



James Frederick Cook

41305 Private, 10th Battalion Essex Regiment, formerly Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 2nd September 1918 in France, aged 40

James is buried at Rancourt Military Cemetery, Somme, France.

At a superficial glance the whole of Pte Cook's entry is very confusing – not helped by the fact that other than on the Harleston War Memorial all his records are in the name of James, which was the name given to him at birth, and this is how I will refer to him from now on.

James Cook, who at age 40 was one of the older casualties from Harleston, was born possibly in Needham, possibly Withersdale, depending on which census entry you are looking at! In truth he was born in Withersdale but had been raised, since a baby, with the rest of the family in Needham.

James' mother, Caroline nee Cook, married James Leist in Needham on the 14th of May 1879. James Leist was a labourer, his father Elijah was a labourer and, although both were living in Needham, both had been born in Rushall. In later years there were a lot of Leists in Needham, this family were the original colonists, moving into the village sometime between 1851 and 1857. Caroline, however, came from the parish of Withersdale.

At this point I leapt to the assumption that young James was an illegitimate child of Caroline and had been born in Withersdale before Mr Leist met and married James' mother, taking on the child with his new wife. This does not actually exclude Leist from being James Cook's father and on further investigation, the Needham baptism records show that James Leist, actually was James Cook's father as, although James Jnr was firmly baptised with the surname Cook, James Leist was equally firmly named as the father. The baptism of James Cook took place on the 9th of November 1879, the next entry but one in the parish register was for his younger brother, Richard Henry Leist. So, in brief, James Frederick was illegitimate, born in his mother's home village of Withersdale. The relationship between James Snr and Caroline continued and with a second child on the way the couple finally got hitched, and only at that point was James Jnr baptised; subsequent legitimate siblings being able to bear their father's family name.

Mind you this laid-back attitude is understandable since James Snr's mother, Sarah Leist nee Buggs, had brought an illegitimate child into her own marriage to Elijah. In the 1861 census, their first child, 7 years old Ann goes under the name of Leist, in the 1871 census she is flying under her mother's maiden name of Buggs. By 1881 Ann Buggs was back to being a Leist - talk about history repeating itself! The Leists Snr seem to have had comfortable accommodation in 1881, but

they were a hard-working family who kept out of trouble – so good for them!

NEEDHAM.
Lot 1.—A DWELLING-HOUSE, with Stable and other Outbuildings, and large Garden, situate in the street, occupied by Elijah Leist, at the annual rent of £5.
Lot 2.—A COTTAGE adjoining, occupied by Elizabeth Sparrow, at the annual rent of £4.

Norfolk News
26 Mar 1881

NEEDHAM.

INQUEST.—H. E. Garrod, Esq., Coroner for the Liberty of the Duke of Norfolk, held an inquest on Monday on the body of Richard Leist, aged three years, who died on the previous Friday.—From the evidence of Mrs. Leist, mother of the deceased, it appeared that on Friday morning last about eleven o'clock, she left the child in her sitting room where there was a fire, while she went to enquire of Mrs. Stegless, a neighbour, whether she was going to bake. She was absent about ten minutes, and on her return found the child's clothes were on fire; she put deceased to bed, and saw that he was burnt about the chest. Mr. Candler, surgeon, was called in, but the child died about twenty minutes past two o'clock that afternoon.—William Crook, fish dealer, Needham, said that about eleven o'clock last Friday morning he called at James Leist's house. As no one came to the door he opened it and smelt something burning. Witness went through the passage and saw the room was full of smoke. He crawled in on his hands and knees and found deceased lying on the ground with his clothes smouldering. Witness pulled his clothes off as quickly as possible; he was very badly burnt. The child's mother came in while deceased was being undressed.—The Jury returned a verdict to the effect that deceased was accidentally burnt, and added their opinion that a guard should have been placed before the fire.

By the 1881 census, both of Caroline and James Snr's children, James Jnr and Richard were using the Leist surname, blow the inconvenient matter of the wedding being after rather than before the happy event. Shortly after this census, in a tragedy of a type that occurred so often at this time that Judges were calling for free fire guards to be distributed to the poor working classes, Richard died at the age of three after his clothes caught fire. Caroline had popped to a neighbour for 5 minutes and returned to find her son's clothes on fire and his chest badly burnt, he died 3 hours later.

Diss Express
2 Feb 1883

The 1911 census shows that James and Caroline went on to have 6 children in total although by 1911 two had died, including Richard Henry, leaving James Jnr as their only son.

Elijah and Elizabeth's family were, of a decent size, about 10 children, not excessive by the

standards of the time. Although Elijah was a labourer, he had some degree of education and status as by 1881, he was also the Parish Clerk. One of his younger daughters, James Snr's sister, Mary, aged 8 in 1881, went on to become the village school ma'am, a role she took on for 41 ½ years.

However, in 1891, Mary was stuck at home helping her widowed mother. Next door, big brother James had 4 children and a wife in his household whilst a few doors away James' slightly younger brother was also raising a family of four and next door to them was James Buggs, Uncle to both the lads. Needham was filling up with Leists, including our James Frederick Cook who was, like his Aunt Ann Buggs next door, flying under the surname of Leist.

Diss Express
15 Nov 1935

I suspect Pte Cook was always called Frederick in day to day usage (to differentiate him from his father) and called James in official documents, it is not surprising that his wife and family chose to remember him under the name they called him, Frederick.

Although the Leists may have had a tendency to be a little lax on protocol, by the turn of the 20th Century there's was a most respectable family; other than one of James' sons, Arthur, occasionally getting hauled up for drunkenness, the family's main appearances in the press where when James Snr was winning prizes for his vegetables. They also turned out for funerals, fundraisers and concerts as appropriate.

PRESENTATION TO MISS M. LEIST.

Memories of tireless and devoted service extending over a period of 41½ years were revived on Friday evening when a presentation was made to Miss M. Leist on the occasion of her retirement from the post of teacher in the infants' department of the school. This pleasing function took place during a social which had been arranged for the purpose in the school. It was organised by two former pupils of Miss Leist—Miss C. Adams and Mr. Albert Bush and there was a large number of people present. Mrs. L. Knights, of whom Miss Leist was a colleague for many years, made the presentation, which took the form of a purse containing £9 in treasury notes, and an album in which were written the names of all the subscribers, who included parishioners, friends, and old and young scholars of the school. Appreciation of Miss Leist's work was expressed by the Rector, the Rev. H. S. Bally, in a short speech and Miss Leist suitably expressed her thanks for the present.

Miss Leist intends to continue to reside in Needham.

It was probably only when documents had to be dug out for James' wedding, a week after Valentine's Day in 1901 that James became a 'Cook' again. It was under that name, al beit without the extra 'e' on the end he sported on his wedding documents, that he also enlisted. James Cook set up home with his wife, Florence Ellen nee Ling, on the London Road somewhere between the Magpie and the Beeches. Florence was one of the oldest of 13 children of a farm labourer from Shelton, 9 of her siblings had survived to the 1911 census.

Also in 1901, at the Magpie, a 23 years old Harleston born Frederick James Leist (just to confuse matters, but a different man entirely) was the boot cleaner, next door 19 years old Rose M Leist from Needham was working as a housemaid whilst few doors away widowed Emma Leist, a dressmaker also from Needham but the widow of a Rushall Leist, was making do in her own household. Emma and Fredrick. were mother and son, Rose was one of James Cook's siblings! Either way a lot of Leists in one small area although there were a lot more in Needham!

By 1911, the Cook family had moved round to Mendham Lane and, after 10 years of marriage they had four children, all born in Harleston and aged between 9 and 1 Slightly startling to relate, another Florence Cook, a few years the junior of James' wife was living next door but one to their household whilst a third, between the two in age, was living up at Jay's Green.

On the death of James, Florence would have been a 38 years old widow with 4 children to raise. Whilst the oldest two may have been able to contribute to the household expenses, she still had 2 dependents. James's soldier's will, dated November 1916 left everything to his wife, address given as Mendham Lane.

At this point a neighbour from earlier times, on the London Road, stepped in. Ernest Bussey, who had been acting as a page boy (junior footman?) in the Beeches in 1901, had survived the war and went on to marry, in 1920, Florence Ellen Cook nee Ling, the widow of Pte Cook. Ernest Bussey's younger brother Frederick Arthur Bussey had died less than a year before Florence's husband. Judging by the details of the next of kin held by the CWGC, Ernest moved into Florence's home.

BROCKDISH.

GOLDEN WEDDING.

A happy old Brockdish couple, Mr. and Mrs. J. Leist, celebrated the golden anniversary of their wedding, on Tuesday. They are both 72. Mr. Leist being senior in age by only a month, and they both enjoy splendid health. Mrs. Leist was born at Withersdale and her husband first saw the light of day at Rushall. For over 40 years the happy pair lived at Needham, where they were married and they came to Brockdish, because Mr. Leist was unable to continue his employment owing to an unfortunate accident.

He was engaged as a horseman at one time, and one day, when he was cutting wood from a tree, the ladder supporting him broke and he fell, injuring himself so that he was unable to do any work at all for some time. There are three children living of the marriage, all daughters, one of whom is married. Mr. and Mrs. Leist have eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren. The old man is very fond of gardening, at which he is an expert, and he spends most of his time in this occupation. His wife used to go out working as a cook and she was employed at the Swan Hotel, Harleston, in this capacity for 13 years.

The event was celebrated by a small gathering of friends and relatives.

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Pte Cook's parents, James and Caroline, made it to their Golden Wedding in fine heath although they had moved from Needham to Brockdish following a workplace accident. Indeed, when James fell off a ladder in the early 1920's when he was 65, the judge at the ensuing court case stated he was a fine-looking man for his age! James obviously continued with his keen gardening, his wife must have been an outgoing soul, having worked in the Swan for 13 years. The piece about their anniversary shows they were obviously proud of all their descendants including the four children of their son who died in the war.

Diss Express
17 May 1929

James and Caroline then made it to their Diamond Wedding, in May 1939, at which point more details came out about their lives, even in his 80's James was still a bit of unit, hoiking large lumps of wood about. Caroline had rather more refined tales to tell of her time in service –

this time their son, James Cook, who died in the war was mentioned. 4 months after their Diamond Wedding was achieved, another World War broke out.

Extra-ordinary as it may seem, the couple not only saw out the war but went on to celebrate their 70th Wedding anniversary, out living their only married daughter, Kate. Caroline was obviously still as sharp as a button, having started work aged 8, for a shilling a week, the only thing that was now stopping her making her prize-winning sweets was 'you can't get the sugar to do it now.'

Sixty Years of Marriage

Brockdish Couple Recall Old Times.

Sixty years of married life is the personal record of Mr. and Mrs. James Leist, Ivy House, Brockdish, who celebrated their diamond wedding on Sunday.

Married at the Needham Parish Church on May 14th, 1879, by the then vicar, the Rev. R. Earl Bulver, the couple now at the age of 82 years, both enjoy excellent health despite years of hard work in connection with domestic service and farm work.

During their married life the couple have always lived in the vicinity, and have resided at Ivy House for the past 15 years, since Mr. Leist retired.

A native of Rushall, Mr. Leist can recall the days when he worked on a farm for only one shilling a week. He had been associated with many local farms, including Shingle House Farm, being employed by Mr. J. R. Warner, and Mr. William Chanley. In all, he was employed at this farm for a period of some 19 years.

Whilst acting as a horseman, he sustained an accident, and from the injury he still suffers. A tree fell on him while it was being pulled down, and he was taken to the hospital suffering from an injury to the back.

For a man of his age, Mr. Leist is exceptionally healthy and strong, and when our representative called, Mr. Leist was busily engaged in carrying huge pieces of wood, the weight of which would have taxed the strength of many younger men.

Mrs. Leist, a native of Withersdale, gave a graphic account of her past life, from working in domestic service at 9d a week to serving in many of the better known hotels in the district. She can remember times, when working at Windsor, of seeing the Royalty out for walks.

Long before her marriage she was employed at Gawdy Hall, Harleston, where vast entertaining was carried out, and also at Yoxford, later at Windsor. During her service, she can recall assisting in the local celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and the Coronation of King Edward VII, whilst her experience in catering arrangements in her early days made heavy calls upon her time.

Mr. and Mrs. Leist, whose son was killed during the Great War, are quite happy in their neat little house, and on Sunday received many visits from neighbouring well-wishers and numerous congratulations.

Diss Express
19 May 1939

Brockdish

MARRIED SEVENTY YEARS.

Many messages of congratulations, and gifts were sent to Mr. and Mrs. James Leist of "Ivy House", who celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Leist were married at Needham, and are both now 92 years of age. Mrs. Leist daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Cook of Withersdale, was one of a large family and started work at the age of 8 years, for a 1s per week. For several years she was employed by the Vicar of Needham. She won awards for sweet making at the W.I. for many years and continued making them until a few years ago. "But you can't get the sugar to do it now," she told a reporter.

Mr. Leist was born at Rushall and is the eldest son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Elijah Leist. For 43 years Mr. Leist worked at Shingle House Farm, Needham as a horseman until he received an injury causing him to retire.

Mr. and Mrs. Leist had six children two of whom are living, eight grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Diss Express
20 May 1949

Picking the bones out of a report of the wedding in 1935 of James Cook and Florence's youngest daughter, when Alice Lily would have been 24 or so, her sister Mabel, had been married (for 8 years) to a Mr Noble with at least three children from the union, all of whom were involved in the ceremony, her older brother William could not attend so her other brother, Sidney, gave her away.

Whilst this would have been a very happy day for all concerned, and I am sure Mr Bussey had made a splendid husband and stepfather, I have no doubt that all present thought of their absent father on that and previous days of similar joy.

**MISS M. LEIST
(NEEDHAM)**

The funeral service for Miss Mary Leist, of High Road, Needham, near Harleston, took place at St. Peter's Church, Needham on Saturday. Miss Leist who was 81 years of age was a well-known personality in the district, having been a teacher at Needham School for close upon forty years, and during her long residence in the village had also taken an enthusiastic interest in the Church and social life. A native of Needham, Miss Leist was affectionately known to most of the parishioners as "Teacher Mary." As a young woman she became one of the first members of the local branch of the Girls Friendly Society, and for many years was a Sunday School teacher and member of the Church Choir. Quite recently she knitted a lace cover for the re-table above the Holy Table at St. Peter's Church. For a long period prior to the introduction of National Insurance Miss Leist acted as a collector for the Harleston and District Nursing Association. During both World Wars she made several hundred gloves for service men and women.

At the funeral service conducted by

Judging by the longevity of his mother, father and at least one of his sisters, had the destruction on WW1 not been visited upon him, James Cook aka Frederick aka Leist may have had a long and productive second half of this life.

**MRS. CAROLINE LEIST
(BROCKDISH)**

The funeral took place at Needham on Wednesday week, of Mrs. Caroline Leist, widow of Mr. James Leist, aged 93 years.

The immediate mourners were her two daughters and son-in-law, grandchildren and great-grand-children, cousins and friends.

The Rector of Needham officiated.

The funeral arrangements were carried out by Mr. Strange, of Brockdish.