



Lionel Lindsay Turner

14288535 Private, 8th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

He died on 1st May 1943, in Tunisia, aged 19

Lionel is buried at Medjez-el-Bab war cemetery, Tunisia

By 1901, Herbert Turner (traction engine driver) and his wife Charlotte were living on the Common and raising a small tribe of girls having married in 1894. Herbert also appears on the electoral register of 1904. Doreen Whurr nee Brown recalls the family in the late 30's:-



'The tiny house to the right of the council houses was occupied by the Turner's - there were lots of them'.

Certainly, by the 1911 census, the illiterate but skilled Farm Machinist, Engine Driver Herbert, had five daughters and one son which whilst not huge by the standards of The Common was certainly a lot of people in one tiny house. The two older girls were working in the hosiery factory, the younger children were still at school getting the education which seems to have eluded their parents. The census was completed on their behalf by their neighbour Robert Saunders, living across the way.

who had completed the form for the family? Like many illiterate people Herbert was rather vague on his age: 44 in 1911; 33 in 1901; 26 in 1891 when he was lodging with Benjamin Saunders, a drill man, and his family in Rushall.

The age of 26, given in 1891, is probably the accurate age as on March 5th, 1865 a Herbert Job, illegitimate son of Louisa Turner was baptised at Hedenham Church. Louisa went on to marry Thomas Mills in Hedenham at the start of 1866, this may have been a marriage of convenience for all concerned. Thomas was substantially older than Louisa, 14 to 17 years depending on which age Louisa was working from.

When the Mills appear in 1871, out on the Seething Fens, Thomas Mills from Pulham had given little Herbert his name, and, in their 5 years of marriage Louisa and Thomas had already added three more children to the family. Louisa, then 25, would only have been about 19 when Herbert was born; she appeared in 1861 working away from home, aged only 16 as a general servant in the household

of a farmer in Hedenham! The 71 census also reveals she had been born in Hardwick and that she may have added a few years onto her age to get the work in Hedingham as the only girl I can find in the 1851 census of about the right age to be her, is 3 years old Louisa Ann Turner, living in Hardwick with her grandfather Thomas Turner and her aunt, Louisa Turner Snr.

Indeed, 10 years on, in 1881, and Louisa was claiming to be only 34, rather closer to what I calculate to be her true age, and the family (now with 9 children) had moved on to the Harleston Road in Rushall, living next the Brick Kilns. Sadly, one of the children, 10 years old Thomas Jnr, was (in the harsh way of the time) described as an imbecile. This actually gets worse as by 1891, not only was Thomas Jnr described as an imbecile, so was his slightly younger brother, Arthur, three years his junior. It was also this year that Henry/Harry was committed for an 'offence' with Anna Hubbard Rant. This seemed to be a terrible blot on the reputation of a family that otherwise, inspite of poverty and overcrowding had in all other respects kept out of trouble. You don't find the Mills up for drunkenness, petty theft, brawling or failure of children attending school! The case went to court and

Anna Hubbard Rant, of Langmere, was charged by Eliza Hubbard, of the same place, with stealing 1s. 7½d. from her house on the 10th inst., and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

was tried with two others of a like nature, but involving men of 47 and 35 with girls of 14 and 13 respectively; these cases were

deeply unpleasant, with elements of what one would now recognise as grooming. Whilst the alleged 'offence' between Harry (23) and Anna (15) had taken place 3 months before Anna's 16th birthday, I am afraid in the intervening time Anna had wound up in court in Harleston, been tried and sent to prison; her credibility was shot to pieces and having decided that it was reasonable for Harry to believe Anna was over 16, the jury acquitted him. They had not been discreet!

Diss Express
27 Nov 1891

He was found not guilty and discharged.—Henry Mills, a labouring man, apparently 27 or 28 years of age, surrendered to his bail on the charge of committing an offence against Anna Hubbard Rant, living at Dickleburgh, on June 14th. Mr. Frere was for the prosecution, prisoner being undefended. The offence, it was alleged, was committed in a field in the parish of Rushall, where both parties were seen by a couple of young men, who gave evidence accordingly. The girl reached the age of 16 last September, but the offence took place on June 14th. Prisoner went into the witness-box, where he denied the offence and swore that the girl had previously told him she was turned 16. The jury found prisoner not guilty, believing that he had reasonable cause to think the girl was over 16.

Regardless, Louisa and Thomas carried on churning out the babies; by 1891 at least 5 more had been added to the mix, 12 of whom were still living at home, making a total of 14 who survived to appear in the censuses.

Must have been mighty crowded with 14 in the house. Looking at the size of their family (and the children did not seem to fly the nest early) it is not too surprising that in 1887, the Mills family of Rushall were particularly mentioned in Candler's report to the Depwade Union, as being repeat offenders for overcrowding.

In 1894 Herbert Turner aka Mills, married Charlotte Land; I think it no co-incidence that back in 1881, one entry below the Mills household appeared the Land household including Charlotte, then 12 years of age and 3 years younger than Herbert. In 1891, Charlotte was a domestic servant in Starston, when they married, in late 1894, Charlotte would have been just 26 and Herbert 28, possibly 29; glad to know they did not rush into things!

Old Thomas Mills died in Rushall in early 1895, although the register claims he was then 69 – 5 years older than one might have thought, His son Thomas Jnr, one of the two ‘imbeciles’ died 7 months later in September 1895, aged only 25.

Lord knows how she did it but with hordes of children still in tow, Louisa snagged herself another husband, widower James Buggs, a mere 3 years older than herself. The couple appeared in the 1901 census with 7 of her children and a boarder in the household. James’ previous marriage had been a sort of bizarre reverse of Louisa’s. James at the age of 26 had married a spinster who was around the age of 40; not too surprisingly no children arose from this union. It must have been one hell of a shock for James Buggs to have gone from his small household of two, to being a widower in early 1893, to taking on a large house hold less than 2 ½ years later! At the time of the marriage, Louisa’s youngest child would have been only 5!

Hats off to Mr Buggs – he married Louisa on Christmas Day and I hope that this was a good omen for the rest of their life together. This sadly was only 8 years in duration, Louisa died at the age of 57 on the 15th of January 1903, at this point her youngest child was still only 12. But bless Mr Buggs indeed, in 1911 he still had two of Louisa’s adult children living with him including the baby of the family, Lucy, then aged 23.

Back to the Common and a family which seems positively small in comparison to the Mill’s! Herbert Job Turner survived to the very respectable age of 71, dying in 1936. His wife outlived him, achieving the impressive age of 88 when she died in 1957.

One of the younger girls, Norah, had a tumble during the “Paul Jones” at a ‘Girl’s Friendly Society Dance’ in George Hall, leading to two stitches – must have been a slow news week!¹ Norah went on to marry James Thompson in 1948 at the quite mature age of 41!

9 years earlier, shortly after the outbreak of WW2, Norah was one of three bridesmaids at the wedding of Hilda Phoebe Payne, youngest daughter of Charles Payne at No6 the Close which is basically the row of Council Houses plus the old former farmhouse, Apple Tree Cottage. All wore ‘ring velvet’, the bridesmaids in ankle length grape!

Doreen Whurr nee Brown remembered an old lady living in the small cottage with two or three of her daughters and a younger boy although she was unsure if the boy was the ‘old lady’s’ or belonged to one of her daughters. Evidence certainly points to the latter as, when Lionel L. was baptised in 1923, his mother’s maiden name was given as Turner. In 1923, Charlotte would have been 54, not out of the question but a little elderly to become a mother again.

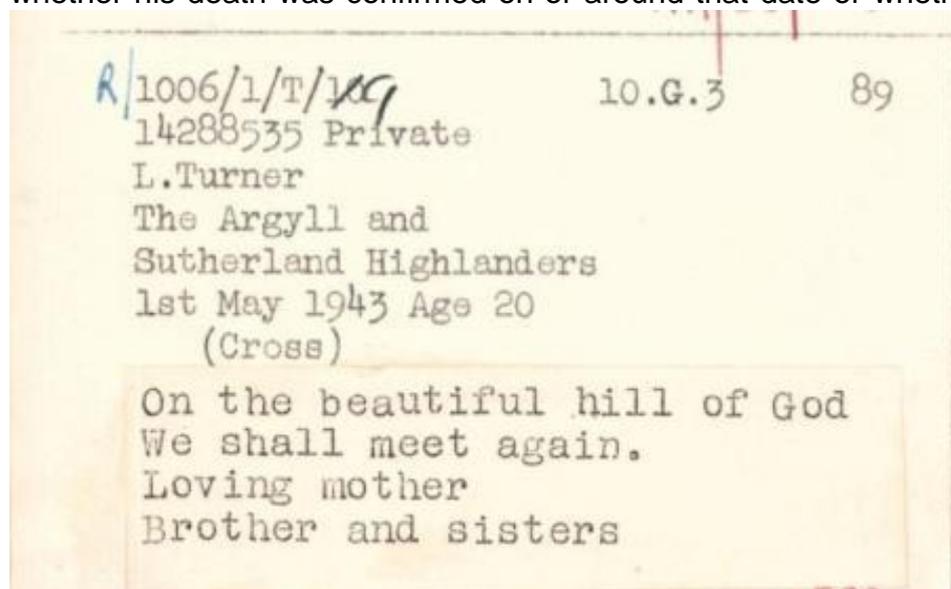
During the inter war period, the rural working classes suddenly got more respectable than they had ever been before, a state of affairs that lasted more or less up to the 1980’s. Previously no-one was too bothered about the occasional (or if truth be told quite numerous) illegitimate children that were absorbed into the families of fathers, step fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles etc etc etc. This all changed somewhat after the first world war and matters were far more covered up.

¹ Diss Express 7th Feb 1930

Lionel L is remembered by Doreen as being called Leslie; I suspect the discrepancy (Lionel/Leslie/Lester) is not down to an old lady's memory not being 100% accurate but the Commoners lax attitude to official naming versus the use of nicknames! Les or Leslie might have been the version used of his middle name whilst Lionel might have been a bit a burden for a ruffy tufty Norfolk lad! Whatever his origins, the family were obviously very proud of their boy, Lionel Turner of Harleston had his Birthday announcement in the 1936 Diss Express. The 1939 register lists Spencer and Norah Turner, their Mother Charlotte, one more person, redacted, a Blanche Howe and, possibly another person, redacted.

The boy, Leslie, was killed, aged nineteen, in the Second World War - his name appears as L.L.Turner on the war memorial, Doreen remembers him as being killed and buried abroad and recalls him 'coming into his mother's yard wearing his uniform² and that he was killed early in the war.

Slightly bizarrely, Lionel had joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders! In a transcribed record his mother's name is given as Mrs C Turner although this is almost certainly his grandmother. Lionel's death is slightly shrouded in mystery; the records show he was reported wounded and missing on the 1st of May 1943; it was later assumed that he died on or shortly after that date. The war in the desert was a highly mobile, fast moving series of skirmishes; it is then a little uncertain whether his death was confirmed on or around that date or whether his remains were discovered



some 4 months later on 23rd of September 1943. It seems that his final status was only officially released on the 14th of December 1944; until then the family could have held on to some hope of Lionel having been captured until then. Dying in Tunisia he was then buried in the Chassart Cemetery but later exhumed and reburied, on the 15th June 1944 at the Medjez-El-Bab War Cemetery as part of

the 'Grave Concentration' process, designed to promote manageable maintenance of larger combined sites.

Turner would have been part of the final push to remove the Axis powers from North Africa - more specifically from Tunisia, in cahoots with the American Army. The final push was launched on 5th May so it seems he was killed in one of the minor skirmishes that took place between the more major battles that raged through this time.

The stone mentioned his 'Loving mother, Brother and sisters', it seems a shame that his loving grandmother had not been included; his grandfather was of course dead by then. A Norfolk lad from the Lush Waveney Valley far from his family.