



George Seaman

5111 Private, 1st Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 20th October 1914 in France, aged 31

George is commemorated at Le Touret Memorial, Pas-de-Calais, France

Back in 1911, George Seaman was a 30 years old father of three, young by our standards, galloping towards middle age at that time. He was raising his family on 'Gull Street' Fressingfeild. As a stockman he was more skilled and would have expected a slightly higher wage than his father, William, who spent his entire working life as an agricultural labourer.

Although George was very much a Waveney Valley lad, born and bred in Metfield, he had been out to see the world. Back in 1898, this then 17 years old lad had enlisted in the militia, committed

to a period of six years, although he was Suffolk lad, it was the 4th Norfolk Volunteers he joined – they had all the best toys up at their Drill Hall in nearby Harleston!

With the outbreak of the Boer War, this militia service was fairly rapidly converted into enlistment in the regular army, on the first of November 1900, to be precise. Off he went to South Africa, there to get himself the 'Soldier's New Testament'. This was printed by W. Walters of the Strand in 1900 specifically for soldiers belonging to the British Home and Colonial Forces engaged in South Africa. While these bibles would have been printed in huge numbers, it is likely that only a small percentage have survived, including George's. We know he was in the Transvaal for at least part of 1901 and 1902, receiving the South Africa medal and bars for those years, probably not to be demobilised until 1902, possibly even 1903 depending on how long the journey back from Africa took.

George would have now been a battle-hardened man, not a callow youth, and he decided it was time to settle down with a local(ish) lass (Ann) Elizabeth Harper from Fressingfield. The couple

tied the knot in 1904 and, rather unusually in this time and place, had a very respectable 2-year gap before the birth of their first child. Having then got the hang of things they then proceeded to

Army Form E. 504.

MILITIA ATTESTATION OF

No. 5984 Name George Seaman Battalion Norfolk Regiment,

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name?	1 <u>George Seaman</u>
2. In what Parish, and in, or near what Town, and in what County were you born?	2 In the Parish of <u>Metfield</u> in or near the Town of <u>Harleston</u> in the County of <u>Norfolk</u>
3. Are you a British Subject?	3 <u>Yes</u>
4. Where do you now reside?	4 In the Parish of <u>Metfield</u> in or near the Town of <u>Harleston</u> in the County of <u>Norfolk</u>
5. Where have you resided for the last twelvemonth?	5 In the Parish of <u>Metfield</u> in or near the Town of <u>Harleston</u> in the County of <u>Norfolk</u>
6. What is your age?	6 <u>34</u> Years <u>11</u> Months
7. What is your Trade or Calling?	7 <u>Labourer</u>
8. Are you an Apprentice?	8 <u>No</u>
9. What is the Name and Residence of your present (or former) Master?	9 Mr. <u>J. Cottrell</u> <u>Harleston</u> or near the Town of <u>Harleston</u> in the County of <u>Norfolk</u>
10. Are you Single, Married, or a Widower?	10 <u>Single</u>
11. If Married, or a Widower, how many Children have you under 14 years of age?	11 <u>3</u>
12. Have you ever been sentenced to imprisonment by the Civil Power?	12 <u>No</u>
13. Do you now belong to Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Royal Navy, the Volunteers, the Yeomanry, the Army Reserve, or the Naval Reserve? If so, to what Corps?	13 <u>No</u>
14. Have you ever served in Her Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, or the Royal Navy? If so, state which, and cause of discharge?	14 <u>No</u>
15. Have you ever been discharged from any part of Her Majesty's Forces with (honour), or as Ineligible and Worthy, or on account of conviction of felony, or of a sentence of penal servitude, or have you been discharged with disgrace from the Army? And you are sworn that you are liable to Enlistment if you make a false answer to this question.	15 <u>No</u>
16. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous Service?	16 <u>Yes</u>
17. Are you in receipt of a pension for any such Service?	17 <u>No</u>
18. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for Her Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds?	18 <u>No</u>
19. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated?	19 <u>Yes</u>
20. Did you receive a Notice and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you?	20 <u>Yes</u> Name <u>H. White</u>
21. Are you willing to be attested for the term of <u>six</u> years (provided Her Majesty should so long require your services) as a Militiaman for the County of <u>Norfolk</u> to serve in the <u>1st</u> Battalion of <u>Norfolk</u> Regiment?	21 <u>Yes</u> Corps <u>4th Bn. R. N. V.</u>

I, George Seaman do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true and that I am willing to fulfil the engagement made.

George Seaman (Signature) Charles Spence (Signature of Recruit)

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MILITIA RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

"I, George Seaman do solemnly promise and swear that I will be faithful to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, her heirs and successors, and that I will faithfully serve in the Militia, until I shall be discharged. Witness my hand."

George Seaman (Signature) Charles Spence (Signature of Witness)

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR OF A COMMISSIONED OFFICER.

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the foregoing questions he would be liable to be punished.

The foregoing questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence. I have taken care that he understands each question, and that he assents to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and only before me at on this 12 day of April 1904.

W. H. White (Signature of Magistrate or Commissioned Officer of the Militia)

If any alteration is required on this page of the Attestation, the Officer who attested the Recruit, or a Justice of the Peace, should be requested to make it and initial the alteration under Section 50 (1), Army Act, 1901.

The Recruit should, if he require it, receive a copy of the Declaration or Army Form E. 504.

pop out three more, almost one a year for the next three years:- Cecil, 1906, Violet, 1907, Alexander 1908 and Kate, 1910.

In 1901 George's wife to be, Elizabeth Harper, had been working as a 15 years old domestic servant at the Fox and Goose in Fressingfield, a good place to work if you wanted to meet lots of thirsty farm workers. Do the maths and it becomes apparent the young couple must have married very promptly the minute Elizabeth was 18 and of an age to marry, without requiring the approval of her parents.

Elizabeth Harper (who may well have been baptised Ann Elizabeth) was rather more difficult to track down prior to 1901. Part of the problem may be down to the apparent mobility of the Harpers of Fressingfield. Of the 20 households I found in the previous, 1891, census containing Harpers from Fressingfield, only 4 were actually still living in Fressingfield. Whilst some were still relatively local, Wortwell, Stradbroke, Diss, there were other households as far afield as Islington, Paddington (two households), Northamptonshire and one wayward lady in a Penitentiary in Kent, the 19 years old Harriet Harper.

The 71 inmates / patients in the Penitentiary came from all over the country, from Cornwall to Westmoreland, one from Ireland and even one from Buffalo City, New York. Whilst there were a very few older ladies, most of the residents were in their teens or twenties, a few 15-year olds and even a 14-year-old. So – time for some investigation. It transpired that, unlike in American Penitentiaries, the ladies living in this home were there of their own free will having been 'rescued' from a life of sin or abuse by those running the Penitentiary. Such institutions were often administered by Anglican nuns who took the radically non-judgemental stance that fallen women had generally fallen due to poverty, bad luck, lack of education or a combination of any of the above. Many such institutions were named for Mary Magdalene, the follower of Jesus who became labelled as a sinful woman or prostitute. These 'Houses of Mercy' where women learnt skills to enable them to become employed and financially independent should not be confused with the notorious Magdalene Laundries in Ireland where the inmates were effectively imprisoned, punished for their perceived transgressions under a strict regime and their labour exploited for financial gain.

Back to our family; as mentioned above, George Seaman's father, William (after whom he took his middle name) had been an agricultural labourer all his life and was also born in Metfield. Indeed, William's father, James Seaman, was in his turn an agricultural labourer, born in Metfield. Their wives had hardly come from far flung places but the gene pool had been enhanced from out of the village: George's wife Elizabeth Harper came from Fressingfield, his father William's wife Charlotte Sillet had come from Withersdale (although Charlotte's father John came from Metfield) and George's grandfather James' wife Maria, had come from Mendham.

Those grandparents, James and Maria, born in the Georgian era when mobility was markedly less than in the late Victorian and Edwardian times and before the great drain to cities during the 19th C agricultural depressions, doubtless had even deeper roots in the Waveney Valley.

In short, George Seaman, was very much a typical lad of his time and background. The son of a farm labourer, he had (as so many other like him) joined the Militia, doubtless having a great time with regular parades, shooting practise, parading through the town with a massive horse drawn cannon, he may even have been part of the contingent who went up to London by train to parade for the Queen's jubilee! He may have been slightly surprised to be called up to be sent to South Africa for the Boer War in November 1899 but he trotted off, did his bit and got the medals to prove it. Doubtless he considered his military career over but in 1914, this married man of four was once again back in the army. Arriving in France with the Expeditionary Force in 1914, this experienced soldier died in the early days of the war, Killed in Action on the 20th October 1914. One can only imagine the disbelief with which the news of his demise was met; this was a war that

was meant to be over by Christmas and George was an experienced soldier, a steady fellow of more mature years.

As a widow, Elizabeth was entitled to a pension, and her children were entitled to maintenance, Elizabeth for only as long as she remained unmarried. So, when she married John S Elvin in Depwade in Autumn 1917, she was no longer eligible to receive a pension. Indeed, it was deemed that any widow in a relationship, even if not married, would not qualify for a pension. However, alternative payments, the War Gratuity and the Service Gratuity, were granted to those who had served more than 6 months. If the person had not survived, the money would be paid to their relics. As Seaman was deemed to have enlisted in 1899 (when he went off to South Africa), and his time in the Boer War contributed to his service, his widow was deemed eligible to £3 3s 3d Service Gratuity. However, having then remarried it was then deemed that of this sum only a third was due to her, two thirds was to go direct to George's children. Following the war, when the War Gratuity was calculated, Elizabeth received £1 13s 4d. It is a little unclear, but it appears that the children's allotment (two sums, one of £2 10s and the other of 16s 8d) was given, not to the mother, but two guardians to administer.

One of these guardians, Florence Buggs, you would expect to be fairly easy to track down – no chance. Unbelievable as it may sound, in 1911 there were two Florence Buggs in Metfield:- Florence nee Harper, 33, married to Alexander and living in the Street, or Florence nee Oolong aged 27, married to Samuel and living on the Common! I think we can assume that it is the Florence Harper, married to Alexander Buggs and some sort of relative to Elizabeth nee Harper (the mother of George's children) who took on the role of guardian. Whoever she was, she did not keep the role long as, barely 6 weeks later, when the final payment was made for the children, the role of guardian had been taken by Eliza C Mills – not a clue who she was!

Elizabeth remained a widow for some three years before remarrying to a John Sidney Elvin; born to Rosie and John in Hempnall in 1894 he would have been 8 years younger than Elizabeth. One of the younger of Rosie and John Snr's 9 children, 8 of whom still survived in 1911, John was, true to form, an agricultural labourer although in 1911 his father, John Snr, was a council Roadman. Hempnall was absolutely knee deep in Elvins, Elizabeth had married into quite a clan! John Sidney Elvin's father, John Snr, had been slow to marry, not doing so until he was 38 when, in 1892, he married Rosa Dye, spinster.

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No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
305	October 6	John Elvin Rosa Dye	offered age bachelor spinster	Bachelor	Labourer	Hempnall Hempnall	John Elvin John Dye	Labourer Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church of England by me, E. E. Ward-Kinn

This Marriage was solemnized between us, John Elvin Rosa Dye in the Presence of us, Anthony Gushon Alice Dye

Rosa Dye had brought a number of illegitimate children to the marriage, at least four, who, in the fine and generous tradition of the Waveney Valley were quietly absorbed into the more formally produced family! However, once again the merry improvisation on given names trips up the family researcher. Back in 1891, Bessie Dye, from Mundham, aged 30 was acting as the housekeeper for her aunt and uncle in Hempnall, a few doors away is a household of three mature Elvins (the family she was to marry into)! Bessie, slightly oddly, has 3 of Rosa's children with her:- Eliza, aged 9, Herman aged 6 – both from Heckingham and Arthur aged 2 from Hempnall. Lo and behold 10 years later in 1901, and Bessie had re-invented herself as Rose, 5 years older than

expected, married to John Elvin. Two of her children from 1891, Herman and Arthur had been joined by little Bertie Dye, aged 9 along with three more sons from her marriage to John Snr including young John who went on to marry Seaman's widow. I did wonder if 'Bessie' was Rosa's younger sister but since Rosa's calculated birth date from the 1881 census matched with Bessie's in 1891, I think we can assume they are one and the same! In 1891, Rosa was a nurse and out of work domestic servant living with a farm labourer and his family in Bergh Apton. Looks as if Rosa was helping out with this young family whilst awaiting the birth of her first child Eliza. Rosa had a tough start in life, her mother had to resort to doing laundry when left a widow with 5 children to raise. I suspect that Rosa had been sent out into the world to earn a living in domestic service, ill-equipped to deal with life, one illegitimate child was followed fairly rapidly by 3 more until John Elvin married her, took on those children and became her husband and protector.

Now I realise that John Elvin, who went on to marry George Seaman's widow is not actually related by blood to George Seaman's family but bearing in mind Elizabeth had 4 children in tow and men were scarce, one can only wonder how she managed to snag a man to marry her! Hopefully he gave his new wife and her four children the same degree of care and protection his father had given his own mother and the four children she brought into the marriage. Ooh – and there perhaps is the link! A son and daughter arose from this marriage of John and Elizabeth: John E Elvin and Rosa R, named for her paternal grandmother who, like her own mother, had been left with four children to raise.

Hopping back to the children from the first marriage:-

I suspect that George had been a little slack with his admin and having not formally registered his children's birth formally had to do so whilst serving in WW1, or perhaps Elizabeth had to do so to claim her War and Service Gratuity payments. I only suggest this as I cannot see any other reason why Cecil, Violet, Albert and Kate would all have been included in the register of Military Births, father in the 9th, birthplace of all 4 given as Stradbroke.

John Sidney Elvin lived to the respectable age of 70, dying in Acle in 1965, his wife, Elizabeth. the widow of George Seaman, I have not been able to find.