

**CYRIL CLARE DOUGHTY**  
**(HM Pioneer Corps)**

and

**MURIEL DORIS ETHEL WHITE**  
**(ACW2)**



One of the entries in the Wood Norton parish register transcripts that stands out is the record of a marriage which took place in All Saints church on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1941:<sup>1</sup>

*Groom:* Cyril Clare Doughty, age 26, single, Wood Norton  
Private, HM Pioneer Corps

*Bride:* Muriel Doris Ethel White, age 20, single, Bircham Newton (Banns)  
Private, ACW2.

Cyril Clare Doughty was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1914 and baptised on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1921 in Wood Norton parish church,<sup>2</sup> the youngest of nine children born to Thomas George and Anna Maria Doughty. Thomas George Doughty (born 1870, Wood Norton)<sup>3</sup> married Anna Maria Waterson on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1892 in Wood Norton parish church.<sup>4</sup>

Cyril's eldest brother, Thomas Walter Doughty (born 1892) was killed in action on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1918 at the Somme and is commemorated on the War Memorial in Wood Norton parish church.

At the time of his marriage it appears that Cyril was a Private in HM Pioneer Corps. The Royal Pioneer Corps was a British Army combatant corps used for light engineering tasks, formed in 1939. Pioneer units performed a wide variety of tasks in all theatres of war, including stretcher-bearing, handling all types of stores, laying prefabricated track on beaches, and effecting various logistical operations. Under the supervision of the Royal Engineers, they constructed airfields and roads and erected bridges.<sup>5</sup>

Muriel Doris Ethel White was born in 1920 in the Farnham registration district.<sup>6</sup> The parish register marriage transcript gives her father's name as John White (shoemaker, deceased). At the time of her marriage it appears that Muriel was an ACW2 – Aircraftwoman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. Records indicate that Muriel served with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), the female auxiliary of the Royal Air Force, service number 895564, and enlisted after March 1939.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages, 1941 (p.107).

<sup>2</sup> FreeBMD, Births, *Quarter to December 1914, Aylsham, Vol. 4b, p.150* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Baptisms 1921 (p.42).

<sup>3</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to September 1870, Aylsham Vol.4b, p.81* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); 1871 Census, Wood Norton (p39) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>4</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1892, Aylsham Vol.4b, p.143* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages 1892 (p.97).

<sup>5</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Pioneer\\_Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Pioneer_Corps).

<sup>6</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to September 1920, Farnham, Vol.2a, p.333* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>7</sup> Forces War Records ([www.forces-war-records.co.uk](http://www.forces-war-records.co.uk)).

Women's Auxiliary Air Force was established on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1939 to free up RAF personnel for front line duties, and conscription of women began in 1941. Members of the WAAF were initially recruited as clerks, kitchen orderlies and drivers but as the war progressed the roles available for women continued to become more varied and went on to include telegraphy, telephony, the interception of codes and ciphers, the interpretation of aerial photographs, compiling weather reports, maintaining aircraft, serving on airfields and working in intelligence. At its peak strength in 1943, WAAF numbers exceeded 180,000, with over 2,000 women enlisting each week.<sup>8</sup>

It seems likely, given that the parish records indicate that the marriage banns were read at Bircham Newton, that Muriel was based at RAF Bircham Newton. Bircham opened as an airfield in 1916 and continued as a peacetime bomber base in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1936 it was assigned to the newly created Coastal Command and a major rebuilding was undertaken. Coastal Command was the RAF's maritime arm, responsible for protecting allied shipping and supply routes into the UK. Bircham established itself as one of the most important Coastal Command stations on the East Coast. Serving in No. 16 Group, Bircham performed a variety of critical Coastal Command operations, including photographic and meteorological reconnaissance, mine laying, anti-shipping strikes (these were strikes against German convoys carrying war materials) and air sea rescue.<sup>9</sup> Bircham Newton finally closed in December 1962, ending a long and distinguished RAF service of more than 40 years and involving more than 80 flying units.<sup>10</sup>



*Figure 1: Bircham Newton 1938, seen from the air  
([www.forgottenairfields.com](http://www.forgottenairfields.com))*

How Cyril and Muriel met is not known, but it is possible that, as part of RAF Bircham Newton's rebuilding programme, Cyril may have spent some time there with the Pioneer Corps, and that is how he and Muriel met.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/blog/2013/06/28/waaf-aiding-the-war-effort-and-helping-to-change-the-social-status-of-women>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_Auxiliary\\_Air\\_Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_Auxiliary_Air_Force); and <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-vital-role-of-women-in-the-second-world-war>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.rafbnmp.org.uk/bircham.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/units/3998/raf-bircham-newton>.

Muriel would have been entitled to receive the 1939-1945 War Medal and the 1939-1945 Star for operational service in WW2.

1939-1945 War Medal



1939-1945 Star



Cyril Doughty died in 1992, aged 78.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index 1916-2007 (Quarter to October 1992, Southwark (Greater London), Vol. 15, p.13)* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).