



James Edward Saunders

22302 Private, 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 18th September 1918 in France, aged 26

James is buried at Chapelle British Cemetery, Holnon Aisne, France

Albert Edward Saunders and his wife Charlotte nee Waller Jnr were to lose both their sons in WW1, their deaths occurring almost exactly a year apart. Their younger son, Herbert, died of wounds received during the battle of Ypres, at the age of about 19 and a half.

The older brother whose death we commemorate on the 18th of September had a particularly gruelling war, being injured several times, patched up and returned to the front before finally dying in the final months of the conflict. Having enlisted in late 1915, within 6 months he was shot in the thigh, being admitted to St Omer Hospital on 29th April 1916 from where he was repatriated to England arriving at a VAD hospital at Westgate on Sea on the 4th of May. His injuries must have been beyond their skill or perhaps he needed specialist repair work as a few weeks later he was sent to the Eastbourne County Hospital. Returned to France, he promptly received another leg injury, this time being shot in the knee, hospitalised in Rouen on the 7th September 1916 and repatriated to Birmingham Hospital on the 11th September.

Not too surprisingly this physically damaged man became susceptible to other complaints, succumbing to trench foot and cold, he was a patient at the 7th Canadian Hospital on 12th July 1917 and had to be repatriated once more to a VAD hospital in Cheshire on 24th October 1917.

Patched up again he was returned once more to the theatre of war and less than 2 months before Armistice Day, this man who had already both suffered and given so much, made the final sacrifice, being Killed in Action on the outskirts of Ypres.

James and Herbert's parents had married in late 1891, very shortly before the birth of their first son, James Edward Saunders – pretty much par for the course in rural communities at the time and something that crops up time and again in the biographies of the other men commemorated on the Harleston and Wortwell war memorial! James was actually quite fortunate, it was almost as common for parents to marry after the birth of their first child who would be quietly absorbed into the household only to change their name back to their birth name in later years when the child got married themselves.

The 7-year gap between this first child and the second child, Herbert, is a little surprising, and the parents do claim in 1911 that they only had three children, all of whom were still living. If they had not so claimed, I would have suspected that their second child was the Charlotte Saunders born about 18 months after James. This child died in Infancy as did a possible third then fourth child, Florence then Wilfred in 1895 and 1898 respectively.

The third, official child, little Lottie, followed three years after Herbert's 1897 birth.

Herbert's mother, Charlotte Waller Jnr, named after her own mother, had been raised as part of a larg(ish) family living out on the Bungay Road, near the Factory. Her parents, James and Charlotte

Waller Snr had started married life in this neck of the woods way back in 1851, Also in the area were Jacob Waller Snr and William Waller Snr, both James' brothers. James Waller named his second child, oldest son and big brother to Charlotte, after Jacob Snr and this Jacob Jnr stayed close by his parents producing a large family, including young William Waller Jnr who like his cousins, Herbert Waller and the Saunders brothers, also died in the war, but a few years earlier in 1915.

Jacob Waller Jnr was one of a group of men sent to court following the Harleston Riots, check out Horace Webb's biography for more detail, but in essence:- the town took a strenuous dislike to an incomer, made and burn effiiges of his family, 500 to 600 persons attacked his house, set fire to tar barrels in the street outside and bashed a desperately outnumbered policeman on the head – his headgear protected him. All got sentenced to several months hard labour, Jonathan Webb, Horace Webb's uncle, got extra time for being on of those who physically attacked P.C.Tuddenham; they were a family not afraid to stand up and be counted when their sense of justice had been offended. I rather suspect that Jacob Jnr, a young man at the time, got swept away the enthusiasm of his firebrand neighbours, the Webbs, as the Wallers, like the Saunders, seem to have spent their time in Harleston quietly getting on with their lives, the men enjoyed the odd pint in the pub but stayed out of courts and at the other end of the spectrum avoided engagement in church, civic and organised social activities.

Charlotte nee Waller's husband Albert came from a very similar background to her own, one of farm labourers although his family was slightly smaller, and they lived out on the Starston /Hardwick borders. Albert was the grandson of James Saunders of Metfield who had started married life as a general agricultural labourer but by 1851 was specialising as a Thatcher and Hay dealer. Three of his five sons variously followed him into the thatching trade, went into bricklaying and another, having struggled to find employment as a groom, wound up in London with his Fressingfield born wife, working as a coachman. James' third son, Edward, in 1851, was at age 18, one of two live-in servants at 'Rookery Farm' still in Metfield. 10 years later and he was living in Hardwick, having married local lass Maria nee Constable, a former servant and daughter of a small-time farmer – 10 acres. Although they had been married 5 years when they appeared in the 1861 census, they still had no children, or none that had survived to the census. Come 1871 though, and they had their full complement of three children, all born in the current home of Starston, two boys and one girl, Albert being the youngest.

Albert's older brother, Walter Ellis, 5 years his senior, had married Charlotte's older sister, Harriet Waller in late September 1888. In the 1891 census, their first born daughter, less than a month old, was being visited at their home on Mill Rd, Hardwick, by 'Lottie' Waller, already the baby's aunt on the maternal side and about to become a double aunt to her by dint of marriage to it's father's brother! Within a few years they were living in Pulham where their two sons were to be born, the older, Frederick not being baptised until he was about 4 and ½ years old in a ceremony shared with his younger brother!

By 1901, Albert Saunders had the slightly more specialised role of 'horseman' and his widowed father had joined his household by the Factory Cottages where wife Charlotte Waller had been raised and where her parents were still living. There continued to be a small enclave of Wallers on the Bungay Road, including Jacob Waller's expansive family although they had moved to Lush Bush by 1911 by which time Albert and Charlotte had moved their home to Low Road Wortwell, Herbert's given hometown when he enlisted. Lottie Snr completed the census form, at the time of her childhood, literacy rates amongst girls tended to be slightly higher than for their brothers, presumably less likely to be hauled off to earn extra money on the land!

Like his parents Albert was in no great rush to start a family, still living with them in Hall Lane Starston in 1881, he was following in his father and grandfather's footsteps as an Agricultural Labourer and did not marry until he was in his early 30's, to Charlotte as mentioned above. Like his parents, he also had just the three children, 2 sons and a daughter. In a bizarre double echo, Albert's older brother, Walter, also had three children, 2 sons and a daughter, like his younger brother he described himself as a Horseman in 1901 and a Teamsman in 1911. Sadly, by 1911 he was, unlike Albert, a widower his wife, Harriet, having died in 1902, aged just 41. However, his sons both survived the war to carry on quietly getting on with their lives although they would doubtless have been affected by the loss of at least 4 of their cousins.

The Albert and Lottie Saunders sole remaining child, Lottie Jnr, married Herbert J Hudson in 1924 and I am delighted to say that she looked after her father in his final years.

Mr. A. E. Saunders

The funeral took place at St. Mary's Church, Redenhall, on Saturday, of Mr. Albert Edward Saunders, who died at the home of his daughter at Homersfield at the age of 82 years. The Rector of Redenhall with Harleston, Canon B. M. Pickering, officiated.

The family mourners were: Mr. and Mrs. J. Hudson, Mr. B. Hudson, Miss Hammond, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hudson and Mrs. Bryant, sen.

Others present included Mr. R. J. Smith, Mrs. W. Brown, jun., Mrs. H. Reeve, the Misses Palmer, Mrs. Reynolds, Mrs. G. Short and Mr. J. J. Davey.