



Robert John Smith,

6395 Private 1st/7th Battalion, The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment)

He died of his wounds on 20th August 1916 in France, aged 22

Robert is commemorated at Flatiron Copse Cemetery, Mametz, Somme, France

It has to be said that faced with the challenge of exploring the history of a chap called 'Smith' the heart tends to sink; we have three 'Smiths' on our memorial, two of whom share the same initials. Whilst having two given names to work with can help the researcher, the tendency for a person to slightly mix and match with their choice of those two names can also make this more of a hinderance than a help!

Fortunately, Smith's CWGC records supplied the information that Robert was the son of John and Annie Smith of Church Lane, Redenhall and there the family appeared in 1911 having moved from Pulham sometime between 1898 and 1901. The census form had been completed by Annie, I have found that in this era girls tended to have better literacy than the lads, perhaps due to the lads spending more time earning money on farms, perhaps as school work was not viewed as 'manly' – I suspect that many rural teachers had their work cut out for them. Annie's careful handwriting contrasts with the speedy and confident corrections inserted by the enumerator; no one seems to have noticed that Annie mis-spelt 'Redenhall'.

After 21 years of marriage the family was, for the time, of modest size. Only one of their 5 children, oldest son John, born in 1891, had died, the teenage lads were working as agricultural labourers, the third generation that we have records of, the teenage daughter was doing half days as a servant and tail ender Herbert, was only 6! The father, John, was a farm horseman – an essential and responsible job in this pre-tractor era!

John Smith Snr had, like all his 6 siblings appearing in the 1881 census, been born in Metfield but having been raised in Shelton, near the Blacksmith's shop, had forgotten this by the time he was completing censuses in his own right! 10 years earlier, in 1871, another Smith family were living by the Shelton Smithy – just to keep you on your toes! Meanwhile 'our' Smith family were, as expected, living in Metfield, on the Harleston Road

Much to my surprise I managed to find John and Annie's wedding details, the pair had married in early 1890. 9 years earlier, in 1881, the then 15 years old Annie Thompson, was working as a Dairy Maid on a small (30 acres) farm in Shelton, doubtless where she met and was courted by her husband to be. Anna Marie, baptised in Hempnall on Nov 7th, 1869, was the daughter of James and Harriet Thompson, James was, of course, a labourer.

As things transpired Annie and John married in Tasburgh and that is where they set up their first home. It was also where their first three children, John (died young), George and Herbert were born before the family spent a brief spell in Pulham where their only daughter, Annie Jnr was born.

In brief, Robert came from an almost archetypal family of the time. On both sides of his family, the roots lay deep in agriculture and doubtless, had Robert survived the war he would have returned

home and continued to work in the rural economy as the internal combustion engine slowly took over the work of the horses his father had spent so many years tending.

His little brother, Herbert, married local lass Lily Russell in 1932 although if they had children it does not seem they had them locally.