxford. The geographical range of newspapers covering the story was extraordinary. From Cornwall to Aberdeen, Isaac Francis Brown's name and those of his fellows was featured frequently as the commission sat for over two weeks, sifting the evidence and recording the laughter from the public gallery at some of it. There were a number of other events where IFB's name cropped up; a George McDonald, who got five months for stealing money from Mr Brown's shop in 1863; the transfer of licence from the deceased to his widow in 1893; his role as executor to two separate wills in 1872 and 1881; the local Floral & Horticultural Society saw IFB carry off 2nd prize at their fifth annual gathering in 1862, in the Poultry category for pigeons (tumblers). Needless to say, I never knew about the Bribery Commissioners (imagine the stigma of such a thing!) until I read the papers. My father did tell me about the pigeons, though.

The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle and the **Hampshire Advertiser** provided Margaret Gott with details of the demise of her great great grandfather Edward Marsh. He died in 1847, aged 65, very suddenly, on the landing dock known as the Common Hard, Portsea. He had been a rigger working in the Portsmouth R.N. dockyards. An attempt was made to find a policeman, without success, so his body was taken 'by shell' (a sort of coracle) to the Station House – presumably a police station – and thence to a tavern, The Rainbow on St. George's Square, where the Coroner convened a court and appointed jurors – presumably some local lads who had been enjoying a pint – to investigate Edward Marsh's sudden death. His death certificate records the cause as 'disease of the heart'. The jury returned the verdict 'Died by the Visitation of God'. What a splendid phrase.

Ancestry revealed a puzzle that was unravelled by Terry Griffiths, researching the history of a friend of hers. His father was Polish, serving in one of the Polish squadrons of the RAF in WW2. His father had told the story of his adventures at that time and part of that story was that he was shot down over France. Terry found the German record of that incident on the Ancestry website. On 11th November 1941, the head of the Wehrmacht Information Centre in Berlin sent his regular report to the Reich Minister of Aviation and Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe. The report is entitled "Advanced Notifications from English pilots" (in German of course). It accounts for 13 aircraft shot down between 7th and 8th November 1941, detailing aircraft type and, where the crew survived, their names and service numbers. In some cases, brief details of the actual crash are recorded.

Our thanks to Margaret Gott and Terry Griffiths for their excellent contributions. Who's next?

Our monthly programme continues in 2022 but with the exception of January. I regret there will not be a January meeting, because of covid caution. All being well, we will resume, as follows:

Friday 11th February 2022

The Three Brown Brothers – Allan Jones will have the chance to deliver this talk, deferred from March 2020 for obvious reasons. Allan writes “Three Victorian entrepreneurs, to whom I am distantly related through marriage to George Edward Brown. He and two of his brothers became very wealthy through running three completely different businesses. Look out for the dancing bear, and the hydroelectric plant!”

Friday 11th March 2022

The 1939 Register and Evacuation – a presentation by **Tricia Pepper**. Tricia has found this register to be useful in her research and will provide us with a brief guide. Also, in 1939 many young children were evacuated from large cities. **Margaret Gott** was one of them. She will share with us her memories of this extraordinary time.

Friday 8th April

We intend to develop themes covering wider social history topics, the first of which *may* be about the **Knutsford Workhouse**. It is a suggestion.

Members, please put forward future subject matter, it doesn't have to be local, we have very diverse backgrounds. Better still, as we are a self-help organisation, prepare a presentation, a ten to fifteen minute talk will be sufficient, unless you have more to offer. Contact details on the group's webpage.

Roger Brown
Group Coordinator