



## Samuel Albert Pearce

15231 Corporal, 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment

He was killed in action on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1916 in France, aged 29

Samuel is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, France

and his brother

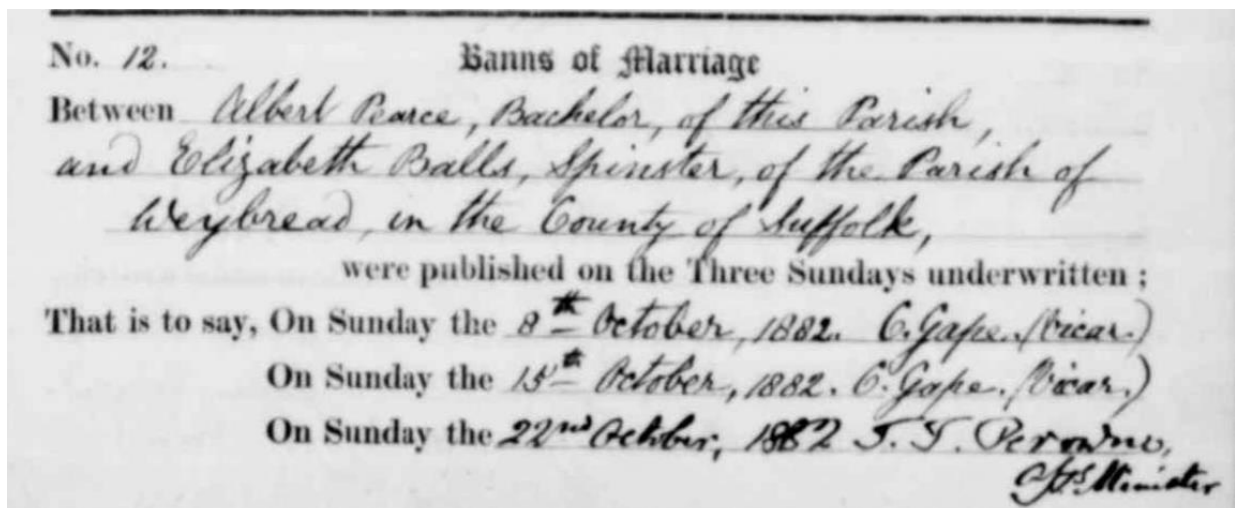
## Harry George Pearce

10157 Private, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment

He was killed in action on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1917 in France, aged 19

Harry is buried in Beaumetz Cross Roads Cemetery, France

Samuel Albert Pearce Jnr was one of eleven children born to Bessie and Albert Pearce, 3 of whom had died by the time of the 1911 census. Samuel Jnr's father Albert originally came from Rushall, his wife Elizabeth (Bessie) nee Balls was living in Weybread at the time of their 1882 marriage.



Albert was the youngest child of a frankly rather elderly father. Samuel Pearce Snr was a Rushall born 62 years old thatcher when his youngest son, Albert was born to him and his wife Elizabeth formerly Nunn. This was, not too surprisingly Samuel Snr's second wedding – in 1861 the 59 years old widower was lodging in Rushall with the Nunn family – no sign of any other family. However, the head of the Nunn household, Elizabeth, also widowed, did have 5 children with her, aged between 2 and 11; although Samuel Snr was 18 years her senior, I am sure he must have seemed an attractive prospect for a woman struggling to raise 5 children and keep out of the workhouse. She was actually heavily pregnant at the time, a 6<sup>th</sup> child, Walter Nunn, was baptised somewhere in Depwade a few months after the 1861 census was taken.

1892. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Rushall in the County of North

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.
49	July 25	Samuel Pearce Elizabeth Nunn	46 y. 46 y.	Widow Widow	Labourer	Rushall Rushall	William Pearce John Nunn	Labourer Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by me, Robert Cooper

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Mark J. Samuel Pearce and Elizabeth Nunn in the Presence of us, Henry Pearce and Samuel Massey

Elizabeth and Samuel Snr married the next year; in plenty of time for the birth of young Albert in 1863, about a year after their marriage. No matter, by 1871, the household of various Nunnns and Pearces regardless of their legal/baptismal names and possible legitimacy were all muddled up together, all going under the name of Pearce and living on the Harleston Road in Rushall. The 70 years old father, Samuel Snr was still working, as a thatcher. In a group of 5 consecutive entries there were two households of Pearces and two of Nunnns – cosy!

By 1881 only young Albert, Agricultural Labourer was still at home with his parents, poor old Samuel Snr, then aged 80 was described as a general labourer – can't imagine how the old boy was still earning a living. He carried on for another 3 years and was buried in Rushall Church in 1883. Samuel Snr' wife worked for many years sewing, in 1881 and 1891 as a tailoress, by 1901, still in Rushall, aged 78, the more basic sempstress. Elizabeth was then relying on Parish Relief but had young Clara Saunders, a 19 years old granddaughter in the household to help out. This little girl had been with granny for at least 10 years, appearing as a 9-year-old in her 1891 house hold. This little girl was the child of George and Eliza nee Nunn later Pearce, Saunders (one of Elizabeth Pearce ex Nunn's older children) and although Clara was born in 1881, she was not baptised until 1898 when she was 17!

Young Clara's parents had been married 9 years by the time she came along as child no 4 (surviving that is), I suspect she wound up with granny purely due to the number of other children in the home. The parents had 9 in all and, in 1891, they and 6 of Clara's other siblings including a toddler and a baby were crammed in to a four-room house! Farming out children to older relatives was a very common practice!

Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Samuel Snr's youngest son, Albert had, in 1882, aged only 19, moved from Rushall to Harleston where he married Bessie Balls who, although she may have then been living in Weybread, later also claimed birth in Rushall. The family may have started their married life in Harleston but pretty soon after, they moved out to Starston where their second child was born, their oldest claimed Rushall birth but this may have been purely due to Bessie returning home to mum, as was the practice, for the delivery of her first child. Samuel Jnr was also born in Starston but by the time their fourth child was born the family were in Harleston indicating their arrival somewhere between 1887 and 1891.

Living up in Jays Green in 1891, Albert had moved from Agricultural work to being a Maltster's labourer, probably at Hudson's Maltings off Station Road. They then had four children, the third of whom was our hero to be young Samuel Jnr.

In 1901, and the now 14 years old Samuel Jnr was already at work as a bricklayer's labourer – not a job many modern lads of that age would fancy. Still living at home but now moved out to the Redenhall Road, the parents and 6 of their at least 7 children were squeezed into a four-room

cottage – presumably two up / two down. Father Albert was still working for the Maltster but I guess had a slightly longer walk to work now. Two years later, and aged only 42, mother Elizabeth died, probably leaving the then 12 years old Bessie to take over much of the housekeeping. Children of working parents had to grow up young in those days

Bessie was definitely keeping house for the family in the 1911 census, probably the same house, although by this time Samuel was working as a thatcher, like his father had many years earlier. In their four-room house, along with father, Bessie and three younger siblings, the oldest of whom, 13 years old Harry, was working as an agricultural labourer, young Arthur Pearce was also in the mix. Arthur was 8 years of age, grandson of Samuel Jnr (who unusually had not remarried) and had been born in Westminster. Without investing in actual birth certificates copies, Little Arthur, born in 1903 is a bit of a mystery. It seems highly unlikely this London born lad is the son of any of Samuel Jnr's sons but highly likely that he is the son of his Samuel Jnr's daughter Clara.

Clara Pearce had, left home by 1901, and was working as a lowly scullery maid, one of seven domestic staff working at a very substantial house in Knightsbridge, 39 Ennismore Gardens:-

- Cook
- Two House Maids
- Nursery Maid
- Scullery Maid
- Butler
- Footman

In addition, the household also employed a Governess, presumably for six years old David Graham who was living there with his 81 years old grandfather James Graham, a Scottish born 'Portugal Merchant' – yes an elderly man and a little boy made up the entire 'above stairs' household served by 7 household staff!

I do believe it would be very easy to underestimate the culture shock experienced by young Clara, only 16 at the time of the 1901 census. Born in the quiet village of Starston, even the relatively bustling town of Harleston was far quieter by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> C than it had been just 50 years earlier, let alone 100 years earlier when the cattle drives were coming from Scotland and fairs lasted up to a month. Having moved from Jay's Green to the Factory Cottages she was very much on the outskirts of the town. Chances are, the tallest building she was familiar with would have been the Swan Inn; the entire Middle Row, Broad Street and Thoroughfare would have almost fitted into the fenced gardens at the centre of Ennismore Gardens, a solid, imposing, repetitive terrace.

Not only were there live-in servants at Ennismore Gardens, but there was also a mews behind the terrace to house the gardening and stable staff. The house, as of July 2017, appears to have been one of only a few that had not been subdivided into flats and was priced then at a cool £13.75 million!<sup>1</sup> According to the sale details of another house, a few doors further along the terrace, these houses were

originally built in 1870 with a façade created from the Portland stone from the original Blackfriars Bridge<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nethouseprices.com/house-prices/ennismore%20gardens,%20london,%20sw7>

<sup>2</sup> <http://thestepletimes.com/the-fog/an-expensive-blank-canvas/>

Clara's employers came from an exotically different background to her and not just financially. The extended Graham family had been out in India during the 1840's, and probably well before then. The Victorian era saw the creation of the last of the hugely wealthy self-made 'nabobs' who, if they were hard working, lucky and survived infectious diseases in the east, could make vast fortunes.

When James Graham, East India Merchant was living in Devon in 1851 with his wife and 5-year-old son, even then there were 9 servants for the three of them. Come 1861, James was visiting his older brother, William, also a wealthy East India Merchant, up in Lancs – in marked contrast to 'unmarried' (Widowed?) James, his brother William had at least 7 children.

When James Graham appeared (for the first time I can find) in Ennismore Gardens for the '81 census he was also the High Sherriff of Monmouth. In the Ennismore household of 1891 appeared James, his son, Douglas William, Douglas' wife Mary, and 1 year old son William James<sup>3</sup> at which point there were 10 servants to look after the four of them! This was a family accustomed to grand houses and a full domestic staff, Clara in the kitchen would have been more or less invisible until her 'interesting condition' became visible – even then the whole matter may have been dealt with by the cook and the butler.

Investigating this chap further, I was interested to find that the Ennismore Gardens House was just a pied a terre, he had also bought

Hilston House in about 1873 *by James Graham, High Sheriff of Monmouthshire* in 1881, who passed the house on to Douglas William Graham, who was living at Hilston in 1902, when the hall was panelled with the oak from the hall of the Lower Duffryn. Graham was also responsible for other improvements, the stone and brick buildings at Home Farm, the Lodges, New Cottages and the reservoir.

Looking at the 1911 census entry for Hilston house we find Douglas William Graham and wife Frances were claiming 8 years of marriage and that their two daughters aged 7 and 4 were their only children. The house had 26 dwelling rooms and a staff of 10 but there was no sign of the boys, William James and David from Douglas Graham's earlier marriage. It was not only poor children who could die young, alternatively they could have been sent off to boarding school or the Navy.



*Exterior and Interior shots of 39 Ennismore Gardens.<sup>4</sup>*

Although, as a scullery maid, it is very unlikely that Clara Pearce would have seen much of the grand, formal interiors, she would have had to deal with precious china the like of which she would never have seen before and observed the cook dealing with strange,



<sup>3</sup> The death of a 2 years old William James Graham is recorded in Pancras in 1892

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/detailMatching.html?prop=49536334&sale=79302348&country=england#>



and to her, exotic foods. In fact, bearing in mind the Graham's far Eastern background she may well have encountered curries and statues of half-naked Indian deities! In the hierarchical structure of the High Victorian Servant's Hall, she would have been very much on the bottom rung. Her nights would have been spent in a spartan room at the very top of the high narrow town house, cold in winter and baking in summer. It would not have been surprising if our little country mouse (who may well have been a sparky, strong-willed individual) responded to a little attention, whether from a fellow servant, a flash Harry she met on her afternoon off, or a familiar face met on a visit home. Either way, Clara's domestic career would have been truncated by the birth of little Arthur Pearce in London in 1903 – she would have been only 18 or 19 at the time.

I think we can assume she was sent back off to Norfolk in disgrace – although I doubt her family would have been too bothered other than having another pair of mouths to feed.

I wonder if Claire heaved a sigh of relief and enjoyed being back in Norfolk or if she missed the buzz of London. Did she have tales of the sumptuous living above stairs to relate to her neighbours and family – she certainly was not the only girl to go to work in a grand house, but her experience was a bit more extreme than many!

A few years later on and in 1906 Clara had another illegitimate child, this time little Annie; guessing by the fact she was baptised at Pulham, I think she may well have wound up in the workhouse for this birth. However, 4 years on, in late 1910 she married Daniel Wisken from the Common appearing there in time for the 1911 census with her younger child, 5-year-old Annie Pearce<sup>5</sup>, no children of their own at that stage although children were to follow.



*Although the terrace looked on to the green area it enclosed, in all other ways Ennismore Gardens, Clara's 1901 workplace was about as far from The Common as you could get in this country!*

Sadly, little Annie died aged only 10 in really quite a sad way, the inquest revealed that Annie who had been complaining of headaches and dizziness had what was described as an 'abscess on the brain' which caused

her death. The poor little mite had also had an ear infection and to comfort her had gone to bed with her mother who woke up to find her dead beside her. At this time poor Clara was alone without her husband – the strapping Daniel Whisken was, like his brother-in-law Samuel Pearce, away on active service.

*Diss Express*  
11 Jan 1916

Daniel with prior military experience would have been in the first tranche of men mobilised. Before we go any further, I do need to mention that there were a lot of

### HARLESTON.

**INQUEST.**—On Monday Mr. G. E. K. Burne, Coroner for the Liberty of the Duke of Norfolk held an inquiry as to the death of Annie Elizabeth Pearce, a child of 10 years, who expired suddenly on Saturday morning. The mother, who is the wife of a soldier now on active service, said the deceased had apparently been in good health, but had complained of pain in the head and dizziness. She had for some time at intervals had a running from the ear. Last Friday she complained of pain in the head. Deceased slept with witness, and between four and five last Saturday morning she said she was worse, and witness applied hot fomentations. The child got easier, and went off to sleep. On awaking about half-past seven she found the child was dead. Dr. Wade said he was called to see the deceased on Saturday morning. He examined the body, which was warm. The clenched fists indicated convulsions. On Sunday he made a post-mortem examination, and found a large abscess on the brain, which was the cause of death. There was no connection between the abscess and the running from the ear. The Jury returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes."

<sup>5</sup> Annie's Pulham Market birth hints she may have been born in the Pulham Workhouse.

Whiskens in and around Harleston, particularly the Common and Lush Bush at this stage.

Back in 1901, a rather older brother, James Wisken, was one of the first to make it to the Common from Lush Bush. By 1911, another of Daniel's older brothers, Robert Wisken was also on the Common; the boys had been raised out on the Redenhall Road as part of a largish family. By the Gas Works in 1881, the family had moved next to their uncle Albert and his family in Lush Bush by 1891. Another brother, Walter between Robert and Daniel, joined the local militia, in September 1897, possibly in response to his little brother Daniel lying about his age and doing the same thing the previous month! It seems the same Daniel Wisken (and I can find no other local candidate) then went on to travel to Yarmouth to enlist in the Royal Artillery for a short service the next year. This might have been inspired by an older cousin, Albert Edward Wisken, who had been living next to them during their Lush Bush childhood, he too had joined the Royal Artillery at the age of 17.

A family with a strong and proud military heritage. Have to be said though, Daniel was a punchy trouble making fellow when he had a few drinks down him and was one of the many frequent fliers at the Magistrate Courts to come from the Common over the years. On the eve of the war Daniel was described by the court reporter as a 'tall powerful man' The magistrates were not amused by his latest antics and fined Wisken 10/- and 10/- costs stating

Unfortunately, defendant had been before them before on three occasions and the public must be protected from him. He must learn to behave himself or he would get into serious trouble.

## HARLESTON

### "SALUTE THE SOLDIER" WEEK

Harleston almost doubled their target figure of £20,000, the final figure being close on £33,000. Week-end events included a bowls drive on the Magpie Green organised by Mr. A. H. Bush which brought in £90. Prize winners were Mrs. Sharman, Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Allthorpe, and Messrs. A. C. Daniel, H. Reeve, and J. Buckingham; a 'darts' tournament at the Magpie Hotel; and a Concert given at the Corn Hall organised by Mrs. Sanders, which proved an outstanding success. At various events during the week, Mr. Dan Wisken collected over £18.

However, age and wisdom settles most of us down and by the time the second world war was in full flow, old soldier Daniel was one of the keenest collectors for 'Salute the Soldier Week'

*Diss Express*  
2 Jun 1944

I suspect bricklayer Daniel met his wife, Clara, via a work colleague; the 1911 census showed that her brother Samuel Pearce, our Harleston Hero, and also a

bricklayer was also living on The Common<sup>6</sup>. He too was married, to May nee Randall from Pulham, and already had their first child, 1 years old Hilda with their second, Samuel, on the way. I wonder who came to the Common first - Samuel or his sister Clara?

Unlike the slightly wild Whiskens, the Pearces seem to have quietly kept their heads down and got on with work. No reports of this family in and out of the courts for drunkenness, offensive language, assault or any other misbehaviours. Like his father, Samuel Pearce Jnr had married early, he was 20 his bride 19, by the time of his death in 1916 he had four children, Hilda, Samuel III, Thirza and Francis. The three older children were all baptised in Depwade but sometime between Thirza's baptism in 1913 and Francis' in 1914 they moved to Henstead in 1914 which ties with his abode being given as Shottesham when he enlisted up in Norwich.

<sup>6</sup> See 540

Our heroes' wife May was the 10<sup>th</sup> (that we know of) and youngest child of the landlord and land lady of the Queen's Head, Pulham Market. May had lost both her parents at the start of 1907; after a long illness her mother had died aged 60, her father than took to his bed and died a matter of only

a few weeks later.

*Norfolk News*  
2 Mar 1907

The previous year, one of May's brothers, Barney Randall had died whilst in the prime of his life, leaving his widow with a toddler

Francis Knowles.

### **PULHAM MARKET.**

The death took place on Feb. 20th of Mr. John Randall, for thirty-four years proprietor of the Queen's Head Inn. The deceased was 73 years of age. He was confined to his bed when his late wife was buried, and he only outlived her a month and a day. The funeral took place at Tivetshall on Monday.

and a six-week-old baby. After this time of sorrow, weddings would have been a welcome lightening of the mood.

John and Sarah Randall's youngest son, Frank, married in September of that same year, 1907, whilst his sister May married our Hero a mere month later! When Frank married, the bridesmaids were Ellen Woodrow, the sister of the bride and his younger sister May whilst our Samuel Pears Jnr was Frank's best man. In the report of May and Samuel Jnr's 'pretty wedding' we see that Ellen Woodrow was once again playing the role of bridesmaid supported by Samuel's sister Bessie, only 16, who had wound up being the family housekeeper on the death of her and Samuel Jnr's mother.

Samuel had chosen Frank Ward of Harleston as his best man. This chap would have been an old friend of his from when the family lived up at Jay's Green and at age 16 a suitably young best man for 20 years old Samuel. One can only imagine the church so full of young people, barely adults really, with such hopes for the future Without labouring a point, and yet again proving how closely linked the Harleston families were, (even though Samuel had left town by the time he enlisted), Frank Ward's younger brother was Reginald Ward, a mere lad of 11 at the time Frank was Samuel Jnr's best man. Reggie Ward died on the same day, side by side with two other of his friends, George Frost who worked for Arthur Rayner (whose son Leonard Rayner was also to die in the war), and Frederick Borrett a carpenter.

### **PULHAM MARKET.**

A pretty wedding took place at the parish church of Pulham St. Mary Magdalene on Thursday, the bride being Miss May Randall, youngest daughter of the late Mr. John Randall, for many years proprietor of the Queen's Head Inn, and the bridegroom Mr. Samuel Albert Pearce of Harleston. The bride, who was given away by her brother, Mr. Frank Randall, was attired in a dress of cream voile with veil and orange blossoms. The bridesmaids were Miss Bessie Pearce and Miss Ellen Woodrow, Mr. Frank Ward of Harleston being the best man. The wedding presents were very numerous.

*Eastern Daily Press*  
26 Oct 1907

So many young men, such early deaths that none of those who attended May and Samuel Jnr's wedding could possibly have predicted. Samuel Pearce, Reggie Ward, George Frost, Leonard Rayner, Frederick Borret; Frederick is the only one of these five closely linked men with a known grave. Further details of all four of these other men can be found on the Royal British Legion Website.

Samuel was one of the many men lost in the chaos of battle, although he was not officially reported as missing in action until December 1916, it is fairly certain he was killed in action two months earlier on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October of that year. Samuel had started off in the Norfolks, almost certainly towards the beginning of the war to judge by the £10 10s war gratuity his family later received. He was promoted to acting corporal, further confirming the steady character of this man in his prime, before

being transferred to the Sussex Regiment.

Samuel died on the day his regiment attacked and too 'Stuff Trench'. We are fortunate that another man in his Battalion, Edmund Blunden, wrote an account of the taking of this trench during which Samuel Pearce and many of his colleagues died.

"The walk to the front line lay over the most bewildering battlefield, so gouged and hummocked, so denatured and dun, so crowded with brown shrapnel-cases and German long- handled grenades, rifles, water bottles....." "....and then the loud whirring of an aeroplane sounded over our heads. British! –not so.....our hearts sank at the knowledge that they knew about tomorrow." "That night, our attacking companies went forward and lay in a ditch with a few 'baby elephant' shelters in it, and much water....." ...."The clear autumn day was a mixed blessing for Harrison, who, in his determination to send over the companies to take Stuff Trench after as much 'rest' as could be found in that Golgotha, had arranged that they should advance from the reserve trench direct to the assault. And by way of novelty the assault was ordered to be made six or seven minutes after noon; the men would therefore have to move forward in broad day and over a sufficiently long approach- liable to the air's jealous eyes....." "Orders had been admirably obeyed; the waves extended, the artillery gave tongue at the exact moment. The barrage was heavy but its uproar was diffused in this open region....." "News of the attack always seems to take years in reaching headquarters ....At last some messages, wildly scribbled.....Stuff trench was taken, there were few men left....."

The messages and signals "A" Form record.....Casualties that day: 268 Samuel's name Names are more difficult to view here, because the pages are not turned very frequently. In France his name appears on The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme Battlefields. Samuel's widow remarried in 1919 and became Mrs Garner, moving away from Shotesham, with her 3 young children. Samuel's youngest daughter Thirza, died in 1986.

Samuel's father Albert, described as a native of Harleston, survived until the age of 80, dying on his now married daughter, Bessie Butcher's farm in Gissing in the middle of WW2, having survived 6 of his eleven children (3 of whom had died young). In the early days of the war, the old fellow in by then 76 was described as incapacitated – he had undoubtedly had a long, hardworking life but at Goose Green just outside Norfolk

Why did Albert's sons' names not appear on the Harleston Memorial? Samuel and Harry's sister Bessie, was not far away, in Gissing in 1939 having married a Mr Butcher. Their father had not travelled far; perhaps he was one of the many men who could not accept the death of his children and could not bear the harsh finality of seeing his sons' names on our War Memorial. Samuel, whose body was never found, is recorded in Chichester Cathedral, in the Royal Sussex Regimental Chapel and in Norwich Cathedral, in the Book of Remembrance. We are also proud to claim both Samuel and Harry as our own.