

A personal selection of local, British Isles and world, history.

EDITOR: Mark Brandon

WEBPAGE: jot-and-tittle.com



BRITISH AGRICULTURAL
HISTORY SOCIETY

ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY



QUEER AS A COOTE

This phrase came up in conversation with my cousins. It was how our parents referred to an outrageously homosexual relative in the 1950s. 'Queer' as in LGBTQ is now acceptable but why coote? A little research revealed that the Chaucerian *qweere* referred to the white shield¹ on a coote's face and meant strange or odd.



THE WINTER CROWN



This novel about Eleanor of Aquitaine by Elizabeth Chadwick (Sphere 2015) closes with an Author's Note. She includes an explanation of why she had chosen the name Robert for a pet monkey in the story. Apparently, at that time, all animals were given proper names relating to their kind. So all cats were called *Gylbert* or *Tybold* (hence Tibbles), all sparrows were *Philip*, all readbreasts were *Robin* and wrens, *Jenny* - and all monkeys were *Robert*.

Whilst on the subject of Eleanor of Aquitaine (seal, left): she was imprisoned by her husband, Henry II, at Old Sarum, outside Salisbury. EC quotes a papal document of 1217 referring to the cathedral there: *The continual gusts of wind make such a noise that those celebrating the divine offices can hardly hear each other speak*. No wonder the new cathedral was built on the flood plain.

BREAMORE CHURCH

Originally, St Mary's was a 120' long Saxon minster in a cruciform shape with the chancel at a slight angle to represent Christ's head on the cross. The transepts were vestigial and called the north and south *Porticus*. It was probably financed by Ethelred II *the Unready* (reigned 978 to 1013 and 1014 to 1016). Dating from his time, an inscription over the arch into the south porticus





reads *HER SWUTELATH SEO GECWYDRAEDNES THE* (*Here is manifested the word to thee*).

Until recently, the *advowson* (the right in English law of presenting a nominee to a benefice) belonged to the Hulse family as the church is in the grounds of their lovely Elizabethan manor house. Naturally, the family vault is in the church and the walls of the crossing tower are covered in their hatchments (deceased's escutcheon, left). There are the remains of wall paintings that are probably 13th century including a Saxon *Rood* painting in the porch with Christ flanked by St Mary and St John.



The churchyard includes an ancient yew tree that predates this 1,000 year old church showing that it must always have been a site of spiritual significance.

BALH

The Journal of the British Association for Local History has an interesting article on Victorian Closed Parishes. It is by Martin Wilkinson and builds on seminal work by Dennis Mills. Below is a flavour of some of his work.

Dennis' academic approach saw *open parishes* as those in which property was divided between several or many owners. In *Closed parishes* the landowner or landowners acting together had the ability, if they wanted, to limit settlement in the parish and exclude or remove those who were likely to require poor relief. Dennis also saw that these two poles represented the extremes of a broad spectrum. His research showed that closed parishes tended to have smaller populations and fewer poor but also larger farms, seasonal scarcity of labour and a very limited number of craftsmen and tradesmen. Their housing stock was of good quality with well-endowed schools and charities. The power of the landlord resulted in a deferential attitude to himself, the schoolmaster and parson. The parish tended to be strongly Anglican.

In the open parish the population was larger and growing, the farms were smaller but there were more craftsmen as well as shops and pubs. The parishioners were more independent and tended to be both radical and Nonconformist. A closed parish might well have a non-resident landlord. This was particularly true of the aristocracy where inheritance had given them estates in various counties. In such parishes, leadership fell on the parson and the larger tenant farmers. Also, the further a parish was from the main residence, the more the buildings became less stylish and less well maintained.

Of course the other important person in a parish with an absentee landlord was the landlord's agent. Much work has been done on the documents covering the estate of the Lords Carrington at



Humberston in North Lincolnshire. Lord Carrington employed his business associate and friend Thomas Thompson of Hull (right²) as his agent. Thompson, a Methodist, had worked his way up from shipping clerk to becoming a partner in Smith's Bank. He had quite a bit of discretion in his part-time role as agent and believed in keeping the poor labourers out of the workhouse by providing them with work, out-relief and allotments. He persuaded Lord Carrington to set aside 60 acres of cow pasture for the use of thirteen cottagers who had lost their rights to common land after enclosure in the 1790's. He later extended this by a further 24 acres to benefit eight more cottagers. The ability to have a cow not only improved their diet but enabled them to generate income by selling surplus milk and butter.



THE HOSTELRY

Pubs are often a great repository of history. One write-up³ I came across recently was of *The Haunch of Venison* in Salisbury.

The ancient and characterful Haunch of Venison in Minster Street is one of Britain's classic pubs. The pub is first recorded in 1320 when it was used to serve the workers building St Thomas's church behind. The current building was constructed in the 15th century and there were alterations in the 18th century when much of the wood panelling was added. The Haunch of Venison has been awarded Grade II* listing, which is rare for a pub, and Historic England describes its importance:

as an early house in the centre of Salisbury, which retains clear evidence of its evolution from a church house in the C15 to a public house, which was refurbished in about 1909.



As you go through the front door you enter a small wood-panelled bar with a pewter-topped bar counter (photo below). On the counter are two banks of rare spirit taps which were installed as part of the 1909 refurb by a local plumber (page 4). They once served fortified wines and spirits by gravity from barrels above.

Just to the right of the entrance is the "Horsebox", a tiny snug with bench seats and a single table which was once the ladies room. This bar was where Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower are said to have met after planning the D-Day landings in 1944, but it seems more likely that they used another, less obvious, room upstairs.

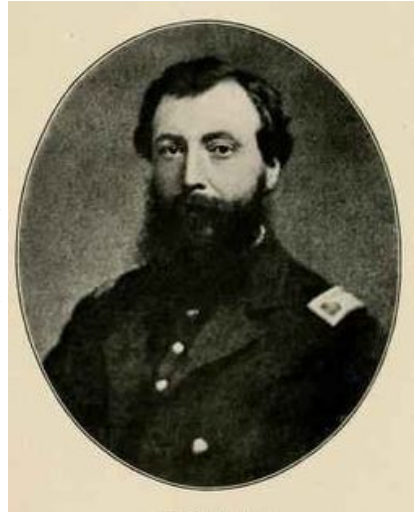


Up the steps from the bar is another panelled room with low beams and a large fireplace. It's called the House of Lords, apparently because it was used by bishops who wanted some peace from the noisy bar below. You do have to wonder how many bishops there were in Salisbury at the time. In a locked bread oven in the fireplace is a severed hand, chopped from the arm of a cheating

card player, and preserved by smoke after being thrown on the fire. The ghost of the unfortunate card player is said to haunt the pub, always appearing with his arms folded to hide his hands. Another ghost is the white lady who is rarely seen, but exudes the smell of flowers.

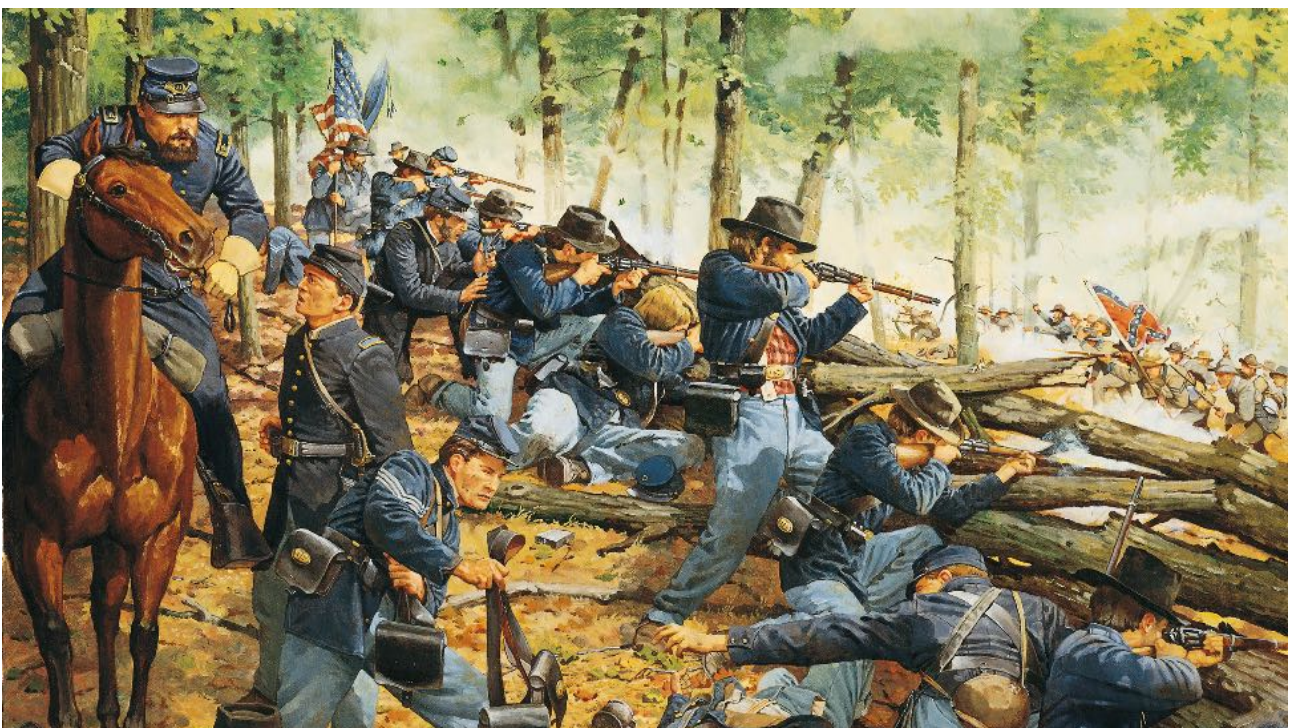
THE GREAT ESCAPE

No, not that one; the notorious Civil War Confederate *Libby* prison in Richmond, Virginia⁴. Housed inside a converted warehouse, Libby Prison was infamous for its overcrowded quarters, squalid conditions and meagre food rations. Hundreds of men were crammed into the building's makeshift cells. A complete absence of beds or bedding meant they were forced to sleep on the cold, unforgiving concrete floors in spoon formation, so as to maximise space and body heat. On command, they would turn over in unison to relieve aching bones and muscles. Of course, waking hours offered little succour. Food was scarce and unappetising, while the open nature of the barred windows meant that the prison was freezing in winter and scorching in summer. Prisoners dare not approach them either, for fear of being shot on sight.

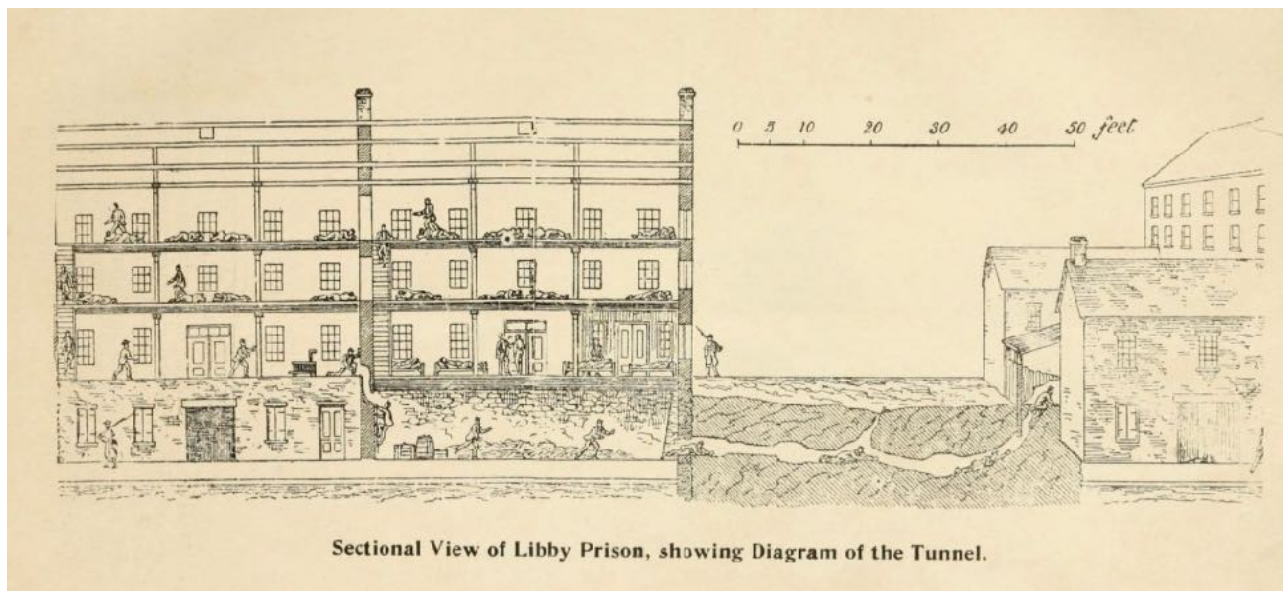


It was into this fetid dungeon that Thomas E. Rose (1830 - 1907, above) walked, shortly after being bested at the Battle of Chickamauga (below⁵), which was the first major battle of the American Civil War fought in Georgia. Still stinging from losing his regimental colours, and appalled at the conditions at Libby, Rose resolved to escape at his earliest opportunity. After unsuccessfully organising a prisoner revolt, as well as two failed attempts to simply slip past the guards, Rose struck upon the plan of tunnelling his way out. Joining forces with the like-minded Major Andrew G. Hamilton, Rose created an opening behind the kitchen stove which led to the basement below.

This area, known amongst both prisoners and guards as 'Rat Hell', was covered in straw and infested by vermin. But despite the obvious discomfort and disgust, it provided the perfect cover



for the escape attempt, since the guards themselves avoided the room like the plague. It was Rose's determination and encouragement which saw the project through to completion. Despite several close shaves and catastrophic setbacks – which saw the vast majority of the conspirators give it up as hopeless – Rose was able to persuade them to keep chipping away, one spittoon of soil at a time. After 17 devastatingly difficult days of digging (much of which was carried out exclusively at night), Rose and Hamilton directed their tunnel to the surface. Coming up in the tobacco shed of the warehouse lot across the street from the prison⁶, the inmates simply walked out of the door and melted away into the city, before heading north to meet up with Union forces.



Once word got out that an escape was underway, there was something of a stampede among the prisoners to access the tunnel. Despite the ruckus that this caused, the guards were so confident in the security of the jail that they did not investigate. Just as the Titanic became one of the deadliest shipwrecks of all time despite being dubbed unsinkable, Libby was the site of one of the biggest prison breaks of all time despite being deemed inescapable. In total, 109 inmates fled the prison walls that night. Of those 109 escapees, 59 made it to the safety of Union lines. Two perished while trying to swim across the James River and the other 48 – including Colonel Rose – were captured and incarcerated in Libby Prison once more.

However, it wouldn't last. Rose's presence alone was enough to cause concern amongst the guards, given how instrumental a role he'd played in the escape last time. Less than two months later, he was exchanged for a captured Confederate colonel. At the close of the war, the prison became a detention centre for many who had once ruled its roost, including its notorious warden Major Thomas P. Turner. Years later, the prison was dismantled and then rebuilt, brick by brick, in Chicago, Illinois as a tourist attraction. Despite initial success, it had a lifespan of less than a decade and all that remains of the prison today is a plaque commemorating one of the greatest and most daring escapes of all time.

1. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.
2. Thomas Thompson 1754 - 1828, Chairman of the Hull Dock Company by John Russell (1745 - 1806), courtesy of Hull Maritime Museum.
3. Courtesy of the Pub Gallery website <https://pubgallery.co.uk/pubs/haunch-of-venison-salisbury>.
4. Courtesy of Sky History 30.09.24. Photo of Col. Rose from Wikimedia Commons.
5. Battle of Chickamauga Creek, North-west Georgia, 1863, from Warfare History Network
6. Diagram of prison from Spared & Shared, The 1864 Diary of Lt. Hiram Luther Sibley.

EDITORIAL

Dear subscriber, I wonder if you can help me? I am trying to calculate the circulation of *Jot & Tittle*.

My difficulty is that although I know the number on the mailing list, many of you represent clubs and organisations and kindly act as a distribution point.

If you are one of those who forward copies to others, can you please make an estimate of how many recipients are involved. I will then co-ordinate all the responses and hopefully calculate the circulation.

Many thanks in advance for your help.

Mark

Mark Brandon
Editor

Meanwhile, I must catch up on my reading.....

