



## John Goldsmith

203211 Private, 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Hull)

Formerly 5433 Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1918 in France, aged 23

John was buried at Bienvillers Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France

The tale of the Goldsmith family is one of folks fighting against rural or semi-rural poverty to make the most of their lives.

To leap back to 1841, 3 generations away from our Harleston Hero and, G-Grandad John Goldsmith and his wife Elizabeth nee Francis were living on Bunkers Hill, which was what Candler's Lane was then called. The three oldest sons, including John snr, 23, named for his own father, were following in his footsteps as Agricultural Labourers whilst the two youngest had no trade, this includes young George, more of him later. As well as these 5 children appearing in the 1841 census, there had been three other children, Harriet born in 1813, William born in 1815, and a James who was baptised in 1819; since the couple baptised another Harriet in 1828, I think we can assume the first had died young. This second, younger Harriet was working in Miss Barham's boarding school for young ladies at the foot of the Thoroughfare.

Meanwhile, at the foot of Candler's Lane the elderly pauper, Mary Goldsmith was making do in Duke William's Yard. In her household she had a young lodger in her early 20's Harriet Self. A common accommodation option for the more settled working classes was to either lodge (bed, no food provided) or board (bed and food provided) in the house of another person with some spare space. This could work well and might enable an elderly person to stay out of the workhouse or bring in extra income for a young couple just starting out.

Often these lodgers were relatives or, at least, well known neighbours or former neighbours. Having a person of unknown background in the house would hold risks as elderly pauper Mary

*Elizabeth Bisk, aged 19, was charged with stealing a cotton umbrella and a silk handkerchief, the property of Mary Goldsmith, of Redenhall with Harleston.—The prisoner had lodged at Mrs. Goldsmith's house, and took advantage of her landlady's absence one day, to steal the articles above named. —Verdict, guilty.—Sentence one month's imprisonment with hard labour.*

Goldsmith of Duke William Yard found out in 1843 when her lodger stole various items from her. Shame on Miss Fisk!

*Norfolk Chronicle  
21 Oct 1843*

Now, you would think that the name Goldsmith would be fairly easy to track down: simple to spell, recognisable by the census taker and not overly common. Sadly this proved not to be the case and having searched through Harleston, Redenhall, Wortwell and Depwade (the local administrative

district) before spreading the net wider across the border into Suffolk, I could not find any of our 1841 Harleston Goldsmiths in the 1851 census at all which is frankly bizarre. Even more so since in later censuses, various of G-grandfathers John's children sport broods of children claiming Redenhall birth during the 'missing' years.,

Anyway, moving on to 1861 and our Harleston Hero's paternal grandparents , John Goldsmith Snr and Anne, were struggling. The family, including 5 children, were in the Pulham Workhouse; the males and females would have been separated from each other, their two youngest children, Henry and Rebecca were further separated being described (at ages 3 years and 6 months respectively) as being in the Infant's Room. John Snr was an agricultural labourer and with such a large and young family, it would not take much to tip them into poverty: illness, injury, a poor harvest, not much would suffice to tip the balancing act the wrong way. All the children appearing with John Snr in the workhouse in 1861 were clearly described as having been born in Redenhall, so where they were for the previous census remains a mystery. The only exception was 6 months old Rebecca who had been born in the Union; the family must have been in for quite a stint.

The other child, separated from his parents and in the infant's room, was Henry, who was to become the father of our Harleston Hero.

The good news is that we know the family had escaped the Workhouse shortly after appearing there in the 1861 census, by the summer of 1861; the bad news is exactly that. In 1861 Walter Ayton, a sometimes, troublesome young man later to be at the heart of the Harleston riots was at the age of 17, pleading guilty and was sentenced, at Norwich, to 9 months hard labour for feloniously assaulting 10-year-old Harriet Goldsmith of Redenhall with Harleston.

**William Ayton (17), labourer, pleaded guilty to feloniously assaulting Harriet Goldsmith, a child ten years of age, at Redenhall with Harleston, on May 27th, and was sentenced to nine months' hard labour.**

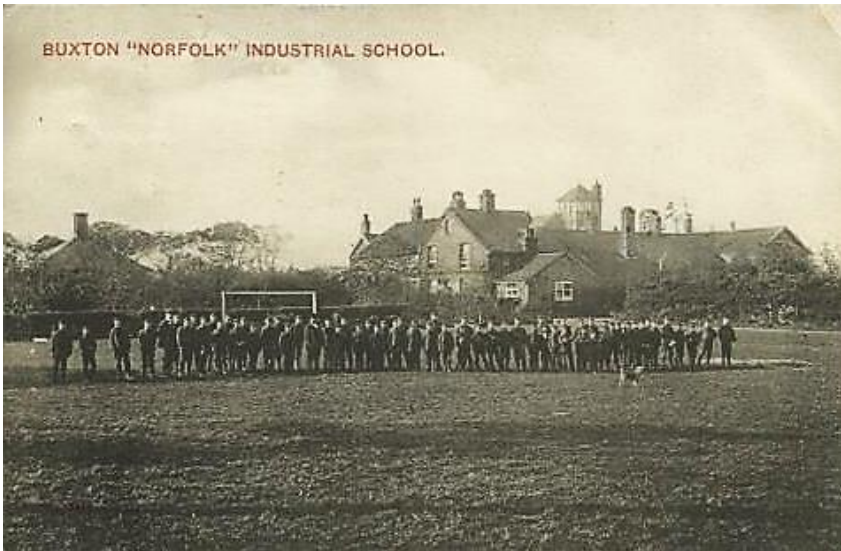
*Norfolk Chronicle*  
6 Jul 1861

I am going to diverge slightly from the main narrative now to relate the history of another Goldsmith which shows how difficult it could be to escape the shadow of the workhouse which could loom over generations of disadvantaged families, particularly women who had very little status or opportunity beyond that extended from their husbands. Back in 1848, Amelia was born to Robert and Ann Goldsmith of Starston, the oldest of at least 5 children baptised in the parish church. In 1871, she was a domestic servant working in Harleston, on the Old Market Place. 10 years later and in 1881, Amelia, a pauper and unmarried lady, was in the workhouse with her 5 years old Mendham born daughter, Alice. Although she may not have found herself a husband, she eventually found a safe berth for herself and her daughter; by the next census they were living in the household of widowed Maltster Robert Leatch/Leech from Mendham. This household, at the foot of Mendham Lane, just up from Keeley's Yard was to be home to Amelia for at least the next 20 years. We cannot tell if there was a romantic liaison between Robert and Alice, it would be very normal at the time for there to have been one, but it does not seem that Alice was his daughter as in 1891 she was referred to as being a 'boarder' in the household. Perhaps Robert's children objected to his remarrying, perhaps it just was not that sort of relationship!

By 1901, young Amelia's daughter Alice had left the household and Percy Goldsmith had joined it; aged 5, I suspect he was the son of Alice rather than a late child of Amelia's. At this census, Amelia's daughter Alice, Domestic Servant was herself in the Union Workhouse with 10 months old Wilfred Ormond Goldsmith, presumably Percy's younger (half?) brother. Unfortunately, Percy ran his grandmother ragged and in 1905 the Magistrates Court, following up a previous Attendance Order

decided to send him to Buxton Industrial School until he was 16 years of age. Whilst Amelia said she could not get him to go to school other evidence was given that he just wandered about and caused mischief: I think he must have had quite a reputation to effectively be incarcerated for 6 years, until the age of 16.

Mind you, there may have been another agenda going on; perhaps Percy's bad behaviour was jeopardising Amelia's home and, in spite of being the grandma, she was relieved to see the back of him



*Buxton Industrial School in 1905; Percy may well be in this group of inmates.*

In the 1911 census, Amelia was still snug in Leech's three-room house at the foot of Mendham Lane and Percy Donald Goldsmith was still at the Buxton Industrial School learning the trade of Bootmaking alongside his academic studies. Percy did not live long to apply the skills he learnt at the Buxton School, dying in the Pulham Workhouse on the 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1915, aged only 20.

I hope his little brother was more tractable, Wilfred Ormonde Goldsmith was boarded out with the Rix family in Pulham in the 1911 census and he did appear to be going to school!

Back to John Goldsmith Snr and his family; in 1871 the family were living out of town, near the gasworks; as expected John Snr was an Agricultural Labourer, wife Ann was bringing in extra work 'charring' (heavy cleaning work), daughter Harriet Jnr (named for her aunt who had been working at the school in 1841?) was a domestic servant but 'out of place', the other children who were old enough to work were also either domestic servants or agricultural labourers including young Harry, only 13 years of age. As well as two younger children, aged 9 and 6, orphaned 'grandson' Charles Bloomfield, aged 5 and born in Woolwich, and a 9-month-old 'son' William, were also in residence. Now this is just confusing, the oldest of John Snr and Ann's children was Harriet who was, at age 21, just old enough to be Charles' mother but was still single and therefore not his mother. It is possible Ann had married before and this was the son of a child from a previous marriage which begs the question as to where this putative child was in the 1861 census!

In 1881, Charles Bloomfield was still living with John Snr and Ann but was then described as a boarder – I suspect Charles was a more distant relative than a grandson, although orphaned he may well have been. I am also a little dubious about the 9-month-old 'son' William who appeared in 1871. Whilst it is not unheard of to fall pregnant at the age of 52, it is a little unlikely, I would be more likely to think William was the 'out of place' Harriet's son, not her brother! Checking up, 10 years later, on John Snr and Ann's 1881 household, William has disappeared and another child, 7 years old Arthur, is also boarding with John Snr and Ann. This young lad is actually the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Goldsmith, the daughter working as a servant in 1871, perhaps both sisters had been caught out by unexpected pregnancies?

As another example of how tough life was in those days and how difficult it was to keep on top of things in overcrowded houses with poor facilities, we also have the story of George Goldsmith, great-uncle of our Harleston Hero by dint of being the younger brother of John Goldsmith Snr

In 1873,

George and Maria Goldsmith of Needham were each committed for two months for neglecting to provide their children with proper clothing. The evidence showed the poor children were in a wretched state and covered with vermin<sup>1</sup>

Checking in the 1871 census, George and Maria Goldsmith, respectively 36 and 34 years of age, already had 6 children aged between 1 and 12. Some time that year George Goldsmith was hauled off to court and ordered to find sufficient room for his family. He evidently failed to do so as in December 71, George was brought back to court for disregarding the order. However, the magistrates adjourned the case as his wife, Maria, claimed she 'had hired a house in Rushall and would shortly take possession of it.'

The 1871 census showed George heading one of three families working at the Furze Green Brickyard, Needham, not working as a Brick Maker, but a Journeyman he was being paid on day rate – an insecure position to be in financially. Following the 1873 conviction, the family upsticks and left their home town; whilst, in the 1881 census the parents and all the older children had been born at Harleston, their then, 8 years old son had been born in Pulham Market (possibly in the Workhouse?), the 6 years old son in Ryburgh and the next child, 2 months old Elizabeth, in Trimmingham where George Goldsmith was once more making bricks.

He sticks with this profession and stays in the Erpingham area, appearing next to the Hunworth Post Office in the 1891 census, still with his wife, a 22 year old daughter and his two younger sons plus a clutch of grand children aged from 1 month to 7 years, all born in Hunworth. Come 1901, Maria and George were living in 'Paul Pry' Yard, Holt, Erpingham, 3 of their younger children were still in the household, only the the oldest of the grandchildren living with them in 1891 (now 17) was still with them but a 5 year old, 3 year old and 1 year old grandchild had been added to the family! In this 1901 census Maria, seems to be the right age, 66, but George, now an agricultural labourer was claiming to be 77, about 10 years older than expected! 1911 and the now widowed Maria Goldsmith was living with the son, James who was born in 1873, most likely in the Pulham workhouse after the parents had been convicted for failing to care for their children. Also, in the household were James' new wife, his two stepchildren and another of Maria's grandchildren.

I really find it difficult to believe that if George and Maria were such terrible parents that they would have continued producing children who, in turn left their own grand children in their care and indeed, one of whom gave a home to his aged mother. A slightly chaotic family, maybe, a family that on occasion struggled – almost certainly, but uncaring – I don't think so!

In contrast to the whole missing families of Goldsmiths in 1851, I find various other slightly surprising Harleston born Goldsmiths popping up across the county, some boarding with other members of the family, Annas and Hannahs are interchangeable, individuals can gain or lose a whole decade between census entries – and I am far too confused now to do anything but concentrate on Henry, father to our Harleston Hero!

---

<sup>1</sup> Norfolk News 8 Mar 1873

So, back in 1871, Henry/Harry Snr was a 13 years old labourer, by 1881 he had lost 3 years and described as age 20, was living with his parents John Snr and Ann, his younger sister Hannah (recorded here as Anna) and 'boarders' Charles Bloomfield and Arthur Goldsmith as described above. The family were then living on Candler's Lane, more or less where they had been some 40 years ago when John Snr was a young man living with his own parents! Henry Snr's sister, Hannah / Anna went on to marry John Turner and raise 11 children with him; two of their sons, cousins of John Goldsmith died in WW1. See Robert and Ernest Turners biographies.

The year following the census, when Henry Snr would have been 24, he married Mary Ann Waller, who would have then been 23 and was one of the daughters of the prolific Waller clan, neighbours from 1871. However, in 1881, she was working as a cook in one of the houses near to the Duke William, very handy for courting! It seems to have taken a few years for their first child to appear, young Henry Leonard, who was followed 3 years later by Gertrude. At both these baptisms, Henry Snr gives his trade as a moulder, a marked change of career from being an agricultural labourer. This short-lived marriage ended in 1890 with Mary nee Waller's death. Buried at Redenhall on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, Mary was only 30 years of age; rather than following the time honoured tradition of importing a housekeeper, Henry Snr had his Mum in the household for the 1891 census, along with an adult nephew from Loddon, son of his rather older brother John.

1895 MARRIAGE solemnized <i>After Banns</i> in the <i>Parish</i> of <i>Redenhall with Harleston &amp; Wortwell</i> in the County of <i>Norfolk</i>								
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.
<i>148</i>	<i>17 August 1895</i>	<i>Henry Goldsmith</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>Widower</i>	<i>Moulder</i>	<i>Redenhall</i>	<i>John Goldsmith</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
		<i>Susannah Ablett</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>Spinster</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Redenhall</i>	<i>George Ablett</i>	<i>Shoemaker</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Church of England</i> by me, <i>P. Cyril Aspinall</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>Henry Goldsmith his mark</i>			In the Presence of us, <i>William Dowling</i>			<i>Cliza &amp; Ward her mark</i>		

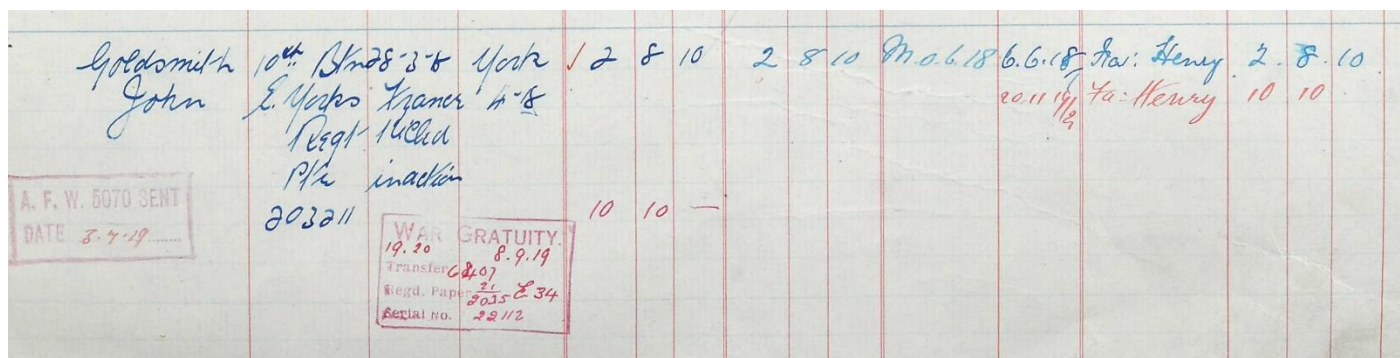
Four years later, in 1895, Henry Snr remarried to Susannah Ablett; first along came Edward, (actually Edward was baptised about a year before the marriage) then John Jnr followed on in 1896. Susannah was one of the younger daughters of George Ablett, the oldest son of Samuel and Elizabeth Ablett from a brickmaking family in Weybread, even though he was born in Mendham. 5 children separated George from his younger brother Alfred Ablett, who went on to become Suffolk's first VC and had very strong links with Harleston. This would make Susan(nah), who was the fourth of at least five children, the niece of Alfred Ablett V.C. George Ablett had not followed the family brickmaking tradition and instead had become a shoemaker. Check out Alfred Ablett's separate biography for more details of John's mother's side of the family.

This marriage also ended somewhat abruptly with the death of Susannah, aged just 50 in September 1909, leaving Henry Snr on his own once more with fairly young children to cope with.

He appears to have managed and in 1911 the much-reduced family, just Henry Snr and two of his sons, Henry jnr, a working baker and youngest son, our Harleston Hero John Jnr, aged just 15 but bringing in some money by working as an errand boy, were living in Wilson's Square.

John Goldsmith would have been barely 18 at the outbreak of the war, he made it through until the last 8 months of the conflict. It seems sad that, like so many of our younger Harleston Heroes we

know so little about them as individuals, instead we have to try to get an image of them by the context of the family they grew up in which in the case of this gentlemen seems to be a robust family who went through tough times, dealt with tough times, included links to a fine military hero (Alfred



Ablett) who struggled with civilian life before finally finding his own niche, and actually seem extremely likeable. John Goldsmith, one of a long line of Harleston men to bear that name left all his effects to his father Henry who was also given the war gratuity of £10 10s. According to the fairly simple calculation (for a private) of £5 for the first years' service then 10s per month (if more than 6 months service), when John died in March 1918, he would have done a month shy of 2 years service.

His slightly older half-brother Harry, appeared in a wonderful 4 generation photograph in 1938, in the lull before another great war. The photograph features Henry Snr, Henry Jnr (like John Goldsmith, the great nephew of Pte Alfred Ablett V.C.), Henry Jnr's daughter Lily Barnes nee Goldsmith and her son Charles, born hard on the heels of her wedding the previous year.

I love this photograph, Henry Snr, a little past 80 years of age, sits there with all the serene pride of the patriarch whilst his chunky little great grandson Charles sits on his knee. Charles' grandfather Henry/Harry Jnr with his splendid 'tash looks proud enough to burst whilst Mum Lily looks just a shade overwhelmed. Does anyone recognise the door they are standing in front of? Old Henry Snr survived almost another 2 years by which time baby Charles would have been talking, running and generally carrying on.

### HARLESTON.



Wouldn't it have been wonderful if John Jnr had also survived to build a similar family?

*Diss Express*  
3 Jun 1938

Four generation are included in the above group, namely Mr. Henry Goldsmith; his son, Mr. Harry Goldsmith; the latter's daughter, Mrs. Barnes; and her son, who is just twelve months old and was born on his mother's birthday.