



Charles Harold Kent

340159 Gunner, 445th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

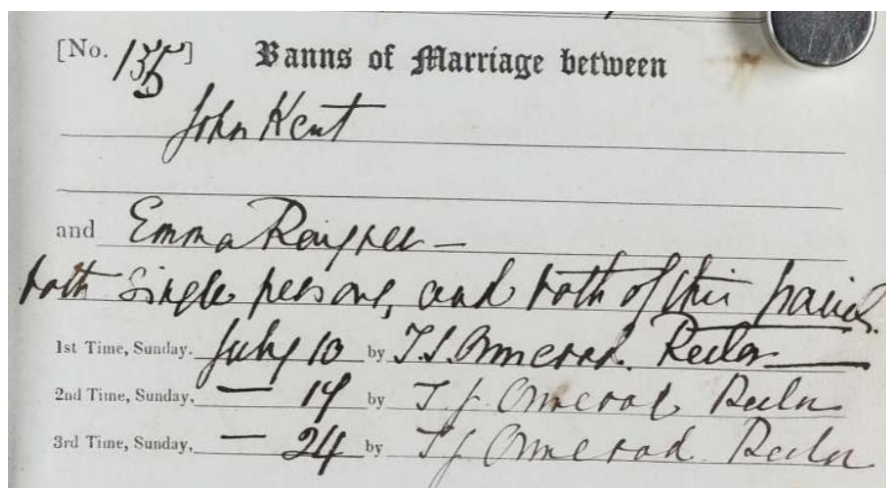
He was killed in action on 17th September 1918 in Salonika, Greece, aged 32

Charles is remembered with honour at the Karasouli Military Cemetery in Greece

Henry Kent was a brickmaker from Needham who ventured to Hadstock, on the Cambridgeshire/Essex borders where he married Susan Cutter in the summer of 1842. She was the daughter of labourer Ishmael and Sarah Cutter and since the 'Imperial Cyclopaedia' of 1850 states that bricks were made in the village I think we can assume that young Henry Kent had wound up at the brick works, a long way from home, and Susan had caught his eye.

Unfortunately, this very fertile family had hit hard times by the 1851 census and 31 years old Susan, a brickmakers wife, was in the Linton Union Workhouse with 5 children, all born in Hadstock and aged 8, 7, 6, 4 and 2 years of age. Henry, I could not find but I think we can assume he is on the tramp looking for work. The then, youngest son, John, was to father our Harleston Hero. Another lad was to follow not long after, young George born in late 1851 or early 1852 at Linton; I wonder if he had been born in the Workhouse.

10 years later and by 1861 the family had drifted their way back to Norfolk, the Rushall Road, Starston to be precise. I say drifted as, judging by the birth places of the younger children, Henry Jnr aged 6, Tasburgh, Eliza aged 5, Stratton St Michael (Long Stratton) and Emma aged 3. Starston, the family had had a highly-mobile few years. Whilst the oldest daughter, 19 years old Harriet, was working as a servant in Essex, the Starston house with 10 residents was full to bursting but at least with four wages coming in (12 years old John and an older brother were all working in the brickworks whilst oldest son Benjamin was an Agricultural Labourer) times would have been better than 10 years earlier.



John Kent married local lass Emma Rayner Jnr in the summer of 1870. Emma Rayner Jnr was the illegitimate daughter of Jane Rayner. Jane went on to marry James Hales, a bricklayer, who took on her illegitimate daughter and gave her his name although she would have had to use her 'proper' name when she applied to get married. In the normal way of

the time, Emma Rayner Jnr, went on to have her own two illegitimate children (another Emma and a Laura) baptised when she was 19, in early 1869 before she married John. Laura, at least, was

raised by her Grandmother Jane and her husband James Hailes, the three of them living next to the Mill House on the Bungay Road in both 1871 and 1881. After Emma Jnr married in 1870, to our John Kent, they also set up home on the Bungay Road, two houses away from Emma's mother, stepfather and illegitimate daughter

Emma Rayner Snr, the aunt of 'our' Emma Kent nee Rayner Jnr was one of two central players in a tale of passion, tragedy, abandonment and attempted murder which played out between Harleston and Kings Lynn between 1851 and 1862. Check out the biographies of George and Harry Rayner to get the whole story.

John and Emma settled down to make babies, lots of babies especially when one realises that Emma had already delivered 2 children into the world; in 1911 the census reveals that Emma had delivered 17 children during her marriage to John, 19 if you include the two children born before they married. Of those 17 children, 9 had died. John and Emma's son Charles, born in 1879 and baptised within 5 weeks of his birth, was one of those who died young, only 2 months old. It is difficult to comprehend the physical impact such a number of births would have had on the mother's body and also, one can't help but wonder at what age the mother let herself become fond of the new child, how much would one invest in a little scrap of humanity that may or not make it through to its first anniversary when there were so many other demands on the parent's attention

In the mid '70's John and Emma had moved onto the Common, this seems to co-incide with John giving up brickmaking. Their son Frederick William Kent, three of the Francis children, and two of the Scarf children, all from Harleston Common, were part of a group of 22 children baptised in the town chapel all on the same day. It appears there had been a round-up of backsliders! Another Frederick William Kent, John's nephew, died in 1871, only 7 weeks old. A very sad report of the inquest appeared in the paper

The child was in bed with his parents, about two in the morning the mother awoke and thought she felt the child moving. She took it up and put it to her breast, but found it to be quite stiff. Upon obtaining a light she found the child was dead. ¹

Nowadays there are very mixed feelings about a baby so young sharing a bed with its parents but since this was January, they were probably more concerned with keeping the child warm and may not have actually had a crib anyway. It was very common practice for a baby to share the parent's bed.

When John Kent and Emma moved onto the Common, sometime about 1876, they were living in a terrace of four houses next door to the Smith family who were caring for four Rayner nieces and nephews whilst their parents were going through a time of crisis (father in prison and about to go bankrupt, mother having a mental collapse). Small town – Emma Kent nee Rayner and Robert Rayner, father of the four waifs, shared a common grandfather, Thomas Rayner.

As we know John Kent had given up brickmaking; his 1881 census reveals he had become a maltster, probably at Pelham Corbould's Maltings in what was then known as Post Office Street and is now the town end of the London Road. The Maltings, along with Corbould's impressive white

¹ Norfolk News 21 Jan 1871

painted house, Selbourne House, had belonged to Harleston Brewery until 1828. Built in the 18th Century and now converted to residential use, the Maltings were last used by Watney Mann.

It looks as if the family had left the Common by the time Charles Harold / Harold Charles Kent was born in September 1886 as his birth place was then given as Redenhall, and the 1891 Census does indeed have John Kent I and his family out at the Factory cottages on the Bungay Road, not far from where they had set up married life 20 years before.

For some reason the family then upped sticks and moved out to the coast, Gainsborough Road, Felixstowe, where John, then 52, had become a bricklayers' labourer, harking back to his trade of 20 years previously but tough work for a man no longer in his prime. The two lads left in the house, including our hero Charles, were both Apprentices to Carpenters so it looks as if the family had really gone back into the building trade. There were also 3 daughters still in the household so the family was not totally scattered!

Even as the children set up their own homes they did not move too far away, In 1911, when illiterate John marked his census with a cross, witnessed by one of his three lodgers, a Royal Navy Stoker, one of his daughters and a grand-child were still in the house on Gainsborough Road² whilst next door John's Son, John Jnr, had given up on the carpentry and was mending boots from home. These houses were very nice, 6 room houses and John Jnr also had three lodgers in his home, all plasterers. In startling contrast to his parents' fecundity, after 8 years of marriage John Kent Jnr was the father of just two girls, with a 6-year gap between the two.

Meanwhile our Hero, Harold Charles Kent was living nearby, literally just round the corner on Felix Road in a similar 6 room house, slightly smaller and slightly less grand and in his case with two lodgers but, after two years of marriage no children to date. Harold would have been 32 at the time of his death, probably called up in mid-1915 when married men under 40 were no longer exempt.

² He was living at 17 Clarkson Terrace, one of a row of three along with a pair of Ipswich semi-detached properties sold by a Mr Leech in 1898.

[http://www.dswebhosting.info/Suffolk/SRODServe/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Site31&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=show.tcl&dsqSearch=\(RefNo==%27HE402%2F1%2F1898%2F45%27\)](http://www.dswebhosting.info/Suffolk/SRODServe/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Site31&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=show.tcl&dsqSearch=(RefNo==%27HE402%2F1%2F1898%2F45%27))