

WITHERIDGE TIMES

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Contents

Letter from the Editor	2
Family News	4
Congratulations	4
Pictures from the Past	4
A Good Recovery	5
Going Strong and Flying High	5
Condolences	5
Reunion 2012 – Our 25th Anniversary	6
2011 Reunion & AGM	8
Timetable	8
Reunion Competitions	9
Officers' Reports	10
AGM Agenda	16
Accommodation in Somerton	19
Reunion Booking Form	19
Reunion Outing Options	20
AGM Voting and Absentee Voting	23
The Bradworthy Bunch	24
Keeping Life Sweet	28
News for Researchers	29
A Traditional English Wedding – Part 1	30
Pictures from the Past	39

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Letter from the

Editor



Dear Friends

As I write this, the sun is shining in a clear blue sky, and spring, the season of hope, is really in the air at last! Looking out on to our garden, I can see the last of the daffodils, tulips and primroses, as well as choisya, lilac, and an array of stunning azaleas.

In the little orchard at the back, the apple and pear trees are hung with delicate blossom, with the promise of fruit to come, and the seeds Roy's planted in the vegetable beds are now pushing through the tilled earth. The peasant ancestry so many of us share lingers on in our delight in gardens and gardening, and particularly in producing at least some of our own food.

Yesterday was Easter Day, the ultimate day of hope. Our parish church was packed with over 300 people, including two linked families bringing children to be baptised. The singing of the congregation echoed through our church's 14th-century chancel roof, resounding round the later barrel roof of the nave, and must have been heard at both ends of our long High Street! It was a truly joyful sound!

In a couple of days' time we have another day of hope, when Prince William and Catherine Middleton marry in Westminster Abbey. The singing there should be very special. It's bound to be a sumptuous occasion, but I feel sure that Catherine will bring to the day her own simple elegance. And with street parties and village celebrations, it promises to be a good day for bringing communities together again.

These occasions tend to bring to mind weddings of the past, and it is tempting to think that the traditional English wedding – on a Saturday, with the bride in a long white dress, with tiara and veil, a beautiful bouquet, one or more bridesmaids, and a meal with many guests afterwards – has



Left: The interior of St Mildred's Church, Tenterden, in 1867, showing the barrel roof of the nave. However good the singing might have been in those days, I doubt they ever had a wedding with almost 50 children attending the bride!

always been like this. Recently our church enjoyed the sight of such a wedding, with no less than 27 bridesmaids and 22 page boys! I can't imagine that any of our ancestors had such a retinue of attendants, but we'd love to hear your family wedding stories and see some of the pictures.

Certainly, the weddings of our grandparents, great-grandparents and other ancestors, are likely to have been very different from today's weddings, in just about every aspect, as you will see from the article on pages 30-38.

This issue also has more family news, as well as fascinating articles about the Bradworthy and Ermington branches of the Witheridge family, and news of interest to the researchers among our members.

Inevitably, there is plenty of material relating to the AGM and Reunion, and everyone on the Committee is looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Somerton on 12 and 13 June.

For those who can't make it, please remember that you can participate through your absentee votes (see page 23), and by taking part in two of the competitions (see page 9 for full details and rules).

Thinking ahead to our 25th Anniversary Reunion in 2012, we've still not received any comments from overseas members concerning preferred dates. AGMs have to be held once a year, and within 14 months of the previous one. So we could have our AGM and Reunion at any time between April and August next year, although the earlier months are easier for financial and administrative reasons. Are there times when travel from overseas is cheaper or less crowded?

And from all our members, whether in the UK or overseas, we need some thoughts about where you would like the 2012 Reunion to be held. Do you want to go back to Devon, where most Witheridge families have their roots? Or would you like to try another place with Witheridge connections, or just somewhere completely different? See pages 6 and 7, and be sure to let Richard, Jason or me know your preferred dates and venues by Monday 6 June, so that members have some guidance when making decisions at this year's AGM.

We look forward to seeing many of you in June, and even more in 2012!

With love to you all,

Kim

Tenterden, 25 April 2011

Family News



Congratulations! (1)

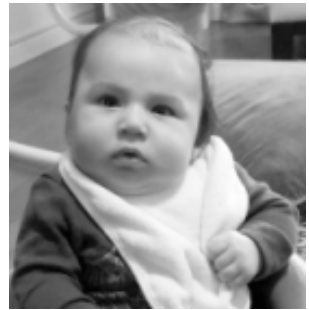
Joyce Stephens writes from Dorset of the arrival of her ninth grandchild! **Thomas Daniel Stephens** (pictured left), the first child for Joyce's youngest son **Glen** and his wife **Joanna**, was born on 27 February 2011, weighing 9 lb 1 oz – that's almost 4.2 kg to our younger members! All are doing well. Congratulations to all the family.

Joyce is descended from the Ermington Witheridges, and is a second cousin of **Joyce Browne**.

Congratulations (2)

Double congratulations to **Brenda** and **Bill Dwyne**, who have become grandparents twice over in recent months. On 1 December 2010, baby **Nicholas** (pictured right) was born to daughter **Erin** and her husband **Alper**.

On 19 February 2011, son **John** and his wife **Jennifer** had a daughter, **Charlotte** (pictured below). Brenda writes that 'both babies are both doing very well, gaining



weight and we see huge changes in each of them with each month that passes. They are a joy to their parents and keep them very busy. We think they are both adorable of course – what else would grandparents think!'

Pictures from the Past

Val Wells writes from Plymouth that she has found a number of photos of her grandmother, **Emily Ellen White** (née Witheridge), of the Ermington branch. These pictures from the past feature in her article on page 39.

Val regrets that she won't be able to join us in Somerton in June, but hopes to be able to get to the next reunion that's closer to her home in Plymouth.

A Good Recovery

We are delighted to learn from **Brenda Dixon** that husband **Ron** is making a good recovery following heart bypass surgery in February.

The operation was complicated by the need to deal with the surgical repairs which followed Ron's horrendous fall from their garage roof in 2009. As a result, Ron's heart surgery lasted more than 7 hours.

Thanks to excellent surgical skills, everything went as well as it possibly could and, although still frail, Ron was home within a week. He is now able to drive again, and getting out and about more. However, Ron does still have health problems and, sadly, he feels he can no longer continue to act as the Society's Auditor.



Above: Ron in hospital after his fall in 2009.

Going Strong and Flying High!



Above: Eve relaxes at the Oaks

What's the best way to celebrate being 89? Well, for intrepid **Eve Witheridge**, of Christchurch, NZ, (mother of **Sue**), it's to go paragliding! Her 30-minute tandem ride took off from the top of a local hill, into a clear blue sky, flying around the hill for a while, and then heading out to sea and returning to land at a bay below the take-off point. A van-load of supporters from the Oaks turned out to watch, and when Eve got back at dinner time, there was applause all round. However, Eve was too tired to eat, so headed off to her flat for a relaxing cup of tea!

Sue has now returned to the UK after her annual visit to Christchurch, just missing the second earthquake! It was a relief to learn that all the family there escaped injury and serious damage.

Condolences

We are very sorry to learn of the death, on 6 October 2010, of **Nellie Howarth** (née Witheridge), mother of **Gwenda Mason**. Nellie, who was born on 11 July 1921, was the last surviving daughter of **Beauchamp Henry Witheridge** (1884-1951) and his wife **Elizabeth** (née **Munro**). Gwenda says her mother is sorely missed by all her family and friends. Our condolences go to Gwenda and all the family.

Reunion 2012 — Our 25th Anniversary!

On 1 May 2012, the Witheridge Family History Society will be 25 years old! We think this deserves a very special Celebration Reunion, and would like to hear the views of members as to when, where and how we celebrate. Are there dates when overseas travel is more economical? Is there a particular place you'd like to visit?

Over the years we've been to many places, and done a variety of things, as our photos show. I couldn't find one of our first meeting in 1987 (although I know I have some pictures somewhere), but I did find one from 1988 in West Wickham (below). As it was taken in colour with a small, low-tech camera, it hasn't scanned and converted to greyscale very well, but it is very evocative of the era!

Some think that in 2012 we should choose a venue with strong Witheridge connections. The strongest links are in various Devon towns, in Cornwall and Somerset, and in the area around Birmingham. However, it might be better to avoid tourist hot-spots, and places where accommodation is in high demand for business conferences, as these tend to be more expensive and difficult to book at short notice.

A decision on date and venue will have to be made at this year's AGM on Saturday 11 June. As no specific nominations have been received as yet, we have no firm proposals to put to the AGM. However, any views you have will be taken into consideration in our discussions on 11 June, as long as you can email your ideas to Jason, Richard or Kim by Monday 6 June.

Below: Our first birthday in 1988, in West Wickham, Kent, with one candle on the cake. Who can you recognise under those 1980s hair styles?





Over the years we've been to many places and done many things (clockwise from top left): told tall tales about hats (Alderton 1992), taken a train into a copper mine (Morwellham 2000), visited a rural museum (Tenterden 2002), discovered a saint (Chichester 2001), visited ancestral homes (Bradworthy 2007), found a very early loo or wardrobe (Singleton 2001) and (centre) enjoyed many birthday cakes! What next?

Witheridge Family History Society

Reunion & AGM 2011

Date: Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 June 2011

Venue: The Methodist Hall¹, West Street, Somerton, Somerset

Timetable

Saturday 11 June

10.00 am–11.00 am	Welcome, registration, and coffee. Please hand in any competition entries (see page 9) as soon as you arrive.
11.00 am–12.00 noon	AGM (Full agenda on pages 16-19) ²
12.00 noon–1.00 pm	Competition judging by all present.
1.00 pm–2.00 pm	Lunch (local pub lunch).
2.00 pm–2.45 pm	Short Talk/Brains Trust Question Time – learn more about your own family, and family history in general.
2.45 pm–3.15 pm	Competition Results and Prizegiving
3.15 pm–4.45 pm	Social time , with refreshments
5.54 pm	President's closing address
5.00 pm	Leave hall
7.00 pm	Evening meal together in local pub/restaurant

Sunday 12 June

9.300 am	Meet for outing (car sharing) to one of the places listed on pages 20–23, and chosen in advance by those attending.
10.00 am	Meet at outing venue
1.00 pm	Meet for lunch at outing venue.

¹ *Throughout the time in the Methodist Hall, there will be a creche for children, run by a registered child-minder and qualified first-aider. However, depending on the number of children present, it may be necessary for a parent to help, in order to maintain the correct adult:child ratios.*

² *All paid-up members of the Witheridge FHS who are 16 or over will be entitled to vote at the AGM. Non-members and under-16s are welcome to attend the AGM, but may not vote.*

Reunion Competitions

This year we're re-introducing the competitions that were so popular at WHFH Reunions in earlier years. There will be three competitions.

- 1 **Most interesting item(s) of family memorabilia.** Each item must be clearly labelled, with some indication of age and purpose and, if possible, information about the original owner. Items may include photos, documents, tools, articles of clothing or accessories, small household items, toys, motoring accessories, or anything portable relevant to the owner's family history.
- 2 **Poetry competition, any subject, maximum 64 lines.** Entries should be typed, not handwritten, with a title, and a label with the author's name on the back of the entry. The author's name should not appear on the front of the page, and the poem should not previously have been entered into any competition.
- 3 **Photo competition, landscape or place of historic interest.** Photos may be colour or black and white, maximum size A5, and should have a label on the back stating the entrant's name, and the title of the photo, with an indication of location. We will do our best to print emailed entries as truly as possible to the original, but cannot guarantee an exact match. Entries should not have been previously entered into any competition.

In categories 2 and 3 there will be **separate sections for children aged 15 or under**. Children's entries should include the age of the entrant on the relevant label(s). Entrants may submit up to six entries in each category.

Those attending the Reunion should hand their entries in on arrival. Those not able to attend the Reunion may enter Competitions 2 and 3, sending their entries by email to witheridge1987@aol.com to arrive on or before Tuesday 31 May (UK time).

Entries will be displayed anonymously and numbered, and those attending (even children) may all vote for entries in each category. When votes have been counted and checked, the winners will be announced and prizes given.

Poems and photos entered into the competition may be published in future issues of *Witheridge Times*. However, photos will have to be reproduced in black and white, but may, at a later date, be included in colour in the Members' Only section of the Witheridge FHS web-site, once this is available.

AGM 2011 – Reports and Agenda

Officers' Reports, 2010-2011

Chairman's Report

by Jason Cook

Following the difficulties in the period leading up to the 2010 AGM, I'm pleased to report that the Society's situation is once again stable.

As the former Treasurer insisted that all financial and membership documents be retained by him until after the 2010 AGM and the appointment of a new Treasurer, and then be forwarded by courier (at the Society's expense), we were in a Catch 22 situation. Without access to our funds, we were unable to meet the up-front expenses of running the AGM and Reunion, or pay for the courier. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to one member who, generously and anonymously, made a gift to cover all these expenses. As you will see from the present Treasurer's report, expenditure set against this generous donation has been accounted for separately.

These problems also affected the production and distribution of *Witheridge Times*. Initially, we overcame these by producing two issues (Winter 2009 and Spring 2010) and distributing them via the Internet. We are now back on track to produce three issues a year in the printed format that our members prefer, and are grateful to you all for your patience during the difficult times.

Richard Witheridge, who now combines the roles of Membership Secretary and Treasurer, admirably supported by his wife Maureen, has worked hard to resolve issues relating to subscriptions and finances, as his report shows. As a result, our finances are in good shape.

We are grateful to Paul Witheridge (Canada) who, having resigned his position as Webmaster, so kindly kept the web-site running until we could find a new Webmaster. All your Committee members have pulled together to ensure that the Society has retained its equilibrium.

My own small contribution has been in two areas: firstly to organise the courier collection of the Society's membership, financial and other documents, and their subsequent distribution to relevant Committee members; and secondly to ensure that, during our Reunion weekends, the official business of the AGM is handled smoothly and efficiently, freeing up time for members to relax and enjoy each others' company. Last year's AGM, at 1 hour 7 minutes, was one of the shortest on record, and I'm hoping we can keep this year's AGM similarly brief and efficient, and enjoy the informal, family, part of our Reunion weekend.

Croydon, 22 April 2011

Secretary's Report

As we have again been without a Secretary this year, we cannot provide a Secretary's Report. However, our Hon President, Kim Cook, has provided the following update for members.

The lack of an elected Secretary continues to be an impediment to the efficient functioning of the Witheridge FHS. A number of people have shared the essential duties, but in doing so, Committee members have been diverted from other tasks, including publicity and encouraging new members. This is a great shame, as such activities are essential if we are to grow the Society.

One of the things I had planned to do was to liaise with the Federation of Family History Societies, and the Guild of One-Name Studies, to try and find us a volunteer Secretary from outside the Society. Ironically, the priorities of producing *Witheridge Times* and preparing for the AGM, at a time when poor health restricted my activities, meant that I was unable deal with this. Catch 22!

Additionally, the Constitution needs to be updated following recent AGM decisions. I have done some work on this, and would like to complete it before the AGM if possible.

These, and other tasks that would normally be done by the Secretary, I have done my best to do, or to organise. For any errors of omission or commission, I apologise. My special thanks go to Barbara Finemore, who took the minutes at last year's AGM, Liz Davey who very kindly wrote a report on the Reunion, and Richard Witheridge and Jason Cook, for their help and support with the preparations for this year's Reunion and AGM. These have been kept simple, leaving members to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements.

However, it would all be much easier if preparation were in the hands of one person. The key work of the Secretary revolves around the Reunion and AGM, checking up on two or three possible venues, collating Officers' Reports, preparing an Agenda, and taking minutes. Spread over a whole year, it's not a heavy task, and anyone who takes on the post of Secretary will, of course, have every support and assistance from other Committee members that he or she may need.

Tenterden, 12 April 2011

Membership Secretary's Report

by Richard Witheridge

Following Beryl and Paul's resignations as Treasurer and Membership Secretary, respectively, at last year's AGM I agreed to take on these posts, both of which I had undertaken in the past.

At the 2009 AGM it was agreed that, because members had not received their quota of *Wetheridge Times* issues in 2008 and 2009, all members in good standing should have their subscriptions extended by one year (ie have a free year).

For those members who had not paid a subscription in 2009, the extension was applied to that year, meaning that they were due to pay in 2010. However, subscriptions for 2010 collected by the previous Membership Secretary amounted to only £44.00, as shown in the 2010 accounts. Those who were due to pay, but had not done so, have now been asked to send their subscriptions for 2010. This has resulted in a further £124.00. Although these payments cover they year 2010, they must, of necessity, be shown on the accounts for 2011. My thanks, and those of all the Committee, go to all those who made back payments.

Those members who had already paid for 2009, have had their subscriptions extended to cover the year 2010, while members who had already paid for 2010 have had their subscriptions extended to cover the year 2011. One member has paid for four years, 2010-11-12-13.

I have now sent two emails (dated 2 February and 12 March) as well as letters to 8 members not on email, to those who had not paid for 2011.

In addition, on 18 March 2011 I sent emails to three members who have not paid since 2008, asking for 2011 subscriptions only, although if they choose to pay the two missing years, that would be appreciated!

During the request for subscription payments, I have given all members the chance to say if they no longer wish to be members.

All members making payments have had receipts either by e-mail or by written forms, which have been posted to them.

By using email as much as possible, I have been able to keep the cost of postage and envelopes to a minimum, and I have not charged the Society for paper or printing ink.

The total membership (full and family members) currently stands at 117. This represents 53 paying members.

Dunster, 12 April 2011

Treasurer's Report

by Richard Wetheridge

At last year's AGM I agreed to take on the posts of Membership Secretary and Treasurer, as these go well together and avoid the need to mail material from one officer to the other!

The 2010 accounts showed a balance of £1632.17, despite the fact that we extended subscriptions, and that other subscriptions that had been due had not been collected.

Prior to last year's AGM and Reunion, we found ourselves with no access to the Society's finances. The gap was bridged by a very generous donation from one of our members, to ensure that we could pay the essential expenses for the AGM and Reunion, and also pay for a courier to deliver financial, membership and other documents to us. The expenditure against this donation has been shown separately, and our generous donor has asked that any funds left over be put towards the refreshments for this year's AGM and Reunion. We are immensely grateful to our anonymous donor.

Although a few members have still not paid for past years, the donation, together with all the recent membership collections and payments, have ensured that there is still a healthy balance this year.

The accounts are now being prepared for auditing. Unfortunately, Ron Dixon is unable to be our Auditor this year, as he is recovering from a heart bypass operation. We extend Ron our heartfelt thanks for his auditing work over the years, and wish him many years of improved health as a result of his operation.

We are very grateful to Mr Derek Nixon, FCIS, who has agreed at short notice to audit our accounts this year. The audited accounts will be available at the AGM and we will, if possible, email copies to members beforehand.

Dunster, 11 April 2011

Editor's Report

by Kim Cook

We are all grateful to our members for their patience in 2008 and 2009 when there was only one issue of *Wetheridge Times* each year. The Winter 2009 and Spring 2010 issues had to be distributed via the Internet because we had no access to funds for printing, and the decision to publish via the Internet was welcomed at last year's AGM. However, following a survey of members, it was clear that even avid Internet users prefer to have a printed copy.

It was decided that we should go back to the system used until a couple of years ago, using Parchments of Oxford to print and distribute hard copies. Following discussions with Parchments, the Committee came to the conclusion that the most cost-effective option was to have three issues of 40 pages each year.

The Summer-Autumn 2010 issue, which included all the reports of the 2010 AGM, went out in October. The Winter 2010 issue should have been despatched before Christmas, but was delayed so that essential information could be included. Unfortunately, in the new year, eyesight issues and other health problems meant that I was unable to

do any work for many weeks. With no Assistant Editor to help out, the result was that the Winter 2010 issue wasn't printed until late February. I hope all our members will accept my apologies for this. The Spring 2011 issue is due out by the end of April.

Recently, I've been doing my best to publicise our Society and the Reunion, in the hope that we'll have a larger attendance at this year's gathering. However, I won't be able to handle publicity or any Secretarial duties for quite a while, so we do need help with these.

Finally I'd like to thank all those who have provided articles in recent months, and all those who supply such interesting family news. Although there are a number of articles in the pipeline, we always welcome more input and fresh perspectives. And of course, a constant stream of family news is essential in maintaining the friendly and sociable element of *Witheridge Times*. For many, it is the most valuable way of learning what is happening in the lives of fellow-members. So please, keep the news coming! I look forward to hearing from you in the coming year!

Tenterden, 25 March 2011

Webmaster's Report

During 2010 the Members Only section of the web-site was closed down by Paul Witheridge (Marlow) so we have been without a Committee forum, or the planned forum for members. Shortly after the 2010 AGM, Paul Witheridge (Canada) resigned his post as the Society's Webmaster. However, we are very grateful to Paul (Canada) for continuing to maintain the main section of our web-site until such time as a new Webmaster could be appointed.

In recent weeks Bill Dwyne (Canada) has said he would be willing to take over the main section for us, and he is now liaising with Paul to do this. Technically, Bill cannot become Webmaster unless and until he is elected at the AGM. He has duly been proposed and seconded (see page 16).

Once Bill has officially taken over the web-site, we will look at whether he wishes to maintain the whole site on his own, or whether, eventually, it will be a dual effort as before, with another member managing the Members Only section, and our forums for the Committee and the membership.

Research Co-ordinator's Report

by Kim Cook

As more and more original (primary source) records become available on-line, I've been able to extend our knowledge of a number of

families, with no cost to the Society. The updated research on the Kent-Birmingham line was published in two issues of *Witheridge Times* in 2010.

Access to original material for Greater London, and particularly the availability of facsimile parish register entries, has been a valuable resource. From the London Metropolitan Archives, I now have facsimile copies of entries for over 40 baptisms, 37 marriages and banns, and 26 burials relating to Witheridge and Wetheridge, with a few additional records on connected families! I'm adding more information on parish register entries from London and elsewhere as often as I can.

As a result, I've been able to take the Wetheridge line of London back to about 1740, and the earliest known ancestors, **Edward** and **Mary Witheridge**, who lived in Hornsey and Highgate. This is the family that later moved south of the river, first to Camberwell, and then further out.

I'm also collecting and collating material from other sources, including military, immigration, criminal and other records.

I must emphasise that copyright regulations mean that I cannot publish these documents, or pass them on in their original form. However, by incorporating the evidence from these documents into files I have already compiled, I can create new documents which then become my copyright, which I am free to use in the context of the Witheridge FHS. Much of this material has already been incorporated into the Witheridge/Wetheridge pedigree files. Some has already found its way into the *Witheridge Times*, and more will follow.

I have managed to transcribe a few more Witheridge wills and other documents we hold from the National Archives (although not as many as I had hoped), as well as updating and augmenting some entries in the collection of Enhanced Narrative Pedigrees. I have also added a few more parishes to my collection of Parish Profiles. Any member wanting background information on a parish in which our ancestors lived – geographical details, information on churches of various denominations, local amenities and development, please ask me, and I'll do my best to fill in some background details for you.

Many of these records and files will be on display at the Reunion and AGM in Somerton. I hope members will have plenty of time to browse through them, and advise me of any updates or amendments needed. Members who can't attend are welcome to contact me and ask for any family details I might have.

Tenterden, 20 April 2011

AGM 2011 - Agenda

- 1 Chairman's opening and welcome
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of the 2010 AGM, held at Cherry Trees, Ingleden Park Road, Tenterden, Kent. These were published on pages 11–20 of the Summer-Autumn 2010 issue of *Witheridge Times*.
- 4 Matters arising from these minutes
- 5 Matters arising from 2011 Officers' Reports
These reports are included on pages 10–15 of the Spring 2011 issue of *Witheridge Times*.
- 6 Election of Officers and Committee Members
The following have been nominated for the posts listed, and have agreed to stand.

Chairman	Jason Cook Proposed by: Alan Smith Seconded by: Richard Witheridge
Vice Chairman	Richard Witheridge Proposed by: Kim Cook Seconded by: Val Wells
Secretary	<i>no nomination yet received</i>
Membership Secretary	Richard Witheridge Proposed by: Val Wells Seconded by: Roy Cook
Treasurer	Richard Witheridge Proposed by: Alison Smith Seconded by: Roy Cook
Assistant Treasurer	Maureen Witheridge Proposed by: Val Wells Seconded by: Kim Cook
Editor and Publisher	Kim Cook Proposed by: Richard Witheridge Seconded by: Val Wells
Research Co-ordinator	Kim Cook Proposed by: Joyce Browne Seconded by: Barbara Finemore
Webmaster	Bill Dwyne Proposed by: Richard Witheridge Seconded by: Jason Cook

Committee Members Pamela Glynn

Proposed by: Richard Witheridge

Seconded by: Roy Cook

Roy Cook

Proposed by: Pamela Glynn

Seconded by: Barbara Finemore

Liz Davey

Proposed by: Kim Cook

Seconded by: Richard Witheridge

7 Overseas Representatives

The following agreed to continue as the Society's Overseas Representatives, and the Society is delighted to accept their offer.

Australia: Judith and Allan Witheridge

New Zealand: Velma Metcalfe

North America: *This post is now vacant. The Society may appoint one representative to cover both USA and Canada, or a separate representative for each of these countries. If any member might be willing to help with this, or knows of someone who might, please contact Membership Secretary Richard Witheridge, who will be happy to explain what is involved.*

8 Appointment of Auditor

Following recent bypass surgery, Ron Dixon is unable to act as our Auditor this year, or in the future. We are very grateful to Mr Derek Nixon, FCIS, a retired accountant, who has kindly agreed to step in to the post for this year. However, he is unsure that he will be able to do this on any long term basis.

9 Vote of thanks to retiring Officers

Proposed by: Kim Cook; Seconded by: Joyce Browne

A special vote of thanks be recorded to Paul Witheridge (Canada) for so kindly keeping the web-site going for the past year; to Ron Dixon, who has faithfully audited our accounts for many years; and to Derek Nixon for kindly acting as our Auditor this year.

10 Proposal to amend Paragraph 2 of the Society's Constitution as follows:

Proposed by: Joyce Browne Seconded by: Alison Smith

The recognised address of the Society is that of the Secretary. If at any time the Society is without a Secretary, the recognised address shall be that of the Honorary Life President, until such time as a Secretary is appointed.

11 Proposal to continue the Society's membership of the Federation of Family History Societies and the Guild of One-Name Studies

Proposed by: Richard Witheridge; Seconded by: Kim Cook
The Society will continue in Membership of the **Federation of Family History Societies**, and the **Guild of One-Name Studies**. The Guild membership, which has to be in the name of a single individual, is now held in the name of Kim Cook, as our Research Co-ordinator. Kim has agreed to relinquish the Guild holding should she at any time cease to be the Society's Research Co-ordinator, so that her successor in this post will be free to take up the holding.

12 Proposal to promote WFHS on the Federation of Family History Societies's stall at the 2012 *Who Do You Think You Are* exhibition

Proposed by: Kim Cook Seconded by: Joyce Browne

13 Proposal to have a Witheridge FHS page on Facebook

Proposed by: Jim Witheridge Seconded by: Jason Cook
There are no costs involved in setting up and running a Facebook page for any group, but it will need monitoring. Jim Witheridge has indicated that he would be willing to look into setting it up.

14 Proposal to hold an informal reunion in the Hertfordshire-Bedfordshire area in July or August

Proposed by: Kim Cook Seconded by: Alan Smith
As Joyce Browne has not been well enough to attend recent meetings, the Committee feels it would be good to hold an informal meeting closer to her home, so that she has a chance to catch up with old friends and meet new members.

15 Christmas Card Charity for 2011 to be the British Heart Foundation

Proposed by: Liz Davey Seconded by: Brenda Dixon

16 Date and venue for 2012 Reunion

No proposals or suggestions for the date and venue have yet been received. Any ideas received at or before the meeting will be discussed and voted on.

17 Any other business

**For information on voting procedures,
including absentee voting by email or post, please see page 23.**

Accommodation in Somerton

Listed below is a selection of places offering accommodation in Somerton

Cleers View Farm, Somerton Hill, Somerton, Somerset, TA10 9AD.

Tel: 01458 272175 e-mail: maiseywebb@aol.com

Long Orchard House Bed and Breakfast, Carol Lomax

Station Path, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PX.

Tel: 01458 272497 Mob: 07974 581183 e-mail: longorchard@gmail.com

Ringers Well Bed and Breakfast, Mrs Sherry Briggs

Station Path, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PX.

Tel: 01458 273476 Mob: 07929 197001 e-mail: sherry.briggs@lineone.net

Somerton Court Country House, Owen and Pauline Stephens

Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7AH.

Tel:01458 274694 fax:01458 274694 e-mail: enquiries@somertoncourt.com

The Lynch Country House, 4 Behind Berry, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PD.

Tel: 01458 272316 Fax: 01458 272590 e-mail: the_lynch@talk21.com

The Globe Inn, Market Place, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7LX.

Tel: 01458 272474

The White Hart, Market Place, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7LX.

tel 01458 272314

www.whitehartsomerton.co.uk

Buttercross Tearooms, Market Place, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7NB.

Tel: (01458) 273168

e-mail: abeardshaw@lineone.net

Unicorn Hotel, West Street, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PR.

Tel:01458 272101 fax:01458 272181

e-mail: theunicorn@unicorn@somerton.co.uk

Reunion & AGM Booking Form

I/we will be attending the 2011 Reunion & AGM in Somerton.

No of adults:

No of children

I/we will/will not be staying for the Sunday programme.

Preferred options for outing: 1

2 3

I/we regret we will not be attending the 2011 Reunion & AGM

Name(s)

Address

.

Reunion Outing Options

In the Winter 2010 issue of *Witheridge Times*, we listed four options for the Sunday outing (12 June) at our Reunion in Somerton. For those who haven't yet decided on their preference, here are fuller details of the four places.

Barrington Court (NT), near Ilminster, Somerset



Barrington Court and part of the gardens.
(Photo © NTPL/Neil Campbell-Sharp)

Echoes of the past haunt this now empty Tudor manor house, so lovingly restored in the 1920s by Sir Arthur Lyle. Old farm buildings host a pottery and woodcarver, both of whom sell their wares. What were once cow yards, pens and fields have been transformed into fragrant and delightful flower gardens, their design influenced by Gertrude Jekyll. The stone-walled kitchen garden produces a variety of wonderful fruit and vegetables, which can be enjoyed in the restaurant, while the orchards provide the apples for our own cider and apple juice. This is a place to relax and refresh the senses.

Barrington Court offers a historic house, other buildings, garden, park, refreshments, shop, picnic facilities, tours, and walks. Sadly, there are no special events on 12 June. Restaurant open for lunches and teas at weekends. Bookings for Strode House Restaurant accepted up to 24 hours prior to visit.

Gift Aid admission (Standard admission in brackets): adult £9.50 (£8.60), child £4.15 (£3.75), family £22.90 (£20.80). Free to NT members.

Right: Jacobean interior at Barrington Court.



Montacute House (NT), near Martock, Somerset

Montacute House is a magnificent, mansion, built in the late 16th century for Sir Edward Phelips.

The house has many Renaissance features, and the Long Gallery is the longest of its kind in England. On its walls are displayed more than 60 of the finest Tudor and Elizabethan portraits from the



Montacute House

National Portrait Gallery collection. The state rooms display a fine range of period furniture and textiles, including samplers from the Goodhart collection.

Montacute's formal gardens are perfect for a stroll and include a collection of roses, mixed borders and famous wobbly hedges. Waymarked walks lead around the wider estate.

In addition to the historic house, refreshments, garden, park, shop, picnic facilities, tours, walks, and events, there are Trails and Tracker Packs available to enhance family visits. Parkland with walks for countryside and nature lovers.

On Sunday 12 June, from 11.00 am–4.00 pm, at no extra charge, there is a special event called 'Hidden In History'. This is a friendly and approachable costumed interpretation group for hands-on Elizabethan pastimes and games. House, garden, café and shop open 11.00 am– 5.00 pm

Gift Aid admission (Standard admission in brackets): adult £10.50 (£9.30), child £4.90 (£4.40), family £24.95 (£22.95). Garden only, (13 March to 31 October): adult £6.30 (£5.70), child £3.00 (£2.60).



Left: The Long Gallery at Montacute, which holds over 60 of the finest Tudor and Elizabethan portraits .



Fleet Air Arm Museum, RNAS Yeovilton

The museum (left) has four exhibition halls covering Development of Naval Aviation, WW11 (with airfield viewing area), Aircraft Carrier Experience, and

Theory of Flight, plus a gallery. Sadly, the Cobham Hall (heritage collection), will not be open on 12 June.

There are two restaurants, the Swordfish and Warnefords, as well as a shop, picnic area, adventure playground with mini Marine Assault Course. The museum is 95% wheelchair accessible.

Open 10.00 am–5.30 pm. No special events on 12 June. Concessions: seniors, students, unemployed, Ex-service Assn, disabled.

Admission: adult £13.00, children 5–16 £9.00, concessions (with valid ID) £11.00, family (2 + 3) £38.00. Gp rate 15+: adult £10.00, children 5–16, £8.00, concessions £8.50. Disabled + carer £11.00+£6.50; child disabled, £5.00, serving military £6.00. Blue Peter badge holders free.



Exhibition Hall 4 at Yeovilton

Clark's Village, Farm Road, Street, Somerset



This former Clark's Shoes factory, now houses a shoe museum, and has been developed to house its own factory outlet and over 90 other stores, some also factory outlet shops with discounted prices. Find books, china and glass, clothing, cookware, home electronics, food and drink, gifts and accessories,

Left: Entrance to Clark's village.



Left: Clark's village, with a wide variety of shops, food outlets, play area and entertainment.

jewellery, shoes, linens, lingerie, and sports goods, as well as a wide selection of places to eat and drink, refreshments, and entertainment.

No admission charges; parking for 1,400 cars, £1.50 for up to 4 hours, £4.00 for up to 6 hours. Sunday opening: Browsing from 10.30 am (in accordance with Sunday trading regulations), sales 11.00 am–5.00 pm. Adventure playground, carousel, play area including King Arthur's castle with swings and slides.

AGM — Voting and Absentee Voting

All full members, and additional family members over the age of 16 who are covered by that membership, are entitled to vote, provided the membership is fully paid up at the date of the meeting.

Any voting member who is unable to attend may register an absentee vote by post or email. **All absentee votes must be received at least four full days before the meeting, ie by Tuesday 7 June 2011.**

Postal votes must be sent to the Hon President at Cherry Trees, Ingleden Park Road, Tenterden, Kent TN30 6NS, England, in a sealed envelope clearly marked 'Postal Vote'. Votes registered via e-mail must be sent to witheridge1987@aol.com, with 'Absentee Vote' in the subject box. Votes received by this mailbox will be printed off and taken to the meeting, but neither these, nor the postal votes, will be counted until the votes of those present at the meeting have been cast. Should more than one vote be received from a member, only the last received for that member will be counted.

Any AGM motion concerning the Constitution (in this case Item 10 on the Agenda) requires a two-thirds majority of votes cast in order to be passed, but other motions can be passed by a simple majority. In the event of an equal number of votes being cast for and against a motion (except motions amending the Constitution), the Chairman of the meeting has a casting vote.

The Bradworthy Bunch!

Six Witheridge Sisters

by Alison Smith



Before we finally sold our house and moved to Eye near Peterborough in September 2009, we spent two years going between Folkestone and Eye. Sorting through everything before moving we found a box of old family photographs belonging to my aunt. Amongst them were a number of particular interest, including one or two showing **Mary Grace Witheridge**, who was my great-grandmother.

Mary Grace (b 1842) was the eldest of six daughters born to **Thomas Witheridge** (b 1816) and **Ann Moore**, known as Nancy. Thomas and Nancy had married in Bradworthy on 7 April 1841.

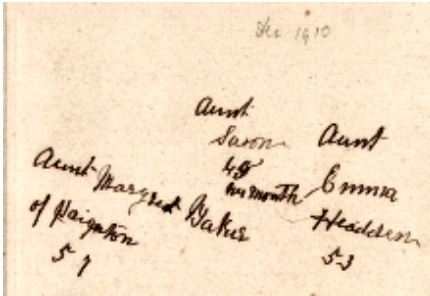
Mary Grace was followed by **Susan** (b 1846), **Sarah Jane** (b 1848), **Elizabeth Ann** (b 1851), **Margaret** (b 1853), and **Emma** (b 1857). Thomas and Nancy also had three sons, but two died without issue, and the eldest, James, had three daughters.

The picture below, which shows four of the sisters, is dated 1910 and was taken in Paignton, the town to which **Margaret Baker** (née Witheridge) returned after spending some time in Australia. The inscription on the front, written by my aunt (my mother's sister)

Below: Four Witheridge sisters photographed in Paignton in August 1910.

suggests that Mary Grace is on the left. The inscription on the back (shown above right) names the other sisters as **Margaret Baker** of Paignton (57), **Susan** (45) and **Emma Hedden** (53). The middle one of the other three sisters is clearly Susan, and we assume that the one seated on the right is **Margaret**. It





Above: Notes on the back of the photo, possibly made by Mary Grace's daughter, Edith Annie Welch.

is possible that the notes on the back (shown left) were written by my grandmother **Edith Annie Kemp** (née **Welch**).

Although we know quite a bit of the history of these four sisters, there are still some gaps in our information.

In 1870, in Mile End, London, Susan Witheridge married **William Cheffer Hill**. For many years they lived in London, where their son, **William Hill** was born in about 1871. However, William and Susan eventually returned to Devon, and were living in Ilfracombe in 1901 and 1911, running a lodging house. The house, which boasted 27 rooms, provided ample space for family, business and servants. In 1911 they had their grandson, **William Ivor Samuel Hill**, aged 27, born in Ilfracombe, living with them, along with two resident servants, and three visitors, all of independent means.

In 1874, in Exeter, **Margaret** married **Robert Baker**. In 1881 they were in Exeter St Sidwell, with their 6-year-old daughter **Elizabeth Jane**. They do not appear in the 1891 census, but by 1901 were at Hill Side Terrace, Paignton, with sons **Arthur Baker** (15), and **Frank Baker** (12), who had both been born in Brisbane, Queensland, and daughter **Ethel** (9), who had been born in Paignton.

Initially I had no idea when, where or why they had gone to Australia and then returned, but Kim did some research for me. She discovered that the family had been on board the *SS Jelunga* when she sailed from Brisbane to London in June 1891 (too late for the census!) The passenger list names Robert Baker (41) labourer, his wife Margaret (39) and their children Elizabeth, Arthur (6) and Frank (2). They had embarked from Brisbane and landed at Plymouth before the

Right: *SS Jelunga*. She sailed on her maiden voyage from London to Brisbane via the Suez Canal in February 1891. The Baker family were on board for the return journey to England.



ship completed its journey to London. The entry for Elizabeth's age in one column is illegible, as it occurs at the junction of two creases, but the column is headed Adults of 12 years and upwards, single. However, she is also marked in the column for children between 1 and 12! She would have been 16. All the children were listed as English.

Further research showed that by 1911 Margaret was a widow, living at 4 Roundham Villas, Sands Road, Paignton, with daughters **Elizabeth Jane Baker** (36), and **Ethel Baker** (19), both single. The house, which had 11 rooms (excluding scullery, bathroom, lobbies etc), was being run by Margaret, assisted by her daughters, as an apartment house.

The census return showed that Margaret had been married 38 years, and had had five children, four still living and one who had died. At present we don't know when or where this child was born, or when he/she died. However, given the ten-year gap between daughter Elizabeth and son Arthur, the child may have been born between 1871 and 1880, in which case the child's death may have been a reason for their emigration to Australia. At present this is just conjecture, but if anyone knows, or can help us find out, the answer to these questions, we'd be very grateful.

We'd also like to find out more about Margaret's descendants. We've not yet discovered what happened to her daughter Elizabeth Jane. Kim has discovered that **Arthur Baker** married, in 1904 in Bridgwater district, **Elsie Louisa Blatchford**. In 1911 they were in Paignton with daughter **Gladys Irene Baker**, born in 1905. Gladys is believed to have married, in 1927 in the Tavistock area, **Henry G Jenkins**.

Frank Baker married, in the Totnes district in 1910, **Alice White**, and they had at least two children, **Frank R L Baker**, born 1912, and **Iris E Baker**, born 1919, both in Totnes district. Margaret and Robert's youngest child, **Ethel**, is believed to have married, in Totnes district in 1914, **Wilfrid G Lang**, but we've not yet had time to follow this up.

The other two sisters in the photo both married in 1876. First was Emma Jane, who married **John Heddon** (also spelled Hedden and Heddern) in the Bideford area. For over 20 years they lived in Welcombe, where John was a farmer, before moving to Parkham in 1901. They were still farming there in 1911. In 34 years of marriage they had had ten children. One, **Silas** (1885-1891), died in childhood, but the other nine survived into adult life.

The eldest sister, **Mary Grace**, was the last of the four to marry. In 1868, while still single, she had a daughter, **Clara Witheridge**. Clara



Left: The imposing structure of the Berkshire, Reading & Newbury Asylum, built at Cholsey in 1870, for the insane poor. James Welch was already working as a gardener there when Mary Grace Witheridge joined the staff as a cook.

was brought up by her grandparents, Thomas and Ann Witheridge, and in 1893 in Devon she married **George Taylor**.

On 11 July 1876, in Cholsey, Berkshire, **Mary Grace** married **James Welch**. This was a second marriage for James, who had previously married, on April 22 1858, **Martha Stallard**. Martha, who had been born in 1828, died in 1874. At her marriage, Mary Grace acquired four step-children, but in 1881 only one was living with her father and Mary Grace.

At the time of their marriage, James had been working for some years as a gardener at the Berkshire, Reading and Newbury Asylum in Cholsey, and Mary Grace was working there as a cook.

Below: Mary Grace and James Welch in later years.

Mary Grace and James had five children. The eldest was **Edith Annie** (1877-1934), my grandmother. She was followed by **Albert Edwin** (1879-1965), **George Ernest** (b1881), **Alice Mary** (1883-1974), and **Frank** (1888-1948).

For many years James continued to work as a gardener at the Asylum, but by 1911 he had retired, and he, Mary Grace and their youngest son Frank, were living in Wallingford. They had been married 34 years and had had five children, all still living.

Although Mary Grace died in Nottingham on Christmas Day 1923, she





Left: The grave, in Cholsey, of Martha Welch, her husband James Welch, and his second wife, Mary Grace (née Witheridge). The white urn at the base is in memory of their youngest daughter, Alice Mary Spriggs.

was buried with James and his first wife at Cholsey. In the picture (left), taken in Cholsey, the tombstone is inscribed with their names, and at the base is a white vase to the memory of their youngest daughter **Alice Mary Spriggs** (née **Welch**), born 1883, who died 1974. She lived in Abingdon.

Of the other two siblings, **Sarah Jane**, (wrongly indexed as **Urthyridge!**) married in 1868 in Morwenstowe, **Thomas Wonnacott**.

They lived in Morwenstowe all their lives, and had nine children! Sarah isn't in the photo because she had died six years earlier.

Elizabeth Ann married, in 1876 in Exeter, **George Philip Heale(s)**. They lived in Taunton, where George, born c 1852 in Topsham, near Exeter, was employed in the printing industry. They were still in Taunton in 1911, by which time they had been married 34 years, and had had eight children, six still living and two who had died.

However, on the night of the census, Elizabeth wasn't at home, and initial searches have failed to find her in England or Wales. But she must have been somewhere, for she lived until Mar qr 1944, when she died in the Taunton area at the ripe old age of 93! George predeceased her, dying in the Taunton area in 1937, when he was 84.

Why Elizabeth wasn't with her four surviving sisters when the photo was taken in 1910, I have no idea. Again, if there's anyone who can tell me why, or where she was in 1911, I'd be very grateful. It would be great to know the full story of all six sisters in the Bradworthy bunch!

Keeping Life Sweet!

MP Sir Julian Critchley (1930-2000), who entered politics believing it to be 'an honourable trade' called his 1995 biography 'A Bag of Boiled Sweets' after a statement he once made that 'the only safe pleasure for a parliamentarian is a bag of boiled sweets'.

Had he lived a few years longer, he might have added, 'as long as you don't claim for it on expenses'!

News for Researchers

Plymouth & West Devon Record Office

Key historical documents of interest to many of our members are stored at the Plymouth & West Devon Record Office (PWDRO), currently housed in Coxside. This unsuitable building was opened in 1982, originally as a temporary measure.



Above: Side entrance to the current PWDRO in Coxside.

In 1998 Plymouth City Council (PCC) was given a 15-year deadline to upgrade the PWDRO facilities or have all statutory documents removed into Government care.

The staff at PWDRO do an excellent job in conditions that are very cramped, both for staff and visitors. The building itself, in an industrial area, is totally unsuitable, and since 2001 has had a tyre depot next door – a dreadful fire hazard. Partial finance for a new local history centre was put in place, but then withdrawn after delays in applying for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF).

Users and friends of PWDRO, including family history societies, civic groups, local and maritime history groups, and the Federation of Family History Societies (FFHS), have applied constant pressure to PCC to move forward, and to improve PCC's very poor communications with interested parties.

After years of wrangling, there is now hope. Last August PCC announced that its preferred option was to transfer PWDRO, with PCC's museum, library, and possibly SW Film Archive's collections, to the site of the former Parkside Community College in Devonport. This large, council-owned campus has been disused for some years.

On 1 April 2011 this decision was ratified. There will be a lengthy process, including the seeking of funds from outside bodies, before essential work can begin, and it may be several years before PWDRO moves to these premises. But at least decisions have at last been made.



Below: Parkside Community College, Devonport.

WFHS members can keep up with PWDRO developments by going to <http://www.saveplymouthshistory.org.uk>.

A Traditional English Wedding?

Today's weddings aren't as traditional as we think they are. In this two-part article, Kim Cook examines the history of English weddings.

Part 1

Every family descended from a Witheridge has ancestors who married in England. In recent years spring and early summer have been the favoured times for weddings, as brides hope for fair weather and a good choice of flowers. This year, the UK (along with many other countries) celebrates a special wedding, that of Prince William and his bride Catherine Middleton.

Most people love a traditional English wedding, with a radiant bride in white with her elegant bouquet, retinue of matching bridesmaids, a service with beautiful music enjoyed by scores of guests and a large reception to follow. But how traditional is such a wedding? What were wedding days like for our English ancestors? In truth, they were vastly different in almost all aspects.

Which Day?

Today, most English weddings take place on a Saturday, but in times past few brides would have had the luxury of choosing their wedding day. Only families wealthy enough not to have to work, and those of quality craftsmen who ran their own businesses, would have been able to choose the day. Most employed people would have been dependent on the good will of their employers, not just for time off, but often for permission to marry as well.

Even when a Saturday wedding was possible, the following old country rhyme might have deterred couples from marrying on that day.

Monday for wealth,
Tuesday for health,
Wednesday the best day of all ;
Thursday for crosses,
Friday for losses,
Saturday no luck at all.

These days such superstitions have little credibility!

But for most people, the preferred wedding days would have been the most widely observed holy days (the original holidays). These were Easter Monday, Whit Monday, Christmas Day and the twelve days thereafter, and the parish patronal festival, which was often the



Above: Charles the Martyr church, Plymouth, scene of some Witheridge Christmas weddings. The church was severely bomb-damaged in WW2, and the ruined skeleton now serves as a memorial to the civilian war dead of the city.

occasion for a fair or market. These were the days on which workers were most likely to be given time off.

For this reason Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day were particularly popular, as there was the chance of a few days off work for a local honeymoon.

Among the Witheridges who married on Christmas Eve were **Emma Witheridge** and **John Holman** (1837, in the parish church of Charles the Martyr, Plymouth).

Christmas Day weddings included **George Henry Witheridge** and **Mary Ann Cook** (1876, Holborn, Middlesex), **Mahala Witheridge** and **Matthew John Chapman** (1871, Plymouth), and **Mary Ann Wetheridge** and **Henry Castle** (1864, Marylebone).

Boxing Day marriages were celebrated by **Thomas Weatheridge** and **Sarah Avery** (1820, Plymouth Charles), **Susan Witheridge** and **William Cheffer Hill** (1870, Stepney), and **Annie Witheridge** and **Alfred Stone** (1888, Adelaide, Australia).

Two Witheridge weddings took place on Christmas Day 1913. **Alice Emily Witheridge** married **Stephen Taylor** in Kentish Town, London, and **Arthur Witheridge** married **Ada Florence Welch** in Summerfield, Birmingham, although by 1913 this may not necessarily have been for reasons of work.

At other times of the year, many couples had to resort to snatching a few hours on their regular weekly or fortnightly half-day off. Half-days were rarely on a Saturday, as these were busy days, with large houses entertaining weekend guests, and shops in towns and cities open till 10.00 pm. The custom of Saturday weddings came only when the five-day (or 5½-day) week became more common in the 20th century. Even then, when most towns still had half-day closing during the week, usually on a Wednesday or Thursday, many shop staff had a mid-week wedding. In the 1960s, two of our member couples, **Brenda and Ron Dixon** and **Barbara and Terry Finemore**, chose a Friday wedding.

Banns, licences, allegations and bonds

The system of posting banns, to be read on three consecutive Sundays in the respective parishes of bride and groom, or to be displayed in the relevant register office, has hardly changed for centuries, although very recent legislation has brought about some adjustments.

Often, today's Anglican church services still use the traditional form of asking if anyone knows of 'any cause or just impediment' why the couple should not be married, and we'd be astounded if anyone said anything! But in times past, this question might well have met with an immediate response from a family member or jilted lover, coming forward during the service with a very public and embarrassing objection! However, the priest could soon determine whether the objection was a genuine one or just spite!

The main, and for most people the only, alternative to banns was an expensive licence obtainable from one of the Archbishops or from one of diocesan bishops, of which there were far fewer than there are now. Until 1823, applicants for such a licence had to swear an allegation, giving names, ages, descriptions, parentage and home parish of the bride and groom. Once the allegation had been sworn, the hefty licence fee, or bond, had to be paid. This was usually accompanied by a document setting out the terms and conditions, including dowry, of the marriage agreement. And just in case of default, each side had to nominate a guarantor!

There were many cases where couples feared objections but could not afford a licence. Restrictions of employment, apprenticeship or military regulations often forbade marriage, sometimes quite unjustly. For instance, it was illegal to marry the widow or widower of a sibling – a restriction that wasn't lifted until the 20th century.

Among the Witheridges caught in this unnecessary prohibition was **James Witheridge**, born 1817, son of **John Witheridge** and **Elizabeth Harris** of Combmartin. James, a mariner, married his first wife, **Elizabeth Redmore**, on 21



Ilfracombe Parish Church where, in 1847, James Witheridge married Elizabeth Redmore. After Elizabeth died, James married her sister, Isabella, but the wedding could not take place here, as there could have been legal objections.

January 1847 at Ilfracombe Parish Church. The witnesses were **William Redmore**, the bride's father, and her sister **Isabella Redmore**. Elizabeth died in 1849, shortly after the death of their infant son. On 14 August 1851, in St Paul's Church, in the St Woolos district of Newport, Monmouthshire, James Witheridge married Isabella Redmore. The Redmore family clearly knew, and approved, of the marriage, for Isabella's younger sister, **Ann Redmore**, was one of the witnesses. But to avoid any possible awkward questions, James described himself as a bachelor.

Although Isabella and Ann Redmore had been living in Combmartin only a few months before the wedding, the ceremony clearly couldn't take place there, as there would undoubtedly have been someone who knew that Isabella was marrying her late sister's husband, and who would have registered a 'just impediment'.

Choice of spouse

In many cases the couple didn't even have a choice of spouse! Throughout the centuries it's been quite common for parents or guardians to arrange marriages, with the bride in particular having little say in the choice of groom. With young women rarely owning money or property, and unable to earn much, they were dependent on fathers or brothers for their home and sustenance, and had to conform to the will of whoever kept them. There were many cases where minors could be betrothed at a very young age. Parental consent for marriage to a partner of choice was rarely forthcoming.

The commonest solution was for the couple to elope to a large town or city, and live there for three weeks. Here they could have the banns called in a church where their names would not be recognised, and therefore no objection could be raised. London's St Martin's in the Fields and Manchester Cathedral were renowned for such marriages.

Right: St Martin in the Fields, London, in the early 19th century. Couples wishing to avoid possible objections to marriage in their home parish, fled to large cities where they could live anonymously while the banns were called. St Martin's in the Fields was a parish much favoured by such runaways.





Above: Caricature of a Fleet marriage, conducted outside the London Prison .

Until Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act of 1753, there was another option. Irregular or clandestine marriages were conducted by clergy who had no parish. Poorly-paid clergy, with large families to support, often found themselves in debt. Some took other jobs, such as school-teaching, and earned extra from fees for conducting marriages in any church they could access for

fifteen minutes or so, so such a ceremony would have been very much a hole-and-corner affair. Sadly, some clergy ended up in debtors' prisons such as London's notorious Fleet Prison. The only escape was to earn money by taking fees for irregular marriages, and desperate couples would flock to the prisons, sometimes with the service conducted through a barred window! While such marriages were not recognised by the church, they were recognised in law. Not until 1837 did the law provide the option of a civil wedding in a register office.

The Wedding Garments

When Queen Victoria wore a white dress, overlaid with sumptuous lace and hung with garlands, for her wedding to Prince Albert in 1840, the wealthy followed the fashion for a short while, but white went right out of fashion when Prince Albert died.

However, the expense of a white wedding was beyond most brides, and even among the wealthy it was an extravagance, for bleaching a fabric white without damaging it was a difficult process. The white dress didn't come into general fashion until the early 20th century.

Right: When Queen Victoria wore a white dress for her wedding to Prince Albert in 1840, she set a fashion for white weddings among the wealthy, but the fashion died when Prince Albert died.



Right: This 1816 dress, for a fairly affluent bride, was creamy yellow, trimmed with lace and decorated with pink flowers and green foliage. The bride's head-dress was a fascinator – more than a headband, but not quite a hat.



In earlier days the choice of colour was primarily a practicality, with whatever concession to fashion was affordable.

In the 18th century, red was a favoured colour for wedding dresses, and Cassandra Leigh, the mother of Jane Austen, wore a red riding habit for her wedding to Rev George Austen in 1764, and for the journey to their new home.

In the early 19th century, the favoured fabric was sprigged muslin. This lightweight fabric, dotted with a scattered pattern of small flowers, usually pink and green, and worn over a plain cream underskirt, was a luxury that lent an air of delicacy to even the most work-worn bride. It was the choice of what we would now call middle-class brides – those whose families had sufficient for their needs, but who could not afford to be extravagant. The dress would often have been made by the bride or a member of her family.

Girls from poorer families usually opted for darker, practical, colours. Young girls in service with generous employers might be given a cast-off gown from one of the family, considered a handsome gift, regardless of colour. Where a family could afford to buy a length of cloth, this would be made up by the bride and her family to the most stylish yet serviceable design the fabric would allow. However, even this home-made dress would continue to be used as a Sunday-best outfit for many years. But for many brides the wedding dress was their current Sunday best dress, perhaps adorned with a new hand-stitched sash or lace collar and cuffs. With these extras removed, this too would revert to normal use after the ceremony.

Often there were no bridesmaids, or at best only one, and again, the choice of dress was usually one of practicality. It certainly wasn't necessary for bridesmaids' dresses to match in any way. They would have been simply dressed in their best, or perhaps something newly-made or handed down. Even when special dresses were possible, colour co-ordination was not a consideration, although fashionable



Left: For this early 20th-century wedding the bride wore a blouse and skirt. She, and the two younger women, have corsages, but there is no bouquet. The men have flowers in their buttonholes .

style was. My own grandmother, at her wedding in 1894, wore an outfit of brown and blue, with bridesmaids in a variety of colours.

The working groom would have worn his Sunday best clothes, sometimes not even a suit, and it would have been a practical impossibility for groom, best man and ushers (if indeed there were any) to wear matching outfits. The unidentified wedding party (above), probably photographed c 1910, shows the bride, and two women seated closest to her (who may well have been bridesmaids), dressed in fashionable white blouses with darker skirts.

Flowers and favours

The beautifully crafted and wired bouquet is another 20th-century fashion. In Victorian times, a wealthy bride carried a spray of exotic flowers grown for the occasion in the family hot-house. In earlier days, most brides carried a simple bunch of garden or even wayside flowers, artfully tied with straw or ivy stems. Most women were adept at this, as they had plenty of practice creating special garlands for regular local festivals.

Tiaras and lace veils were for the wealthy, but most brides would decorate a best bonnet with flowers and new ribbons, possibly adding a demure piece of net to cover her face. A circlet of flowers would be woven for the bride who couldn't afford a bonnet.

While the choice of wedding flowers was dependent on the season, great attention was given to the meanings and attributes attached to flowers. Asters, red roses and forget-me-nots represent true love, while lilac means acceptance, and white lilac (right) represents youthful innocence. Lavender speaks of devotion, while snowdrops, almond or hawthorn blossom speak of hope. Honeysuckle



speaks of generosity, daisies of purity and innocence, and lily-of-the-valley of the return of happiness. Violets symbolise modesty and faithfulness, irises speak of faith and wisdom, while wallflowers promise faithfulness even in adversity. Ivy is symbolic of faithfulness, as are dandelions!

The wedding ring is the most universal of wedding favours or gifts, and has been used since pre-Christian times. Its circular form, with no beginning and no end, represents the eternity of true love.

The reason for the popularity of horseshoes is less clear, but may stem from a legend about the 10th-century St Dunstan, a blacksmith who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. One day while Dunstan was at his forge, the devil, disguised as a traveller, came to him asking for a horseshoe. Dunstan, seeing through the devil's disguise, beat him until he promised never to enter the house of a Christian with a horseshoe hung over the door. A rhyming version of the story states:

St Dunstan, as the story goes,
Once pull'd the devil by the nose
With red-hot tongs, which made him roar,
That he was heard three miles or more.



Thus the horseshoe became a symbol of Christianity, designed to keep the devil at bay. Originally a bride would have carried a discarded horse-shoe from a local source, and later hung it outside the door of her home (as in the picture above). Now the horseshoe has become a silvery, ribboned accessory, which wouldn't last five minutes in our weather!

Another wedding favour was a wooden spoon, considered the most essential of household items. In many cases this would have been carved by the groom, or a male member of the bridal family, and was usually made of fruitwood. Often the design would include emblems of faith, a love-knot and the initials of the couple, and sometimes even an indication of how many children the family hoped for! While these have survived mainly in Wales, they were also produced in English villages.



A favour of a different kind was the local sweep! Young children employed as sweeps were often

Left: The left-hand spoon has a heart, for love, and wedding bells. The spoon on the right has a continuously intertwining Celtic design, with no beginning and no end, symbolising everlasting love.

maimed or killed while carrying out this dangerous work. Thus a healthy adult sweep was seen as lucky survivor. The foolish superstition that good luck rubs off from one person to another, caused some to believe that a sweep's good like would rub off on the couple. People of sound faith and good education didn't believe this, but the less-well educated were more likely to be superstitious, and would arrange for the local sweep to greet the wedding procession and then attend the wedding breakfast. The offer of a free meal and drinks was usually enough to ensure his presence!



Among other favours carried by the bride, one commonly used for autumn brides in many areas, including Kent and Devon, was a basket of hazel or cob nuts. Our ancestors well knew that nuts were a good source of nutrition and oils, and preserved them for times when food was scarce, and health and survival might depend on them. Thus nuts came to symbolise sufficiency of food, constancy, and fertility – all considered desirable for the happy couple.

In September 1979 this old custom was resurrected at a family wedding which had connections with both Devon and Kent. The bride was **Caroline Chester**, daughter of my cousin **Joan Chester** (née Gleeson), and grand-daughter of **Eva Gleeson** (née Witheridge). The groom, **Nigel Fuller**, hails from Kent. I asked our local greengrocer (we were then in Surrey) to buy in some early hazelnuts from the market, and then arranged them in a wicker basket for our sons **Jason** and **Adam** to present to the bride.

(To be continued)

Part 2 will look at getting to church, the marriage service, guests, wedding food and drink, and the honeymoon!



Left: Reviving an old Devonshire and Kentish wedding custom in 1979, Jason Cook (front left) and his brother Adam (front right), give the bride, Caroline Chester (centre), a basket of hazelnuts. The groom, Nigel Fuller is on the left, and the bride's mother, Joan Gleeson (grand-daughter of William Henry Witheridge) is on the right.

Pictures from the Past

by Val Wells

My mother, **Elsie Mary White**, who was born in 1915, died in January 2003, sadly knowing little about her family. My grandmother, **Emily Ellen Witheridge** didn't talk about her family.

Shortly after the death of my mother, I saw an article in the *Daily Mail* by **Annette Witheridge**. Curious at seeing my grandmother's family name in print, I emailed Annette. She kindly gave me details of the Witheridge FHS web-site, and through that I contacted **Kim Cook**. From Kim I learned that Annette had been a founder member of the Society.

Kim was able to tell me that in 1881 my grandmother, Emily Ellen Witheridge, was living with her mother, **Emily Ellen (née Attrill)**, and three older siblings, at 63 Southside Street in the Plymouth Barbican area. This made me feel quite nostalgic, because my first job after leaving college was as a secretary at Coates Plymouth Gin in Southside Street, which would have been very close to where 63 Southside Street had been situated.

Soon after I joined the Witheridge FHS, I was delighted to see in the Spring 2004 issue of *Witheridge Times*, a section of the Ermington family tree, showing my own Witheridge ancestry, going back 12 generations to **Lion Witheridge** who had died in 1606 at Strode Manor Farm!

I thought you might be interested to see some pictures of my grandmother. The first one shows both my grandparents, **Albert Henry White** (born 10 June 1871), and Emily Ellen (born 1877), with my mother, Elsie Mary White (born 1915). I believe my mother would have been about 7 or 8 years old at the time, so the photo was probably taken in 1922 or 1923.

Right: Albert Henry White, with daughter Else Mary and wife Emily Ellen, in about 1922 or 1923. The photo was taken in the studio of E Hadden in Union Street, Plymouth.





Left: This photo of Emily Ellen White (née Witheridge) was taken in 1941.

Right: Emily Ellen in October 1928, on the day she said was her 50th birthday. However, according to the registers, she would have been 51.



The next photo (above left) was taken some years later, and has a date stamp of 24 October 1941. This would have been the day after my grandmother's 63rd birthday¹.

The third photo (above right) has a faded date stamp of 23 October 1928, her 50th birthday¹.

I have yet to learn more about my grandmother's siblings², and discover whether I have any cousins in the Plymouth area.

I know **Richard Witheridge** mentioned he is linked to my tree³, and has a family member living in Elburton, which is virtually 'up the road' from where I live. Several years ago, while I was on polling duty at Elburton, a voter named Witheridge came in and I had to check his name on the register of electors. There wasn't time to say much, as the polling station was very busy and there was a queue, but I seem to remember he said that his father lived in Elburton, so maybe he was from Richard's family.

*Editor's notes: ¹The registers show that **Emily Ellen Witheridge** was born in the December qr of 1877, not 1878, so when the above photos were taken she would have been 64 and 51!*

*²Emily Ellen Witheridge's surviving siblings were **Hannah Elizabeth** (1865), **Rhoda Jane** (1867), and **George Thomas** (1869). George and his wife **Ruth** had two children, **Ruth Emelen** (1896) and **George Philip** (1898). Rhoda married **William Henry Hannaford**, and in 1901 they had 2 sons and 3 daughters, but I have not yet found the family in 1911.*

*³Although both **Richard Witheridge** and **Joyce Browne** are from the Ermington branch, they are not the members most closely related to Val. I believe the closest is **Barbara Finemore**. Barbara and Val are 3rd cousins, sharing common great-great-grandparents **Philip Bowden Witheridge** and **Jane Ann Netherton**.*