



## Dennis Marshall Howard M.C. (Military Cross)

201370 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, The Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, Royal Armoured Corps.

He died on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1942 in Italy, aged 23.

Dennis is buried at Florence War Cemetery, Italy.

Dennis Howard was born into a comfortable family, living well and engaged in both the secular and social life of the town of Harleston.

His parents, Harry Frederick Howard and Persis Jenery Shee married in 1912 in Guildford. The previous year she was one of 20 girls, all of them shop workers, living over the shop, Plummer Roddis of 1-3 Robertson Street, Hastings. The only man in the 'household' was a 35 years old shop walker – a very trusted position since he was unmarried as were all the girls in his care. Those girls were mostly far from home, a few came from Sussex, but others came from all over Britain, including Wales. Persis gave her home address as Woking, one of her colleagues had even been born in Australia. I hope their supervisor lived up to his responsible position!



*Plummer Roddis, Street Scene, Hastings, early 20<sup>th</sup> C,*

*Advertising, 1905.*

Plummer Roddis was a hugely successful chain of department stores mainly focussed along the south-east coast which was eventually bought by Debenhams in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>C. Originally George Roddis had a draper's store at nos. 1-2 Robertson Street, Hastings and William Plummer another draper's at No.3 Robertson Street, the rest is history!

As well as having staff living on the premises, Plummer Roddis provided additional accommodation in nearby Russell Street, one establishment for women, one for men. Harry Frederick Howard, from Cawston, Norfolk was living in the men's hostel; at age 33 he was almost the oldest in the establishment and 10 years older than his bride to be.

Harry was born to the trade, his uncle Frederick was a draper in Cawston back in 1881, whilst Harry's father, Howard, living next door to his brother, the draper, described himself as a travelling draper.

The advertisement is a dense, multi-column layout. At the top left, it lists 'COSTUMES & SKIRTS' and 'Half-Price'. In the center, there's a section for 'SAC COVERT COATS' with a small illustration of a woman in a coat. To the right, a 'Remarkable Bargains' section features a 'Parisian Millinery' hat. The central part of the ad is dominated by the text 'PLUMMER RODDIS LTD.' and a large 'SALE' announcement. Below this, it states 'DRASTIC REDUCTIONS!' and 'BARGAINS in Every Department at HALF-PRICE and Under.' The ad also mentions 'Commencing the First Day in 1906' and 'January 1st will be a One-Letter Day in HASTINGS.' At the bottom, there are more fashion items like '50 YARDS FLANNELETTES', '50 YARDS ART SERGE', and '50 French Silk Blouses'. The overall design is typical of early 20th-century retail advertising, with decorative borders and various font sizes to draw attention.

The census taker rather more succinctly added the rather more down-market 'hawker' to Harry's father's entry. This seems more than a little unfair, Howard was running quite a serious enterprise. It does seem that occasionally Howards' keenness to make a sale may have overwhelmed his business principles; in 1882 Howard took a labourer to court to reclaim a debt of £6 10s and 4d and was told off for allowing a labourer to accumulate such a debt, for furniture and other goods. The debtor only earned 13s a week to support himself, his wife and two children (6 were to be born in total, 4 came to adulthood); it was judged he should pay 3s a month, Howard would not receive full payment for almost 4 years! He was then a young man of about 28, doubtless he would have got wiser as he got older. I had suspected that Harry and his brother were working in partnership, an assumption that was confirmed when, in 1890, the brothers successfully applied for a spirit license for their shop in Earsham Street, Bungay. Howard and Frederick were moving up!

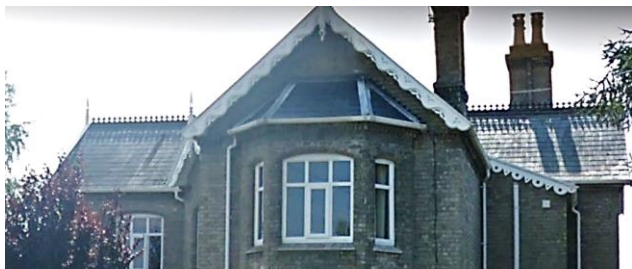
Although in later years Horace moved into farming, his own father, Harry's paternal grandfather, was a grocer in his own right, three generations of shopkeepers, slowly moving up in class and specialism although Harry chose not to push his children into his business.

The 1901 census shows Harry had moved off to St Ives, Huntingdonshire, where he was busy learning the trade prior. It would be highly likely that Harry Howard had worked in several stores, gaining expertise and polish before he wound up in Plummer's, Hastings, where he acquired himself a wife to accompany him into his foray into running his own store. Indeed, when Harry acted as best man at his brother's wedding in his address was then given as Weston-super-Mere.

Persis was one of seven siblings, two of whom had died by the time of the 1911 census, her father had a good steady job, working as a Building Clerk for the local county council in Woking. I think he was probably a fairly steady fellow all together, he may have emigrated from London, but he raised his family in the same house near Woking railway station for at least 20 years. His last entry reveals that, having retired from his clerk's job, he was a commercial traveller selling ironmongery. Of his surviving children, besides Persis in Hastings, Margaret was working as lady's maid in a grand 20 room house in Highgate, Samuel and Mary were still living with their parents at home as a builder's foreman and dressmaker respectively, the fifth child I could not find.

Department store managements tried to keep very close paternalistic eyes on their staff, respectability was essential if well-presented modern young women were to wish to, or be allowed to, work for such a store. However, Harry and Persis' marriage in late 1912 was followed by the birth of their daughter, Margaret Jenery (named for her maternal grandmother) in early 1913, by which time the pair had already moved to Harry Howard's home county of Norfolk, Depwade to be precise! Howard would expect to have been called up, assuming he did not enlist, in WW1 which may explain why a sibling for Margaret, Dennis (named for a paternal uncle), was not born until spring 1919. Although Dennis and Margaret's parents came from generously sized families, 6 and 7 children, they chose, as did many of their generation, to limit their family to just two children.

Those parents, Harry and Persis Howard, turned their skills to the trade they knew best and seem to have done rather well at it. In the 1929 and the 1937 Kelly's directories, Harry was listed a private



resident living at 'The Gables', Mendham Lane, rather a substantial house in grey/white brick that still stands today. Their last years were spent at a house on the junction of Spirkett Lane and Shotford Hill. Not only did the family have a nice house to live in, but they were also well enough off to employ domestic help.

**SPECIAL !!**  
**End of Season's Goods**  
**at Clearing Prices.**

**All Millinery Finally Reduced**

**Ladies' Coat Frocks** in Newest Colours and fine Quality Materials - from **10/11**

Agents for Celebrated W.B. Corsets & Kayser Hosiery

**H. F. HOWARD,**  
**Thoro'fare :: Harleston.**

**G**ENERAL Servant wanted, May 1st, 1931; some knowledge of Cooking; aged 18-21.—Apply, Mrs. Howard, The Gables, Harleston, Norfolk.

We have the Finest Selection of  
**XMAS GIFTS & TOYS**  
in the District.

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**PAY US A VISIT—**  
**IT WILL REPAY YOU!!**

~~~~~

**H. F. HOWARD,**  
**Draper : : : : Harleston.**

The 'Ladies' Outfitters' that was supporting this establishment was sited in The Thoroughfare, Harleston and, judging by the advertisements from 1928 and 1929 had an interesting selection of other items for the discerning shopper – although the promise 'it will repay you' sounds a little threatening to modern sensibilities!



Whilst I cannot say for sure where the Howard's shop was for the entire period they were trading, one local resident remembers it being in the shop next to the Swan, with the attractive dome top windows.

Even though the 20's and 30's were a time of worldwide depression, the Howards thrived during the interwar period. One gets the impression the family were hard working and conscientious. Despite anticipating their wedding vows slightly, Fred was actively involved in the Methodist church. So much so that when the Methodist Church in Fornsett St Mary got electric lighting, it was our Mr Howard of Harleston who had the honour of turning the lights on for the first time! I get a bit confused

about the details of non-conformist churches but in the post war era Howard continued his non-conformist practices, being involved the Congregational church.

Much as Harry had followed the trade of his forefathers, so he had inherited the strength of his religious beliefs. In the 1901 census, Harry's father, Horace, was combining being a 'local preacher' with farmin; non-conformist chapels often relied on unpaid visiting preachers, there being relatively few stipended men. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Horace Howard regularly featured in his preaching capacity in the local papers.

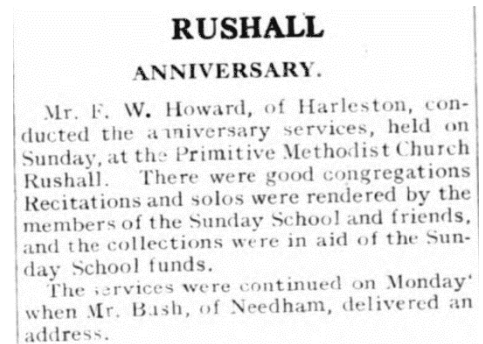
During the inter-war period, like many other comfortably well-off young things, Dennis and Margaret were both keen sports players. Margaret played hockey for the Magpies until, aged 18, she left for Yarmouth, reasons ungiven. At the time of her marriage, Margaret worked for Norwich Union but whether this was a lifetime career or just during the war, I cannot say. It is possible her brother turned out regularly for the local football team but since no initials are given in the multiple team lists, it could be that this 'Howard' was another local chap, football tended to be a more working-class sport at the time. Dennis was more renowned for Tennis and Hockey, sports his school were particularly keen and which he pursued when his employers, the Norwich Union posted him to Northampton.

Dennis was sent off to Culford School, Bury St Edmunds to be prepared with the skills of a middleclass Christian gentleman. This independent school was slightly unusual being based on Methodist Principals and is still educating children today. Back in the Howard's times the school was not co-educational as it is today, Margaret is likely to have been sent to Culford's sister school, the East Anglian School for Girls.

Harry Howard was bringing his children up in the faith he was so active in, preaching on the Diss circuit, engaged, not just with his own chapel, but also leading worship in other chapels scattered in the villages around Harleston. In the light of what the future held, I hope his faith brought him and his wife comfort.

When war was declared, Dennis was only 20 and, having been brought up in a family and school of strong religious focus and with the principals of service, was doubtless more than prepared to do his bit. The decision had been made not to follow his father into the business, instead Dennis had joined the Norwich Union Insurance Company and was living away from home, enjoying a lively social life up in Northampton.

Joining the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, he wound up serving in the Royal Armoured or Tank Corps and it was whilst serving in the Tank Corps in the Middle East that he was awarded his M.C. This was posted in the London Gazette on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1942 and was an award designed for junior officers, Captain or below, and warrant officers. Posthumous recommendations were not possible, but the medal could be awarded from recommendations that had been raised before the recipients died, either of wounds or from a later action. During World War II Captain Sam Manekshaw of the Indian Army was hit by a burst of machine-gun fire in the stomach. Major General D.T. Cowan spotted Manekshaw holding on to life, fearing the worst, Major General Cowan quickly pinned his own Military Cross ribbon on to Manekshaw saying, "A dead person cannot be awarded a Military Cross." Manekshaw survived and went on to become a Field Marshall.



Whilst Dennis Marshall survived the incident that earned him his M.C., he did not survive to be awarded it. The second world war was, in contrast to the entrenched warfare of 20 years earlier when armies swayed to and fro, making gains and losses measured in mere yards and thousands of men, nothing if not highly mobile. Dennis crossed the Mediterranean Sea from the middle east to southern Italy, Tuscany.

## HARLESTON

### OFFICER'S DEATH

The death occurred on the 21st July in a Prisoner of War Hospital in Italy of Second Lieut. D. M. Howard, M.C., The Notts. Yeomanry, attached Royal Tank Corps, only son of Mr. and Mrs. H. F. Howard, of The Thoroughfare, Harleston. Second Lieut Howard gained his award while serving with the Tank Corps. in the Middle East. and news had only recently been received by his parents that he had been taken prisoner after being wounded in action.

### M.C. HOLDER DIES IN ITALIAN HOSPITAL

News has now been received by his parents, who live in Norfolk, of the death of Sec. Lieut D. M. Howard, which has taken place in an Italian hospital.

It is only a few weeks ago that Howard, who was well-known in tennis and hockey circles in Northampton, was awarded the M.C. for gallantry in the Middle East.

He was on the staff of the Norwich Union insurance offices in the town.

The pride Dennis' parents would have felt when they heard the news of their sons winning the M.C. would have turned to

sorrow when, less than two weeks after this was posted in the London Gazette, they received the news of his death. The precise details of Dennis's death are a little clouded, but the most likely scenario is that he was wounded in action and subsequently taken prisoner. This was followed by his death, presumably of his wounds, in a Prisoner of War Hospital in Lucca, Tuscany, Italy on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July. An undated and untitled newspaper cutting states 'A brave soldier and an unselfish man. May he enjoy the fruits of his labour in peace'. He was buried at Florence War Cemetery, Italy.

Having been taken prisoner, there would have been a delay between his death, the notification of this to the Red Cross and the information getting back to the War Office and then on to the family; the news did not get to the family until late August. Dennis is now buried in a Cemetery outside

Florence along with 1631 of his comrades in arms, most of whom died two years after Dennis, during the July to September 1944 offensive in the region. The site was inaugurated in November 1941 primarily for the burials from Hospitals in the region, including Dennis who had died 2 years previously. Dennis Howard's stone bears the inscription

'Viriliter agite estote fortes'

O Jesus Thou hast promised

That where Thou art in glory,

1164/1/T/9 1.E.4 59  
 2nd Lieutenant  
 D.M.Howard, MC.  
 The Nottinghamshire Yeomanry  
 Royal Armoured Corps  
 21st July 1942 Age 23  
 (Cross)  
 "Viriliter agite estote fortes"  
 O Jesus Thou hast promised  
 That where Thou art in glory  
 There shall Thy servant be

There shall Thy servant be.

Not too surprisingly, this family of lifelong Methodists turned to their church in their time of sorrow and distress. The memorial service, because of course there would have been no funeral, was held in September, 2 months after this young man died 1500 miles away. Today, you can travel from Norwich to Florence in less than 18 hours, in the post war period it is debateable if Dennis' parents could or would have made the must longer journey to their son's final resting place.

#### MEMORIAL SERVICE

In addition to members of the family, there was a large congregation at a Memorial Service at the Methodist Church, Harleston, on Sunday, for 2nd. Lieut. D. M. Howard, M.C., Notts. Yeomanry (attached Royal Tank Regt.) who died on 21st July, in a Prisoner of War Hospital in Italy. The service was conducted by Dr. J. W. Skinner, M.A., Ph.D., head master of Culford School, Bury St. Edmunds, assisted by Mr. W. Edwards, B.A., the late Mr. Howard's house master at Culford School. Mr. J. W. Frost was the organist.

Dr. Skinner made reference to 2nd Lt. Howard's school, business, and Army life, and to his gallant action for which he was awarded the Military Cross, and to his ultimate sacrifice for his country.

Life did have to continue and in October 1944 Dennis' sister, Margaret, married Ronald George Darking, a former employee of Barclay Haverhill, who was then serving in H.M.Forces. In the wedding write up it transpires that Margaret, who was 32 when she married, had like her brother, also been working for the Norwich Union. The Norfolk bride and the Suffolk groom married in a Methodist ceremony at a Buxton Wesley Church in a service led by a minister from Burton on Trent who had been a preacher at Harleston! Ronald survived the war, but the couple do not seem to have had any children whilst Dennis died before he had had the chance to marry. The couple returned to the area, living well into their 80's, their deaths were recorded in the Waveney Valley.

In the post war period, Howards' store carried on going and as Harry aged (he ran his business well into his 70's) his need to recruit good staff became more pressing. Trade had become more complicated and, in the post war period, bound with price controls. In 1946 Howard had, for the second time, miscalculated the correct price for a few items although it is a sign of how upmarket his shop was that the correct price of a leather handbag should have been £5 9s 9d and a doll 17s

**D**RAPERIES—Vacancies for two experienced Assistants, one for Show-room, one for Fancy Counter. Also Junior Assistant.—Apply full particulars H. F. Howard, Draper, Harleston.

6d. Howards over-pricing was minimal, his fines reflected that the court accepted his defence that the mistake was not deliberate but in light of this having had occurred once

previously, it was suggested he hire a man who could deal with the regulations!

Unfortunately, Howard did not follow this good advice and when, for the third time he messed up he received swinging fines although it was still generally agreed that this offence was caused by the old boy's incompetence rather than a desire to defraud. However, our final thoughts should be of the sorrowing father, struggling in old age to continue the business which had afforded him the wherewithal to raise his family in comfort and style and produce an undoubtedly brave son who died and was buried far away.