



Henry Ward VC

2729 Private, 78th Highlanders

He was awarded the Victoria Cross for 'Valour' in the presence of the enemy

Henry died on 12th September 1867, at Malvern, Worcestershire, aged 44

Henry is buried at Great Malvern Cemetery, Worcestershire.



*Private Henry Ward
(1823–1867), VC, (78th
Highlanders at
Lucknow, 1857)
Louis William Desanges
(1822–1906)
The Highlanders'
Museum*



Henry Havelock Ellis V.C. in later years.



Private Henry Ward, VC

Henry Ward VC in earlier and later years



The Wards were a fairly ruffly tufty working-class family who thrived in the courtyards and alleys to the west of the town of Harleston in the early and middle nineteenth century. Their career options tended to be limited to one of three choices, military, bricks or labouring. Life was precarious; like many families of the time, the Wards were only one mishap away from the Workhouse.

Henry Ward was born to James and Mary Ward nee Reeve in June 1823, baptised 4 months later, he appears to have been the oldest of James and Mary's children. Mary and James Ward's next two children, Elizabeth and Simon, were also baptised at Redenhall, in January 1829, when they were about 3 ½ and a year old respectively whilst their fourth child, Charlotte Ward was baptised in 1831.

James Ward died in 1838, and whilst a Mary Ward died in 1842, there were really rather a lot of Mary Wards in and around the town at the time and a later census showed this was not the mother of Henry, Elizabeth, Simon & Charlotte! For instance, a Mary Aggus Ward, daughter of Mary Ward, (assumed spinster) was christened in 1835, no father's name given although baby Mary's middle name of Aggus does rather give the game away as to who her mother was claiming the father to be. I suspect this pair are the female servant living in Starston in 1841 with Charlotte Ward aged 8 and younger sister Mary (Aggus) aged 5 in the 1841 census. As so often happens, a disadvantaged start led to a difficult life, Little Mary appeared as a 16 years old pauper in the Pulham Mary Workhouse in the 1851 census. Big sister Charlotte is highly likely to be the young lady visiting the Ellises, also from Starston, but then living on the Common in 1851¹

¹ See 534

Back to Henry and his siblings; in 1841, following the death of their father, Simon, Elizabeth and Charlotte Ward were all living as paupers in the Depwade Workhouse. Henry himself was an agricultural labourer lodging in Wilson's Square, in the house of a fish merchant – his age appears to be 15 years, but this actually means he was 15 up to 20 years old. In this census once a person passed the age of 15, their age was recorded in bands of 5 years.

It is actually by moving to later censuses and searching backwards that we can establish what had happened to Henry's mother Mary; although I can't find her in 1841, she appears on Broad Street in 1851, living with her son Simon and described as a widowed char woman. I would expect she had remained locally in 1841, probably scraping a living doing rough scrubbing work, but not earning enough to keep her children out of the workhouse. Henry and Simon's sister, Charlotte Ward who was working for the Rector in Dickleburgh in 1851, turns up in her cousin Thomas' household in 1861: along with Thomas Ward's wife, also named Charlotte Ward and the same age as Henry's wife. Beware the multiple characters sharing single names that abounded so much in Harleston!

Whilst I have no record of Henry's father James Ward having ever enlisted, his brother, John Ward did and perhaps it was his tales that inspired John's nephew Henry to join up. John's own son also enlisted; the 22 years old illiterate labourer put his cross to his attestation documents in Yarmouth in September 1880.

A rather earlier, 18th Century, John Ward I of Mendham was cut from a different cloth to our hero Henry; he was one of 6 privates whose descriptions were circulated following their desertions from the 'Suffolk Regiment of Fencible Cavalry.' In my ignorance I assumed 'Fencible' meant well trained in sword play but, as can be seen from below, this was very wrong!

The Fencibles (from the word defencible) were British regiments raised in the United Kingdom ... against the threat of invasion ... in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Usually temporary units, composed of local recruits and commanded by Regular Army officers, they were usually confined to garrison and patrol duties, freeing Regular Army units to perform offensive operations. Most fencible regiments had no liability for overseas service.²

John Ward I was described as being:-

21 years of age, 5 feet 7 ½ inches high (*very much standard height looking at the details of the various other deserters*), light hair, blue eyes, light complexion³

The advertisement went on to offer a 20s reward over and above that allowed by act of parliament, John was not the first and certainly not the last local lad to join up and then regret his actions!

Enough of Henry's family although, hopefully, we have a picture of a family of strong characters walking the tightrope between getting by and failing to make ends meet.

Henry himself enlisted on the last day of March 1845, slightly bizarrely in the 78th Regiment of Foot, later renamed the Seaforth Highlanders. I say bizarrely but in the late 18th and early 19th century,

² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fencibles

regiments were either trotting up and down through Norfolk on their way to or from postings or being sent chasing after smugglers along the East Coast and the Highland Regiments did have a very eye-catching uniform. At this time the Highland Regiment had recently been allowed to recruit nationwide due to the losses suffered from Cholera. After starting his career in Scotland, at a slightly stubby 5' 5 3/4", Henry completed 21 years of service including 13 years in the East Indies, (actually 14 on his documents but this would have included his 'bonus year') a posting notorious for eroding both moral fibre and physical health of many soldiers. Bored soldiers, hot climate, lots of alcohol (less likely to give you dysentery, cholera or a host of other illnesses than water), lots of women struggling to survive and consequently lots of infections – not that we have any proof Henry Ward was prone to any or all of the above.

For the first 13 years of his service it seems he was barely, if at all, in the country moving through Aden, India, Persia and back to India in time for the Indian Mutiny – a long way from the Harleston / Suffolk borders.

Henry won his Victoria Cross by his actions in Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny in 1857; essentially two soldiers of his regiment were amongst those who had been wounded in the street fighting around the Lucknow Residency and, as did others in similar straits, resorted to a glorified sedan chair in lieu of an ambulance. Ward cajoled and badgered local bearers to carry the wounded men through a hail of fire whilst remaining resolutely calm. One of the men in the dhoolie, wounded badly in the elbow, was Lt Henry Havelock, son of Major General Sir Henry Havelock, who had been nominated for his own V.C some two months earlier. If you are going to risk your life for another soldier, you really could not pick a better candidate than this fellow, the hero son of a man who was already a hero and went on to inherit his father's elevation to a Baronetcy! The Major General was also very active in the area at the time and am sure must have been supremely grateful to the lad in the Highland uniform who probably spoke with a Norfolk accent so broad his fellow troops could barely understand him, and doubtless vice versa.

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| <p>Private Henry Ward Date of Act of Bravery, 25th and 26th September, 1857</p> | <p>"For his gallant and devoted conduct in having on the night of the 25th, and morning of the 26th of September, 1857, remained by the dooly of Captain H. M. Havelock, 10th Regiment, Deputy Assistant-Adjutant-General, Field Force, who was severely wounded, and on the morning of the 26th of September, escorted that Officer and Private Thomas Pilkington, 78th Highlanders, who was also wounded, and had taken refuge in the same dooly, through a very heavy cross fire of ordnance and musketry. This soldier remained by the side of the dooly, and by his example and exertions kept the dooly bearers from dropping their double load, throughout the heavy fire, with the same steadiness as if on parade, thus saving the lives of both, and bringing them in safety to the Baillie Guard." (Extract from Divisional Orders of Major-General Sir James Outram, G.C.B., dated 27th October, 1857.)</p> |
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Not only did this deed get Ward a VC (although, unlike Alfred Ablett, Harleston's other VC winner not at a state presentation), and an award of a year's free service, enabling him to retire 20 years after he enlisted rather than 21, but it also got him a fairly decent job for the rest of his military life, being chosen to be Havelock's personal servant or Batman. This role would

have steered him away from many temptations, his Officer was a muscular Christian from a very Christian family! Ward was later promoted to Quarter Master and, as mentioned above, left the army in 1865 after 21 years' service being discharged in Dublin, details follow below as listed on his discharge notes.

21 years and 16 days service during which period he served 14 years in the East Indies

His discharge is proposed in consequence of his own request to go out pension having completed 21 years' service.

Character appears very good. He is in possession of five good conduct badges he earned in the Persian Campaign of 1857 medal. Also served in India during the Mutiny of 1857 & 1858. Medal with two clasps. Also, in possession of the Victoria Cross. His name was never entered in the Rat. Defaulters book. He was never tried by a court martial.

He was slightly wounded in the left foot on the 25th Sept 1857

Like all soldiers who serve long enough, Henry wound up in Aldershot, in 1861, although sadly not in time to appear in the census of that year. Newly married, to a Scots lass, Elizabeth Ross his first daughter, was born in Dover and named for her mother, a second, Caroline, was born in Aldershot. As so many ex-military did, and indeed still do, Henry swapped one uniform for another, joining the Railway when he retired with his pension up to Inverness. For whatever reason he was then transferred down South to Malvern in Worcestershire.

WARD.—Sept. 12, at Lansdowne-terrace, suddenly, Private Henry Ward, V.C., of the 78th Highlanders, aged 43. [It is stated that the deceased once saved the life of Havelock.]

Worcester Journal
21 Sep 1867



Sadly, Henry Ward only survived 2 years after he left the Army and died in Malvern on September 12th in 1867 of heart disease, to be buried in a paupers' grave. His wife went back home to Scotland; when the man whose life he saved, Havelock Ellis, heard of this fate he paid for a handsome stone to be erected over Ward's grave. As time eroded the stone, the Victoria Cross Trust replaced it with a stone in the style adopted by Fabian Ware and seen in serried ranks in military graveyards across the world.

Henry's cousins and siblings continued on in Harleston in their normal mostly cheery, occasionally chaotic way. Charlotte Ward (wife of Henry's cousin Thomas) wound up in court as part of a bizarre 3-way punch up between herself, her lodger and another, female, resident of Duke William Lane. Henry Ward V.C.'s Harleston namesake way back in 1852, along with a neighbour the same age, when they were still teenagers, were lucky to get off the charge of duck stealing, essentially due to a technicality.⁴ The lad who was the other duck stealer some years later was then convicted of stealing Henry's boots! Another of the cousin', Noah, was hauled off to Norwich Castle for thumping a female neighbour – hey ho, such was the life in the courts off the Thoroughfare during the 19th century.

Before one gets to rosy a view of life in those times, we should consider the unfortunate Almena, the daughter of John Ward, cousin of Henry Ward V.C. Almena Ward married John Borrett in Hoxne

⁴ Norfolk Chronicle 21 Aug 1852. Henry Ward and Jubal Shepperd, aged 14 and 15, respectively were bound over on a surety of £5 to be of good behaviour for 3 months.

in 1866 when she was only 17 years old. This marriage to a man more than twice her age ended tragically, both for her but far worse for the two young stepsons and stepdaughter who she took on with the marriage. It appears that she was totally unequipped to look after these children, whilst continuing to work out at the osier beds and it seems her new husband, was both too infatuated and too irritated with his new wife to bother much either. Particularly striking in this case was the general public's different attitude to father and stepmother. There was a strong prejudice amongst the townfolk in favour of the father and against the stepmother, indeed it was stated in several reports that if Almena's father had not stepped in the town's folk would have lynched her. John Borrett seems to have assumed his responsibility to his children ended when he provided his children with a step mother, beyond beating her on Saturday evenings for not providing sufficient food, he took no more proactive steps to care for his children – leaving the young and inexperienced step mother to struggle on.

In 1868, John (40) and Almena (19) Borrett appeared in the Harleston Court for a

CASE OF ALLEGED STARVATION

At the Harleston petty sessions on Friday a case which excited considerable degree of public indignation in the neighbourhood was investigated... ..The defendant was a laborer named John Borrett. He was charged as the father of Stephen Borrett, a child aged ten years with omitting and refusing to provide his son with proper and nutritious food. The man appears to have married a woman much younger than himself. He was then a widower and had six children, three of whom were of a tender age, and were consequently left under the care of the stepmother during his absences at work. When charged with the offence he at once disclaimed all knowledge of it.

John Borrett was living next to the Red Lion back in 1861 with his first wife Mary Ann and 6 children aged between 1 and 11 years of age. Mary Ann Borrett died in the middle of the next year, 4 years before widower John Borrett married the then 17 years old Almena.⁵

I went to the house. Mr Colson, surgeon, was there. He undressed the child (*Stephen Borrett*) in my presence. The limbs were very much shrunk and appeared to be very much emaciated. The child asked for food ...Mr Candler (*stated*) The child was very much emaciated in every part except the body. That arose, I imagined, from insufficient food – not from atrophy. The body was swollen. There were no marks of bruises. Mesenteric disease had commenced. An insufficient quantity of food would be sufficient to bring on the disease.

A neighbour also gave evidence

Mrs Mary Ann Rayner said .. I have been in the habit of seeing .. Stephen Borrett without food .. I have told the father about it. He said the woman (his wife) had taken a dislike to this child, The stepmother has beaten it two nights running....she is rather (Hesitating) well a person I don't neighbour with....I have seen the children up the yard.

⁵ Widowers would struggle with childcare hence the almost universal solution of a man left with young children deciding to remarry. A Robert Chandler, originally from Suffolk but living in Wortwell by 1891, had been left with three young children to cope with following the death of his wife Elizabeth in 1894. By 1897 he was up in front of the magistrates charged that he did unlawfully ill-treat and neglect the said children (*George, James and Gertrude Chandler of the ages of 14, 12 and 6*) in a manner likely to cause them unnecessary suffering on the 28th June 1897 and divers other occasions – 9 months hard labour but the family were reunited in time for the 1901 census

I have seen them pick up the crumbs from the stones .. get into the muck bin and eat potato peelings. I have often heard this child scream, .. when the stepmother came home.. put them to bed without a bit of anything to eat... in cold seasons during the winter to be kept in the house all day without a bit of fire... I have known the child to be three days without a drop of water...

Mary Johnson, wife of a bricklayer ...I saw Stephen Borrett at different times sitting on the threshold of the door crying for victuals. .. he said he was crying for bread. ... When the crumbs were very small, I've seen the poor thing wet it's finger and pick 'em up. I've seen the girl in the muck bin picking the bits of parsnip out. Did you see them eat them? Yes I've seen the little one come out on the step and eat them

A week later Borrett was back in court

After a fortnight's proper treatment and diet the children presented a better appearance .., considering the neglect which it is alleged they suffered. Adelaide, the little girl looked pale and wan, as also did Frederick; but the most noticeable effects of the neglect were visible on the appearance of Stephen, five years of age, but who looked only two, having evidently suffered from mesenteric disease. ... They all looked in a most filthy condition. The boy Frederick had a large ulcerated sore, as big as the palm of my hand on the back of his head. [Sensation] It appeared to have been caused by neglect but he seemed to have had more food than the other two. The children were covered with vermin.... Hannah Harper said – I live in Crowe's⁶ yard. ... I have seen the boy pick up crumbs from my dish cloth and from stones in the yard and when the crumbs were very small, he would wet his finger and get them up. I have seen the girl pick potatoes and parsnip peelings from the muck bin and eat them. .. The little boy Stephen often used to say he would be glad when five o'clock came and then his father would come home and give him some bread. I washed the little boy several times as I could not bear to see him so filthy. ...

The little girl Abigail was then brought into court – difficult to imagine nowadays

.. the child sobbed and wept so much .. afraid to be amongst so many people... the neighbours gave her and her brother food sometimes, because they had not enough at home, that was when her father was from home.. Her little brother was beaten by his stepmother 'because his belly ached'. ... very often with a big strap and a stick which was 'not very thick'.. .. the window and door were tied up by her stepmother . Her brother Edgar would give them bread and cheese for dinner when there was any. Their stepmother would give them bread and cheese and treacle when she came home.*(to her father)* you never beat me and always gave me victuals when you were home. The youngest child was passed to the bench .. on being asked if he would like to go home said “yes” and on seeing his father said “Daddy go home too” and holding up some sweets which had been given him. He said look here Daddy”

The older brother, Edgar, also gave evidence

⁶ Crowe and Burford – grocers.

I have come lately to live at Harleston with my father. Sometimes no food is left for us ..my little brother cry, .. of being hungry. If there was any bread or cheese we used to get it. Mother washed the children almost every Sunday morning. I have seen both my brothers beaten by my mother but not by my father. .. My sister washed them almost every morning; she almost always had soap. I go home at eight and one o'clock every day. I have bread and cheese, if there is any. Mother leaves it for us if there is any. If there was only a little we had it amongst us. We often have no dinner on Saturday. I saw my brothers head was in a bad state; father told mother to clean it and keep the children clean. I have seen mother beat Stephen as many as twenty times all together with her hand. I never saw her with a stick. There was almost always a fire in the house when I went home. (*To his father*) – you never misused me. You always gave me victuals when I was at home and mother took it away from me and you took it away from her again. She used to take victuals from Stephen. ... Stephen used to cry for food. ... I have seen you beat mother almost every Saturday night because she did not give the children enough victuals. You used to beat her with your hand. You told her to mind and give us enough food. Mother made me go without food sometimes when there was food in the house, sometimes because I was a naughty boy. You never made me go without food. We dare not get food when we were hungry.

The article goes on to report

On leaving the court, the stepmother, a young woman who did not appear to be more than 21 years of age, only escaped rough treatment by her father hurrying her away from a crowd of people who seemed bent on venting their indignation upon her.
...children ...taken back to Pulham.

Three weeks later, the stepmother joined the father in court

indicted for wilfully neglecting, omitting, and refusing to provide food and nourishment for their children,...

Henry Lombard Hudson....the children were sent by witness' direction to the workhouse. They were in a most shocking and horrible condition. The cottage was in a very dirty state. ...

Mr Candler Surgeon ..(Stephen) was removed to the workhouse and was now very ill. The swelling had not gone down and the limbs were still very much wasted.....When he saw the boy Frederick (about ten days after he saw Stephen) the child's head was full of scars, and supposed that lice &c

...guilty against both defendants, but they thought the female very much the worse...male prisoner three months hard labour and the female six months imprisonment

It should be noted that evidence had been given that the mother was also out working from seven in the morning, peeling 'rods'⁷ at Wortwell. Evidence was also given that when she was working, she would lock the children in a bedroom without food. From the modern perspective it would seem the stepmother was totally out of her depth; only the same age as her oldest stepchildren, their father gave neither practical nor emotional support to her. Judged harshly by her neighbours,

⁷ Most likely willow stems grown prolifically in this area in Osier beds for use in the basket making industry.

they too could have contacted the authorities earlier than they did. Part way through the hearings it was queried by the magistrates as to whether the wife could be held responsible in a legal point of view (it being traditionally held that a man was responsible for the actions of his wife) – the council decided yes so Almena, having already been tried and found guilty in the eyes of the town and the gossip of the yards, was taken to legal trial. This in spite of evidence from the older son, Edgar Borrett, that his father regularly beat his stepmother on Saturday nights – presumably after a drink or three.

After the dust settled, Almena went back to live with her parents, John Borrett took closer charge of his children, aided by some of the older siblings. The younger lads headed for the coast, married had children and generally got on with life in spite of their terrible early years. Little Abigail did not fare so well and died young after having at least one illegitimate child.

With splendidly oblivious hypocrisy, directly below the reporting of the decision that Almena was rightly to stand trial for cruelty to her children was reported, to our eyes, a startling sentence given by the magistrates, in 1868, to 9 years old George Baker (Barker) from Brockdish. For the crime of being on the premises of Mr Coulson one evening for some unlawful purpose,⁸ apparently no actual crime having been committed, this young lad was sent to Norwich castle for twenty-one days hard labour. I still cling to the hope that this was a mis-print and young George was actually 19 not 9, but there was a George Barker, Brockdish resident and born, aged 1, in the 1861 census so it is quite possible this primary school age child was sent to the Castle Gaol. Harsh indeed.

In summary, Henry Ward VC was celebrated in a romantic and dramatic way by a fashionable painter of the time, the man he rescued seems to have been a thoroughly decent chap but would have no idea of the reality of the background Ward came from. Life in the Yards of Harleston could be hard and attitudes to children, of whom you might have many, were harsher than today. The death of a bread winner or even just his long-term incapacity could tumble a family into destitution. Much as Almena could not cope with being a stepmother at such a young age with limited support and resources so Henry Ward VC could not cope when he left the Army that had cared for him his entire adult life.

⁸ Norfolk Chronicle 4 Jul 1868