



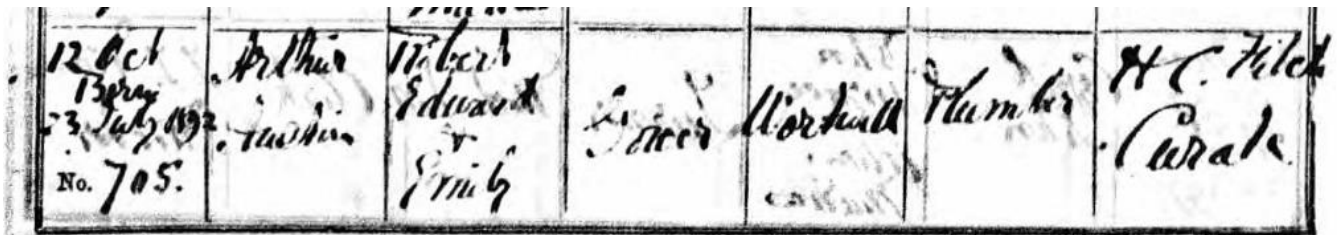
Austin Arthur Gower

14441 Lance Corporal, 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 15th September 1916 in France, aged 24

Austin is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France

He died on the same day as fellow Harleston soldier Reginald Staff.



Our Harleston Hero, Austin Arthur or Arthur Austin as he was actually baptised, was a gardener in a family of skilled tradesmen from Wortwell.

Gowers have been in and around Wortwell for a long time, in July 1698, Elizabeth Gower was buried at St Mary's Redenhall, various other Gowers appear in the church registers through the years. The first one to be specifically described as being from Wortwell, was the widowed Samuel Gower who married at Redenhall in May 1748. Sarah Gower, a 39 years old spinster from Wortwell was buried on the 5th of December 1780. Samuel Gower, a pauper of Wortwell, and quite possibly the chap relaunching himself into marriage almost 4 decades earlier, followed on the 29th of December 1786. The next year, in 1787, Rebecca Gower of Wortwell was convicted of 'false reeling'; she would have

been an out worker supplied with wool to spin at home. False reeling occurs when the spinner claims a certain length of thread is on a finished reel when they have given short measure, a practice rife at the time! I wonder if she was the same Rebecca Gower who baptised her illegitimate child, Elizabeth, at Redenhall in June 1768?

Norfolk Chronicle Norfolk, England
11 Aug 1787

The following persons have lately been convicted of reeling false and short yarn, and paid the penalties according to act of parliament, viz. Elizabeth Webster, of Thetford; Frances Marshley, and Rebecca Gower, of Wortwell; Hannah Bond, and Martha Bullen, of Starston; Sarah Lord, of Woodton; Mary Woodward, of Tasborough, and ——— Chapman, of Attleborough; and Ann White, of Thetford, and Sarah Barhans, of Kenninghall, were committed to bridewell for the above offence.—Also Holly Sewell, of Thetford; Sarah Nollarth, Susanah Clarke, and Elizabeth Jolly, of Eye, were committed for embezzlement of wool.

Half a century later and farmer John Gower, great-grandfather of Austin, was on the Low Road raising a clutch of 5 children. The oldest in the household (and bearing mind John and his wife were

in their 40's, there may have been older children elsewhere, equally there was a fine tradition of Gower men marrying late), was 11 years old Robert Gower Snr, Austin's grandfather. Robert Snr's father, John, invested the money, and 5 years lack of income, to apprentice him so by the time the 1851 census rolled around, 22 years old Robert was able to claim he was a master glazier. This decision launched three generations into skilled trades. Unlike the rest of the family, both John and his son Robert Jnr claimed birth in Alburgh. By 1861, Robert Snr was the only child left at home and, now able to state he was a master plumber as well as a master glazier, this was the year he finally got around to marrying, to Maria Rayner, by which time they were both in their early thirties.

WORTWELL.—ACCIDENTAL DEATH.—An inquest was held at the house of Robert Gower, Wortwell, on Saturday last, before J. Muskett, Esq., Coroner, on the body of Charles Reeve, who came by his death under the following circumstances:—Garrett Legood, carpenter, Earsham, deposed—Yesterday, the 7th inst., the deceased and myself got on Steward and Patten's (brewers) van at the Buck Inn, Earsham. We rode on the fore part of the van, sitting on the barrels. Deceased was on the off side, the driver in the middle, and I on the near side, when I observed, coming in the opposite direction to us, a van drawn by a pair of grey horses. I remarked to Webster, the driver, that he would see a pair of very fine horses that came from Diss. Directly I had made the remark, and before the van had got up to us, Webster said, "Good God!" I turned my head and missed deceased off the van. I jumped off the other side of the van and ran round it as quickly as I could, and deceased was lying flat on his face on the road; the heel of one of the horses hind feet stood on deceased's trousers. We got him on to the bank, when I observed froth coming out of his mouth. We untied his neckcloth and shirt collar and set him on the bank, but he was quite insensible, and then brought him into Mr. Gower's house, within 10 or 12 yards from where the accident occurred. I identify the body now shown to the jury as that of Charles Reeve. He is twenty-eight years of age. I was passing through Earsham village yesterday about twelve at noon, when he called me into the Duke Inn. I went in, and he asked me to go with him to Alburgh, and said he would pay me for my time. He had at that time a glass of beer standing on the table. I left to change my clothes and returned to the Duke, and he went with me walking on the road to Harleston. We were overtaken by the van close to the Buck. The van stopped at the Buck and we had a pot of ale between the three. We then went on in the van to Wortwell, where we had another pot of beer, and then went on on the van till the accident happened. Deceased was the worse for drink, but could get on to the van without assistance.—Confirmatory evidence was given, and the jury returned the following verdict—"That deceased died from injuries received from accidentally falling from a van on to the road."

An incident was reported in the papers of 1867 which really highlights how different life was then to how it is now. Essentially a carpenter and his drinking companion, Charles Reeve, hitched a lift home back towards Harleston from the Buck Inn, Earsham on a brewers' dray. The pair were perched on the barrels either side of the driver when a smart pair of grey horses approached and caught the attention of the chaps on the dray. Unfortunately, Reeve's balance was so compromised by the amount of beer he had drunk earlier, he promptly fell off the dray where the effect of falling off was probably compounded by being run over by the vehicle. An unfortunate incident, but I suppose the equivalent of drink driving today. What is bizarre to the modern sensibilities was that the body was taken to the nearest private home, Robert Gower's, and there it remained until the inquest was taken over it the next day, also at Gower's house. Can you imagine parents today, bearing in mind there were three children in the house, accepting the dead body of a total stranger, brought in by a pair of other strangers (at least one of whom may have been slightly the worse for wear) followed by the local coroner holding an inquest in your front room?

Anyway, making up for their slow start in the marital stakes, by the time the 1871 census came around, Robert Snr and Maria had popped out 4 children, Fredrick W, 1862, Alice Mary, 1863, Robert Edward Jnr, 1865, and little Arthur C (also known as Charles), 1869. Three more children were added to the

total, Mary Ann, 1872, Alfred C 1874 and Elizabeth 1877. Since both parents would have been hard on their 50's by the time Elizabeth was born, she would have most likely been their last child, even if father Robert Snr had not died in 1880 at the age of 52 leaving his widow to raise the children.

By 1881 the oldest of Robert Snr and Marie's children, Alice Mary, 18, was at the other end of the country working as one of two general servants in a pleasant 3 story terraced house in Tynemouth, Northumberland. The employers were a middle-aged customs officer and his wife, but with two

young grandchildren in the house perhaps not as dull as it might otherwise have been! Arthur, slightly bizarrely, was 'visiting' a thatcher and his family, George Miles, in Westhaston, leaving Maria with the 3 younger children to raise. Marie's two older boys, Frederick and Robert Jnr were also in the household; both qualified Plumbers and Glaziers they would have been able to supplement the income their mother was making as a tailoress, producing fitted clothing and a stage higher than a dress maker. This is a family that aimed for the best!

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY.—In connection with this society athletic sports were held in a meadow adjoining the flower show. The races were well contested, especially the one mile, which was the cause of much excitement amongst the spectators. Mr. J. Holmes kindly acted as starter; Sancroft Holmes, Esq., and Mr. G. Durrant being the judges. The following is the prize list in the principal races:—100 yards flat race for men, 1, Hunting, 4s.; 2, Spalding, 2s. 6d.; 3, Gower, 1s. Quarter-mile flat race, 1, Nunn, 7s. 6d.; 2, Markwell, 5s.; 3, Gower, 2s. 6d. High jump, 1, Hunting, 5s.; 2, Gower, 2s. 6d. Half-mile flat race, 1, Rumsby, 7s. 6d.; 2, Markwell, 5s.; 3, Nunn and Hunting, dead heat for third place, 2s. 6d. each. One mile flat race for men, 1, Dalistone, 12s.; 2, Markwell, 8s.; 3, Barber, 4s.

During the 1880's the grieving widow still found time to enter into local produce competitions, wining prizes for both vegetables – a brace of cucumbers no less, and flowers: musk roses, geraniums and petunias. Whilst at this time her son Robert was entering the races that also formed part of the Horticultural shows, in later years he followed his mothers' example, entering his own prizewinning produce.

23 July 1888
Diss Express

Norwich Mercury
18 Jul 1903

Like his own parents, Robert Jnr did not charge into marriage at an early age but married neighbour Emily nee Riches in late spring 1890 when he was 25 and had known his wife at least 10 years. They appeared on Wortwell High Road in 1891 census when Emily would have been heavily pregnant with their first child, Allen, who was surprisingly born a year after their marriage; I say surprisingly as for many rural workers it was baby first, marriage second!

They actually married, across the border in Suffolk, most likely Emily's home parish of Mendham, which raises another unresolved issue. Emily claimed birth in Mendham but was raised in Wortwell by her aunt and uncle, George and Lydia Palmer nee Hines, appearing in this farmer's 1871 household

as a 5-year-old. 10 years later and George and Lydia had moved back into the centre of Wortwell, a couple of doors away from the Gowers. By then George was reduced to being a charcoal burner, dirty ill paid work. This begs the question as to what happened to Emily's parents. I tried following all sorts of marriages between: Riches and Palmers, Palmers and Hines, Hines and Riches but did not come across any sort of obvious link that led me to George and Lydia nee Hines being the Aunt and Uncle of young Emily Riches. However, in Norfolk in those days, terms were used fairly flexibly, one or the other of George or Lydia may have been an older cousin of sorts – a mystery! Alternatively, since the record of the marriage I have is a transcription, it could be that Lydia was

HORTICULTURAL SHOW.—The annual exhibition of the Harleston Horticultural and Cottagers' Society was held in the grounds of Caltofts on Thursday in last week. Some good specimens were staged, and passed under the judgment of Mr. Miller, the Horticultural lecturer to the Norfolk County Council. Mr. John G. Prentice acted as honorary secretary. The band of A Company, 4th V.B.N.R., under Bandmaster Luck, played some excellent selections of music. Two concerts were given on the lawn, whilst the Harleston Amateur Orchestra gave some instrumental selections. School children, under the conductorship of Miss Hobson, sang part songs, and the Starston ringers gave exhibitions on the handbells. The principal prize winners were:—F. King, Earsham; Jos. Hines, Brockdish; E. Flatt, Brockdish; R. Osborn, Starston; A. Cook, Starston; F. Barber, Alburgh; D. Page, Homersfield; F. Howell, Earsham; Jas. Leist, Needham; T. Skeet, Needham; G. Coleman, Harleston; Jas. Taylor, Wortwell; J. Borrett, Wortwell; Mrs. Jackaman, Harleston; F. Keeley, Harleston; R. Gower, Wortwell; Miss Brock, Harleston; and C. Norman, Kedenhall. In the amateur classes, the prizes were divided between the Rev. J. H. White, Miss Taylor, and Mrs. Pemberton.

actually a mistranscribed Wiles! Whatever her antecedents, Emily was raised in a stable household, doubtless much loved.

WORTWELL.

FUNERAL OF THE LATE MR. A. C. GOWER.

The funeral of the late Mr. Alfred Charles Gower, who died at Radcliffe Infirmary County Hospital, Oxford, took place at the Baptist Chapel, Wortwell, on Friday.

The officiating ministers were Mr. R. Hawes, Horham, assisted by Mr. A. Eisey, Weybread. The inscription on the coffin was as follows:—"Alfred Charles Gower, aged 56 years." Mr. Gower was a native of Wortwell, and well known as an exceptional craftsman.

The mourners were Mr. F. Gower (son), Miss Florence Gower (daughter), Mr. F. Gower (brother), Mrs. A. Fisher (sister), Mr. R. Gower (brother), Miss E. Gower (sister), Mr. A. Gower (brother), Mrs. A. Gower (sister-in-law). Mrs. Gearing (sister) was unable to be present, owing to illness. Mr. F. Gower (nephew), Mrs. Baker (niece), Miss D. and Miss R. Fisher (nieces), Mr. A. Fisher (brother-in-law), Mrs. F. Gower (sister-in-law), Mrs. G. Curson and Miss D. Curson (cousins), Mr. J. Rayner, and Miss R. Rayner, Mr. E. Rayner, Mrs. K. Barker, Mrs. J. English (cousins) and Mrs. A. Gower (Earsham).

The move into the village centre brought the Palmers to just a few houses away from the Gower household where Robert, a mere year older than Emily, was living. However, being sensible folks, it took them another 10 years of acquaintanceship before they married.

Robert Jnr's widowed mother, Marie, was still living with three of her children in 1891. Arthur J was a carpenter whilst Alfred Charles was following the very specialised trade of wood carver. He went by the day to day name of Charles and this was the name he appeared under in the 1911 census boarding in London, working as a wood carver for a ship building company. I suspect he would have been working on fittings and decorations for luxury boats, possibly even one of the grand liners that were launched shortly before WW1. His obituary in 1930 describes him as an exceptional craftsman.

Diss Express
14 Mar 1930

The oldest of the brothers, Frederick William Gower may not have been such a talented craftsman as his brothers; he started off as a plumber and glazier but abandoned the trade to become a pub landlord at the Two Brewers in 1904. He was employing his niece Ida, Austin's sister in 1911 at the pub but gave up the tenancy in 1913 when his wife died. At that point he made a total turnabout of career and become Bailiff of the Harleston County Court. This was a job he excelled out and it is a testament to the quality of the man that he made the leap from Plumber and Pub Landlord to such a position of responsibility. This was a very able man and a general all good bean as evidenced by his obituary in 1941. He also appeared, over the years, on almost any committee that was going in the town and would have been well accustomed to rubbing shoulders with the great and good of Harleston

Diss Express
3 Oct 1941

Robert Gower Jnr may also have considered himself a cut above the average chap in his village, having the skilled trade of plumber. Whilst today plumbing is a very technical trade, in those days using the materials available, it was an art as much as a trade. A lot of skill was required to manage the soft lead pipes or alternately the intractable cast iron ones. Like a lot of plumbers, Robert also doubled as a glazier – lead and glass being as closely linked traditional as lead and plumbing! He also, in his early married life claimed to be a painter, yet more lead as this was a major component in many paints until the 1960's. Surprising he didn't wind up with lead poisoning!

His obituary reveals he worked for a Mr Keeley of Harleston (had a shop on the corner of Bullock Fair, opposite the Butchers) for 50 years, so good steady work for this skilled tradesman, probably from the moment he left school. There is a real trend emerging amongst the men of the Gower family. Steady fellows who did not rush into any thing (marriage included) but instead took their time and, once they found their niche, excelled at what they chose to turn their hand to and carried on doing it for year after year.

Roll on 1901, Robert Jnr and Marie's splendid family had moved from the High Road back done to the Low Road and consisted of Allen A, 1892, Arthur A, 1893 and Ida M, 1895, (the lass who 10 years later was helping out her Uncle at the Two Brewers in Broad Street).

The same census has Grandma Marie, a shop keeper (probably selling a limited range of goods from her front t parlour but with this family, who knows) living next door with her daughter Mary Ann, aged 30, one of her middle children

A HARLESTON WORTHY.

Death of Mr. F. W. Gower.

The funeral took place at Redenhall Church on Tuesday of Mr. Frederick William Gower, a well-known Harleston personality, who died on the previous Friday, at the age of 80. For over 36 years, prior to his retirement in 1937, Mr Gower had been Bailiff to the Harleston County Court, and had served under four Judges: Judges Mulligan, Willmott, Herbert-Smith and the present Judge, his Honour Judge H. J. Rowlands. He had also worked under four Registrars: Messrs. George Lyus, W. H. Hazard, F. W. Cook and the present Registrar, Mr. Walter Joseph. At one time the area covered by Mr. Gower in his official duties included 42 parishes. In the execution of his duties he had always shown considerable tact, and among creditors and debtors alike, was held in high regard as a man of strict integrity. Until he was 78 he rode a bicycle in connection with his work, and the distances ridden by him ran into several thousand miles. In more recent years he had a simple accident while mounting his bicycle and fell to the ground, fracturing his shoulder. Despite treatment at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, he never fully recovered from the mishap, which undoubtedly hastened his death. A native of Wortwell, Mr. Gower throughout his long life, was an exceptionally active man, and for over fourteen years held the licence of the "Two Brewers" public-house in the Thoroughfare at Harleston, which he vacated after the death of his first wife in 1915. He was keenly interested in Friendly Society work, and was a trustee of Court "Earl of Waveney" A.O. Foresters, Harleston. Prior to being appointed to that office he had passed through all the offices to the chair. At the time of his death he was treasurer of the Juvenile section, and Chairman of the Committee. He had also been an officer of the local Shepherds Friendly Society. He was one of the oldest members of the Harleston Accident Club. In his younger days, he was a member of the old 4th Volunteer Battalion Norfolk Regiment, and was proud of recalling the fact of having been one of the local party which formed a guard of honour at London Bridge, on the occasion of the late Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

His second wife survives him.

A couple of years later, in 1903, Robert Jnr and Emma's 4th and final child, Frank Edward, completed the family. There is a fabulous family portrait, judging from the age of the youngest child, I would think it was taken in 1907 or thereabouts which also matches in with the ages of the older children.

WORTWELL.

THE LATE R. E. GOWER.

Deep regret has been occasioned by the death of Mr. Robert Edward Gower, of Providence House, which occurred on May 2nd after a long illness, at the age of 67. Mr. Gower, who was born in the house, where he died, was a plumber and glazier and was apprenticed with the late Mr. George Keeley, of Harleston by whom he was employed for nearly fifty years. Of a very friendly disposition, he was always willing to help in the social work of the village. There was a large assembly at the funeral on Friday at Wortwell Low Road Baptist Chapel, in the graveyard of which several members of the family lie. The service was conducted by Mr. A. J. Elsey, assisted by Mr. Harold Rackham of the Congregational Chapel (where deceased was a regular attendant). An address was given by Mr. Elsey. Deceased's favourite hymn "Jerusalem the Golden" was sung and appropriate music was played by Mr. Cyril Elsey. The chief mourners were Mr. Aubrey Gower, Mr. Frank Gower (sons), Mr. and Mrs. Hall (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Gower, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Gower (brothers and sisters-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. A. Fisher (brother-in-law and sister), Miss Gower (sister), Mr. J. Riches and Mr. Blaxell (brothers-in-law), Mrs. Riches and Mrs. C. Blaxell (sisters-in-law), Miss D. Fisher (niece), Mr. A. Riches (nephew), Mr. G. English, Mr. R. English, Mr. A. Gower, Mr. and Mrs. Curson Miss A. Rayner, Miss R. Rayner, Mr. and Mrs. E. Rayner (cousins), Mrs. Barker (housekeeper), Mr. and Mrs. J. Vincent and Mrs. and Miss Palmer. Others present included Mr. R. J. Smith, Mr. J. C. Thacker, Mr. W. J. Baker, Mr. O. Hopkins. Mr. and Mrs. I. Keelev.

The oldest son, Allen Aubrey has a look of his mother (although this is not the most flattering portrait of him, a later, posed studio portrait shows a handsome fellow with a twinkle to his eye). Arthur Austin and Ida May look like their mother and baby Frank just looks as stumpy as any child his age would when rammed in a chair and told to keep still or else . .

Austin would have been about 14, still a skinny young lad; the portrait of him in his uniform taken a few years later shows a strapping young man who had really filled out but still had fair hair and gentle eyes

Looking closely at the family portrait, whilst the chap's suits may look, to modern eyes, a little baggy and worn, they were three-piece suits, worn with collars and ties and all three of fellows are sporting watches and chains. Ida meanwhile has a mesh purse hanging from her belt whilst the mother is decidedly wearing a best frock with quite ornate panels and the youngest son is so enjoying his white lace collar! This is a family doing very nicely thank you. It has to be said that both the parents do not seem to be wearing so well for people in their early 40's.

Diss Express
13 May 1932

Sadly, the very slim mother, died prematurely, aged only 41 in 1908 leaving Robert to raise the family; as was par for the course, he brought in a live-in housekeeper, the widowed Kate Barker, much the same age as Robert, in her mid 40's.

Whether there was a romantic element to this relationship (as so often happened) is impossible to say, all we do know is that Mrs Barker remained as Robert's housekeeper until his death in 1932 when she they were both in their late 60's. She attended Robert's funeral, described as one of the chief mourners; I hope the family made provision for their father's bereaved housekeeper and companion.

So, Arthur Austin as he was baptised, or Austin Arthur as he lived, came from a family with as deep roots as any in the village of Wortwell, going back 100's of years. On a more immediate scale, when Austin's father died, 16 years after his second son, he did so in the house he was born in. Would Austin have achieved the reputation and respect earned by his father and uncles, a mix of steadiness, skill and integrity?

His younger brother Frank true to form, did not marry until he was in his early 30's; Austin, who died aged 24, never married at all, in his will he left all he had to his father Robert. 24 was the age his sister Ida May was when she married in 1919. Older brother, Allan Aubrey Gower, when he was aged 25, married a Violet Waller up in Lambeth in 1917. He named his first son, born in 1918 after Uncle Austin who had died two years before the birth of his namesake. Allan built a life in London, I have no evidence of him returning to Harleston.

Frank married a lass from Norwich. Gowers, possibly from other branches of the family, were involved in many aspects of the life of Harleston between the wars. Busily fund raising for local Health Care, engaged in the organised sports, health insurance clubs they helped make the town the lively place it became after WW1

In all honesty it would have been enough if Austin had the opportunity to have quietly carried on minding his own business and raising a family of his own.