



# St Helens Townships Family History Society

Founder And President-Richard Waring

[www.sthelenstownshipsfhs.org.uk](http://www.sthelenstownshipsfhs.org.uk)

[email:townshipsfhs@googlemail.com](mailto:townshipsfhs@googlemail.com)

phone:07851 503 307

March 2008  
NEWSLETTER  
number 4



## Townships score a century – Congratulations– We are now 100 strong!!!

Arthur Plumbley last month became our 100th member, For those who don't know, Arthur is our secretary Pauline's dad. Pauline promised him membership no.100 if and when we reached that number. Little did she know, that we would reach the target in only 9 months. Arthur and his daughter started their family history research 13 years ago. This fuelled Pauline's enthusiasm for genealogy and she became the mainstay of the formation of our present society. Thank you Arthur for giving us our" Mighty Atom"



### Circus in St Helens !!!

Through our dedicated Townships web site plus our email and telephone services, we receive requests to carry out research on various family history based topics.

One of the most intriguing was from a lady in Surrey whose great grandfather Thomas Cullen who was a circus proprietor. She asked us to check the St Helens newspapers for reviews and adverts for a circus based in the town. With some scepticism we searched the archive films for evidence of the circus in the late 1800s. Lo and behold, there were many advertisements and reviews of performances, for Culeen's Circus based in North Road. Further investigation revealed, plans submitted to the Council for a temporary wooden structure with a slate roof. Where on earth could this be? We turned to the Ordinance survey maps for the period and there it was. It was on a site next to what is now the YMCA building, where "Sir Anne Taylor's" shop used to be.

The Programmes were a far cry from the entertainment of today. One example is the following, which would not be tolerated in today's politically correct society.

#### **"Negro Entertainment at The Circus St Helens"**

In aid of St Joseph's Catholic Mission, Peasley Cross by Members of St Helens Amateur Minstrel and Choral Union.

Other Programmes included a re-enactment of Dick Turpin's ride to York complete with the death of Black Bess.

An Ice Skating Spectacular ( actually roller skating).

Another exciting event was Fancy Riding Bicycle Contest for the Championship of England. What is apparent is that the only animals to appear were horses and dogs, what a disappointment no lions tigers or elephants. Unfortunately there were no pictures in the newspapers of the time so we can only imagine what it looked like and what excitement it must have created.

In an era when the only other entertainment venues were the Theatre Royal, the Volunteer Hall and various church halls

### 23rd Psalm for Genealogists

Genealogy is my pastime, I shall not stray.

It leadeth me into churchyards.

It maketh me to lie down and examine tombstones

It restoreth my ancestral knowledge

It leadeth me in the paths of census records and ships passenger lists for my surname's sake.

Yea though I walk through the shadows of research libraries and microfilm readers .

I shall fear no discouragement, for a strong urge is within me.

The curiosity and motivation they comfort me.

It demandeth preparation of storage space for the acquisition of countless documents.

It anointest my head with midnight oil.

My family group sheets runneth over.

Surely, birth, marriage and death dates will follow me all the days of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the family history archives for ever and ever

Amen

Monumental Inscriptions are an important part of family history research, here are some classic examples:-

Here lies Ann Mann, Who lived an old maid, but died an old Mann.

December 8th 1767

Here lies the body of Jonathon Blake, he stepped on the gas instead of the brake

Here lies Sir John Strange, An honest lawyer, And that is strange

One from the Wild West:-

Here lies Lester Moore, Four slugs from a 44, No Les, No Moore

John Penny's Epitaph in Wimborne Kent:-

Reader if cash thou art in want of any,

Dig four feet deep and thou will find a Penny

*In our last newsletter I asked for contributions from our members  
Here are two examples of family History mysteries solved by diligent research*



Frances Highcock

**A lady from the USA recently asked for our help, with her research regarding her ancestor Frances Highcock.**

**In 2003 she had bought a Birth Certificate dated 20th February 1854, this showed no father's name only her mother's, -Ann Highcock. To further her research the lady purchased one of our newly issued CDs for St Anne's Sutton, this showed the baptism of Frances Highcock, on the 19th March 1854 born 20th February 1854. Again the father's name was missing. As our Society holds photographic images of the original baptism records, our researcher requested a copy. Loh! And Behold the father's name is clearly shown as John Barr. Ann Highcock and John Barr were married five years later. The moral of the story is to be persistent, even if the father's name is not shown on a Certificate, there are other resources, and our Society is there to help.**

#### Am I Peter Smith or Peter Dyer

When I was growing up in St Helens, we had a picture on the mantelpiece of boxer Jackie Dyer.

The story was that he was my Dad's brother, my uncle. How come then was he called Dyer?

Was he Dad's step brother, was grandmother married twice? The answer to both questions was no, so where did the Dyer connection come from? This fuelled the start of my family history research, Am I a Smith or a Dyer?

My wife Margaret and I sought help from two elderly cousins. They told us that my father and his brothers we always known as Dyers. Why? I wondered. His surname was definitely Smith according to his birth Certificate.

After months of research we think we have finally found the answer.

My great grandmother Ellen Wilkinson, married John Smith. They had two sons, George and my grandfather John. Great grandfather John Smith died leaving Ellen with her two toddlers. Ellen then married a Patrick Dyer and went on to have further children. All these children were brought up as Dyers including the two Smith brothers who only used their Surname Smith on formal documents. Then came the next generation. My father, Jackie and their brothers. The name Dyer lingered on.

Jackie, the boxer never used his legal name and was always known as Jackie Dyer. He was born in St Helens in 1888. He travelled the length and breadth of the country, becoming nationally famous. He fought over 70 fights including one against Jimmy Wilde "The ghost with the hammer in his hand" or "The mighty Atom".

Boxing took it's toll, Jackie became ill and returned to live with his mother in St Helens. He died in 1931 aged 43 of Neurasthenia ( a condition of nervous exhaustion and physical tiredness) presumably caused by boxing. I now realise that Jackie's early death must have influenced my father. He prevented my elder brother from pursuing a promising career in boxing, a sport he loved. He was obviously concerned for my brother's well being and didn't want him to suffer a similar fate.

The mystery has been solved ..... Grandfather was a Smith also known as Dyer, so was his son (my Dad) and my uncle Jackie.

My final words are the Family historian's regret...Why did I not ask the questions of those who knew the answers before it was too late? Still if I had known the answer, would I have had so much satisfaction doing the research?

Now I know who I am I AM Peter Smith.....or Am I Peter Dyer?