



Arthur James Bacon

25256 Private, 'B' Company, 12th Battalion East Surrey Regiment

He was killed in action in Flanders on 2nd August 1917, aged 35

Arthur is commemorated at Menin Gate, Ypres Memorial, West Flanders, Belgium

Arthur James Bacon was one of the middle children of Henry Bacon snr and his wife Rosa nee Gibbs. Although married in Depwade in 1865, the young couple promptly moved to Southwark when, in the 1871 census, Henry gave his trade as Farrier,¹ with a 3 years old daughter, Rosa S and a 1-year old son, Henry W Jnr, both born in Southwark. At the time of the 1881 census the family had recently moved to Lambeth - living on the Wandsworth Road. 13 years old Rosa S was then in service, Henry W Jnr was still at home and had been joined by Agnes L (8), Annie Edith (4)¹ and Ada E (1) - all Southwark born.

I suspect it was Rosa's parents' ill health that prompted the Bacons to upsticks and move back to Harleston. They had run the lodging house on The Common for many years, but Henry Gibbs died suddenly aged 69 at the Lodging House Harleston Common¹ buried Feb 1882 whilst Ann, still of The Common was buried on 1st Dec 1883 aged 76.

HARLESTON, NORFOLK, and WINGFIELD, SUFFOLK.

MESSRS. MADDISON & MILES have received instructions from the Representatives of Mr. Absalom Feavearyear, deceased, to Sell by Auction, at the Magpie Hotel, Harleston, on WEDNESDAY, 15TH JULY, 1885, at Four for Five o'clock in the Evening, the following valuable HOUSE PROPERTY, in Seven Lots:—

REDENHALL-WITH-HARLESTON.

A capital Freehold DOUBLE COTTAGE, with walled-in Garden, having a good frontage to the high road from Scole of 184 feet, occupied by John Patrick and Charlotte Butcher. A well-built DOUBLE DWELLING-HOUSE, now in the sole occupation of William Bacon, situate on the Common, and known as "The Traveller's Rest," with Half-an-Acre of Garden attached.

In 1885 when the estate of Absalom Feavearyear who owned these properties was sold off, including these properties known as "The Travellers Rest" Bacon was described as being the sole occupant of the cottages. I suspect they had kept the lodging house going although by the 1891 census the Price family was managing that side of the business. If so, the Bacon's had an unfortunate start to their tenure here when, in 1884,

Elizabeth Taylor of the 'Lodging House Harleston Common' died at the early age of 33.

To call the Traveller's Rest a lodging house possibly slightly overstates the quality of the facilities available, towards the end of its time it was described as a 'low lodging house for tramps'. The double cottage had originally been the house and barn's associated with the Common Mill which stood nearby until the early 1830's. When the mill ceased functioning, the barns etc were converted to a number of small dwellings, then to the flop house whilst one half of the original Mill house

¹ Norwich Mercury 18 Feb 1882, aged 63 according to the Parish Register

became a bakery and the other half the home for the lodging house keepers. We are not talking a pleasant Inn or rustic pub here but the cheapest form of accommodation available for the itinerant rustic.

The Bacon's children, Henry included, would have grown up in the rougher end of town with their parents providing accommodation to the roughest and poorest members of society at the time. No food was provided although the lodgers normally had access to a kitchen- a multi-purpose dining, sitting and food cooking room. The census returns show that on the nights of the census whole families of parents and children were passing through as well as single men. Single women were more rare, tending to hitch their star to a man for protection on the road – although those men often proved themselves to be drunken brutes. Still better the brute you know than the monster you don't? There was even a quack doctor at one point.

Rosa was no shrinking violet, appearing in Court in December 1890 for using threatening language towards Eliza Chandler, also of the Common, fined 18s and bound over for good behaviour - £10! The court commented that the quality of the language reflected poorly on both women but I suspect the Chandlers may have been trouble makers, being involved in a three-way fight with some other (admittedly drunken) residents in March 1891. Neighbours!

Sadly, the youngest child in the 1881 census, Ada Elizabeth Bacon, died aged 8 and was buried at Redenhall in 1887. Older sister Agnes stayed up in London, working in service, whilst her younger siblings came down to Harleston with their parents. I have not been able to track Annie Edith down in the 1891 census, but since she would have then been 14, I suspect she was in service. She kept at least one foot in Harleston as, in 1899, she married a neighbour from across the Common.

Bearing in mind Arthur's parents had been married 19 years by the time of the 1891 census it would be reasonable to assume that some other older siblings had left home, others may have stayed in London, others died; at this stage their fates unknown, Harriet Belinda, baptised in Harleston in 1885 must have died shortly after her birth.

With the death of Ada and with older siblings working away the children more or less de facto split into two groups, those from London and those from Norfolk. In 1891 the Bacons were living in their house of 5 or more rooms with just 3 children listed, Arthur (8), Harriet (6) and Albert (2), all Harleston born! I wonder if it was the farther Henry, who turned out for the Harleston team, appearing in 1899. He would have been knocking on a bit by then but since Bacon played in goal, I suspect he may have managed. You would have to be fit to be a blacksmith and I would imagine there would be a certain useful intimidating bulk to this player!

Their Bacon's tenancy expired at Michaelmas 1900, the sale details described this property as

A Brick and Tiled DWELLING HOUSE in Two Tenements, pleasantly situated on the Common, with Good Outbuildings and Large Garden, in the occupation of Mr Henry Bacon²

It was only a few weeks before, that an incredible thunderstorm hit the whole region with animals being killed, lightning hitting chimneys – in one instance leading to the destruction of the chimney

² Eastern Daily Press 9 Jul 1900

whilst in another instance the lightning went on down through the rooms and caused an amazing amount of damage. Meanwhile, closer to home:-

A tree was struck on the Dove House Farm and on the Common an apple tree belonging to Mr Bacon and standing within a few paces of the dwelling house was shattered to pieces.

Very dramatic, too dramatic maybe as by 1901 Blacksmith Henry and Rosa Bacon had moved out to Starston, along with 'Grocer's Assistant' Arthur, 'Dressmaker' Harriet and 12-year-old 'Scholar' Albert Edward.

A headstone in Redenhall churchyard commemorates Henry Bacon 'beloved husband of Rosa' died on the 24th of November 1902. *'His toils are over, His work is done and he is fully blest, He fought the fight, the victory won and entered into rest'*. Rosa is also commemorated on the same headstone 'wife of the above' died on 12th May 1930 aged 83 *'Gone but not forgotten'*

**OLD-ESTABLISHED BLACKSMITH'S BUSINESS
FOR DISPOSAL, at once; death of late pro-
prietor.—Mrs. Bacon. Starston. Harleston.**

Following

Henry's death in 1902, his widow, Rosa, sold up the business and returned from Starston to Harleston, appearing at a four-room house on the Needham Road for the 1911 census. Rather oddly she claims to have only one child, and that still living, but I suspect she misunderstood the question from the census taker and described the one child still living at home, young Albert Bacon, a blacksmith at the nearby works. Also sharing the house was George Durrant, aged only 3 and described as 'Nurse' child i.e. an informal fostering arrangement.

Arthur's little brother, Albert Edward Bacon, remained in Harleston, marrying a Jesse Staff in 1912. Sadly, their first child, a little boy, died at birth but they went on to have 4 more children, all boys! He survived the conflict, both he and his wife became active in the Conservative Association, played bowls for many years in the interwar period and kept a dog or two, one of which was accidentally shot in the 1930's. Albert also sang, both solo and in a choir, this choir including a certain Horace Webb who had served in the war and lost a cousin by the same name in that war. Albert was an active member of the Norfolk Playing Fields Association and as such was actively working with the British Legion during the 1930's and the 1940's when they were trying to raise funds for the War Memorial Pavillion to be erected on The Wilderness recreation ground. When opening the first Hareleston Fete immediately after the war Bacon was quoted as saying the Association existed for the main purpose of bringing happiness to everyone in the county.

This is the sort of busy, civilly engaged and civilised life that so many hoped to return to after WW1, including no doubt Arthur, the Grocer.

Albert's older brother, Private Arthur Bacon 25256, was Killed in Action on 2nd August 1917 in Flanders. Unlike his older siblings, Arthur was born and bred in Harleston, Grocer's Assistant Arthur Bacon had moved on to Greater London area, appearing in 1911 with his wife, of less than 2 years in an attractive brick and stucco villa at 44 Oaklands Rd, Cricklewood. He enlisted in the so-called 'Bermondsey' battalion with his listed next of kin including wife Ethel Louise nee Sayers, who returned to her hometown of Crawley sometime after Arthur enlisted.

I may have been just co-incidence but between 1912 and 1915, three children, surname Bacon, mother's name Sayers, were born in Hackney, Elizabeth, Arthur and Emily. I would not be surprised if these were Arthur's children but short of purchasing the certificates, we have no way of knowing at the moment.

Perhaps no longer being an active member of the congregation explains the terse entry 'dead' against Arthur's entry in the Mendham Lane Congregational Church register. Arthur was probably killed during the Battle of Pilkhem Ridge, part of the build up to the Third Battle of Ypres. The Ypres salient was formed in October- November 1914 when a small force secured the town (known as Wipers to the troops) and pushed the Germans back to the Passchendale ridge. The Second Battle began in 1915 when, for the first time in the war, poison gas was used, in this case by the Germans on the Allies. The Third Battle began in June 1917 with initial successes, whilst Arthur Bacon died at the end of The Battle of Pilckem Ridge, shortly before what became known as the Battle of Passchendale. It was hoped that a sustained bombardment would 'soften the opposition'. With unseasonably wet weather, the ground was so churned up that not only were tanks unable to progress, but also many troops were bogged down and even drowned in the mire.

Troops of the 12th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, who attacked on the first morning of the Battle of Messines (7 June), on 11 June 1917.³

In 1901, just after the Bacons had left for Starston⁴, the Riches were living next door; The Riches also lost a son to the Great War, Henry George, but a year earlier than their neighbours, on August 18th 1916.



³ Imperial War Museum image Q2819

⁴ Arthur, Grocer's Assistant, still gave his address as Harleston Common when he joined the Congregational Church in 1900.