



Reginald James Mitchell

40020 Private, 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 2nd October 1917 in France, aged 20

Reginald is buried at Maroc British Cemetery, Grenay, Pas de Calais, France

Reginald James Mitchell had, compared to many of our Harleston Heroes, quite shallow roots in the town. Instead, the roots of his family lay in Shotesham and in the building trades. Back in 1841, there were two households of Mitchells in this small village a few miles south of Norfolk. Richard Mitchell a Carpenter with 4 children was already raising his oldest son to be a carpenter; his wife, Elizabeth, came from Needham. John Mitchell Snr, also a Carpenter had a slightly younger family of four children but 10 years later the 1851 census revealed his family were not, at this stage following the building route.

John Snr's wife Sophia did not appear in the 1851 census, although as John was described as 'Married' not 'Widowed' I think we can assume she was still alive, just not in home on the night of the census. Instead, John Snr was listed with just 3 children at home:- third son, John Jnr, aged 15, gave no employment, daughter Sophie (named for her mother) was only 12 whilst a fourth son, Thomas Mitchell was aged 8. Oldest son, James, was working as a groom to a miller, the next son down, George, had died in the year of the census.

However, blood will out and by 1861, James, the former groom, had moved up to London and, cashing in on the Victorian Building Boom, had become a Bricklayer. Also in the household of James and wife, was his sister in law, Margaret Powley, a 24 years old waitress; more of her later. After some hard work in London, James returned to his home county; appearing in the 1881 census as a retired builder and, having set himself up as a farmer in Hethersett by 1891, his niece, Bessie Powley, aged 24, London born and highly likely to be the daughter of Margaret Powley was also part of the household.

Whilst James was up in London, Thomas was pootling away carrying on with the carpentry. Widowed John Snr had married to Edna Moore from Hempnall in 1855, doing so in Norwich when Thomas would have been about 12. John Snr, Edna and Thomas appear together in the 1861 census when 17 years old Thomas had, like older brother John Jnr, followed his father into the Carpentry Trade.

Thomas went on to marry Elizabeth Anne Howes in 1862; by 1871, he and his wife had produced 5 children within a span of 7 years. Also, in 1871, John Snr and his second wife, Edna, were hosting John Jnr, his married sister, Sophia, aged 33, now Riches, and her 9 years old dtr Selina.

Just to show how careful you need to be, in the same 1871 census, Arnold Riches, a Shotesham born mustard maker was living up in Norwich with his Shotesham born wife, Sophia (aged 27) and his two daughters, Clara and Selina, aged 14 and 11. It would be all too easy to confuse the two families, assuming they were separate families, it would be all too easy to dismiss them as different families when they could have been one and the same with incorrect details provided by the father who, like many men of the time, tended to have only a vague idea of the finer details of family life,

including the ages of children and wife! In this 1871 census, John Snr, aged 75, was combining the carpentry work with the less physically demanding work of running a village shop, doubtless aided by his wife, 15 years her junior.

Up 'til now, this has been an unremarkable tale typical of the skilled working class of the time. People got married, had children, became widowed, remarried, visited each other, maybe popped off to the big city to embrace wider opportunities, nothing untoward.

However, this all came to an almighty crisis two years after this last census when, in 1873, respectably married Thomas, in the prime of his life, his early thirties, and with at least 6 children to raise, including one barely a year old, brutally and almost fatally attacked his step mother, Edna, who would then have been in her early 60's.

In the court case that followed, Thomas was several times reported as being strangely detached from the proceedings – we can only guess as to what was really going on in his head.

A pre-trial hearing was arranged at the castle when Thomas was described as being 'a sturdily built man, below the standard height, of light complexion with whiskers and a moustache' – these whiskers, or at least a missing part of the whiskers, were to play an important part in the ensuing court case.

'There is nothing unusual in the general expression of his features. He was dressed in mixed trousers and wore a blue overcoat, into one of the pockets of which he thrust a felt hat as he somewhat jauntily entered the room. For a few seconds his face expressed some slight nervousness, but it passed away almost at once and the most perfect coolness . . . distinguished his demeanour throughout the proceedings.' Remarkable since at the time Edna's life was still hanging by a thread, this in an age when, if she had died and Thomas had been convicted of murder, Thomas would have hung.

The assault took place about midnight on the cusp of the 5th and 6th of April. Edna had a child, Lucy Ann Gooderham, staying with her. This child would have been 'boarded' out; the equivalent of an informal self-funded fostering that occurred if a home was overcrowded, a parent had become widowed or ill or a single mother was working and unable to cope. The child called Edna 'Aunt', a practice I remember from my childhood when family friends, totally unrelated, would be given this title.

Described as an intelligent little girl, Lucy stated that she had been living with Aunt for about 5 months and on the night of the assault the two had gone to bed as normal, sharing one bed. Mrs Mitchell woke her in the night as she had heard noises, after a pause Lucy '*heard such a noise as if the house was "breaking in". Aunt then got out of bed and knocked against the wall for neighbours, . . . she opened the window and shruck out "murder" three times. Then he came running upstairs*'.

Defence council tried to shake Lucy's identification but since she knew Thomas well from before (Thomas's house was not far from his stepmother's) and Edna had lit a candle when they were first disturbed from her sleep, there was no shaking Lucy's testimony. The child must have been terrified as Thomas, dressed in dark clothing, came upstairs with a hatchet on his shoulder and, with no door to the room, there was precious little the pair could do to stop him. Thomas grabbed Edna by her hair and pulled her away from the window out of which she was shouting murder. He forced her to sit on a chair by a chest of drawers, pushed her head onto the drawers and cut her across the chin with the hatchet. Unlike many young girls Lucy resisted the temptation to over egg her evidence and firmly stated that she could not see clearly how Thomas hit Edna, just that he did hit her. Not too surprisingly, Lucy Ann ran away at this point but not before she heard Aunt say, '*I know who you are*'.

Thomas had broken in by bursting the back door lock but in her panic Lucy ran downstairs to the front door; luckily it was a moonlit night so although the front door was barred and locked this plucky young girl managed to open it and ran to alert the neighbours; Mrs Purdey could not be woken but the washer woman, Mrs Lemmon, was roused. Mrs Lemmon, wrapped the scared and barely covered girl in a shawl, dressed and roused more neighbours, these folks armed with sticks and pokers surrounded the shop with the intention of capturing the assailant, focussing on the front door left unlocked by Lucy. This of course acted in Mitchell's favour as he fled through the back door, bursting through an elder hedge to the rear of the property. Not too surprisingly Mrs Lemmon dared not go to the house alone. However, when she did eventually go to the house, leaving Lucy with her husband, she found Edna lying on the bed with her face much cut and covered in blood.

Edna was left with her face badly cut and bleeding heavily; eyewitnesses (rather more graphically than the surgeon) describe the wound splitting the nose and jaw but also another large wound forming the flap of the whole left cheek. This divided the nerves and blood vessels, causing 'paralysis of that side of the face'. The right side of the face had another deep wound, the lip was completely divided in two places and several other wounds penetrated to, but did not split, the bone. The lower half of the face was described as having fallen, 'leaving a cavity into which the hand could be laid. The neighbours moved her to the bed, the local doctor was called, the local bobby was called who promptly sent for a Norwich surgeon.

Three weeks after the assault, the surgeon deposed that there were at least 8 wounds on Edna's face and head, some just long flesh wounds, others had divided or broken the upper jaw and the bones of the nose; this was a determined and sustained attack. Not surprisingly *'the wounds were of such a character and she was in such a state of exhaustion from shock and loss of blood, as to bring her into immediate danger of death.'* Incredibly, in those days before anti-biotics and blood transfusions, this elderly lady survived the attack in the unhygienic conditions of a Victorian country cottage. What may have tipped the balance in favour of survival, was the dispatch of a trained lady from the Norwich Nurse's Training Institution who remained in constant attendance from the morning after the attack.

The local bobby seemed very on the ball, taking a strapping butcher with him for back up, he headed straight to Thomas' house and spotted footprints in the soft damp earth path leading to Thomas' door. Thomas was shaking and trembling but played the innocent, a little thin as Lucy Ann promptly identified him as the assailant and he was arrested.

Police reinforcements arrived, the house was searched, a big wet overcoat was found with 'mould' (earth) on the elbow and skirts, some patches appear to have been scrubbed but spots of blood remained on the coat. The wet, bloodstained hatchet was found wrapped in a sack and hidden in Thomas' garden shed. Damp weather and local clay soil conspired against Thomas, allowing the police to clearly follow prints of stockinged feet between Edna's and Thomas's houses. Indeed, the prints were so clear that the print of heel 'grain' could be seen where there was a hole in the heel of the wearers stockings, toe marks were also clearly identifiable. These stockings, washed but still stained and complete with holes in heels and toes, were later located at a neighbour's house.

Meanwhile, the police superintendent searched Edna's house and found a lock of hair in the bed; when the doctor had dressed the wounds, hair was also found between the woman's fingers. Both the samples matched Thomas' whiskery chops and there was even a matching gap in the beard. The old lady must have put up some fight even though heavily outweighed and out armed. The superintendent also found the incredible amount of £48 hidden in two bags between the feather beds (mattresses); was it this money, accumulated by John Snr and Edna, through trading at the shop and saving through the years, that Thomas was after?

George Purdy, (I think we can assume the husband or the son of the Mrs Purdy who could not be awoken by Lucy as she fled in panic), gave evidence that some three weeks before the incident he

had been discussing his planned departure to America, the land of new futures and wide horizons. Although Thomas had 6 children at this point and, as it transpired in the court case, another on the way, he was still in the prime of life, his carpentry skills would have been much in demand; this could have been a new future for him and his family. During the conversation in *The Globe*, between Thomas and George Purdy, local lad and former poacher, Purdy who had booked a passage to go to America, joshing Mitchell said that Thomas should accompany him. A fair amount of beer had been drunk, Mitchell said *'Damned if I don't go, if I could kill that damned old woman'* which Purdy assumed referred to Edna Mitchell.

Bearing in mind that Edna was the woman who had raised him during his teens, there seems a lot of anger here. Perhaps Thomas knew of Edna's savings, but she had refused to stake him and his family to emigrate.

So, these are the bare bones of the events, the *Norfolk News* seems to have had an early investigative reporter on the staff who went to the effort to visit the 'picturesque village of Shottisham All Saints or High Shottisham.' There he came across 'a row of half a dozen white fronted cottages with gardens before and behind. . . the property of. . . Edna Mitchell . . . who resides in a small red brick tenement adjoining the cottages where . . . she carried on a little shop keeping business, a rudely painted board . . . informing the public that she was licensed to sell "tea, tobacco and stuff". In front . . . is a neatly kept flower garden . . . The shop is an unpretentious affair, having only ordinary cottage windows; still small as it was, the villagers say that Mrs Mitchell did a nice little business.

However, money is indeed the root of all evil. The widowed John Mitchell Snr. wooed and married Edna Moore in the mid 1860's, when she was the housekeeper to the Rector of Howe. Described as 'a very thrifty and careful wife . . . she not only assisted him in his (John Mitchell's) business but with the money she brought to the marriage the couple were able to release a row of cottages from a mortgage. When John Mitchell Snr died, he left his wife certain inheritances for her use, and use only, not to be disposed of, during her lifetime, unless she married in which case all reverted to his estate. First of all, the household goods and furniture were assigned to her use, then to revert to John Snr's son, Thomas. Edna was given the choice of one of three cottages to live in, one being her current home the others being tenanted. These three cottages would then revert to John Mitchell Jnr whilst another four cottages would revert to Thomas on the occasion of her death or marriage. Whilst Edna was expected to maintain and insure the cottages, the income from all 6 that she was not occupying, about £24 per annum, would be hers. John Mitchell Jnr was appointed co-executor, all fairly standard; John Snr's widow was provided for, but the assets would stay in the family.

This upset John Snr's two sons, John Jnr (who was also one of the executors) and Thomas who frankly did not want to wait to get their hands on their inheritance. James does not seem to have been included in this deal but perhaps it was believed he was doing well enough from his London activities. After a bit of argy bargy and upset between Edna and her stepsons, John Jnr sold his potential interest in the four cottages (including the one Edna was living in) to his brother Thomas,

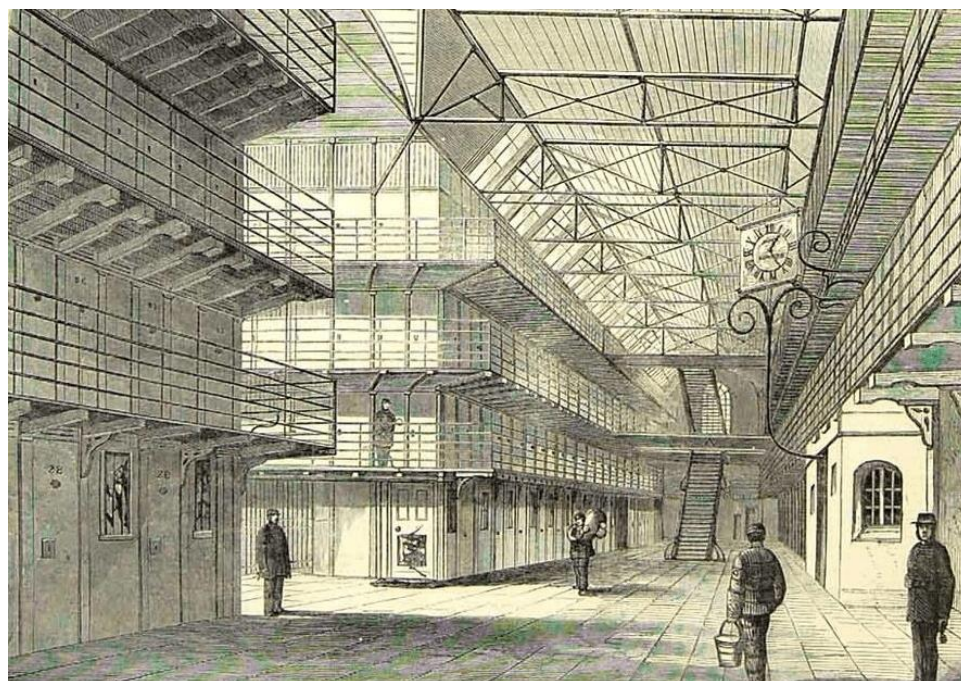


thus giving John the wherewithal to go too America, which he promptly did. This however would have left Thomas with no cashflow until his stepmother died, at which point, he would come into possession of the cottages and a respectable annual income. In the meantime, his brother had the life he wanted in America nad he was stuck in the East Anglian hinterlands with another baby on the way and no money beyond that which he could earn as wheelwright.

Chatham Prison from the front

Thomas, 'a steady industrious man, who never lost any time at his business, and who was not at all addicted to drink' seems to have just lost it that evening. It could be that the imminent arrival of the 7th child in their family may have triggered this aberration in the behaviour of a normally steady going fellow. Thomas was sent to trial in August 1873; after hearing all the evidence, the jury retired for 10 minutes and returned a verdict of guilty, not of Attempted Murder, in spite of the repeated thwacks he took with the hatchet, but of Grievous Bodily Harm. The judge was patently somewhat startled by this conclusion and giving Mitchell ten year's penal servitude, he expressed his desire to have given him twenty had it

not been for the recommendation of the Jury. So, this ill thought out, impulsive action designed to give him and his family the ability to follow older brother John to the wide-open spaces of America resulted in his incarceration for 10 years. Having languished in Norwich Castle for 9 months, in June , Thomas was sent to Chatham prison in Kent.



Chatham prison from the interior.

No.	NAME.	Age	TRADE.	Particulars of Indictment.	Name and Address of Committing Magistrate.	Date of Warrant.	When received into custody.	Offence as charged in the Commitment.	When tried.	Before whom tried.	Verdict of the Jury.	Particulars of previous Convictions charged in the Indictment and proved in Court.	Sentence or Order of the Court.
1	Thomas Mitchell	31	Carpenter	R.&W.	W. G. Lely, Esq., Framingham.	1873. April 24	1873. April 24	Feloniously wounding Edna Mitchell, by striking her about the head and face with a hatchet, with intent to kill and murder the said Edna Mitchell, at Shuteham St. Mary, on the 6th day of April, 1873.	1873. August 6	Mr. Baron Cleasby	Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm		10 years' penal servitude

Back in 1871, Thomas and Elizabeth were busy raising 5 children, with two more to be added within two years. Elizabeth had a sober, hardworking fellow with a steady job working for a wheelwright. There may have not been a lot of money in the household, but the family were getting by. Father John Snr, aged 75, would have been on his last legs, which may explain why both his unmarried son and his married daughter were visiting him and his wife that year. John Snr died, John Jnr headed to America and Thomas festered for 2 years before finally exploding in a rash and violent act.

By 1881, Edna, alive but doubtless cruelly scarred, was still running her little shop as she continued to do for another 10 years or more. Thomas' wife Elizabeth was still holding her family together but the baby she was carrying when her husband went to trial, had not survived. Expectations had shrunk, Edna's younger children were being educated but the older boys were labourers rather than, as might have otherwise happened, apprenticed to a trade. Poor Elizabeth, after all she had been through, did not get the chance to settle down in happy old age with her husband on his return, instead she died in 1884 so, as was the practice at the time, Thomas remarried, to Caroline (Barrett? in 1889). Caroline either brought her mother, Ann Haylett with her to the 1891 household, or inherited her predecessor's mother in law! With Thomas back at work as a carpenter, the younger sons could be apprenticed, James to a blacksmith, whom his family were handily living next door to in 1881, whilst slightly surprisingly, his youngest brother, Walter appeared in Liverpool in 1891, boarding with a miller whilst he learnt the trade!

Edna survived until 1893 when, presumably, Thomas finally came into what he judged to be his rightful inheritance.

I am afraid to say that middle brother William Frederick, destined by his father's absence to start his working life as an agricultural then a bricklayers labourer, may have had some of his father's temper about him. Whilst his younger brothers were put to trades, he was not but he still married, to Annie Elizabeth Utting of Bergh Apton in 1892. Unlike his father, William was not a steady fellow, was addicted to drink and made his wife's life so miserable that after only about 3 years of marriage she fled back to her parent's in Bergh Apton. William brooded for about 6 months then smashed up the windows of his in-laws' house and threatened to 'settle' his wife and her parents. Committed for 14 days hard labour, he came straight out of prison, returned to his in-laws house and this time threatened to blow his wife's brains out; he wound up back in prison having not been able to meet the £10 bond for good behaviour.

days. The money was paid.

William Frederick Mitchell of Shotesham, bricklayer, who was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment at the last sessions for being drunk and disorderly at Bergh Apton, was again brought up in custody charged with using threatening language towards his wife, Annie Elizabeth Mitchell, at Bergh Apton on the 9th inst. The parties are young people, and have only been married four years. It appeared that defendant is very much addicted to drink, and they have lived very unhappily. In consequence of defendant's bad treatment and neglect Mrs. Mitchell, with her child, has been compelled to leave him, and for the past seven months she has been living with her parents at Bergh Apton. On the evening of the day in question defendant came to their house at Bergh Apton and made a disturbance. He threatened he would blow his wife's brains out, and they heard reports of firearms when he was near the house. Mrs. Mitchell informed the Bench that she was in fear of her life, and she applied for sureties of the peace. Several witnesses gave corroborative evidence of defendant's threats towards his wife. The Bench ordered defendant to enter into his own recognisance in the sum of £5, with one other surety of £5, to keep the peace for six months. The Chairman said he had no doubt that drink was the cause of the whole thing. Defendant failed to obtain the required surety, and was removed in custody.

Eastern Daily Press
31 Jan 1896

William Frederick Mitchell of Shotesham, bricklayer, was also brought up, in custody, charged with being drunk and disorderly at Bergh Apton on Saturday night, the 11th inst. Police-constable Lord said he was on duty at Bergh Apton on Saturday night, in company with Police-constable Addy, when they found prisoner drunk and behaving in a very disorderly manner near his father-in-law's house at Bergh Apton. Prisoner was very violent, and smashed some of the windows of the house, and threatened he would "settle" his wife and her father and mother. The officers were obliged to take him into custody. It appeared that prisoner's wife, in consequence of his neglect and bad treatment, had been obliged to leave him, and was living with her father and mother at Bergh Apton. She had not seen anything of him for six months until Saturday night. The Bench committed him for fourteen days' hard labour.

Norfolk News
25 Jan 1896

Sadly, this angry violent man did not learn from this slap on the wrist and later on that same year not only attempted to murder his wife by cutting her throat but also wounded his three years old child. Whilst drink had been involved in January, the second attack, including one on little Frederick Charles Glanville Mitchell seems to have been carried out when he was sober.

A bricklayer named Mitchell of Bergh Apton on Sunday night attempted to murder his wife by cutting her throat. He also wounded his child of three. The outrage was committed on the road in the village of Thurton. Mitchell made his escape, but was captured on Monday morning at Rockland St. Mary.

THE THURTON CASE.

William Frederick Mitchell (28), bricklayer, was charged with feloniously wounding Annie Elizabeth Mitchell, with intent to murder her, at Thurton on August 23rd. A further indictment charged him with feloniously wounding Frederick Charles Mitchell, with intent to murder him, at Thurton on August 23rd. The prisoner pleaded guilty to feloniously wounding his wife with intent to do her grievous bodily harm.

Mr. Blofeld appeared for the prosecution, and gave the history of the prisoner's married life. The prisoner's wife had left him on account of his treatment of her, but they had met again, and were apparently on friendly terms. However, on January 29th, the prisoner had been bound over to keep the peace, and this might account for his feelings towards his wife. There was no suggestion as to his having been drunk at the time.

Sentence was deferred.

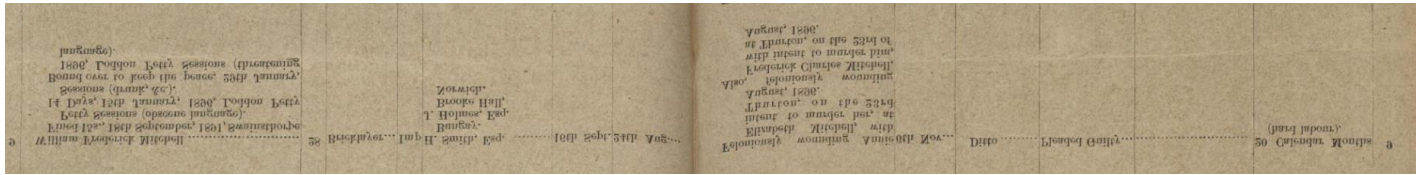
Norfolk News
29 Aug 1896

Eastern Evening News
6 Nov 1896

A very detailed reports referred to the previous attacks when setting the scene for this potentially lethal assault. William, of a 'jealous disposition, furious in his temper and drunken in his habits' had persuaded his wife and son to walk with him from Berghapton to Thurton. During, what should have been a pleasant summer stroll, they popped into the pub, seemed to be on

amiable terms, had a few drinks and ambled off back to Annie's cottage. Close to the home, William, with no warning threw his wife to the ground and with a knife slit her throat leaving a wound of some seven inches in length. Fighting for both her life and that of her son, Annie regained her feet, only to be thrown down again, whereupon William renewed his attempts to stab her, Annie's hands were terribly cut during her defence. Their child, barely more than an infant, not surprisingly commenced screaming, which in turn attracted the attention of its father. Poor little Frederick was cut in two or three places, more by luck than judgement these wounds were relatively minor. Annie rushed to the defence of her child, Mitchell fled the scene over the fields and Annie against all odds staggered to a neighbour's house with her child. The doctor was called, Annie and Frederick were patched up then Annie sent off to the hospital. The police, concerned

that Mitchell would escape by train, set off after the man and tracked him from the Claxton Folly public house to the Star Inn Rockland. The knife used for the attack was found on him and the sober man calmly stated that 'he quite intended to kill his wife if she had not made so much noise'. Now, whilst his father received 10 years penal servitude for attacking his stepmother, William received only 20 months for a similar attack, not only on his wife but also on his son. Perhaps this represented an attitude still lingering from Georgian times that your wife and child were yours to do as you wished with, whilst Thomas' attack seems to have been provoked by greed not passion.



Meanwhile, at more or less exactly the same time, William's father Thomas was let off a charge of poaching with a dog, due to unclear evidence

James, brother of the murderous William and son of the equally violent Thomas, married Harriet Eleanor Fisher from his home village in late 1892, knocking the dust of the village and any taint of scandal of his reputation, James and Harriet headed off to pastures new; James chose not to become a blacksmith, instead when he, his wife and their son Reginald appeared in Guestwick in 1901, he was working as a Groom/Gardener having arrived in town via Bergh Apton, arena for his brother's appalling behaviour. Reginald's birthplace and birth dates indicate they would have been in town when all the set-tos were taking place. Perhaps they had gone there to pour oil on troubled waters and support their sister in law and nephew.

God knows how, but by 1901, William and Annie seem to have come to some peace; perhaps the horror of what he had done combined with over a year and a half of tough prison sorted out William's temper. Not sure what happened to little Frederick Glanville, but a daughter Mable C had been added to the 'happy' family, now living in Mundham, perhaps looking for a fresh start.

The 1911 census may reveal what had triggered all the jealousy, violence and drama. William and Annie were then living on Station Road Ditchingham. Having been married for 18 years William Frederick claims two children and two children only:- Mabel Annie E and Edward. Frederick Charles Glanville has been airbrushed out. Perhaps William believed, rightly or wrongly that Frederick was not his child and his passionate fury led to the jealous rage. William was now a jobbing gardener, insecure, often ill paid work; not too surprisingly the family were making do in a 3-room cottage.

At the same time, Reginald's parents had drifted down to Weybread where James was working as a cow man at Petts farm. Reginald had gained 2 younger sisters and the family now boasted 3 very well spread out children, after 18 years of marriage.

It seems extraordinary that this family, in two successive generations, had given way to violent impulses of temper, one driven by greed, one by passion but both almost resulting in the death of vulnerable women. James Mitchell, to all appearances a man who had inherited his father's steady ways but not explosive temperament, chose to move away from Snettisham and the neighbours' knowledge of this father and brother's actions only to encounter the industrial scale violence of World War One, which took their oldest child Reginald. Reginald's war gratuity went to his father, just over £13/-; by which time his footloose family had moved onto Pulham Market, perhaps they then moved into Harleston, explaining why he was marked on our memorial.