



St Helens Townships Family History Society

www.sthelenstownshipsfhs.org.uk

Founder And President-Richard Waring



Christmas
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COMMITTEE Chair:Margaret Crosbie, Vice Chair:Tom McKenna, Secretary/Treasurer: Pauline Hurst,

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PRESS-GANGED INTO AMERICAN CIVIL WAR By Sue Davies

My great, great grandfather, John Pratt, was born in Aberdeen and was a marine stoker. I assume it was this trade that brought him to the port of Liverpool around 1858. On 7th February 1864 he was to embark on what he thought was a voyage to the East Indies, however all was not as it seemed. He and his work colleagues were plied with drink, taken down to Dover and shipped to Calais where they were taken on board the steamer Rappahannock. The Rappahannock was originally built in the Thames in 1857 and named HMS Victor. She was sold in 1863 to a secret confederate agent but the British authorities suspected she was to be a confederate ship of war bound for America so detained her. However, she succeeded in escaping from Sheerness in November 1863 only for mechanical breakdown to force her to put in to Calais for repairs.



After seven weeks on board John and his colleagues left the ship, presumably with some secrecy and urgency since they left all their belongings behind and returned to England. The Rappahannock was detained by the French government for the rest of the Civil War at whose conclusion she was turned over the United States Government.

We, John Dow, John Pratt, and Walter Dixon, all of Liverpool, firemen, do truly and solemnly swear that we were shipped with six others by James Cunningham and Joseph Buchanan, at a public house, corner of Athol street, Liverpool, for a voyage to the East Indies. They informed us that the steamer was lying at Gravesend waiting for firemen, the wages to be paid at the rate of £6 10s. per month. We were all well treated with drink, and they promised that our wives should have the month's advance if they came with us to the station, Lime street, Liverpool, at 11 o'clock; but instead of our wives getting any money, we were all hurried into the train and more liquor given us in London. We were taken in cabs to the station for Dover, and on arrival there were put into the steam packet for Calais; after we had arrived at Calais, we were taken on board the steamer Rappahannock, and in the morning asked if we wanted to enlist. Graham, one of us, said that we came as firemen or stokers, and not as soldiers. We were then ordered to sign articles. They were not read over to us, but we were to have £6 19s. 10d. per month and £10 bounty instead of advance, which was to be paid in three days. Our half-pay notes were to be paid to our wives in Liverpool for twenty-four months, by Messrs. Jones, Higgins & Co., Chapel street, Liverpool. After remaining on board about seven weeks, and as the provisions were bad, and we were treated more like dogs than men, we left the ship, leaving our clothes on board. None of us would have gone to her had not Messrs. Cunningham and Buchanan deceived us. They told us she was for India. Had we known she was a ship of war for the confederates we would not have gone at all.

JOHN DOW.
JOHN PRATT.
WALTER DIXON.

Sworn by all the deponents at my office, No. 5 White Hart court, Lombard street, in the city of London, this 31st of March, 1864, before me.

JOHN J. ANDREW,
A London Commissioner to Administer Oaths in Chancery.

Another Great contribution from Steve Spencer

Never Give Up Hope

Of the people I have discovered while researching my families history my grandfather, Ernest John Spencer, has and still is proving the most difficult to bring his story to closure. From the start what remains of the family (4 grandchildren) knew very little about him, there where no photographs of him, we didn't even know his first name as he was never spoken about. Over the last 3 years I have been able to piece together a history of his life up until 1920 when he left his wife and 4 young children never to be seen again.

Ernest was born in Rainhill in 1882 where he spent his early years until the family moved to St Helens in the late 1880's. They continued to live in St Helens until the early 1900's when they moved to Prescott.

In July 1900 Ernest enlisted with the Militia and was attached to the 5th/6th Manchester Regiment, at the time he was working for an Ironmonger, Mr. Harrison, of Church Street St Helens. After being in the Militia nearly 12 months he enlisted with the Regular Army on a Short Service contract. He stated on his Attestation Form that he was at the time serving with the 7th Battery Lancashire Field Artillery, and is enlisted with the Royal Horse & Royal Field Artillery as a Driver. By October of 1901 he had been posted to Bulford Camp on Salisbury Plain Wiltshire. This posting at least provided us with the answer to one so far unanswered question 'How had Ernest meet his wife to be Annie Elizabeth Sainsbury?' (Annie had been born in Woodford, Wiltshire). Ernest seems to have spent from 1901 to 1909 serving with the Army in this area.

Ernest and Annie marry at Prescott Parish Church in December 1909, after he had completed his 8 years service with the Colours (Ernest extended his time with the Colours to 8 years in 1904). Annie must have faced a daunting journey from her home in Salisbury, probably on her own, up to Prescott after leaving her family. Annie gave birth to their first child Ernest George in December 1910. Ernest was working as a wire drawer for BI & H Cables Company, a second child Annie Elizabeth followed in 1912. In July 1913 Ernest was discharged from the Short Service contact he entered in 1901 having completed the 12 years that he signed on for.

Ernest's story now moves forward to July 1915, nearly 12 months after the outbreak of war, when he enlisted again with the Army this time for the duration of the war. As he had had previous service with the Royal Horse & Royal Field Artillery he is assigned to them. He was initially sent to No.2 Depot, Royal Field Artillery in Preston before being posted to France in August 1915. Once in France he is posted to the 42nd Brigade Ammunition Column as a Driver and served with them until July 1916 when he was seriously wounded with a gun shot wound to the lower hip. After being evacuated to the French coast he was transported back to England and sent to a hospital in Ripon, Yorkshire, while convalescing he spent some time on home leave before being sent back to France in December 1916. On his return to France he was posted to the 6th Divisional Ammunition Column before being posted to 24th/38th Brigade Royal Field Artillery. Ernest's third child James (my father) was born in May 1917 while he was serving overseas.

At the end of the war in December 1918 Ernest returned to England, he was discharged as medically unfit for service in January 1919. Ernest and Annie's fourth child Lucy Mary was born in May 1920. For his war service Ernest was awarded the Silver War Badge, 1914/15 Star, the British Medal and the Victory Medal, none of these medals has survived.

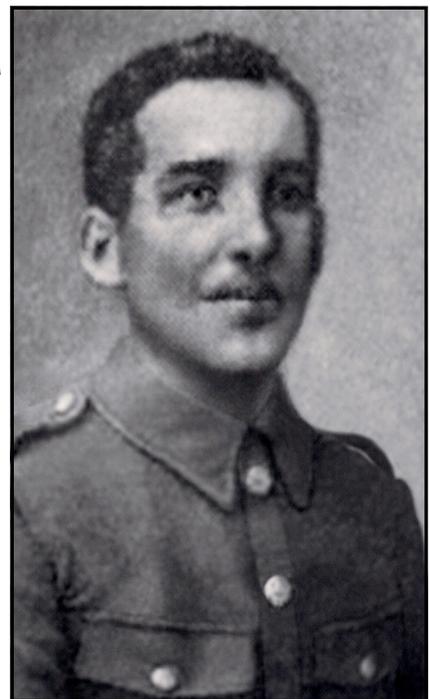
The story passed down through the family is that shortly after Lucy was born Ernest left his wife and young family never to be seen or heard of again. Rumour has it that he left with another woman and possibly emigrated.

I said early in this piece that there were no photographs of Ernest. At our last meeting on 21st September, we had a brilliant talk by Stephen Nulty on the Prescott Role of Honour. Stephen had originally set up his website to trace the history of those men from Prescott who died in WW1 his web site now also covers those men from Prescott who served in WW1. After the meeting I spoke to Stephen thinking that I might be able to add Ernest details to his list of 'those who served' he told me that he thought that Ernest was already on the site. On returning home I fired up the computer loaded the Prescott Roll of Honour website and entered Ernest's name. Imagine my surprise when not only where his details there but also a photograph I have to admit I was speechless at seeing this image. I can only described it as one of those 'Who do you think you are' moments, where the researcher presents a vital piece of information to the relative, the only difference in my case is that I was both researcher and relative. I emailed my cousin in South Wales not telling her what I had found just to search on the website. The following morning I had a text message form her saying that she was sat in front of her computer crying with joy while looking at a photograph neither of us thought we would ever see.

Is there a family likeness - yes I can definitely see my father and his brother when they were younger and my wife reckons that I have more than a passing likeness to him as well. I spent my lunchtime today in Huyton Library looking at the 1916 microfilms of the Prescott Reporter and now know exactly when the image was published - 28th July 1916.

Someday I hope to find out exactly what happened to Ernest and where and when he died.

Steve Spencer



OUR speaker for the September Meeting was our Secretary and Treasurer Pauline Hurst—The Beecham Story—Worth a Guinea a Box



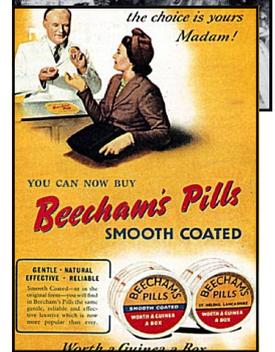
Thomas Beecham Founder

The scene was set for a fascinating look at this well known St Helens family – The Beecham's. Thomas the founder was an eccentric yet reclusive man who was married three times but is was ultimately buried alone with one grandchild. Joseph his eldest son, who was fabulously rich due to the success of the business but never found true happiness in his family and relationships. And lastly Sir Thomas Beecham, the conductor, who nearly never had a musical career due to lack of support from his family.

The talk charts the rise of the mighty Beecham Empire with examples of the advertising champagne and products they made and a behind the scene looks at the iconic building that stands today. Pauline has made good use of all the usual family history resources to research this talk.



Joseph and Josephine Beecham



The St Helens Pals Project Meeting on 22nd November



The purpose of this meeting of our Society was to provide updated information about the progress towards the publication of the story of 11th (Service) battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment (St Helens Pioneers), in the Great War. The project received a Heritage Lottery Grant after a revised second bid was

submitted. A book and a web site will eventually published.

David Risley spoke about the sources of information and of the many helpers who are contributing. A website has been set up for transcribers to save information directly to a database, this system cuts out unnecessary intermediary stages.. Over 41,000 records have been examined including 1500 men enlisted in the St Helens Pals and 1400 men were drafted in from other regiments more than 350 local men died.

Our President Richard Waring and Peter Harvey recounted the human story of how the war had a great effect on life in general.

Peter told a poignant story of "two little boys " who were rejected as "not fit ",they were too small. They desperately wanted to serve their country and so enlisted again in other regiments, both were killed in action, still only "little boys".

The Project is making great progress but volunteers are still required to help with research

Meetings

After the Christmas Break Our Monday Working and Help Desk Evenings will restart on 7th January 2013 at 5:00 pm

Monthly meetings are held at St. Helens Town Hall, 6.45 for a 7pm start. You do not have to be a member to attend.

2013 Programme

17th Jan:	Member's Evening
21st Feb:	God's Glaziers with Heather Davies
21st Mar:	Catholics in Lancashire with Alan Minchinson
18th Apr:	Williamson's Tunnels with Clair Moorhead
16th May	Visit to ST Anne's Sutton (members only)
20th June	"More on Wills and Probate" with David Lambert
18th July	Cemetery Walk with Ted Forsyth
15th August	Member's Evening
19th September	Behind the scenes at the Register Office
17th October	Pilgrimage in Medieval England with Tom Hughes
21st November	PALS Update with Dave Risley
12th December	Annual General Meeting "Members Only"

**Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year to all our friends
from the Committee and your editor Peter**

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