



Hector Donald Reeve

79288 Private, 11th Battalion Royal Fusiliers

He died in France on 6th September 1918, aged 18

Hector was buried at Daours Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France

Confusion surrounds Hector Reeve, one set of CWGC records states that he died on the 6th of September, the main index also gives his death as 6th September however an early list of those buried in the cemetery gave his details as H.W. Reeve and that he died on the 7th of September. Question is – were the earlier records, 27th October 1919, the more accurate and were later details mis transcribed, or was the later record a corrected version after a mistake was picked up? There was even a degree of confusion about his middle name, at some point someone, somewhere mis heard or misread this name as 'Macdonald' and that along with a hometown of 'Worthwell' is another variation on the theme! One thing we do know is H (W/D) Reeve was the son of George Reeve of Wortwell and he was only 9 months past his 18th birthday when he died in the last few months of the war. His Regiment had been withdrawn from the lines to a training camp on the 3rd of September, it must have been before then he received the wounds that were to kill him days, maybe even weeks later.

Hector was too young to have made much impact on the world, he had kept out of trouble, was unmarried and one of many siblings. 100 years or more after his death, it is difficult to research a young man like this in his own right, instead we can look at his family.

Hector was the 5th child of 11 that George and Elizabeth Reeve nee Pearce had brought into this world by 1911, there may have been more to follow as, at the time of the census, Elizabeth was only 36 and her youngest child only 1. The 9 children that had survived were all at home in their 'bursting at the seams' 5 room house on School Lane although 10 years later they had moved back to Wortwell, the given address of George when the CWGC were creating order from chaos and erecting the familiar serried rows of uniform stones within tended gardens.

Back in 1901, when the family were living on Holbrook Hill in Alburgh, 3 weeks old Ethel had just been added to the family; she would have been the sixth child had she survived and, not too surprisingly, mother Elizabeth took the opportunity to send one years old Hector off to his Aunt Mary Scotchmer nee Pearce, on the Low Road Wortwell. Other than a few years in Alburgh, Elizabeth and George had spent most of their married life in Wortwell, winding up back there after the war, so I am sure Hector and his aunt were well acquainted, she had two of her own children at home to keep the lad company.

Aunt Mary had, just over a year previously, in early 1900, lost her husband Arthur Scotchmer in the winter floods which had covered large amounts of the low-lying meadows around the Waveney. One Sunday afternoon, about 3pm, he decided to retrieve his boat from Homersfield Mill, by rowing it up to Wortwell. Rowing strongly upstream . he hit a submerged obstacle, holed his boat and in desperation struck out strongly for the banks. Although a good swimmer his heavy clothing overwhelmed him and in full view of two lads he was swept away and drowned, leaving a widow

and young family. Rather unpleasantly, it took some time for the body to be found in spite of the river having been dragged continually since the accident without any result. Two local men, James Skinner and William Strutt, possibly using their local knowledge

'made another effort and the body was found in a deep hole in the river nearly embedded in the mud. The body, although having been in the water for nearly three weeks was not in an advanced stage of decomposition.

Mary was a few years older than her husband; she had been keeping house for his double widowed father 10 years earlier. As was common, the widowed father had previously taken on another housekeeper; unusually, but more appropriately bearing in mind the age of the protagonists, Mary the second housekeeper had not married the father, but had married the son. This was actually the father's second widowhood – he had married the previous 'housekeeper' Lydia Page nee Hazel who appeared with 5 children of her at least 7 children (10 months to 12 years) living with him in 1861, 10 years later those 5 children had all taken on the name of Scotchmer (since all but the oldest had been born after Lydia was widowed, about time really!) and 2 more, legitimate, children had been added, including the unfortunate Arthur who drowned in the icy waters of the river Waveney at the turn of the new century.

Sisters Mary Ann and Elizabeth nee Pearce (mother of our Harleston Hero) appeared together, along with 5 other siblings, living at the bottom of Candler Lane in 1881 with their parents Elizabeth and Blacksmith Henry. Hector's father, George, came from an even larger family; he was the oldest son of the 12 children of Walter and Elizabeth Reeve. Walter had started off as a brickmaker, became an agricultural labourer and in his final years worked at the less demanding job of a Jobbing Gardener.

George had started work as a Drover, generally walking animals to market, a job that required a trustworthy man, with good boots! I suspect that it was whilst he was attending these markets that George decided to dabble in stock dealing himself, being a 'Fowl Dealer' did not require much land or other facilities to care for the animals but unfortunately tended to attract the less reputable sections of rural society, not that there is any evidence George was anything other than totally reputable. Indeed, when he featured in a case of Fowl theft in 1907, he was fully exonerated. However, the other gentlemen involved, Robert Seaman and George Oakley had terrible local reputations and having stolen 3 cockerels from another slightly iffy gentleman, John Julian Whurr, were given 2 months and 6 weeks hard labour respectively. It should be born in mind that chickens were not generally sold 'for the pot' but for their egg laying potential. What is interesting is the number of hands these birds passed through – detectable as Whurr had marked under the wings with red paint. Seaman and Oakley stole the animals from Whurr, sold them on to a man called Cutts, Cutts sold them to George Reeve and Reeve sold them at Beccles Market!

COUNTY COURT.

There was only one case of public interest before His Honour, Judge Herbert Smith at the sitting of the County Court at Harleston on Monday morning.

Frederick Westgate, farmer, of Morningthorpe, v. George Reeve, dealer, of Wortwell, was a claim for £32 14s. 0d.

Westgate gave evidence that he had bought some sheep for Reeve for £32 14s. 0d. at Saxmundham, and he had never received the money for them. Reeve was earning £2 a week.

Reeve said he had lost the sheep and did not have them. He could only afford 2/6d. a month as he earned 35/- a week, of which he gave his wife 30/-.

His Honour said it nearly served plaintiff right. He was a very foolish man to have incurred a liability for such a man, who obviously could not pay.

An order was made for 5/- a month.

When Reeve was living in Wortwell he was the victim of one of the dopy crimes that abounded in the papers of the time. Local lad, John Markwell, aged 18/16 nicked one of the 40 chickens that Reeve had in stock at the time and took it home. Presumably with some plausible excuse as how he came by it as his father promptly sold it to the local shop. The police were called in, John Markwell, a very respectable father who was doubtless extremely embarrassed by being roped into this case, refused to back up his son's alibi, son wound up in court, the father who also attended to see his son get justice, refused to pay his bond for good behaviour or his costs. Luckily for John his employer came to the rescue – not an offence he was likely to repeat!

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It does seem that George Reeve was that almost mythical creature, a sober, steady and honest dealer! The only glitch on an otherwise largely unblemished record, (he did get fined 15/6 for fare dodging in 1893, fined in 1900 for leaving his pony and trap unattended and fined about the same time for not having his name on his wagon) occurred when he bought some sheep for over £32 and then promptly lost them. Whether they died, were stolen or just trotted off merrily into the sunset was not explained at the ensuing court case when the irate framer, all the way over in Morningthorpe demanded payment. The judge basically told the farmer it served him right for selling them to Reeve in the first place, Reeve was ordered to pay 5/- a week, i.e. he had almost 3 years in which to make reparations. Rather sweetly he claimed that of the 35/- he earned weekly; he gave 30/- to his wife!

He did get into another minor spot of bother in 1931, or rather a member of the landed gentry got him and three other men into a spot of bother. At the time the stag hounds were still a feature of life in the Waveney Valley. Three of the horses involved in one such hunt had lost shoes during the chase. Watson, of Herringby Hall, decided to while away the time at the Queen, Earsham, whilst they were being reshod, with three of the chaps who had been helping out with the hunt. Unfortunately, this was out of hours; very decently Watson paid the fines for himself and all three men, including our George Reeve, Shepherd.

In summary, young Hector Donald, in spite of sporting a name rather unusual in an era of Georges, Williams, Johns and Henrys, was a lad from a very ordinary family, larger than many but not unusually so. His father and brothers followed typical trades of the agricultural working classes although his father was more honest and sober than many dealers of the time. Had he survived, Hector would have most likely married a local lass, settled down to a job in agriculture but, unlike his father, would have been able to enjoy all the sporting and social activities that became available to young men in the interwar period. Essentially Hector's death, as well as being a personal tragedy, is so typical a representative of the vast number of young men whose lives were tragically terminated during the 1914 to 1918 war.