



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor



Hello historical fiction lovers!

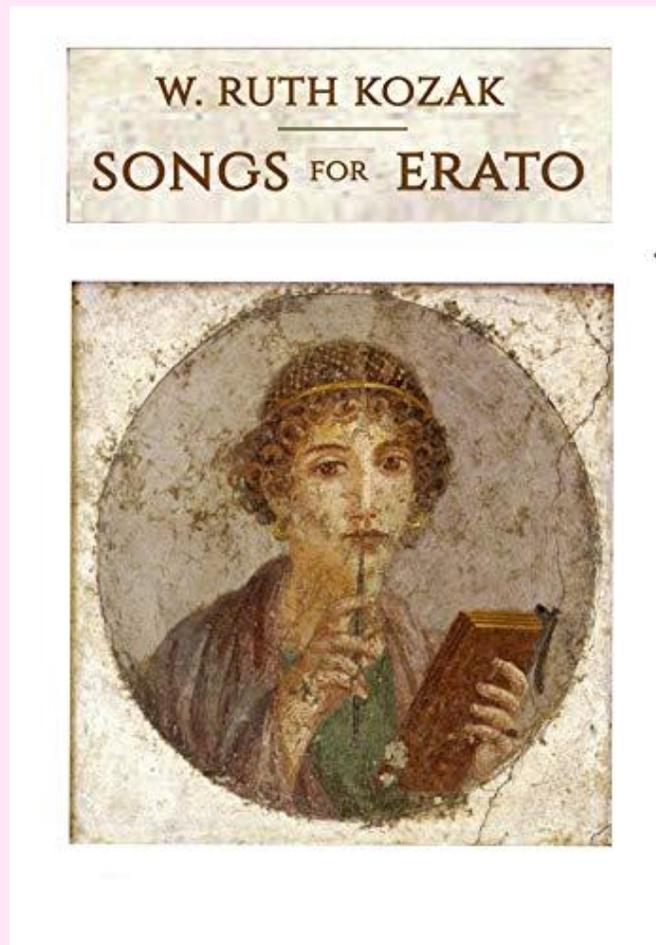
We're into December, the home stretch of 2020. It's been a doozy of a year. (Doozy, is that a historical word?) Whether or not the word is historically accurate, 2020 has been like a year out of a SciFi book. But we're almost done with it and hopefully are moving into a year that will be better.

There's lots of fun things in the plans for next year – including a new short story contest coming up to celebrate our second birthday in April. More details to come in early January. But for now, keep reading to see what fascinating tidbits Angela Petch shares with us this week.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Linore Burkard, Celia Martin, DS Elliston, Sylvia Broady, Gini Grossenbacher, and a lot more!

Trisha

New Releases



Songs for Erato

Ruth Kozak

Poems written in my travels in Greece, and about the history of this ancient land.

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Occupations

A chandler, a fletcher, and a puddler walked into a bar...

Oh, you've heard that one?

When reading or writing historical fiction, we step back into time and back into worlds before us that abound with occupations unknown to us today. A chimney sweep was a real profession, not some mythical made-up occupation solely for use in *Mary Poppins*.

According to a list compiled by the Wise County Historical Society, a chandler is a "Dealer or trader; one who makes or sells candles; retailer of groceries", a Fletcher is "One who made bows and arrows", and a Puddler is a "Wrought Iron worker."

Your characters occupation may seem insignificant, a mere minor detail that you use to fill in one line on your list of facts. Yet, this tiny scrap of information plays a vital role in shaping the character that you write about. After all, it was an important enough detail that occupations are listed on ship manifests and on census sheets.

Your character's occupation can provide many clues as to the activities that make up their day to day life. The daily life of a man that owned the mercantile store in town would be vastly different from one that worked in a coal mine.

When I was researching Athelstan, Iowa and the 1934 quilt squares, for [Memories on Muslin](#), I found a reprinted newspaper article that mentioned the stores in the early town. At one time Athelstan was a bustling little burg. Never as large as Bedford, the county seat 18-miles away, it still had its share of commerce. Besides the 'gallon' store on the Missouri side, it listed these businesses:

- Charles Merrill, drugstore
- Mr. Winston, drugstore
- Ace Nighswonger, general store
- Hal Brown, general store
- Miles Martin (first postmaster), general store
- W.J.W. & Pearl Townsend, store
- Sid Merriman, store
- Miles Martin (postmaster & general store owner), hotel
- Ed and Avon Johnson, butchers and sausage makers
- Flint and Coats, coopers
- Dr. Childres, first physician
- Schoenmann and Sons, lumber yard

I'd never heard of a cooper and had to look it up. According to Wikipedia, "Traditionally, a cooper is someone who makes wooden staved vessels of a conical form, of greater length than breadth, bound together with hoops and possessing flat ends or heads. Examples of a cooper's work include but are not limited to casks, barrels, buckets, tubs, butter churns, hogsheads, firkins, tierces, rundlets, puncheons, pipes, tuns, butts, pins, and breakers."

Besides the job of cooper, which no longer exists today, many other occupations don't exist anymore. Think switchboard operator, milkman, service station attendant, or iceman are just a few common occupations from not all that long ago that vanished with the changing times.

Many occupations may be familiar to us, even though they're not in existence anymore. A tinker is an itinerant tin pot and pan seller and repairman, a fish monger is a seller of fish, a bard is a poet or minstrel. Many occupations still have the same name today such as a mason is a bricklayer.

It's fun perusing the [London Census 1891 Transcription Blog](#) and reading some of the occupations listed at that time.

- An 'ankle beater' was a young person who helped to drive the cattle to market.
- A banker (not what you'd think) dug ditches to allow drainage, placing the surplus earth in banks.
- A battledore maker made the beaters used on clothes and carpets etc. to remove dust
- A bellowfarmer was a person responsible for the care and maintenance of the church organ.
- A bellows maker made the bellows used for organs or blacksmiths fires.

Just for fun, here are a few websites that mention other occupations that have disappeared, such as a knocker-upper, rat catcher, bowling alley pinsitter, or a lector, among others.

What are some of the weird jobs that no longer exist?

<https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-of-the-weird-jobs-that-no-longer-exist>

11 Jobs From 1850 That Are Totally Extinct

<http://www.businessinsider.com/11-jobs-from-1850-that-are-totally-extinct-2013-9>

35 Important Jobs that No Longer Exist – Part 2

<http://www.best10resumewriters.com/35-jobs-no-longer-exist-part-2/>

Old Jobs that No Longer Exist

<https://journal.media/old-jobs-that-no-longer-exist>

10 Common 19th Century Occupations That You're Not Likely to See Today

<https://familyhistorydaily.com/family-history/20-antiquated-occupations-1880-us-census/>

Free Dictionary of Old Occupations and Trades

<https://www.thoughtco.com/dictionary-of-old-occupations-and-trades-1422235>

Old Names of Occupations and Their Meanings

<http://wisevahistoricalsoc.org/2010/09/08/old-names-of-occupations-and-their-meanings-dan-burrows-2/>

London Census 1891 Transcription Blog

<http://www.census1891.com/occupations-a.php>

Author Spotlight: Angela Petch



Welcome to Pages of the Past Angela. We're so happy you could join us today to chat about your books. Your three latest books – *The Tuscan Secret*, *The Tuscan Girl*, and *The Tuscan Memory* – all have a common Tuscan denominator. How did the Italy connection come to be to join these three stories?

Thank you so much for inviting me to chat across the miles.

Italy is a very important part of my life as I lived in this beautiful country as a child when my father was posted to Rome. He worked for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in the 1960s, not too long after the end of World War 2 in fact. Children are like sponges and I absorbed all things Italian from that day forward. When he took us to visit the beautiful, dignified cemeteries in the countryside, even as a young child, I could appreciate the effects of war.

I am married to a wonderful half-Italian, half-English man. His Italian mother was a war bride and she told me many stories about occupied Italy. She isn't Tuscan but now that we live for six months of the year in Tuscany, I transposed her story (in *The Tuscan Secret*) to this region.

What drew you to write these stories set during these times?

Where we live, in a remote river valley in eastern Tuscany, there are still trenches and gun emplacements scattered along the mountain ridges. In World War Two, our area was occupied by the German army who ordered the construction of a defensive barrier from coast to coast, incorporating the mountains as a natural barrier. It was known as the Gothic Line. I speak fluent Italian and we have many elderly friends who have shared with me their stories of this time. Sadly, we are beginning to lose them. My elderly friend, Bruno, died in June and he was one hundred years old. I feel the need to record their stories so that they will not be forgotten. Of course, I ask permission and some of their accounts are slightly tweaked and names changed.

Your first book of this Tuscan series is *The Tuscan Secret*. It's stated that this tale is inspired by true events. Can you tell us a little about it?

Many events are true, including the accounts of massacres that happened locally. As mentioned earlier, the whole area was occupied by the German army. Partisan activity was strong, and my local tourist office has many documents that they allowed me to consult. I love to walk along the old mule tracks and hardly ever meet anybody and the ghosts of the past seem to whisper to me through the trees and I feel compelled to dig out the history of the place.

The details about Ines when she moves to England were taken from my own Italian mother-in-law's experiences. She wrote letters home to her parents regularly and her father kept them all and I have had access to them, providing me with lots of detail – gold dust for an author.

Not everything is true. The Tuscan Secret is not a history book. I used poetic license to embellish certain happenings and to invent characters. I have to add that my English father-in-law was a wonderful person... without giving anything away of the story!

What kind of research was needed to write these three books?

I always research extensively because I feel I should respect the past. The trick is not to include too much of the research but to weave it into the narrative so that it feels natural.

For *A Tuscan Memory*, which is not a World War Two story, I again spoke to my elderly friends in the area. The background to this novel is an occurrence called the *transumanza* – (From Wikipedia: “Transhumance is a type of pastoralism or nomadism, a seasonal movement of livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures.”) This practice continued until the 1950s in our area of Tuscany and involved menfold (and sometimes families) moving away from the mountains in September and down to the Tuscan coast until May each year. I was fascinated and decided to walk part of the ten-day route to see the kind of terrain the caravan had to cross with the sheep and cattle. The idea of families separated for so long set my imagination afire. I also visited several museums and read personal accounts to help me write my story.

To summarise: to research my books I use a combination of oral memories, written accounts and any books I can get hold of. I also have a couple of Italian author friends who specialize in World War Two who have helped me immensely. The writing community is so generous.

Of these three books, were any of them easier or more difficult than the others?

I think my first book was the hardest as I didn't really know what I was doing. I self-published initially in a hurry to get the book out before my mother-in-law fell ill and there was lots to take on board. Formatting and marketing were particularly difficult. When my publisher, Bookouture, gave me a contract and sent me edits, that was also difficult. Unravelling something I had written a few years earlier was not easy. But I am slowly getting used to it and feel so grateful to be with this wonderful publisher. They have helped me sell over 160,000 copies to date.

Your first book is vastly different from the historic theme your next three books took. *Mavis and Dot: Frolics, foibles and friendships by the seaside* is not historical fiction. Yet, I know many of our readers read other genres besides historical fiction. I understand that there's a special cause behind *Mavis and Dot*. Can you tell us about this book and what it means to you?

Mavis and Dot is in fact the third book I wrote and I enjoy writing about these two ladies. I have started a sequel while I wait for edits to arrive for my new Tuscan novel which should be published in March 2021.

Sadly, I lost my best friend a while back to ovarian cancer. When she was with us, we used to enjoy hunting for bargains in charity shops and we called each other Mavis and Dot. When Olga was very ill, I wrote her a story (loosely) based on us and she loved it. Twelve years after losing her, I added to that story and self-published a novella which I sell to raise funds for research into cancer. If you are looking for a Christmas gift for somebody who needs cheering up, then why not consider buying a copy? You will be contributing to a worthwhile cause in the process.

I'm so pleased with the reviews Mavis and Dot have received:

Over the Rainbow blog: "If you like heartwarming hilarious books that will make you laugh and cry, then you'll love this book."

Sandie's Book Shelves: "Every single character in this tale is a masterpiece of the author's observation of real people, every one is individual and many are eccentric in their own way. I cannot think of a single criticism to make of this novel – apart from the fact I wanted it to keep going..."

The Midnight Review: "What a cast! I loved Mavis, I want to be her when I grow up..."

Thank you for joining us today, Angela. We appreciate your time. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books and we'll go follow and friend you.

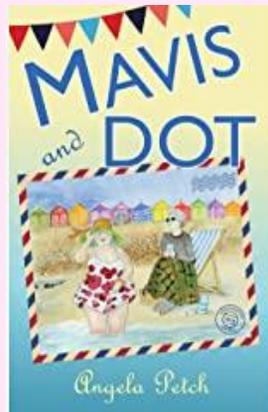


You can find Angela Petch's books here:

The Tuscan Secret: <https://geni.us/B07Q38YX7XCover>

The Tuscan Girl: <https://geni.us/B083P5XHRCover>

A Tuscan Memory: <https://amzn.to/2ZVOQ5B>



As it is for charity, I've been cheeky and included a 4th link to Mavis and Dot: www.mybook.to/MDot

You can find Angela Petch here:

Blog: <https://angalapetchsblogs.wordpress.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AngelaJaneClarePetch>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/Angela_Petch

BIO: Angela Petch divides her year between the Tuscan Apennines and West Sussex.

Her first book was written for her Italian mother-in-law, Giuseppina, and also to make readers aware of the courage shown by families of her Italian neighbours during WW2. Signed by Bookouture in 2018, this book was republished as *The Tuscan Secret* in June 2019. *The Tuscan Girl* followed in February 2020.

Now and Then in Tuscany, was self-published in April 2017 and features the same family. Bookouture acquired the rights, and created a new title, *A Tuscan Memory*. Research for her Tuscan novels is greatly helped by her knowledge of Italian.

Although Italy is a passion, *Mavis and Dot*, published at the end of 2018 and sold in aid of research into a cure for cancer, relates the antics of two fun-loving ladies who retire to the Sussex seaside. *Ingenu/e Magazine* says: "Absolutely Fabulous meets *Last of the Summer Wine*... a gently hilarious feel-good book that will enchant and delight...".

A prize-winning author, Amazon best seller and member of the RNA, she loves to travel and recently returned to Tanzania where she used to live. A keen tennis player and walker, she enjoys playing with her five grandchildren and inventing stories for their entertainment.

Her short stories are published by PRIMA and the People's Friend.

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