



## Henry George Riches

28489 Private, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Suffolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1916, aged 22, in France

George is commemorated at the Arras Memorial in France

Henry George Riches was generally known as George, appeared as George Henry on the Harleston War Memorial and also appeared as George Henry in the CWGC records! Following convention, George had been named Henry after his father, following standard practise he was then commonly known by his middle name and that is what we too will call him too.

Slightly less conventionally, whilst his parents were living in the former bakery on The Common in 1901, Mendham born George Henry, aged 5 in 1901, was living with his paternal grandparents, Robert and Caroline Riches, also in Mendham. Just to add to the confusion, another grandson, also called George Riches, also born in Mendham, was in the household although this older chap, aged 18, was contributing to the household, working as a flour miller. This miller was actually the son of another Robert Riches, oldest son of Robert and Caroline Riches. Just to show how easily mistakes can creep in – a third George Riches, also Mendham born, was living on the London Road in the 1901 census!

I think we can assume that 'our' George was, to all intents and purposes raised by his grandparents as he was still living with his widowed grandmother in 1911 although by then they had forgotten he was Mendham born and put his birthplace as Harleston; understandable, after all his parents and siblings still lived there.

George's parents Henry Riches and Mary Ann, also nee Riches, had both come from across the border in Suffolk, where they had married, in 1894. This was not exactly a liaison they had rushed into as they would have known each other for some time; back in 1881 Mary Ann was working as a domestic servant at the neighbouring farm to Robert and Caroline's household when Henry was a 19 years old shepherd. Robert was then a thatcher, a steadier job than that of 'dealer' of 10 years earlier. Being a dealer could cover a multitude of sins, form a perfectly respectable livestock dealer to a very iffy scrap-man!

Henry Riches was one of at least 8 children; it is a bit trickier to track his wife down as Mary (Ann) Riches was far from a common name in this area, but I think the best bet is the Mary Ann Riches, living on the Wingfield Road in the parish of Fressingfield in 1871. Although census entries state she came from Syleham, her obituary does describe her a native of Fressingfield. Mary Ann was, like her husband Henry, also from a large family. In her case she was one of 10 children, 8 of whom

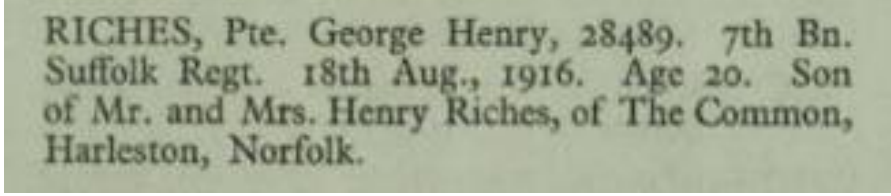
were still alive in 1911 when her parents were living in 'The Old Workhouse' at Fressingfield with two of their younger children.

Now this is when things could have got very confused. Henry was one of the younger children of his parents, Robert and Caroline Riches who were both born in 1833 in Mendham, whilst Mary Ann Riches' father, William, was the oldest son of Robert and Charlotte Riches who were both from Fressingfield! Fressingfield Robert had been born in 1819 whilst his wife Charlotte nee Lemon had been born in 1822. I will confess to having had a brief moment of bewilderment when it seemed possible that Henry had actually married his niece, before I realised that these were completely different couples and closer inspection proved this was just another example of a limited library of families using a limited library of first names in a fairly limited area!

Indeed, Mary Ann Riches' mother, wife of William Riches, was also called Mary Ann and they went on to have their own little Robert Riches and their own little William Riches. I hope you are now as bewildered and confused as I was when I first tried investigating this family!

The Riches' house on the top corner of Harleston Common was part of a group of buildings that had three functions, one was a very basic rough lodging house, one was the accommodation for those running the lodging house and one was a baker's house complete with accommodation for the baker and a large oven. 70 years earlier the buildings had been the accommodation for the miller associated with the nearby Harleston Common Mill, barns and store houses (later to become the lodgings) and, much the same as many years later, the bakery and baker's accommodation. There was a brief period when the barns etc had been split into a further three individual dwellings, but these three dwellings had been combined into a single rough lodging house by 1861. There was a very large transient population in Harleston requiring accommodation, as well as the normal pedlars and chapman that featured in rural Britain's economy at this time, people were attracted to the large fairs, regular livestock auctions and weekly markets.

Henry Riches home had been the home of the baker and, whilst his older son lived with his grandparent's, in 1901 Henry Snr was living here with his wife and two children Albert and Cissy May (3 & 1) in a four-room house, 8 year old Edith had been added to the family on The Common by 1911. I am not sure why George was not at home, they were hardly overcrowded!



RICHES, Pte. George Henry, 28489. 7th Bn. Suffolk Regt. 18th Aug., 1916. Age 20. Son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Riches, of The Common, Harleston, Norfolk.

When George was 18 his already widowed grandmother died, shortly after the outbreak of WW1. I wonder if George would have

given his parents as his next of kin had his grandmother Caroline still been alive, after all he had spent at least 13 years of his short life with her and her husband Robert. This was an unusual situation, whilst it was quite normal for children to be sent out to live with relatives, this generally only happened when homes had become extremely overcrowded or as a temporary emergency measure. By the standards of the times, the Riches' house was a good size and their family small. During my researches into the town, I came across at least two cases of grandparents having to care for their grandchildren following their mothers' incarceration in mental institutions, and of course if a mother died grandparents may well be roped in until a 'housekeeper' could be found – neither of these situations apply to the Riches.

George Henry Riches was killed on August 18th 1916, one of many casualties of the First World War (or Great War as it was known at the time) and is commemorated at the Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France as one of 34,739 casualties (with no known grave) who died in this sector between Spring 1916 and August 1918.<sup>1</sup>

His family remained here for many years - the current owner buying the property from a member of the Riches family. Henry Riches was a farm labourer,<sup>2</sup> according to his obituary, for the Dimmocks at Shotford Hall Farm<sup>3</sup>



*Troops of the 7th (Service) Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, in the ruins of the church in Tilloy [near Arras], 18 October 1917<sup>4</sup>*

The funeral took place on Monday at St. Mary's Church, Redenhall, of Mr. Henry Riches, The Common, Harleston, who passed away on Christmas Day at the age of 68. For 25 years, Mr. Riches was employed by Mr. J. B. Dimmock at the Shotford Hall Farm.

appears<sup>5</sup>

14 years later his wife Mary Ann's obituary

## HARLESTON

The funeral was held at Redenhall Church, on Tuesday, of Mrs. Mary Ann Riches. 78, of The Common. Harleston. Mrs. Riches, a native of Fressingfield, was the widow of Mr. Henry Riches, and had resided in the same house at Harleston for over fifty years

The surviving son, Albert J, was by way of being a smallholder when he grew up: - a Mr (Albert) Riches who farmed opposite Bunn's lane

'leaving the farm riding his trusty trade bike with a full milk churn on the front - bandy legs akimbo'. 'a tiny man with a thin face and large glasses. Always dressed in breeches and buskins<sup>6</sup> (with) a flat hat.... Extremely bandy and spoke with a squeaky voice. Late in life, he married a very buxom lady, who could have picked him up under one arm and carried him away, even if he was protesting. She always wore a red felt hat, a long dress and welly boots. As far as the farm was concerned, it was a collection of broken-down

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1620698/RICHES,%20GEORGE%20HENRY>

<sup>2</sup> Shepherd in the 1881 census

<sup>3</sup> Diss Express 3 January 1930

<sup>4</sup> Imperial War Museum image Q6097

<sup>5</sup> Diss Express 1 Sep 1944

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking a knee or calf high open toed boot - Mr Taylor might mean leather gaiters.

barns and sheds. With sheets of galvanised flapping in the wind and hessian sacks hung up strategically to keep out the draughts. On this rag tag and bobtail farm every animal that has ever been labelled a farmyard animal existed. They ran about freely in mud galore, with nettles and thistles growing to enormous heights'<sup>7</sup>

Mr Riches has also been described to me by Dennis Farrow as riding on his old bike with Milk Churns and by Doreen nee Brown as a 'skinny bloke' who wore a cap and was nicknamed 'Dull Boy'. I also heard this from Dennis Farrell - is that from all work and no play or a reflection on his academic abilities?

Doreen remembers him as a small-time farmer working the field on the left-hand side of Wilderness Close - opposite the Council houses and now built on. She thinks he may have also had some land off Starston Lane but not a huge amount. A small excerpt from a lengthy report<sup>8</sup> detailing the theft of a handbag from Miss Nuthall headmistress of St John's School confirms Riches having 'a meadow on the Starston Road...adjoining the foot paths leading from the station to the railway bridge'

In essence an itinerant lavender seller took the opportunity to steal Miss Nuthall's handbag, robbed it of its contents, threw the torn bag into Riches' meadow and then proceeded to Starston where he got very drunk at the Gate Public House and finished off his busy afternoon by stealing the offertory box in Starston. Riches described himself as being a 'bricklayer' and states he found the bag when he was

'looking for some small ducks he had lost'

One has to admire the honesty of this gentleman - many would not have bothered to hand it in.

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<sup>7</sup> Sid Taylor's Harleston Cameos

<sup>8</sup> Diss Express 12 Aug 1932

and later in the day she told Miss Nuthall the handbag was in the hall. She looked for it and missed it. She was unable to identify the man who sold her the lavender.

Albert James Riches, of the Common, Harleston, a brick-layer, stated he had a meadow on the Starston Road, Harleston, which adjoined the footpaths leading from the Station Road, Harleston to the Railway Bridge. About 12.30 on July 27<sup>th</sup> he was on his meadow, looking for some small ducks he had lost and he found the handbag produced. It lay in the bottom of the ditch about 10 yards from the stile from the Station Road. The mirror lay near it and that was what attracted his attention. He handed the bag into the Police Station at Harleston to Sgt. Cullum.

P.-Sgt. Cullum gave evidence of being in the Police Station on July 27<sup>th</sup> when accused passed going towards the stile on Riches meadow. Later the same day, at 12.40 p.m. he was handed the bag by Riches, about 20 minutes after he had seen the accused going towards the meadow.

Both Olive Puttock and Dennis Farrow remembered him as having a bicycle with a tray on the front for delivering milk and also at one time owning a horse and having chickens. Although he did not marry until after his mother died, he had known his bride some time as she helped him in his farm work. In contrast to Sid Taylor, Doreen Whurr nee Brown remembers Riches' wife as being 'tiny but round'.

I wonder if he was riding his 'Milk Delivery Bike' when 'James' (flying under his middle name) Riches, Dairyman<sup>9</sup>, along with John Hawes and William Robert Saunders, all of the Common were Fined 2s 6d, along with another 12 Harlestonites in a 1939 crack down on bike lights!<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Or rather more grandly in the 1939 census, a 'Dairy Farmer'.

<sup>10</sup> Diss Express 1 Dec 1939

