



## George Clarence Cooper

21165 Private 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Border Regiment

Formerly 19422 Norfolk Regiment

He died of wounds on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1916 in France, age 20

George was buried at Etretat Churchyard, Seine Maritime, France

This biography also pays tribute to his soldier brother Percy Banyard Cooper who died on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1915

In 1901, the unusually named Banyard Cooper (actually baptised (*Herbert*) Banyard in 1873) and his wife Harriet nee Bennett were raising their young family on Harleston Common: - Percy Banyard, George Clarence and Ivy Rosa, later to be joined by Alice Sarah in 1903. This family were absolute shockers for inconsistent naming not helped by the fact that the same names kept popping up within the extended family making it difficult to work out if a particular name belonged to two different characters, slightly mis recorded or to one character, grossly mis recorded! Just to add to the joy, generation after generation merrily dumped their first name and operated with their middle names, shared by rather too many other members of the family – read on!

While we are talking about names, there are ones that nowadays have a slightly comedic edge. I am from the generation that will for ever recall a boss-eyed lion when they hear the name Clarence; Percy, Herbert, Howard and Russel are not much better. However, to put these names in context, they are all the patronyms of grand families of England and it is in this strong, patriotic context that these names were selected and should be viewed.

So, lets skip back a generation or two to 1851. In this census we find Robert Cooper, gamekeeper, born in 1790, living with his slightly older wife in a lodge associated with Flixton Hall. Next door in 'Boyce Hall' is his son Edward Cooper, also a gamekeeper, and various children. Edward named his older son after his father, Robert, the younger son, aged 2, bore the name (*George*) 'Banyard'. Slightly confusingly Edward's sister-in-law, Charlotte Cooper is also in the household, and yes Edward's wife, Maryann, whom he married in 1841, was also a Cooper. This actually casts some confusion over the provenance of the youngest member of the extended family recorded here in 1851; 2 months old Maryann Cooper jnr may be Charlotte's illegitimate child, she may be Maryann Snr's youngest child! Later evidence indicates that Mary Ann jnr was actually Charlotte's daughter, Maryann snr would have been pregnant with her own child, Lavinia, at the time of the census.

Rolling on 10 years and, by 1861, Edward had returned from Flixton to his home village of Wortwell, Edward was now a Cow Keeper, they were living next door to Martha Cooper whilst their two oldest children had left home. This mature Martha (not to be confused with another Martha Cooper, 30 years her junior, also living in the village) was a small farmer raising, as she had been since he was

a baby, a grandson, Arthur (12) from another branch of the family. I am glad to say that when Martha reached her dotage, young Arthur repaid her earlier care by bringing her into his own young family. Either that or, as was very common, he just never left home and moved his wife in on marriage!

By 1871, (*George*) Banyard Cooper Snr was settled down, still in Wortwell, having married Louisa Cowell in Southwark in the summer of 1866. Married in London they may have been, but Louisa had actually been born in Horsford, Norfolk, moving to Tivetshall by 1861.

With a lamentable lack of imagination, Banyard named his oldest daughter after his little sister, Lavinia, the next one after his mother, Mary Anne whilst the third child, 4 months old, he named Herbert; I fear this child died in infancy as two years after this census, in 1873, Louisa Cooper baptised their fourth child Herbert Banyard Cooper. Rather confusingly, the previous year, Banyard Snr's sister, Rosa baptised her second, illegitimate, son Robert Banyard Cooper. Even more confusingly the cousins both lived in Wortwell and both used their middle name Banyard in day to day dealings!

This results in the situation when in 1881 we have, (Robert) Banyard Cooper and his older (and equally illegitimate) brother Albert living at their Grandfather Edward Cooper's house, where they had been raised since baby hood, whilst their cousin, 'our' (Herbert) Banyard Cooper was living out in Denton and both going under the name of Banyard, with barely a year between them in age! Still at least they were not all calling themselves 'Bert' which would have been appropriate for all three!

(Herbert) Banyard Cooper's relocation from Wortwell to Denton was due to the loss, in 1872 at the shockingly early age of 24, of his father, carpenter (*George*) Banyard Cooper. (*George*) Banyard died in late Summer/early Autumn leaving his wife recently bereaved of both a baby and a husband with another child on the way; this child she named Herbert Banyard after both the dead infant and her dead husband. It could well be that (*George*) Banyard's sister, Rosa, also chose to memorialise her brother by giving her son, Robert Banyard the same middle name.

Widowed Louisa remarried, in 1876, to James Butcher, a blacksmith six years her junior; her younger children, Mary Ann Cooper and (*Herbert*) Banyard, appeared in the blended household for the '81 census along with their 3 younger half siblings from Louisa's second marriage.

(*George*) Banyard Cooper's nephew, (*Robert*) Banyard Cooper died at the even earlier age of 19, just across the border in Sufflok, not long after the 1891 census. His older brother Albert settled in Gravesend following the trade of shoemaker.

The Butcher/Cooper family, having moved from Wortwell, to Denton, moved into Harleston sometime in the late 1880's; 1891 saw 'our' (*Herbert*) Banyard, Horseman, lodging in a house by the gas works. His mother and stepfather were close by at the 'Old Mill House' with five of his younger half siblings.

(*Herbert*) Banyard's mother, Louisa, and stepfather, James Butcher, were in Bullock Fair Close by 1901 with two daughters. Despite being 6 years his senior, Louisa also outlived her second husband. In 1911 widowed Louisa 'Arubah' Butcher, mother of 9 children, 7 of whom were still living, was resident in Norwich with her 89-year-old father William Cowell<sup>1</sup> and a lodger! Louisa had inherited the name Arubah (a Hebrew name meaning 'one who loves her husband') from her mother whilst her younger sister's full first name was Anastasia, simplified to Anna! Presumably it was Louisa's father who reminded Louisa of the unusual middle name she had inherited from her mother but had not used in any previous records I could find!

Louisa's widowed father, William Cowell, had remarried by 1871, come 1901 the now very elderly

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<sup>1</sup> Claiming Yarmouth birth as opposed to the more precise Fleggburgh given earlier.

couple (both 78), living in Kent, were employing a servant, a bit of a struggle on a gardener's wages

CHAMBERLAIN, Pte. George William, 15710. 10th Bn. Norfolk Regt. Died of meningitis 16th Feb., 1915. Age 32. Son of Mrs. Alice Edith Bean, of Honing, Norwich. C. 28.  
COOPER, Pte. P. B., 18464. 10th Bn. Norfolk Regt. 15th Feb., 1915. Age 19. Son of Banyard and Harriett Cooper, of The Common, Harleston, Norfolk. C. 12.  
DAWSON, Pte. Arthur William, 16278. 3rd Bn. Norfolk Regt. Died of meningitis 6th March, 1915. Age 25. Son of William and Ellen Dawson, of East Carleton, Norwich. C. 18.  
DENNIS, Pte. Thomas Stanley, 16278. 3rd Bn. Norfolk Regt. Died of meningitis 6th March, 1915. Age 25. Son of William and Ellen Dawson, of East Carleton, Norwich. C. 18.

but necessary as in the census William's wife, Elizabeth, appeared as 'bedridden'. Presumably on the death of Elizabeth Cowell, Louisa and her father re-united although why in Norwich and not in Harleston, I can only guess at.

Meanwhile, (*Herbert*) Banyard Cooper married Harriet Bennet in 1895 and it seems quite likely that the couple had moved up to The Common by 1898 as, in this year, his step father, James Butcher, bore witness, in a chicken stealing case, to seeing two main suspects

coming from across Harleston Common. Perhaps he was up here to take his stepson out for a pint at the Cherry Tree – Banyard may have been prone to a drink or three as he was fined a total of 6s 6d for being drunk on the 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 1901!<sup>2</sup> To be fair I have found no other reports of drunkenness so this may have been a bit of an aberration.

Like his father, (*George*) Banyard Cooper and his cousin (*Robert*) Banyard Cooper, (*Herbert*) Banyard, agricultural labourer, died young, aged about 34, in 1907: one of the two deceased of the 9 children his mother reported in the 1911 census, the other would have been his name sake, Herbert, who had died as a baby 35 years previously. (*Herbert*) Banyard's widow Harriet remained on The Common, appearing in the 1911 census with young Alice Sarah born 3 years before her father died, added to the family. Harriet Cooper remained here during the First World War, or The Great War as it was then known.

Both Harriet's sons, (*Percy*) Banyard and George died, within 18 months of each other. Unlike many Harleston Heroes who had no known grave, both the Cooper sons had proper burials (although this must have been little consolation at the time). Private Percy Banyard Cooper<sup>3</sup> died, 'at home' (meaning in the UK as opposed to posted abroad), on 15th February 1915, aged only 19, probably of an illness or infection rather than directly of wounds, his Battalion not having been deployed at this point. He was buried at Felixstowe (Walton) Cemetery in Suffolk - along with another 26 of his peers, mostly from Norfolk or Suffolk Regiments. Although a cause of death is not given, and it could be (*Percy*) Banyard shared a congenital issue that resulted in the early death of his father, his cousin and his grandfather. Alternatively, you will see the soldiers listed either side of him both died of meningitis shortly after his death – co-incidence or an indication that this infectious disease had swept through the battalion barracks? Banyard's mother paid the 4d per letter to have Rest in Peace added to his headstone.

Her other son, Private George Clarence Cooper, having enlisted, or more likely been conscripted, in 1916, like his brother, joined the Norfolk Rgt. Unlike his brother he was transferred to what must have been an even more alien environment, the Border Regiment. He died within a matter of months, aged 20, of wounds on 2nd October 1916, and was buried at the Etretat Churchyard at Seine-Maritime, associated with the No 1 General Hospital. The first seven British burials were amongst existing French graves then two separate plots were soon set aside for the Commonwealth war dead, 263 eventually, including a single German casualty. For this, her younger son, Harriet requested the epitaph Rest in the Lord.

COOPER, Pte. George Clarence, 21165. 6th Bn. Border Regt. Died of wounds 2nd Oct., 1916. Age 20. Son of Harriett Cooper, of "The Common," Harleston, Norfolk. II. C. 13A.

<sup>2</sup> Diss Express 15 Mar 1901 –

<sup>3</sup> (18464) enlisted at Norwich in the 10th Battalion Norfolk Regiment, initially a Service Battalion, later a Reserve April 1915, Training Reserve Battalion September 1916

It is most unlikely Harriet Cooper ever managed to visit her older son's grave in France, but perhaps she would have made the trip to Percy's grave in Felixstowe and been proud to see both her sons commemorated on the Harleston and Villages memorial. The two brothers were still single when they died, not sure what happened to Alice Sarah but sister Ivy Rose married William Spinlove in 1923. This was a family that quietly got on with life, having already had more than its fair share of tragedy and bereavement. Harriet continued to live on the Common, living by herself in 1939 and when she finally died, having outlived her husband by almost half a century, she was buried at Redenhall with an obituary in the local paper in 1949.