



Herbert Charles Markwell

29166 Private, 1st/6th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Formerly 46003, Northamptonshire Regiment

He was killed in action on 4th October 1917 in Flanders, aged 33

Herbert is buried at Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, West Flanders, Belgium

Unusually, we are able to start this biography with a eulogy from the son of the daughter that this Harleston Hero never met; I feel it is right that the family take precedence.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/remembrance/wall/record/10233> Contributed by: Alan, on 2008-11-09 Background image copyright Imperial War Museum

Dear Grandpa

I wish I could write an eloquent eulogy about your brave and heroic exploits on foreign soil but the truth is I know very little about you. You were conscripted into a war you didn't want to go to. I try to imagine what that final parting from your family must have been like. You have left me with so many questions that remain unanswered. You didn't know when you left that your wife Martha was with child. I know you never got to meet Mum but at least you did receive the news she had been born. She was only nine days old when you were blown up at Paschendale. Your friend was talking to you at the time. Afterwards he said "you were there one second then there was an explosion and you were gone". At least they must have found something of you to put into the ground at Tyne Cot. It was very emotional when my wife and I visited your grave and placed a wreath. Seeing so many endless rows of white headstones. The majority had the epitaph 'name unknown'. At least you are in a marked grave and for that I am thankful.

It was a very difficult time for the family after you had gone. Bringing up two children with no father was far from easy. There were no social services in those days. Ernest and Mum were picked on by the other children at school because they were different; they didn't have a father. Mum's special day of the year was always 11th November. That was the day she stood up before the rest of the class and recited a poem. Even at 91 she still remembers the words "In Flanders fields the poppies blow" She was so proud of you. In later life Mum came to hate remembrance,

all the media hype treating it with little more respect than a circus. Yes, there were things she wanted to remember but also there were things she wanted to forget.

When grandma died in 1971 there was a box of letters tied in a ribbon. Mum read them



all, most related to every day trivia especially about how Ernest was growing up. In one letter Martha had mentioned a complaining remark from a neighbour. Your response was "since I have been here, I have found out what hell is like. When I come home, I will never complain about anything ever again". All you ever wanted to do was to come home to your family and the farm life you loved.

I suppose what I am trying to say is that I do not need a special day or a flower to remember you. I think of you from time to time often when I least expect. Forever you are in my heart. I love you the grandpa that I never knew and thank you for your part in making me who I am today.

Your loving grandson Alan

So, who was this reluctant soldier who left behind a young widow and two orphaned children? He appears to have been a son of the soil, but he actually came from a family with basketmaking practically woven into their DNA. Indeed, this biography is really more the story of a disappearing craft as it about a particular man.

The Markwells had been making baskets in and around the Waveney Valley and beyond, from Diss to Beccles since, at least, the early 19th Century. In Victorian and Edwardian times, almost anything that did not go into a crate or a sack would be put into one of a multitude of variously shaped or sized wicker works. The Waveney Valley with its low-lying Osier or willow beds, nurtured this skilled trade.

The 1841 census reveals two Markwell families in Stradbroke; one consisted of Joseph Markwell, basket maker, his wife and four children including James also a basket maker. I found an early record, 1835, of the tragic death of young Hannah Markwell whose clothes caught fire in her father's house at Stradbroke, a horribly common cause of death, particularly for girls.

The Ipswich Journal
25 Apr 1835

neck was dislocated, and with the car wheels passing over his body, caused instant death.—20th inst., at Stradbroke, on the body of Hannah Markwell, aged 4 years, whose clothes caught fire in her father's house, on the 16th inst. by which she was so much injured that she died next day. Verdicts in all cases—Accidental Death.—Before Mr.

Also for Sale by Private Contract,
A substantial and excellent Dwelling-house adjoining the foregoing, with a barn, stables, and other out-buildings, and about seven acres of very productive pasture land, including two orchards, well planted with choice fruit trees, and a garden partly walled in, now in the occupation of Mr. Samuel Aldous, Butcher, whose term will expire at Michaelmas, 1843. A Cottage divided into four dwellings, with good gardens attached, in the several occupations of John Markwell and others, as yearly tenants. The above properties produce a rental of £84. per annum, and will be sold on

John Markwell's
Cottage for Sale
1843

There was a John Markwell who we shall call John the Elder, working out on the coast in 1841, the brother (I believe but the evidence is a bit tenuous) of Joseph Markwell whose children founded the Beccles and Harleston dynasty of Basket makers; the free hold of John's cottage was up for sale in 1843, unfortunately he went bust in 1853, possibly a lesson taken on board by his brothers' descendants, a hardworking and steady crew indeed.

INSOLVENT DEBTOR.

To be heard before Francis King Eagle, Esq., the Judge of the County Court of Suffolk, holden at Ipswich, at the Shire Hall, St. Helens, Ipswich aforesaid, on Friday, the 13th day of January, 1854, at the hour of Ten in the morning precisely.

JOHN MARKWELL, the elder, (sued as John Markwell,) formerly of Stradbroke, in the County of Suffolk, Basket-maker and Farmer, afterwards of Stradbroke aforesaid, Farmer, afterwards of Stradbroke aforesaid, then of Woodbridge in the said County of Suffolk, afterwards of Colchester in the County of Essex, and late of Woodbridge aforesaid, Journeyman Basket-maker.

R. GALSWORTHY,
Carr Street, Ipswich,
Attorney for the said Insolvent.

The other household was headed by Maria, basket maker and her two young children, Dinah and Ezekial; Ezekial's descendants spread from Oakley, including to Diss, busily basketmaking into the 20th Century. Ezekial continued until his mid 70's when, following his wife's suicide by rat poison, he moved to London to be with his son.

East Anglian Daily Times
29 Apr 1908

The death occurred on Monday, at the residence of his eldest son, Bearcroft Mansions, Fulham, of Mr. Ezekiel Markwell. Deceased, who was 76 years of age, carried on the business of a basket-maker and tobaccoist, in Saxmundham, for nearly forty years, and only gave it up in July, when, on the death of his wife, he went to reside with his son. Until that time Mr. Markwell had resided in Suffolk all his life, having been born at Stradbroke. He was well known amongst East Anglian Nonconformists, and only about a month ago was visited by Dr. Clifford. The funeral will take place at Fulham Cemetery on Friday.

Meanwhile, across the Norfolk border, Joseph's son, young John Markwell Snr's family were living in Wortwell. By 1851, this basketmaker's family boasted 3 children, with a startling 10-year gap between oldest son John Jnr, then aged 11, next child, Henry aged 1, and then (hard on Henry's heels) little Martha, only 2 months old. It could well be that infectious illness had taken three children in between; there are three Markwell deaths that are possible matches.

By 1861, the family had moved into the Thoroughfare, a much more bustling market for their wares than Wortwell. Young Samuel had been added to the clan, whilst John Jnr, only 20 years old had set himself up in Beccles as a Basketmaker in his own right. He, married Ann Baxter in 1866, and almost lost both his stock and his business in 1871 when some drying osiers caught fire, the flames spreading to the roof.

BECCLES.

FIRE—On Thursday afternoon an alarm was raised that the premises of Mrs. Markwell, basket maker, near the Congregational Chapel, Hungate Street, were on fire. A quantity of osiers had been put in the wash-house to dry, and Thursday being washing day, a fire was made in the copper. Mrs. Markwell, on returning to the wash-house after a few minutes absence, found the osiers on fire, and the flames communicated to the rafters and beams. She quickly raised an alarm, and a neighbour coming promptly to her assistance, the fire was extinguished before any material damage was done.

Norwich Mercury
5 Aug 1871

John Jnr died young, aged only 40, on the 21st of March 1879. His widow and six children appeared in Blyburgate in 1881; her youngest child was only 1, so she must have been pregnant when her husband died. She was then described as a basket seller, she did not have the skill to make the baskets but being familiar with the product, I am sure the

extended local family were supplying the 32-year-old widow with competitively priced goods, enabling her to support herself and her children.

Ann remarried to a chap called Rowe, a wood sawyer; John and Ann's children followed in the sawyer or book printing trades, or domestic service – thus ending this little branch of the basketmaking trade. However, nature abhors a vacuum and since John Jnr had obviously built up a lucrative business, a 3-generation household of Stradbroke born Markwells moved into the Blyburgate premises

Robert Markwell, a first cousin of John Jnr's, (his father, James, being the younger brother of John Snr), appeared in Beccles in 1891 with his Essex born wife, 3 sons (the two who are old enough,

following in the trade), his father in law, all the way from Billericay, and his own father, one of the older Stradbroke Basket Markers. The sons were born out on the coast, but Robert was Stradbroke born. I like this family; they seem to stick together and really care for each other. They founded quite the empire of Beccles basket makers, Robert and Henry Markwell appear as Blyburgate basket makers in the late 19th century almanacs, whilst Fred Markwell made baskets in Ballygate until at least 1965. The Beccles and Bungy Times carried a nice piece about him in the late 40's when his trade was already being viewed as being a bit anachronistic.

Dec 20 1947

BASKET MAKER, Mr Frederick Markwell, is one of the few left in the Waveney Valley. He works in a shed at the back of his house 19 Ballygate and he has been in the business for 60 years, having started as a boy of eight. He was one of a young family his father, Mr Robert Markwell brought to Beccles from Grundisburgh. His grandfather, Mr James Markwell was also a basket maker at Harleston. Two of his three sons are bricklayers, and one is in the army. The Markwell family is one of the oldest basket makers in Suffolk or Norfolk. Every year his father would take an order for a hundred dozen hampers, and they worked out at 4 ½d each. They were to put herrings in, those being the days before boxes were used.

For a time he worked in the Tan Yard in Northgate, but stuck to basket making in his spare time. During the First World war he was for three years a prisoner of war in Germany with two other Beccles men. Serving with the 2nd Battalion the Suffolk Regiment, he was wounded and taken prisoner at Devil's Wood on the Somme. Only 48 men survived out of 600 in that action.

Soon he will have to cut the new willows. He will do this job after Christmas. They grow on marsh land in Beccles. After cutting, they will stand in bundles in six inches of water until they start to shoot. Then he will take them out and peel them. A period of drying will follow, and after curing for a week the willows will be fit for use.

Eugene Ulph mentions a John Markwell basket maker, at Smallgate, and describes how a Mr. Markwell used to allow his uncle to grow vegetables on his osier bed headlands during the thirties, the two later becoming ARP wardens. This second clan of Beccles basketmakers eventually spilled out from the town to produce more colonies of basket making Markwells.

Back to Harleston: we had left the Markwells in the Thoroughfare in 1861 raising their younger three children. In 1871, it is a bit easier to locate their exact whereabouts, Anna Court (in later years Rayner's builder's yard), Henry, Martha and Sam were all still at home, but none claimed a trade in this census. Business must have been booming though as John's younger brother (by only a year) James, father of Robert who had moved to Beccles, had also moved in from Stradbroke and he too was busy basketmaking. By 1881, John's family had moved a little bit along the Thoroughfare (going upmarket) but the actual basketmaking yard was still operating from Anna Court, then named Markwell's Yard. John's first wife had died and he had remarried to Eliza Woodrow, gaining a 10 years old stepdaughter in the process, of his own children, only Sam was still at home. His first born, John Jnr, had died in Beccles, two years previously, his only daughter, Martha had married in 1872, to Charles Beare a butcher. She was just across the road, doing very nicely with three children and a servant to take care of the drudgery. Some older residents may remember when there was still an abattoir at the back of the Beare's shop – now Brown's but still a butchers!

BEARE—MARKWELL —On the 3th inst., at Redenhall Church, by the Ven. Archdeacon Ormerod, Charles, youngest son of Robert Beare, farmer, of Aldeby, to Martha, the only daughter of John Markwell, basket maker, Harleston.

John Snr's younger son Sam picked up the mantle of basket making and had a yard up on the

DEATH OF MR. S. MARKWELL.

The funeral of an Old Harleston character took place at the Redenhall Parish Church on Thursday week, by the interment of Mr. Samuel Markwell aged 84, of The Common, Harleston.

A basket maker by trade, Mr. Markwell was one of the "characters" of the district, and was believed to be the oldest surviving member of the original Harleston detachment of the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. Of this he had been a member for over 35 years and he held the silver long service medal. In his younger days Mr. Markwell was a keen sportsman, and a runner of no little ability. In the latter part of the 19th century there were few races in the district in which he did not take part and he was the possessor of many prizes. Years ago he was a popular member of the Harleston Fire Brigade. Before his death he had expressed a wish to be buried with his family at the Wortwell Baptist Chapel, but it is learned that a grave digger could not be found in the parish, and the interment consequently took place at Redenhall.

The service was conducted by the Rector, the Rev. B. M. Pickering, and the family mourners were: Mrs. Markwell, widow; Mr. Alfred Scardiffe; Mrs. E. Gibbs; Mr. and Mrs. W. Moore; Miss A. Sayer; and Miss Finch.

Others present included: Capt. W. G. Rutter, to whom Mr. Markwell had acted as batman during his Volunteer service; Mrs. W. Pegg, Mrs. Whisken, Mrs. Wiles, Mrs. Cook, Miss Whisken, Mrs. E. Cook and Mrs. Francis.

Common, a large one in earlier years, he left the Common for a while and when he moved back had stepped production down markedly and was making baskets from a small shed behind his half of a compact double dwelling at the top of the Common.

Many of the older residents of Harleston will recall Olive Puttock; some may have been brought into the world by this diminutive but formidable midwife well known in the local showing circles for her Yorkshire Terriers complete with tartan bows to keep the hair out their eyes!, Olive Puttock recalled Sam Markwell living in a small house in the 1930's when he would have been in his 80s and more or less retired. A well-known character, his death was reported in the Diss Express of November 1937 with some familiar 'Common' names amongst the mourners.

Doreen Whurr nee Brown recalled the adjacent plot in the late thirties having some kind of natural hollow. There are also reports of there being a pond at the back - I think it safe to assume the hollow and the pond were one and

the same - both now filled in and covered by a small bungalow. I suspect that when Markwell was making baskets up here, he would have soaked his reeds and withies in the pond to render them pliable

Some 70 years later on in 2009, Miss Puttock still had a laundry basket made by him! She also recalls him picking reeds from the banks of the River Waveney to make baskets. Roy Riches refers to Samuel Markwell making 'his ware with osiers obtained from the nearby river Waveney' and stated 'there (was) a basket weaving yard on the Common'. The original basket-weaving yard was by the old house at the top of the path leading to the Common from Wilderness Close The pond adjoining the garden of the house would have been useful for soaking the reeds and willows to keep them flexible. A barn or similar building appears on the 1839 tithe map, useful for storage of reeds and ideal to work in (an unheated building being essential for successful working of the osier).

It is John Snr's second son Henry, basketmaker (what else?), who was to be the father of our Harleston Hero, (Herbert) Charles Markwell. He moved back to his birth village of Wortwell, where his father had previously spent at least 10 years making baskets. He married Elizabeth Goodwin, also of Wortwell, in 1872 and it is quite possible that his father had set him up in a house he himself owned. By 1881 Harry could proudly boast a clutch of 5 children and this family orientated crew also had Elizabeth's older brother in the household. By 1891, Harry Snr had added 5 more children to the tribe and was dealing in chickens as well as basket making. His older daughters had been sent out into service, Gertrude as a housemaid with a wine merchant in Thorpe, Martha as a general servant lodging near the Buck Inn Flixton. Slightly surprisingly, his oldest son, Harry Jnr, was not training to be a basket maker but was, instead, working with cows.

Even more surprisingly, 10 years later, in 1901, Harry Jnr was lodging up in Chelsea, a storeman! He rather disgraced himself later on that year but more due to being an unexperienced young lad out of his depth than any failure of character. Essentially Harry Snr and Harry Jnr went off to a pub to do a horse deal, while the father was otherwise engaged, a rather shady character plied the son with drink, conned him into tossing a coin for his father's horse against another horse and then tried to grab Markwell's horse. The Magistrates seem as confused as I was when reading the case and sent it off to a higher court!

Back in Wortwell, another 3 children had been added to Harry's family and still no sign of any following their father in basket making although they were now living in a home they owned themselves having paid the princely sum of £50 to buy it, and the accompanying garden and orchard from the estate of Harry Snr's father John in 1898. John Snr and brother James had carried on working in Harleston, fairly profitably I would suggest as, when John died in Depwade in 1898 it became apparent he had done rather well for himself with a number of properties auctioned off at some substantial prices. This included selling the Anna Court properties to Rayner, the builders; this turn of the century photo shows Arthur Rayners' sign over the entrance arch.

HARLESTON.
At the Magpie Hotel, Harleston, Messrs. Maddison, Miles, and Maddison submitted to public auction several lots of property, by direction of the executors of the late Mr. John Markwell and others. Results:—Freehold dwelling-house, shop, and basket-maker's premises, with frontage of 29 feet to the Thoro'fare, Harleston, Mr. A. F. Rayner, £500; building site, with stabling and buildings, at Harleston, Mr. J. L. Perfitt, £50; cottage and garden, at Harleston, Mr. S. Debenham, £122 10s.; newly-erected dwelling-house in two tenements, with gardens, facing the Thoro'fare, Harleston, Mr. J. H. Etheridge, £235; two-storied workshop, 26 feet by 15, at Harleston, Mr. B. Rayner, £60; Whalebone Villa, with garden, Mr. Etheridge, £115; three newly-built houses and garden, in Jay's Green, Mr. Etheridge, £375; double dwelling-house and gardens, Mr. Etheridge, £140; freehold cottage, with stable, shed, orchard, and garden, at Wortwell, Mr. H. Markwell, £50; six cottages, shop, and garden, in all 1r. 25p., at Pulham Market (part freehold and part copyhold), withdrawn: freehold double cottage, at Alburgh, and 0a. 3r. 30p. of land, Mr. Hazard, £105.

Norfolk Chronicle
25 Jun 1898



I would not say John had over provided for his wife; 7s a week, use of his house for as long as she liked although she was expected to keep the house in good repair and insured against fire out of this allowance!

James Markwell survived his slightly older brother and was living up at Jays Green in the 1901 census, still giving his occupation as basket maker; he had remarried to a Metfield born Harriet, aged 63.

None of Harry's Snr's numerous children (the 1911 census shows Harry Snr and his wife Elizabeth Goodswen, popped out 13 children over a span of 31 years! Mindboggling) had followed Harry into the family trade. Instead they went on to work on farms, building sites, in domestic service, at the Harleston Laundry, one made it up to London, but all remained in work typical of their time and status. Our Harleston Hero was one of the older of the tribe, and travelled under the name of Charles (common enough at the time to use a middle name rather than a first name), although one

of Harry Snr's grandchildren did go under the name of Herbert, appearing in the household under that name in 1911.

John Jnr's children did not go into basketmaking, Henry's did not, Martha's did not and, with the exception of an adopted daughter, Sam had no children from his long marriage so although John Snr had trained all his sons in the skill of basket making, none of his grandchildren followed into the trade.



Basket maker, Mr Markwell, at his Angel Street, Hadleigh workshop. Picture: PETER BOULTON Picture 1946, see below for accompanying text.

However, other of the Stradbroke Markwells spread out across the Waveney Valley, Harry Markwell in Diss (descendent of Ezekial from Stradbroke) Oakley, Hadleigh, Beccles, of course, Harleston, Wortwell, Sam moved to Weybread for a while, Lowestoft, Grundisburgh, Saxmundham, Jays Green, Woodbridge in fact in this area it was probably assumed that if you were a Markwell you had something to do with basket making.

Indeed Charles Markwell, Basketmaker of Hadleigh, (East Soham when the will was written) was described as John Snr's nephew when he was appointed one of three executors of John Snr's Will

PHOTO BY P. BOULTON, 1946
 "A whisk of the willow," or "A Wizard of the Osier." Such is the craft which we depict this week, in continuance of this series, and the craftsman is Mr. Jephthah Markwell. For over 50 years he has been at his workshop in Angel Street, Hadleigh, and will be seventy-two next birthday.

The fourth generation of his family to carry on this craft, Mr. Markwell's father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all basket makers, residing in Beccles (Suffolk) and Harleston (Norfolk).

This has been his sole occupation during the whole of his life, and he has made almost every article that can be made from willow, ranging from shopping baskets to chairs and crates. At present he has more work than he can cope with, including orders for a number of cradles or cribs.

"That's the result of the family allowances," he says, "and I don't believe in it."

We'l, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Hadleigh Happenings

ON Sunday last, fourteen members of the Hadleigh Angling Club made a further trip to Harleston (Norfolk) for another competition in the waters of the river Waveney. At the latter part of last week, the inclement weather put a doubt in the minds of some as to whether the journey would be worth while. However, there were indications of an improvement on the Sat-

Adverts from the early 1890's showing some of the variety of work basket makers did.

BASKET Makers.—Wanted, Four steady Workmen for London; rim pecks, bushels, and currant sieves.—Markwell, Saxmundham.

BASKET Makers wanted, for white square work and for wine hamper making.—Address, Markwell, Saxmundham.

For some reason, Henry decided not to train his children in this lucrative, but as history shows, about to become

obsolescent trade; our Harleston Hero, Charles was one of many boys destined to become an agricultural labourer and, as was normal at that time, stayed at home probably until his marriage in 1915 to Martha Cook, most likely the 18 years old housemaid who appears at her parents' house

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***T H E only free-lance
basket maker between Sud-
bury and Ipswich, 75-years-
old Jeff Markwell, of Had-
leigh, has decided to go on
working. He doesn't want
his craft to die out!***

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in Reydon in 1911. His family had enjoyed a special niche in a rural industry that thrived in the Waveney Valley and allowed his father to raise 13 children to adulthood but which he, his siblings and the second half of the 20th Century turned their backs on although in 1949 Jeff (Jeptha) was still determinedly carrying on his trade The warmth and mutual support this family shared seems to shine out from the eulogy written by (Herbert) Charles' never met grandson.