

PULVERTAFT PAPERS

A Newsletter on the Pulvertofts & Pulvertafts

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EDITORIAL

With this issue I complete Volume 2 of these papers and ten years of what I referred to in my first editorial as "a new phase of my researches from what has been a personal study, communicated only to two or three close members of the family, to a period of publication of the information, not only to the whole family, but also to other interested people, either directly or through specialist societies and libraries."

That the phase has lasted for ten years must itself indicate that I am achieving one of my objectives; that is gathering information from you, my readers. Certainly I now know much more about the two families than I did at the outset - even though I haven't been able to "forge" the connecting link - and, as I have made some good new friends in the process, I judge it to have been a success and hope that you have gained something too.

As with Volume 1, I plan to print a title page, contents list and index and I would hope to forward these at Christmas.

ROBERT JAMES VALENTINE PULVERTAFT

Robin Pulvertaft was born in Dublin on 14 February 1897, the second child of Thomas John Pulvertaft (q.v. Vol 2, No 2 of these papers) and Barbara Charlotte Denroche. Educated at Westminster School from 1910 to 1915, he won a Classics scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge; but, as with so many of that period, his education was interrupted by the First World War.

He joined the 3rd Royal Sussex Regiment in 1915, and served as a Lieutenant in the 4th Royal Sussex Regiment in Palestine where he was seconded as an observer in the Royal Flying Corps. He then served in France as a pilot with 205 Squadron RAF.

After the Great War he returned to Cambridge (MRCS) and St Thomas's Hospital (LRCP 1923) where he met and, on 14 May 1922, married Elizabeth Lilian Mary Costello (Isobel). They had three children, Isobel Lalage, Damaris Robyn (Rosalind) and Thomas Bourke - See Vol. 1, pages 28 & 29.

From 1923 he was the Pathologist to Units at St Thomas's and from 1929 was the Plimmer Research Fellow in Pathology. In 1931 he moved to Westminster Hospital as head of the Pathology Department, but his hospital and teaching career was to be interrupted again - this time by the Second World War. A glimpse of his service during the war and of his character are found in the words of an obituary printed in The Times on 11 April 1990.

"Known as "Robin" to his family but "Bulgy" - being mildly exophthalmic - to his myriad friends, Pulvertaft was a brilliant eccentric who, once encountered, was unforgettable. His exotic surname, he claimed, went back to Saxon days and meant "a heap of dust". The other half of his parentage was Irish, and when he talked of things Irish his impeccable English accent unconsciously slurred by a trace of the brogue.

During the Second World War Pulvertaft was Pathologist to the 64th General Hospital in Alexandria until his seniority and military experience led to his appointment as Assistant Director of Pathology MEF, with promotion to Lt Col, commanding the Central Laboratory, housed in the 15th General Scottish Hospital in Cairo.

Ever alert to new advances, Pulvertaft interested himself in Sir Howard Florey's work on penicillin. He obtained from Florey a culture of his *Penicillium* and produced vast quantities of the mould floating on the surface of countless gallons of broth in pails, crocks and tanks all over the laboratory floor. The filtrate was applied to infected wounds of battle-casualties by some of the hospital's surgeons, who found it very effective by the standards of the day.

But this venture was frowned on by Florey and his team, who did not want their work on the extraction of pure penicillin for systemic use to become confused with the local application of a crude brew. Three pundits flew out from England to investigate, but Pulvertaft defended his procedure so ably that all ended happily.

In late 1943 he was ordered to accompany Brigadier Evan Bedford, the Consultant Physician at HQ Middle East, on a flight to Bizerta to attend on a "sick VIP". It turned out to be Churchill. The patient on being asked for a blood sample said to Pulvertaft, "You can use my finger, or my ear - and, of course, I have an almost infinite expanse of arse."

In 1944 he was honoured with an OBE and soon returned to London. His medical achievements and those as a teacher were included in another obituary written by a colleague, this time Prof. J.R.Hobbs in The Independent.

Returning to Westminster, Pulvertaft created three specialist chairs in Pathology and made his department one of the best in the country; Westminster's results in Pathology often bettered not only the rest of London, but Oxford and Cambridge too. From his enthusiastic teaching he produced a profusion of professors and his lecture theatres were known to explode with laughter.

In his final years at Westminster his research on the tissue



ROBERT JAMES VALENTINE PULVERTAFT

culture of cancer cells and of bone marrow cells and lymphocytes was ahead of its time. In 1959 I looked down his microscope and saw the serum of a patient kill a culture of the patient's melanoma cells within 25 minutes; that patient had a rare spontaneous remission which lasted until his death 21 years later. Such work inspired a long series of researches into melanoma at Westminster which has spread around the world. Similar cultures revealed differences in the surfaces of cancer cells compared to normal cells, whereby because of lack of contact inhibition the cancer cells were able to invade their neighbours. This work by one of his pupils was the foundation for famous research continuing in the US. "Bulgy" also introduced the word "emperipolesis" to describe the way he had observed lymphocytes wandering around tissue cultures and nuzzling into other cells. At an international meeting a noted haematologist challenged him: "Do you really believe this happens in real life?" "Bulgy" replied, "If you go to the circus at Olympia, you can see bears riding bicycles." It is now known that this is a very important mechanism whereby lymphocytes police and nurture the tissues of the body and, indeed, it is one of the ways that a bone marrow transplant providing healthy lymphocytes can donate a previously deficient enzyme to a child who would have died of a genetic disease.

..... It was in Pulvertaft's medical school that the first successful human bone marrow transplant was carried out by the late Joseph Humble in 1957, and later applied from 1970 onwards to correct inborn errors of metabolism.

He retired in 1962 and, with his wife Isobel, settled near Shaftesbury for a short time before accepting visiting professorships in Nigeria and later Uganda where he conducted original research in Burkitt's Lymphoma before returning to Dorset in the late sixties. In the mid seventies they moved to Cambridge where Isobel died on 28th July 1985.

Robin died on 30th March 1990 at Macclesfield, Cheshire.

BIRTH, MARRIAGE AND DEATH CERTIFICATES FROM IRELAND

Having analysed the Pulvertaft entries in the Irish Civil Registration Indexes of births, marriages and deaths in the last two issues of these papers, the next step had to be to send for a selection of the more significant certificates to see how they might add to our knowledge of the family.

From the Index of Births, that of Amos William Pulvertaft was selected as the certificate was expected to show the names of his father and mother, thus confirming the part of the Pulvertaft pedigree which straddles pages 27 and 28 of Vol. 1. Sure enough it records the birth of Amos William on 5 May 1882 at 119 Georges Street, Cork, son of Robert Pulvertaft, brassfounder of 119 Georges Street, and Elizabeth Anne (nee Bogan). It was Robert Pulvertaft who informed the registrar of his son's birth. (The pedigree is thus confirmed in that particular area).

From the Index of Marriages, that between Robert and Elizabeth Anne Bogan was chosen to see what else might emerge. The certificate records firstly that Robert Pulvertaft, of full age, a bachelor and a brassfounder of Cork was the son of Thomas Pulvertaft, also a brassfounder; secondly that his bride was Elizabeth Anne Bogan, of full age, spinster of Cork and daughter of James Bogan, merchant; and thirdly that they were married on 19 September 1865 at the Parish Church of Rincurran, Co. Cork. George Bogan and John L. Robertson witnessed the marriage. (Confirmation again of part of the pedigree on page 27 of Vol. 1).

Finally from the Index of Deaths, the certificate for Thomas Pulvertaft (who died in 1864) was requested as it was hoped that this might help to prove the connection with the earlier Thomas Pulvertaft of Cork as was suggested on page 71 of the last issue of these papers but has correctly been challenged by one of our readers.

The certificate informs us that Thomas Pulvertaft, a married man of 46 years and a brassfounder, died on 21 December 1864 at the Cork Fever Hospital of Typhus Fever, having been ill for eighteen days. The registrar was informed of the death by the Resident Medical Officer of the Cork Fever Hospital.

This does not allow us to say that Thomas (M010) who died in 1864 was the same person as Thomas (C130) who is shown on page 37 of Vol. 1 as being baptised at Shandon in 1822 and whom, from the Shandon parish register, we know was born 15 August 1822. On date evidence the two are not the same person as by December 1864, when Thomas (M010) died, Thomas (C130) would have been only 42 and not 46 years old. However, the fact that the informant of the death of Thomas (M010) was the Resident Medical Officer of the Cork Fever Hospital means that there could have been an error as he would presumably have told the registrar the age recorded in the hospital records which, in turn, would have been that given by Thomas's relatives when he was admitted with typhoid fever. An error of four years in these circumstances is not too difficult to contemplate and more evidence is needed before we come to any firm conclusion.

Overall, the three certificates have shown themselves to be a worthwhile purchase as they have reinforced the Pulvertaft pedigree and have added quite a lot to the information which was printed opposite Thomas Pulvertaft's photograph on page 77 of Vol. 1 of these papers, even though we are not able to include that he was son of Thomas and Hester Pulvertaft.

NOTES & QUERIES

There are a dozen or more reference books which describe themselves as dictionaries of surnames but, until recently, none has included any reference to the names Pulvertoft or Pulvertaft.

This changed in 1988 with the publication by the Oxford University Press of "A Dictionary of Surnames" by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges. The authors attended the 1983 A.G.M. of the Guild of One-Name Studies and spoke to the meeting about their project, realising that Guild members had a great deal to offer from the research that each of them had done on their registered names. As a result, I sent them a few facts about the Pulvertoft and Pulvertaft families to which they have added their own knowledge of names. The resulting entry is:

"Pulvertaft Irish: of uncertain origin, possibly a var. of the extinct Lincs. surname Pulvertoft, which may have been a habitation name from some lost place. Pulver is probably an old stream name, preserved also in Pulverbath, Shrops., derived from ON puldra to gush; -toft is a common N English placename element, from ON topt home-stead, although in the earliest known instance of the surname the second element seems to be CROFT.

The first known bearers of the name are Robert and John Pulvertaft, who married in Cork in 1753 and in 1765 respectively. All modern bearers of the name, which is found in the U.S., Australia, S Africa, and Denmark, as well as Ireland and England, seem to be descended from Thomas Pulvertaft, who was married c.1840."

So there is another possible explanation for the name. It is a bit different from that which I suggested on Vol 2 page 7 and, for myself, I think that the idea of reclaimed land (polder) seems to be more in keeping with the 14th century fenlands of Lincolnshire than a gushing stream - but at 600 years range, who's to tell?