



Reginald Staff

14565 Corporal, 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 15th September 1916 in France, aged 23

Reginald is commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France

In 1911 there were at least 20 'Staffs' living in Harleston cum Redenhall including 2 Reginalds! The younger Reginald was one of the older sons of Frederick and Ellen Staff although by 1911 his mother had died and his stepmother, Louisa, was helping raise him and 5 siblings in Everson's Yard. The older one, Reggie as he appears in the 1911 census, was one of the younger sons of Fred and Rebecca Staff, his mother was helping out as Grandma to a new born, and as yet unnamed granddaughter in Wickham Market, whilst Reggie and his father were on Candler's Lane; this was to be their home street for the rest of their lives. The two Reginalds, 8 years apart in age, were living about a quarter of a mile apart in this later census.

So far, so close; in 1911, Frederick was a groom, to the local vet, Fred was a Farm Labourer but in the same census his son Reg was working as a groom. As a jolly little aside, Frederick and his employer, John Buckingham MRCVS enjoyed a lock in the Duke William back in 1901, Frederick got so plastered he was fined 6s 6d, the land lord, John Reeve, was fined £1 4 /- for permitting drunkenness, the vet got away with it!

At this point matters begin to diverge, whilst Reginald was fairly well Harleston born and bred, our Harleston Hero, young Reggie, son of Fred, was born across the river in Mendham as were his father and siblings. As a side note, although Reggie started off as a Reginald, his father was always a 'Fred' rather than a Frederick, even as a little 4-year-old lad out near Potash Farm in Mendham in 1861

DIAMOND WEDDING.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Staff, of Candler's Lane, on Christmas Day celebrated their diamond wedding and despite their age both are hale and hearty. They were married at Mendham Church, near Harleston, by the Rev. J. Brereton on Christmas Day, 1877.

Mrs. Staff will be 85 next March and her husband is 83 and is very active for his age. Mr. Staff is fond of his pipe and a pint of beer and he has spent over 70 years on the land, commencing when a boy of nine on a Mendham farm, minding sheep for seven days a week for which he received 1/-. As can be imagined he never went to school, yet he can converse on most subjects. At the time he was married his wages were 10/- a week and later there was a family of seven children to support. One son was killed in the war. Mrs. Staff, whose maiden name was Rebecca Fairhead of a family of eleven living at Pulham Market and as a young girl was in domestic service at Needham.

Mr. Staff is a regular attendant at the local cricket matches and other sporting events. His grandson, Mr. R. Staff, is a popular member of the Town Cricket Club.

Fred was more or less destined to be an Agricultural Labourer, his father was one as were all his brothers and indeed most of his neighbours and their sons. Roll by 20 years and Fred had set up in his own household, still in Mendham but with wife and two young lads. He had married Rebecca Fairhead in late 1877, shortly after the birth of the oldest of his six lads, young (William) Walter Fairhead. (One transcription claims this was actually 1878). Fred was claiming Walter as his own; the prevalence of a first child being illegitimate is quite startling to those of us who think Victorians were strait-laced and respectable. In the countryside the more liberal Georgian mores lingered on! Young Charles was their first legitimate son.

Diss Express
31 Dec 1937

The piece commemorating their Diamond Wedding reveals a Christmas Day Marriage – and that Fred, like so many of his peers, had received no education and started work as a nine-year-old, hard to imagine!

THE LATE MR. F. STAFF.

The funeral took place at St. Mary's Church on Monday, of Mr. Fred Staff, of Candler's Lane, who passed away at the age of 82. Mr. and Mrs. Staff celebrated their diamond wedding on Christmas Day, 1937. Mr. Staff, who spent over 70 years on the land, was keenly interested in local sport, and for many seasons had been a regular spectator, at local cricket matches. His grandson, Mr. R. Staff, is a playing member of the Harleston Club.

The Rector (the Rev. B. M. Pickering) conducted the service. Family mourners were Mr. Charles Staff, Mrs. C. Francis, Mr. Ernest Staff, Mr. Spencer Staff, Mrs. C. Francis, Mr. R. Staff, Mr. and Mrs. E. Howard, Mrs. Nunn, Mr. and Mrs. E. Staff, Mr. Reginald Francis, Messrs. F. Thurston and W. Thurston, Mrs. Grimwood and Mr. Albert Fairhead.

The widow and Messrs. George Staff and Walter Staff (sons) were unable to attend.

Others present included Miss Brooker, Mr. and Mrs. H. Francis, Mr. W. Gowing, Mrs. Gowing, Mrs. A. Bryant, Mr. W. Edwards, Mrs. S. Pearce, Mr. and Mrs. W. Weeds, Mr. E. Reeder and Mr. J. J. Davey.

Among the wreaths were those from Harleston Cricket Club, and friends at the Tavern and Duke.

Again, quite true to custom, by 1891, Walter (William) had lost the Fairhead name and become a Staff, only to reappear as a Fairhead when he married. In this 1891 census the mother, rather confusingly, is now calling herself Abigail R Staff – it was not just surnames that could be fluid! It was under this name she was logged as working in domestic service in Weybread in 1871. The same process seems to have happened with the couple's second son, Charles in 1881, now Frederick Charles; I suspect this was the name he was baptised with but to avoid confusion with his father, he would have been called Charles in ordinary life! At this stage the family had expanded to 5 children, there were to be 7 in all.

Leaping forward, Fred's obituary reveals that Fred liked his pint, his pipe and his sport – no mention of good works or church going for this stalwart who 'spent over 70 years on the land' indicating he worked until at least the age of 80!

Diss Express
14 Apr 1939

The mother, Rebecca Fairhead came from a slightly knockabout family, her parents being William and Emma Fairhead. Her family had shifted about a fair bit between 1852 and 1861, the 6 children born during this period indicating at least 5 moves – unusual at the time and generally indicating a slightly shiftless character. Steady workers tended to stay put in one place! However, they settled in Pulham for a while, the 5 children born between '61 and '71 all giving Pulham Market as their birthplace. William was an 'Engine Driver' at the time, most likely of a steam traction engine.

The Fairhead family, who eventually wound up on Harleston Common, were living in Mendham in 1881, the very fertile William Fairhead (groom, non-domestic) and his wife were living with various

adult children:-

Charles Gilbert Orlando (unemployed, non-domestic gardener) Charles married Bessie, the daughter of Alfred Allured Taylor, the following year and finally emigrated to Toronto claiming to be 40, though actually 50,
Henry Herbert (Carpenter),
Albert William (Ag lab – later to work at Gillingham Hall and given 7 days with hard Labour for stealing 8 hen's eggs in 1882),
Isabella (the only one of their 12 children with no middle name, she married a local chap but wound up in Peterborough),
Mary Elizabeth and
Ernest Edmund.

Living next door to his parents were another son, James Edward Fairhead (Carter (Ag lab)) with wife, son and sister in law! Living in nearby Wortwell was yet another son, William Walter (wheelwright and namesake for his nephew) and his wife. His house, a double dwelling shared with David Chenery, featured Stable, Pigstyes (*sic*), spring of good water and, most luxurious, two newly built w.c.s - we know all this from the sale details of 1881. The year after this census William Walter Fairhead Snr was charged with a rather shameful assault on an 80 year old man, Robert Bell. William Walter Fairhead Snr was a mere 26 years old at the time (or possibly 23 depending on which census you use) and owed Bell money. Having met each other on the road at Wortwell, Fairhead leapt off the cart he was driving and knocked the elderly gentleman down 3 times!

'The Chairman characterised it as a brutal and cowardly assault and fined him £2 and 13s costs.'

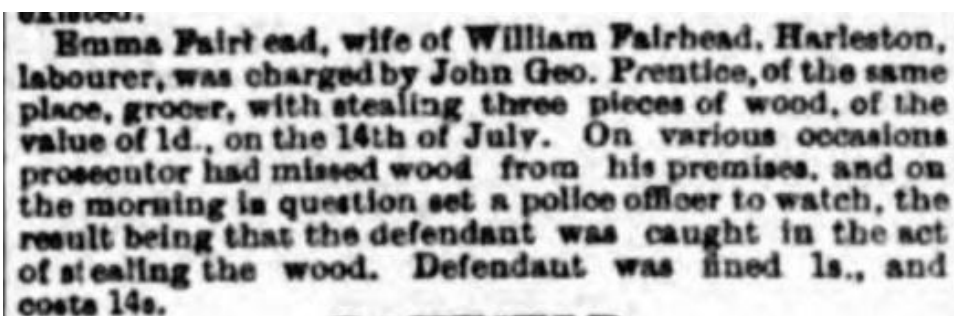
Quite right too!

And of course, oldest daughter Abigail Rebecca Fairhead, having had illegitimate Walter William (Fairhead in 1881, Staff in later censuses) in 1876 was safely married off by 1878 to Frederick Staff and also living in Wortwell near Uncle William Walter Fairhead, yup, all designed to confuse!

10 years later William and Emma Fairhead had moved into town in Chapel Yard, their home must have been a little cramped; William and Emma, both in their late 60's, were sharing with their daughter Mary (dressmaker), son Ernest (carpenters apprentice), married daughter Emma Thurston (dressmaker), her husband Edgar Thurston (agricultural labourer) and the Thurston's two daughters - a family who believed in propinquity, or more likely a family demonstrating the desperate overcrowding that came with the poverty of the time. It is not too surprising that in 1888, Emma was

found guilty of a (very) petty, but possibly not isolated, theft.

Thetford & Watton Times and People's Weekly Journal 11 Aug 1888



Emma Fairhead, wife of William Fairhead, Harleston, labourer, was charged by John Geo. Prentice, of the same place, grocer, with stealing three pieces of wood, of the value of 1d., on the 14th of July. On various occasions prosecutor had missed wood from his premises, and on the morning in question set a police officer to watch, the result being that the defendant was caught in the act of stealing the wood. Defendant was fined 1s., and costs 14s.

By 1901 the now elderly parents, William Fairhead (gardener, raised by his grandparents) and his wife Emma nee Chapman were up on Harleston Common, also appearing there in the 1904 electoral

FUNERAL

The funeral took place at Redenhall on Monday of Mrs. Rebecca Staff (aged 90) widow of Mr. Fred Staff of Candler's Lane Harleston. On Christmas Day 1937 Mr. and Mrs. Staff celebrated their Diamond wedding. Both had resided at Harleston for the greater part of their lives.

The funeral service was conducted by the Rector (Canon B. M. Pickering).

The family present were Mrs. F. Canham, (sister), Mr. and Mrs. G. Staff, Mr. and Mrs. E. Staff, Mr. S. Staff, Mr. and Mrs. C. Francis, Mr. and Mrs. R. Francis, Mr. and Mrs. E. Howard, Mrs. S. Nunn, Mrs. E. Staff, Mr. R. Staff and Mrs. H. Sadd.

There were many floral tributes.

register. William was survived by his wife; the 81-year-old widowed Emma remained on The Common to appear in sole occupancy of a 5-room house in the 1911 census, 10 of her 12 children still surviving! Rebecca inherited her mother's longevity, living until 1944 when she died at the age of 90.

Diss Express
21 Jan 1944

So, looking at Reggie's parents: Fred Staff was a fairly standard fellow of his place and time, his wife Rebecca (or possibly Abigail) came from a slightly wilder family although one that stuck together through thick and thin, reflected in ten of her eleven siblings making it to adult hood. By 1911 youngest son Reggie was their only child still at home; at the time adult children, men or women, normally stayed home until they married and there had been a lot of family weddings between 1901 and 1911! Whilst we cannot predict what Reginald may have done had he survived the war it is interesting to speculate.

Oldest son Walter William Fairhead / Staff, moved off to Oxfordshire where he married former domestic servant Mary Ann Upton in 1901, she was rather older than him (her 42 to his 35) and by 1911 they had one, 2 years old son, Walter Fairhead Jnr sharing their household along with her widowed mother. Walter was then a gardener at a rectory just outside Market Drayton in Shropshire – very respectable.

The second son, Charles (Frederick) was a farm labourer boarding out in Somerleyton in 1901, unfortunately I lost him after that but since he made it to his father's funeral in 1939, I suppose he could not have gone too far from home.

Third son George stayed very local; in 1911 he was a cow man working on Wortwell High Road. He had been married for a year to his rather younger wife, 21 to his 29, and as of that point there were no children. His wife Lily nee Heslop, rather surprisingly hailed all the way from Northumberland but since they married in Depwade I think chances are she was working as a domestic servant somewhere locally. She was the daughter of a coal miner living amongst a community of coal miners, somewhat a contrast to the soft rolling green meadows in the Waveney Valley.

Fourth son, Ernest Edward, already a gardener when he appeared aged 17 in the 1901 census, married Eleanor Mary Waller in 1907. She was one of the younger daughters of Jacob and Mary Ann Waller, one of her brothers, William Alfred, died in Gallipoli, another was wounded in the last months of the war and she also lost three cousins as well as her young brother in law, Reginald, in this conflict that ravaged Europe for 6 years. They had moved to Beccles by 1911 when, like his older brother Walter, Ernest was still a domestic gardener.

Emily Augusta, child number 5, and the only daughter, married Charles Francis in 1909 when she was 24, a sensible sort of age. When the couple appeared on Mendham Lane in 1911, they were enjoying the luxury of a 5-room house – just to themselves. Charles was then a Maltster's labourer

and he too had come from a decent sized family, out on the Bungay Road when he was small then moving to Jay's Green, possibly after his father died. He was the son of an agricultural worker and had also followed the same trade before working at the Maltings. His family had started out Earsham way before drifting into town, a very similar background to Emily's. 28 years later, in 1939, Emily and Charles were still living on Mendham Lane, Charles was still a Maltster's Labourer, but their lad, Reginal Francis, had a white collar job, working as a Wine and Spirit Shop Manager.

Spencer Barber, the 6th and last child before baby of the family Reginald, was a horseman out in Wickham Market; judging by his writing, I suspect that like many his age he had not been a keen scholar. He had married in 1909 and with wife, Emma, in 1911 had a 2-year-old son with the splendid name of Rolland Reginald. Also in the family was a new daughter, as yet unnamed and less than a month old with Grandma Mrs Fred Staff there to help out! Spencer ambled back to town at some point, probably following the death of his wife in 1918. By 1939, he was a general labourer and a retained Fireman. His son Rolland Reginald, a Maltster's labourer was a keen cricketer and committee member during the interwar period, much to the pride of his grandfather; the family may have all lived together during the interwar period, or at least been close neighbours. The 1939 register has Spencer, living with his recently widowed Mother and his son on Candler's Lane – a bungalow so not likely the house Fred and Rebecca had been living in in 1911! There had been various other Staffs jumping and running and being a sporty in Rolland's father's generation but with so many in one small area sharing the same initials it is difficult to work out who was who! Rolland had joined the Police Reserve as his bit towards the war effort, until he was called up.

I think Reginald may have been a bit of a favourite; his adjacent siblings both named a child after him, before he was killed in the war, so we are talking affection not memorial. Reginald would probably have followed much the same routes as his older brothers. Like Spencer he was working with horses in 1911, he may have drifted to mechanised transport during the interwar period. He would most likely have married a girl from a similar background to himself although, judging by his siblings, he may have drifted out of town once he had married and had the one or two children typical of his generation. This is not a family likely to set the world on fire, but good solid, down to earth, 'Backbone of Britain' types.