



Edward Jack Warden

5772422 Private, 1st Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment

He died on D Day 6th June 1944 in France, aged 30

Edward is buried at Ranville War Cemetery, Calvados, France

Edward Jack Warden was born in Harleston in 1914 and baptised the following spring. All the evidence points to him being the illegitimate son of Hannah Edith Warden. Hannah Edith would have been 21 at the time of Edward Jack's birth, she appeared in the 1901 census living with her parents Henry and Eliza I Warden in one of the slightly ramshackle buildings that stood roughly in the area now occupied by the petrol station and the Clearance Warehouse on London Road. Her father, Henry, was a Bill Poster (a poorly paid and unskilled job) whilst his oldest son, James William, was a blacksmith presumably in one of the workshops neighbouring their house. In 1911, Edith was described as being a 'day girl' indicating she was acting as a cross between housemaid and kitchen maid for one of the wealthier families in town.

Henry, aged 59, had taken a good stab at completing the census form but with compulsory education not having been introduced until he was thirty years old, his literacy levels were quite low. This should not be taken as an indication of lack of intelligence, even in later years many children in rural areas would miss large lumps of school as they were put to work supplementing the family income. Henry had spelt all the family's names correctly but 11 years old Charles Henry was described as a 'scoller' and whilst Henry had got his and his wife's home villages, Mendham and Starston respectively, spelt properly, the children were described as having been born in 'Rendhall' (Redenhall). The job of 'Bill Poster' was not a well paid one and this may have been reflected in the fact that of the 9 children born throughout his and his wife Eliza's 30-year marriage, 3 had not survived.

Henry may have been a 'bill poster' but both his grandfather and father, James Wardens I and II were master bricklayers. By 1851, James I, the illegitimate son of Ann Warden, had become widowed and moved in with his son, James II, his wife and their 5 children aged between 10 months (little Harry) and 8 years old.

James I was not the only child of unwed Ann, about 2 ½ years after his own baptism in 1784, his equally illegitimate brother John Christmas followed, John was rebaptised aged 13 in 1798 along with an 8 years old sister named Mary! Whilst we cannot say for certain all of these children belonged to the same Ann Warden, I can't imagine there were too many ladies of that name having illegitimate children in Harleston in the 1780s.



The Warden's family home throughout the 1850's on the corner of James' Yard.

Back to 1851 when the three-generation family were living in a house near the Magpie and next the Old Harness Makers; a part of Harleston that was then known as Mendham in Norfolk but rather confusingly meant the family appeared in the Suffolk census! James

Warden II was born in Essex, Mersea Island, but was already living in Harleston in 1841 when he appeared with his parents on Bunker's Hill (Candlers Lane). In fact, checking through the parish registers I found that James I and his wife Hannah nee Everett, baptised a son, John, at Redenhall in 1823, although he had been born in August 1822! I suspect his being born away from Harleston was due to an accident of timings and work commitments!

AT HARLESTON.
 Lot 8. A substantial and convenient DWELLING-HOUSE, used as the Post-office, situate in Mendham, Norfolk, comprising three sitting rooms, five sleeping rooms, stable, gig house, offices, warehouse, and small yard and garden.
 Lot 9. A brick and tiled COTTAGE at the rear of Lot 8, in the occupation of the widow Wright.
 Lot 10. A Plot of BUILDING GROUND, with the Building and Materials thereon, with an entrance from the street, late in the occupation of James Warden.
 Possession of all the above Property, except Lot 6, may be had at Michaelmas next.
 Further particulars may be had of the respective tenants; of Mr. W. M. Hazard, Solicitor; and of the Auctioneer, Harleston, Norfolk. [4867]

Norfolk News 9 Jun 1860

At this time a lot of bricklaying was going on in Harleston – not only were numbers of new buildings being put up, but old buildings were being given new brick frontages. In 1860, it seems that James Warden had moved his building yard, formerly close to the Post Office. This was the post office on the London road next door but one to their home! In 1861, James II was employing 5 men and through the late 1850's and early 1860's he placed several

adverts to recruit more men. Bricklaying was thirsty work and the Harleston brickies tended to be a rambunctious lot – James less so than many but he too was involved in at least one brawl. He may have believed himself to be the injured party, but the magistrates seemed to take the view of 6 to one and half a dozen to the other!

THREE BRICKLAYERS can have work by applying to Mr. James Warden, Bricklayer, &c., Harleston.

William Doughton, ostler, was charged with an assault upon James Warden, bricklayer, Mendham, on the 10th ultimo, but the case was dismissed, the bench obviously thinking that for any injury the complainant had received, Warden had at least done something to bring it on himself.

Norfolk News
 11 Jun 1864

As was the way of the time, although James II's father had died by the 1861 census, his brother William had moved in – bit crowded with three adults, two teenagers and four children in the house! The Wardens were very much a working-class family, with trades such as chimney sweep, blacksmith and shoemaker also being followed by various of James II's sons.

James II himself died, in 1869 aged 53; his widow and 5 of her children including Henry, moved from the London Road to one of the Yards in town, Henry still working as a chimney sweep.

10 years on, in 1881, Harry (the grandfather of our Harleston Hero) was freshly married and, living in Broad Street described himself as a sweep's assistant and, going back to his roots, a bricklayer. Harry does seem to be very much scratching a hand to mouth living – a marked contrast between him and his father who had teams of bricklayers working for him.

By 1891, the family had 5 children in the house, by 1901 three more children had been added including Hannah who went on to give birth to her son, Edward Jack Warden on the eve of the first world war. One wonders if Edward's father was one of the men who never came back.

When Edward Jack was baptised, in 1914, his mother's name was still Hannah Edith Warden – perfectly feasible if she had married a chap of the same name. However, in spite of searching several websites, I have found no trace of a Hannah Edith Warden getting married. The evidence points to Edward Jack having been illegitimate – not that unusual a circumstance at the time and a conclusion backed up by no father's name appearing in the Grave Registration report. It is rather touching that his epitaph read 'A loving husband and son, who will be remembered by all who knew him'.

*123 Fonthill Road,
Finsbury*



Although his mother appears to have never married, Edward Jack did marry, to an Annie E Smylie in 1942, she was a little older than him and was born in Islington in 1911. Her parents, George Edward Smylie, Cycle Maker, and Louisa Emily Bowles had married in Westminster in London in 1902 and appeared in the 1911 census living at 124 Fonthill Road, Finsbury. The Smylie family of 2 adults, 3 children with a 4th (Annie) on the way were crammed into 2 rooms, one of which would have been a multipurpose kitchen, living room dining room, the other for sleeping in. Looking at the building as it stands today, I suspect that what was originally a pleasant Georgian building had been subdivided into 2 dwellings per floor, one either side of the central entrance with shops on the ground floor below. Now the unsympathetic window treatment and obtrusive signage leaves only the roof pediment and the arched doorway as hints to its former glory before

subdivision into housing for the poor and later into commercial premises.

Another resident of 123 Fonthill Road in 1911 listed how himself, wife and 5-year-old son had a single room, 'top back room' whilst Mr Rose, his wife and four children were, like the Smylies, squeezed into 2 rooms.

