



James Edwin Oxborough

16540 Private, 2nd Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 5th March 1916 in Mesopotamia (Iraq), aged 17

James is commemorated on the Basra Memorial, Al Basrah, Iraq

Oxborough/Oxborrow is not a 'Harleston' name, although a well-established group of Oxborough families were living in nearby Beccles: 'our' Oxborough family originally came from rather further afield. In 1901, though, the family headed by William Oxborough Jnr, a shepherd, were living on the Low Road at the bottom of Shotford Hill. The two oldest children of William Jnr and Harriet Oxborough nee Butters had been born in William Oxborough Jnr's hometown of Ashill; James, their third child, second son and the man whose name appears on Harleston War Memorial was the first to have been born in Mendham, in mid-1898.

The boy's father, William Jnr, was an Ashill lad, born and bred. In 1871 he appeared there as the three years old son of labourer William Oxborough Snr and Ann nee Butters, both also born in Ashill. He was one of the younger of 10 siblings born over a period of 20 years, and was the third son to be named after his father, the first Wm Jnr died at only 1 week old, the second at 9 months before finally our William Jnr arrived, survived and thrived. William Snr died in 1885 aged only 56 and by 1891 it was just William Jnr left at home with his widowed mother Ann. I hope you picked up that, amongst all those Williams, both William Oxborough Snr and his son William Oxborough Jnr had married Butters girls.

Our Harleston Hero's grandfather, William Oxborough Snr had had a tough start to his life; way back in 1841 he was already out earning his keep as a live in Farm Labourer (aged only 12) although he was back in his own father James' household in 1851. Next door to the 1851 household was another household of Oxboroughs, headed by William Snrs' slightly older brother Robert Oxborough, next door to them were Robert Butters, and his wife Sarah nee Oxborough; yet another Butters / Oxborough alliance!

Now, I hope you are paying careful attention to all these links between Butters and Oxboroughs, as this is going to get more confusing before it gets less. In apparent contrast to all these Ashill Butters and Oxboroughs on James' father's side of the family, James' mother, Henrietta Butters was actually born in Durham, Stockton on Tees to be precise. I had assumed that she had been working in domestic service away from her home in the North East when she met and married William in Norfolk and it was just a co-incidence that her name was Butters. However, I dug out her marriage certificate and it all becomes more complicated. In 1893, William Jnr's wife to be was indeed Harriet Butters, a 24 years old spinster but her father was William Starling, an engine driver!

between us, ()

1893. Marriage solemnized at S. Nicholas' Church in the Parish of Ashill in the County of Norfolk

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.
254	June 3 rd	William Oxborough	25	Bachelor	Shepherd	Ashill	William Oxborough (deceased)	Labourer
		Henrietta Butters	24	Spinster		Ashill	William Starling	Engine Driver

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Oxborough } in the Presence of us, James Reditt (Curate) }
Henrietta Butters } Marian Oxborough } Rector.

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Now this is frankly weird, since she was a spinster called Butters, how could her father be Starling? Perhaps she was born Starling, her father died, her mother re-married and she was adopted? Rather unlikely as not many would have the money or see a need to formally adopt; instead, when exploring several of our Harleston Heroes we find them, or family members, growing up as unknowingly illegitimate children under one name and only becoming aware of the fact they were born before their parents married (if they married at all) once they themselves married.

This seems to have been the case with Henrietta. In early 1871, Henrietta Starling was baptised in the booming, overcrowded town of Stockton, Co Durham. I don't expect the over worked curate bothered to enquire too closely into the marital condition of the baby's parents since William Starling and Elizabeth Butters did not actually marry until a few months later. In 1881, 10 years old Henrietta Starling was living in Ashill with her grandparents, Robert and Sarah Butters nee Oxborough. Yes, the Robert and Sarah Butters who back in 1851 were living next door but one to our Harleston Hero's grandfather, and next door to his great-aunt and great uncle! This census entry also rather neatly confirms that Henrietta's mother, Elizabeth Butters, was Robert and Sarah's daughter, a young lady who, having been baptised in Ashill in 1850, also appeared in the 1851 census as an 11 month old baby, to be one of at least 9 siblings.

Henrietta would have assumed her name to be Starling, this was how she was baptised and raised, the fact that her parents had only married after her birth would only have become apparent when she herself married. Luckily in rural Norfolk at the time, illegitimacy was so widespread amongst the labouring classes that not many would judge a child on this fact. It was only between the end of WW1 and the end of the 1980's that illegitimacy became such a stigma.

I vaguely assumed (never a good idea to vaguely assume anything when tackling genealogy) that Henrietta Starling / Butters had moved to Norfolk to live with her grandparents when her mother

had died, possibly but not quite that simple. Her mother Elizabeth seems to have returned to Ashill in 1873; this is where her daughter Sarah Marie Starling, was baptised in mid December. We don't know if Henrietta was left with her grandparents at this point, if her husband, William Starling (Wymondham born even if the couple married in Stockton), had accompanied his wife to Ashill or remained in Stockton eaning his crust of bread, but we do know that little Sarah Maria Starling died up in Stockton in early 1874, aged only 2 months. When Sarah Maria was baptised, her father William was described as a 'skip watcher' a fairly responsible job.

Roll on 1881, when Henrietta Starling was living in Ashill with her maternal grandparents, and we find Henrietta's mother, Elizabeth nee Butters very much alive and living with husband, William Starling, in 13 Croft Street Stockton with an, as yet unnamed son, only a week old. This little lad is almost certainly John Robert Starling who died, as so many children did within months or possibly weeks of his birth. Elizabeth's younger brother, 18 years old Charles Butters was also in the household and, along with Elizabeth's husband William Starling, both were described as labourers. Baby John Robert Stirling died not long after the census, his mother died not long after he did. There were almost certainly other siblings born and died young between Sarah Maria Starling who died at 2 months of age in 1874 and John Robert who died 7 years later, probably at an even younger age. We cannot know now whether Henrietta had been sent down to her grandparents to spare her the experience of another sibling dying, whether Elizabeth had some underlying health issues (tuberculosis was rife) that meant Henrietta was sent to her grandparents, whether Henrietta had spent her early years in Stockton or whether she had remained in Norfolk after the visit in 1873. Regardless of all this speculation, at some point widowed William left his only surviving child with her grandparents and seems never to have remarried; can't find him in 1891 but in 1901 this widowed labourer was still in exile from Norfolk, still lodging in Stockton.

As mentioned above and as confirmed on the Marriage Record of William Oxborough Jnr and Henrietta (Starling/Butters)'s, William Oxborough's Jnr's father died prematurely. Henrietta's

maternal uncle Robert, named for his father, Henrietta's grandfather who raised her, also died young, aged only 33. He was a victim of all too common an accident at the time; falling off the shafts of a wagon he was run over by his own vehicle and died an agonising death, possibly due to a ruptured intestine, hence the quick and fatal onset of putrefaction.

ASHILL.
FATAL ACCIDENT.—On Tuesday last a man named Robert Butters, a team-man, in the employ of Mr. R. Horsley, was returning home with his waggon and horses, when by some means he slipped off the shafts, and the wheels passed over the lower part of his body. He was carried to his home, and suffered great agony until the following day, when mortification set in, and although he received every attention from Dr. Alexander, of Watton, he died on the following day, leaving a wife and large family to mourn their loss.

Thetford & Watton Times
20 Nov 1880

On the day of his death, Robert Butters had 5 children; he was buried on the 18th November 1880, exactly a week later his youngest child, Elizabeth, was buried at the same Ashill church aged only 1 year.

Robert Butters No. 115	Ashill	1880 Jan 18	33 years	W. B. Greer Curate
Elizabeth Butters No. 116	Ashill	1880 Nov 25	1 year	W. B. Greer Curate

Next year's census shows Robert Butter's widow, Hannah, and her remaining 4 children living next door but one to William Oxborrough Snr and his wife Ann nee Butters. The unfortunate Hannah, having lost her husband and youngest child within a week of each other, was left to carry on which in the way of these tough women she did, marrying an Alfred Carter in 1882, her children adopting his name. Alfred Carter was one of the younger children of a large family; it does rather seem that a huge number of the Ashill population in the mid to late 19th Century were either Butters, Oxborroughs or Carters – far too difficult to untangle! Not too surprising when one finds that, in 1859, both Butters and Carter were given prizes for supporting their large families!

children under 12 years of age, 10s.; Charles Carter of Ashill, for maintaining six children under 13 years of age, 7s. 6d.; Robert Butters, of Ashill, for maintaining six children under 14 years of age, 5s.—Special Prize-man: William Carter, of Ashill, for having nine children under 14 years of age, £1 10s.—Superannuated

Norfolk Chronicle
24 Sep 1859

These were families that stuck together and looked after each other, Robert and Hannah Butter's second daughter, Rachel (travelling under her step father's name of Carter in 1891) gave birth to young Basil John Butters on Valentine's Day in 1896, appropriate since Basil was what used to be known as a love-child. Little Basil was raised by his grandparents, appearing with Alfred and Hannah Carter in both the 1901 and 1911 census which revealed that Hannah had lost two of the four children born to her and Alfred. A lady who had more than her fair share of bereavement. Fairly unusually in 1911, Alfred was not able to sign his name, whilst many men of the time's ability to read or write was 'imperfect', most were able to produce a signature.

Eleven years after Robert Butters death, following a horse drawn vehicle accident, Henrietta's youngest uncle, Charles Butters was lucky to escape a motorised version of a similar accident. He

ACCIDENT.—On Saturday last C. Butters, in the employ of Mr. Scott, met with a somewhat serious accident. He was on a traction engine with a fellow workman named Johnson, who had been engaged with him drawing wood to Watton Railway Station. Returning to Ashill, they had reached Mr. Griffin's farm gate, when Butters, making a false step in descending from the engine, fell to the ground. Johnson was driving, but could not stop the engine until three wheels of the drags had passed over Butters' legs. Fortunately the drags were not loaded, and no bones were broken.

hopped off a traction engine as it approached a gate, stumbled but was lucky to go, not below the engine, but below the wheels of the empty 'drag' (sort of open sided tumbrel) that was being pulled behind the engine. Unlike his older brother, he escaped with nothing more than bruised legs.

Thetford & Watton Times
22 Aug 1891

Trotting back to the Oxborough / Butters family links:

In 1840, Richard Butters son, Robert Butters married Sarah Oxborough.

One of their daughters, Elizabeth Butters, grew up to marry William Starling, their daughter, Henrietta Butters aka Starling went on to marry William Oxborough Jnr, son of William Oxborough Snr.

In 1852, James Oxborough's son, William Oxborough Snr married Ann Butters, daughter of John Butters

In resume:

In 1893 William Oxborough Jnr, married Henrietta Butters. Henrietta was the daughter of Elizabeth Butters, Elizabeth Butters was the daughter of Robert Butters and Sarah Oxborough. William Oxborough Jnr was the son of William Oxborough Snr and Ann Butters

And frankly anymore investigations will only make both my brain and your brain ache so we shall leave it at that!

On the whole the Butters, the Carters, and the Oxboroughs of Ashill were busy hard-working families who got on with life and stayed out of trouble with a few exceptions! John Butters, gang master and higgler (slightly iffy peddler/ hawker) was always in and out of trouble, Eliza Butters got herself in a bit of trouble in the mid-1870s; rough music was a traditional communal punishment in rural England but Eliza and another woman got a bit carried away and wound up in the Wymondham Bridewell. Even worse, one of her younger sons, Morris, at age 5, whilst playing with matches managed to burn a stack of about 8 wagons of straw -oops! 10 years later the same lad was caught playing pitch and toss on the highway. However, none of the above were closely related to our hero and his family!

Moving on to the eve of the 20th Century: James' parents William Jnr and Henrietta Oxborough already had 4 children in 1901; by 1911 they had cranked out 9 children, all still alive with 8 living in their 4 room Mendham home; oldest child Dorothy had not gone far, she was working as a general servant at the Beeches on London Road, then lived in by the well to do Pratts, solicitor. There were still 9 children actually in the Oxborough household as they had been joined by a young cousin, 8 years old George Ezekial Oxborough from Hackney! This George I am assuming to be the orphan boy referred to by Ruth Walton. Another cousin, 18 years old Emily Butters had been in the household in 1901. The oldest son, George Snr, was at age 15, already following in his father's footsteps as a shepherd.

This lad, George Oxborough Snr, also served in WW1 and was shot and captured by the Germans but, unlike Thomas Sayer (another of our Heroes) survived being a Prisoner of War and on his return said he had been well treated. By the eve of WW2, shepherd George Oxborough Snr had moved onto Moulton where he and his wife Alice nee Roberts were raising three children including George Jnr, the third generation of shepherds! Their youngest child, Gladys Oxborough, married Claude Wiles, cousin of Stoker Wiles who is also remembered on our memorial. Gladys and Claude's descendants are still living in Harleston.

Others of the Oxboroughs stayed more local; Arthur Herbert, 10 years junior to our Hero James, was a cowman working on Grove Farm Withersdale in 1944, essential work keeping the nation fed.

James Edwin Oxborough enlisted in Norwich and sadly whilst he was listed amongst 40660 other names on the Basra Memorial, due to continuing unrest in the area, this memorial is no longer advisable to visit; memorial books have been compiled to be held at Maidenhead and kept available for interested parties. The physical memorial had already been relocated from a Naval Dockyard to an inland site.