



## Frederick Jonathan (John) Webb

3691 Rifleman, 1<sup>st</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion London Regiment (Post Office Rifles)

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

Frederick is commemorated at the Arras Memorial in France

This family's origins are a little complicated; back in 1851, Jonathan Webb Snr, a 40 years old married Sawyer from Thorrington in Suffolk was lodging in Walpole with Elizabeth Buck, the 25 years old unmarried mother of Emma Eliza, aged 2, and William aged 1.

Jonathan Webb Snr had married 12 years previously, I believe to a Martha Winter although the couple never appear together in any censuses; a Martha Webb died in 1852, 4 years later, in 1856, Jonathan and Elizabeth married. All this took place in Blything; without accessing the original documents it would be reasonable to assume that Jonathan had married in haste, repented in leisure, hooked up with a young lady 15 years his junior and when free to marry, finally got around to doing so four years after he was able to do so.

Alternatively, Jonathan Snr's trade was itinerant, moving from one estate saw pit to another, cutting timber on site and when his wife died, he returned to the young lady with whom he had been lodging some years earlier and took on her and her children. I rather suspect the more likely tale was that Jonathan had quietly ditched his wife before she died as, by the 1861 census, three more lads Horace, Jonathan Jnr and Harry had been added to the household and Emma and William no longer bore their mother's name but had both become 'Webbs'. The family were still in Walpole in 1861, but father Jonathan Snr was lodging away again, in Brockdish; one would hope in an innocent and professional manner only!

By 1871, the family were living out on the Bungay Road between the Gas Works and the Windmill. The oldest legitimate son, Horace was at home with his parents, presumably on leave having recently enlisted in the 27<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot in Colchester although he would have fairly rapidly wound up in Northern Ireland. He also spent 18 months in Malta, which is where he probably finished his career as he got paid an extra 35 days to cover the period between the end of his 7 years' service and his 'disembarkation'! Hardly a stellar career, he entered as a Private and left as a Private, had one good conduct medal but also had his name in the Regimental Defaulter's book ten times. Judging by the rest of the family, this young man with limited education, was probably a bit of a Barrack Room Lawyer! Aged 26 at the time of his discharge, he was described as being no longer fit for service which is generally code for – we've had enough of him! Also in the 1871 household was William and Uncle Henry's older (*half?*) sister, Emma, illegitimate herself, who was following in the family tradition with her own illegitimate child, little Elizabeth aged 3 and Redenhall born, in the household along her great grandfather, Elizabeth's father, John Buck. A four-generation household!

### THE LATE MRS. E. WEBB

One of Harleston's oldest inhabitants, Mrs. Elvina Webb, wife of Mr. William Webb, of London Road, Harleston, was interred at the Parish Church on Thursday of last week at the age of 83 years.

The funeral service was conducted by the Rector (the Rev. B. M. Pickering). The family mourners were: Messrs W. Webb, H. Webb, A. Webb and S. Webb (sons), Mrs. H. Overton, Mrs. T. Whittock and Miss L. Webb (daughters), Miss J. Webb, Mr. A. Bryant, sen., Mr. A. Bryant, jun., and Mrs. W. Webb.

The widower and Mr. and Mrs. Gregory were unable to attend.

The third son, Jonathan Webb Jnr, not only inherited his father's name but also his trade as sawyer.

Before we gallop onto the 1881 census, Jonathan Webb Jnr (commonly known as 'Jack') was in court in late 1875 and then remanded in custody until early 1876, as one of the leaders of the Harleston Riots. Boiling down an extended day of mayhem, a 'blow-in', Mr Bunn, had a feud going with a popular local who then died rather suddenly of apoplexy. Locals decided to demonstrate their disapproval, effigies were made and burnt, tar barrels were set fire too, the blow-in's house was almost destroyed, a lot of drink was consumed, and a policeman, who declaimed he would rather die than fail in his duty, was bashed on the head. The subsequent court case was a tangled mesh of loyalty over truth, and small-town squabbles being exposed. Whilst Jonathan Webb, was alibied by various locals who had a dislike of Mr Bunn, and his brother William Webb (father of another of our Heroes, Horace Webb) gave alibi for one or two of the other accused, Jonathan still wound up being found guilty of being one of two locals who bashed a poor beleaguered and outnumbered P.C. on the head. Luckily Constable Tuddenham's headgear protected him and the constable beat a strategic retreat until re-enforcements arrived

Upwards of 5 to 600 people took part in this extraordinary outburst of civil disturbance and some indication of how high feelings ran is indicated by the prosecution requesting that no gentleman who either subscribed to the defence fund or, even more tellingly, 'lived in the immediate neighbourhood of Harleston' should be allowed to serve on the jury. The first condition was allowed, whilst an attempted proviso (presumably from the defence) that anyone who had subscribed to the prosecution also be barred, was not granted.

Summing up, the Chairman at the Quarter Sessions said

I don't think since I have sat here it has ever been so painful to me to pass sentence as in this case. To see seven grown men standing in the dock upon such a charge cannot but be painful to anyone'<sup>1</sup>

At six hours, the case was the longest the Chairman remembered although whether this a comment on the complexities and number of people involved in the case or the occasionally summary nature of Victorian justice is debatable!

Feelings, amongst at least some, in the town continued to run high; almost 5 months after the riots, the Bunn's house continued to be vandalised.

Much to the discredit of the town and its inhabitants. The house has been besmeared with paint (*yellow on one occasion*) and other things (*agricultural area – think we can take an educated guess*) five or six times. ... A few days ago, the house was neatly whitewashed ... early on Tuesday night the house was again besmeared.

Whilst this could have been the work of one disgruntled individual, the article goes on to infer a wider sense of discontent.

The town has, during the time the persons convicted were, and still are undergoing their term of imprisonment, been constantly in a state of considerable excitement and confusion, caused it is believed by those who encouraged the 5<sup>th</sup> of November proceedings

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<sup>1</sup> Diss Express 7 Jan 1876

The writer goes on to appeal to both civic pride and the pockets of traders and those who benefit from money generated in the town in the hope that residents would

endeavour to put a stop to the proceedings, and thus remove the slur which has been and still is cast on the town.

This he suggests occur, regardless of whichever way the majority of public opinion may tend, thus really putting in black and white the general prejudice against the Bunns. The extent of the damage caused is evidenced in the following proceedings:-

It was ordered that the sum of 78/. Is. 2d. be levied on the Hundred of Earsham, under the provisions of the Act 7 and 8, Geo. IV., c. 31, in order to reimburse the county, the expenditure, for damage done to a property in Harleston. belonging to Mr. Bunn, by rioters on the 5<sup>th</sup> November last.<sup>2</sup>

Just a quick reminder, in case we have gone too far off in a tangent, Jonathan Webb Jnr was a key player in an extraordinary outburst of apolitical civil disobedience which, whilst shocking the entire county, reaped a lot of local support. At the time of the riots, Jonathan Jnr was living up by the Four Horseshoes (the house to the left of the petrol station).

Also charged for his involvement in this fracas was a Jacob Waller: two of Jacob Waller's nephews, Herbert Waller Saunders, James Edward Saunders and one of his sons, William Alfred Waller were to die in the first world war whilst another son, Charles Richard Waller was lucky to escape with a wound in 1918.

In all honesty I think the Webbs were a family of slight mavericks. Jonathan Webb Snr, abandoned his wife to hitch up with a woman slightly over half his age, although he stuck with this second wife, Elizabeth, for the rest of his life. Jonathan Jnr and his brother William were in the thick of rioting; in the summer following the riots William was in trouble for causing an obstruction in the middle of town and preventing people from attending the new church in town. He was one of several young men physically expressing the upset caused by the demolition of the old chapel which had stood by the market place since 1402. This may have been more a case of jumping on a band waggon or general resentment of the 'great and good' (the prime mover for replacing the church was the slightly bumptious self-made lord of the manor – William Hazard) changing the time-honoured ways of the town than down to religious fervour as we have no evidence of the Webbs being involved in any church activities.

There was however a tendency to the military amongst the brothers, not only did Horace enlist, but Jonathan Jnr and his brother William Webb were active members of the Norfolk Reserve Volunteers. William won 4s and a pair of trousers for his rifle shooting in 1877 and 5s, no trousers, in 1878! The Webbs continued to be involved in the Reserve Volunteers for many years although I suspect the social life may have been a contributing factor, I recognise a lot of names in the muster lists who were frequent fliers at the local magistrate's court due to drunken misdemeanours. However, I would emphasise that whilst the Webbs, like most men of their class in that time, spent a fair amount of time in pubs, I have no records of them causing any disturbance whilst under the influence

In 1881, Jonathan Jnr and his now widowed mother, Elizabeth were living next door to brother William and his wife Elvira. Elizabeth was described as a nurse, more likely to be what in later years

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<sup>2</sup> Norfolk News 8 Apr 1876

was described as a Sick Attendant and nowadays would be called a 'Carer'; a person with no formal training but ready to assist a family to tend to an invalid. Jonathan Jnr was described as an engine driver for a miller; essentially a mechanic operating and maintaining a steam engine. This was a family that tended to work together and stick together, through thick and thin although I have no doubt patience got a little frayed from time to time. A close-knit family, in 1891 Jonathan's mother was still living with her son, a 'Maltser's Engine Driver', but by then they had moved from London Road to the Bungay Road. He had married, in late 1883, to a Jane Prentice who died in early 1884, I think we can assume in childbirth, not unusual in this family for marriage and birth of child to be more or less simultaneous. Ten years later, in 1894, when he would have been about 40, Jonathan married, for the second time, to a London girl, Annie Mitchell from Millwall. I suspect Jonathan had taken his skills up to London, met a local girl, got married (in Woolwich) and returned home with his bride to Harleston where he took up the trade of coal carter. Jonathan had probably been working for the Hudsons for the duration as this family with fingers in many pies had maltings, a steam mill and an interest in the coal trade. Jonathan and Annie's son, Frederick Jonathan Webb was born in 1895, it was this lad who was to die in 1916.

Frederick was followed a few years later by twin girls, K/Catherine Betsy and Helena (Corrected from Eleanor in the baptismal register) Annie. Born on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, 1897, Katherine was baptised on 7<sup>th</sup> June, her sister 3 days later. A fortnight after her baptism Helen(a) died, buried on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, aged just one month. At the end of all this, Jonathan had probably fathered 4 children, half of whom had died peri-natally.

No more children were to follow but dear old grandma, Elizabeth Webb was also in the 1901 household along with Jonathan, his second wife and his two surviving children.

## REDENHALL.

### FUNERAL

The funeral took place on Wednesday at St. Mary's Church, Redenhall, of Mr. Jonathan Webb, of Redenhall Road, Harleston, who died suddenly on the previous Saturday at the age of 78 years. He leaves a widow and one daughter, his only son being killed in the war. The funeral service was conducted by the Rector (Dr. Inskip), and the family representatives were, the widow, Miss K. Webb, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, Mr William Webb, Mr and Mrs. Harry Webb, jun., Miss L. Webb, Mrs B Parker, and Mrs A. Bryant.

Others present included Mrs. H. Hipper-son, Mrs. Catchpole, Mrs Sadler, Mrs Arnup and Mr. J. Rayner (representing the late Messrs. Brock and Co.), (all of Harleston), Mrs. J. Snowling, Miss Webb, Mrs, E. Gooch, Mrs H, Francis, Mrs J. Taylor, Miss Page, Mrs Hurry, and Miss Taylor.

There was several floral tributes.

The 1911 census describes 16 years old Frederick as a Telegraph Messenger thus explaining how he wound up in the Post Office Rifles. Doubtless it would been one of his successors who would have brought the news of his death to his parents.

It seems Frederick's sister, the surviving twin, was one of those whose potential husband died in the devastation of WW1; when her father died in 1933, she was still single at the age of 36. By the standards of the time Katherine would have been firmly on the shelf but never give up hope ladies; in 1938 she married Alfred Pye!

*Diss Express*  
7 Apr 1933

In 1939, married but childless Katherine Betsy Pye was a housewife living up in the suburbs of Norwich, whilst her mother, widowed Annie, was living out at the Seven Cottages on the Redenhall Road, one of the less expensive outskirts of the town. This lady, surrounded as she was by numerous Webb nieces and nephews, was destined to never become a grand-mother and she herself died in 1950, at the age of 84. I suppose we could view Annie as a representative of the collateral damage caused when a large proportion of a generation of men perished in the war leaving not only grieving relatives behind but also women destined never to marry, their children never to be conceived or born let alone grow up to continue their families down through the generations.



Frederick is commemorated at the Arras Memorial in France but is also fondly remembered on his father Jonathan Webb's gravestone in St Mary's Churchyard in Redenhall. It was probably his mother who added his name to his father's headstone – you will see that she used the name Frederick John rather than Frederick Jonathan as recorded in the baptismal registers.

