



Leonard Arthur Rayner

10750 Private, 2nd Battalion Honourable Artillery Company

He was killed in action on 9th October 1917 at Flanders, aged 30

Leonard is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, West Flanders, Belgium

There was a time in Harleston when Rayners were synonymous with building, there were the posh Rayners and the ruffy-tuffy Rayners. Arthur Rayner was a very different character from the Robert / Bob Rayner builders who for many years had operated from the other end of the town, having a yard for some years by the Three Horseshoes. The Horseshoe branch (although they did make it down to Station Road for a while) were slightly chaotic, often drunk but very closely knit and survived all sorts of disasters over the years. Arthur may have lost his father young, but his mother was a strong woman and he had a good stable upbringing. Whilst the other Rayners got the contract to churn out cheap pine coffins for the workhouse, Arthur was commissioned to make the grander coffins such as the one provided for Mrs Perowne, wife of the Rev Archdeacon Perowne; his son Leonard Arthur was one of the posh Rayners

Way back in 1841, Jonathan Rayner a Manservant from Wortwell was raising two boys, Arthur and Henry somewhere in the muddle of small cottages between Old Market Place and the actual Market Place. In 1851 they were described as being in the Thoroughfare and Jonathan had become an iron monger whilst oldest son Alfred (actually baptised William Alfred) was a carpenter; he trundled off to London leaving his brother, Henry behind. He married Eliza nee Wittrick from Kirby Cane; conveniently for a carpenter, Eliza's father was a Sawyer! Unusually, Henry was literate, his wife was not (generally literacy in the working classes in this area tended to be more prevalent amongst women)

1849. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Kirby Cane in the County of Norfolk

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
64	April 26 th	Henry Rayner	22	Bachelor	Carpenter	Harleston	John Rayner	Sea-stinger
		Eliza Wittrick	22	Spinster		Kirby Cane	Thomas Wittrick	Sawyer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by me, Wm. C. G. G. G. G.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Henry Rayner and Eliza Wittrick & her mark in the Presence of us, Thomas Wittrick and Harriet Wittrick & her mark

By 1861, this hardworking young man (only 24), living near Wilson's Yard had a year-old daughter and was already employing 2 people, whilst his father and mother were living a short way down the road. Father Jonathan seems to be working for the Denny's predecessors on the corner of the Market Place and Chapel Yard, as one of several ironmongers assistants. The dear old fellow was still working there in 1871, his fellow assistant was a positively babyish 32 compared to his 73!

Jonathan's son, Henry, now had three well spaced out children, Sophie, Arthur and Jessie and was living next to Markwell's Yard, what we now call Anna Court, more or less opposite Station Road.

These were sad times for the Rayners, oldest daughter Sophie Jnr died in 1881, aged only 21, Jonathan was working into his 70's and survived until 1872, dying aged 75, sadly Henry died in 1879 aged only 42 leaving his wife of 21 years, Sophie Snr, to hold the family together. She took up the trade of Stationer, they must have had some funds behind them to stock the business that the family carried on in their house on the corner of the Markwell's Yard from at least 1881. Young Arthur became a fully-fledged carpenter and his sister Jessie Snr was a draper's assistant.

This really was a busy and industrious family who came through in spite of their losses in between 1872 and 1881. By the time the next census came along, it seemed like Sophie Snrs business was going well, she was still on the corner of Markwell's yard but now had 4 lodgers to supplement the income from her stationary and fancy goods shop. Her son Arthur had set up home next door, having married Elizabeth Ann Bowles in 1884 and rapidly cracking out 4 children, including young Leonard, then aged 3, the second child and only boy. Not too surprisingly they had a house servant to help with the menagerie!

Arthur was by then a builder as well as carpenter; in 1887 one of his older workmen came to a sudden and tragic end. George Grice had been complaining of feeling breathless but went off to work with Arthur Rayner, the more upmarket branch of the Rayner carpentry empire, as normal. An early start was obviously standard as he went to work as usual and after breakfast deceased and (*Arthur Rayner*) started to go on the Common¹. George Grice must have been feeling very ill as, during the short walk from Broad Street, where Rayner had his premises, to the Common, where they were planning on working, George had to stop three times to rest. Another source claimed he had previously been in 'normal health'. On arrival at the Common, he was given some brandy (universal panacea in Victorian times) and recommenced work. The pair having started work together, Grice was talking of his father's sudden death at the early age of 56 when, he himself fell to the ground and could not be revived. Dying shortly after he became unconscious, Dr Candler later diagnosed heart disease. Unfortunately, tragically early deaths were also visited on George Grice sons, making at least three generations haunted by heart issues.

Harleston

WEDDING.—A quiet and and pretty wedding took place on Thursday, the 11th inst, at Redenhall Church, the Ven. Archdeacon Perowne, officiating, between John Locke Perfitt, of Harleston, eldest son of Robert Joseph Perfitt, of Stalham, and Jessie Julia, only surviving daughter of the late Henry Rayner, of Harleston. The bride, who was given away by her brother (Mr Arthur Rayner), was accompanied by two bridesmaids, Misses Alice and Fannie Perfitt, sisters of the bridegroom, Mr. Henry Paok, of London, acting as best man. At the breakfast, the Ven. Archdeacon, in proposing "The health of the newly-wedded couple" gave a touching address, wishing them joy and long life to their new home. The happy pair left en route for London by the 2.41 train, amidst the inevitable showers of rice and slippers. The presents, which numbered between eighty and ninety, were both costly and useful. The wedding cake was supplied by Mr Edwards, confectioner; and the prettily decorated carriages, from the Swan and Magpie Hotels, of this town.

The Villas to the west of Wilderness Terrace were Arthur's work, nice solid houses and about this time his sole surviving sister, Jessie Snr married into the Stonemason's family via John Locke Perfitt. Quite a good mesh, Rayner made the coffins and Perfitt made the headstones!

Yarmouth Independent
21 Dec 1889

TO LET, GORDON HOUSE, Eight Rooms; also No. 1, WAVENEY TERRACE, with Seven Rooms; good water and small Gardens; Rents £16 and £13; on London Road, Harleston.—Apply, Arthur Rayner, Harleston.

Eastern Daily Press, 11 Sep 1901

¹The Ipswich Journal 19 Feb 1887

TO BE SOLD or LET, Station Road, Harleston, with immediate possession, pleasantly situated, large Garden.—Apply, Arthur Bayner, ated RESIDENCE, 2 Reception, 5 Bedrooms, usual Offices: large Garden.—Apply Arthur Bayner, Harleston.

Eastern Evening News
3 Oct 1908

In 1901 this stable steady going family were building up a good portfolio of property working from the house/neighbouring house where they had been for at least 30 years, adjacent to their building yard. Sophie Snr's boarding house was running very nicely with four white collar workers in residence. Arthur's family had got no larger, they still had a house servant and their oldest daughter was training to be a milliner. The big difference was that Arthur, 3 years previously, had been able to



buy the yard in Anna Court and the adjacent shop and house, from the estate of John Markwell, presumably the family's landlord for the previous three decades. This lot cost him £500 but he was now able to proudly put his sign over the entry to the yard. At the turn of the century Arthur built the New Drill hall behind the station, another prestigious project.

Harleston 'New' Drill Hall, opened 1902, (up behind the station), with two of the horse drawn gun carriages.²

² Early 20th Century printed postcard

There were numerous pleasant games.

HARLESTON.

During the summer Mr. W. H. Hazard has made extensive additions and improvements to his residence, "Caltofts." The work has been carried out from the designs of Mr. E. J. W. Hider (London) as architect, and the contractor was Mr. A. F. Rayner. To celebrate its completion, the tradesmen and workmen employed thereon were on Tuesday entertained by Mr. Hazard at the Cardinal's Hat Hotel, the company present numbering 35, and a first-class repast being served by Host and Hostess White. Mr. Hazard was in the chair, and those present included Mr. A. F. Rayner (principal contractor), and the sub-contractors, Mr. J. L. Perfitt (stone work), Mr. G. Keeley (plumbers' work), Mr. H. A. Yallop, &c. After dinner an enjoyable evening was spent in toast and song. Mr. Hazard, who presided, proposed "The Imperial Forces," Sergeant Burroughes responding. For "The Town and Trade of Harleston" Mr. A. F. Rayner made the requisite

1906 saw some more prestigious work as Arthur made improvements to Caltofts at the behest of William Hazard who was to lose his son, Noel, in the war that was still not even a shadow on the horizon. Arthur's brother in law, John Locke Perfitt, was also able to enjoy a finger in the pie!

Norfolk News
8 Dec 1906

In 1911, Arthur and his wife had just one of their younger daughters still at home, schoolteacher Eleanor; Nelly as she appeared 10 years previously! They did have a servant to help them in their 7-room house – very nice! Ma was still next door running her

shop with just two boarders in situ in her 6-room house.

In the normal run of things, I would have expected the only son, Leonard, to have trained up to take over the business from his father, however I would have been completely wrong. 1911 has young Leonard, boarding in London, and working as a bank clerk – away from the tools and in a white-collar job.

However, as it happened a third generation picked up the mantle of this family business. Leonard's little sister, Jessie Jnr (named for her father's younger sister who a few decade back had married a stone mason) married a certain Herbert Blackburn in late spring 1917, her brother chose not to continue the business founded by his grandfather Henry and continued by his father Arthur, instead Herbert Blackburn stepped into the gap and took over the business when Arthur died in the early 1920's. Herbert carried on with the business until he too started feeling his age and on retiring in 1952 the company was taken over by R.G.Carters – yup that well-known local company giving a

The evidence given at the last hearing by Harry Henry, an apprentice in the employ of Mr. A. Rayner, a builder, of Harleston, was read over. He then stated that he had seen all the defendants, who had been employed about the house, go down into the cellar and drink wine.

link through to modern times. At the retirement dinner the Blackburns were presented with a carriage clock by an

employee who had started as a 13 years old apprentice with Arthur Rayner! This apprentice was a certain Harry Henry who gave evidence back in 1903 when, somewhat embarrassingly, four of Arthur Rayner employees did their best to drink their way through the cellar of Haddiscoe House whilst the owners were living elsewhere. And just cos I do love a nice circle, I am afraid that George Dalliston (brother of Harleston Hero, Edward Dalliston), and Ernest Cook, (the older brother of Charles Cook who is also commemorated on the Harleston Monument) were two of the happy four who glugged through at least 54 bottles of vintage port. Ernest Cook 'got off' due to testifying, George Dalliston and the other two inebriates got a month's hard labour each, a lenient sentence in light of their previous good characters and Harry Henry got a job for life!

FAMILY BUSINESS CHANGES HANDS

Harleston Staff Dinner and Presentations

A Harleston builder's business which has been in the hands of the same family since it was established one hundred years ago by the late Mr. Henry Rayner, passed into new ownership as from Friday. The new proprietors are R. G. Carter, Ltd., of Drayton.

At the Magpie Hotel, Harleston, on Thursday week, the retiring owner, Mr. Herbert Blackburn, whose wife is a grand-daughter of the late Mr. Rayner, gave a farewell dinner to the staff. With Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn and their two daughters at the dinner were Mr. R. G. Carter, senior director, Mr. R. E. Carter and Mr. E. T. Moore, the new Harleston manager.

Mr. Blackburn, who took over the business thirty-one years ago after the death of Mrs. Blackburn's father, Mr. Arthur Rayner, thanked the men for their loyal co-operation and support. He said he and his wife naturally felt the severance of the connection, but unfortunately his own health during the past few years had not been good enough to stand up to the strain which the business entailed.

Mr. Harry Henery, one of the oldest employees, handed Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn a travelling clock, with a list of subscribers as a parting gift. He mentioned that he was apprenticed with the late Mr. Arthur Rayner when a lad of 13.

Mr. Blackburn proposed the toast of "R. G. Carter Ltd." and in reply Mr. Carter said one of the reasons his firm had taken over the Harleston business was the very good name it held in the building industry in Norfolk. He could assure them that that good name would not be let down by his firm.

Mr. R. E. Carter and Mr. Moore also replied.

Mr. Sidney Grapes entertained, and Miss Ann Blackburn was the pianist.

Just to tighten the close circle of tightly linked Harleston Heroes; Arthur owned the Clay works out at Baker's Barn where the Frost family had worked for many years, two Harleston Hero brothers, William David and George Henry Frost both worked out there for Arthur, yet another lad, Reginald Ward who died the same day as George Frost was a carter for Arthur, and of course there was the son of William Hazard, one of Arthur's prestigious clients. This is only one example of the overlapping circles and ripples of tragedy that spread out with the death of each of our Harleston heroes.

As for Leonard, he had left Harleston, married Doris Kathleen Martin, an Essex girl and settled down to build his career behind a telling counter somewhere near Hornsey. Doris was the oldest of 7 children, 5 daughters followed by two sons. She had trained as a shorthand typist, legal — I wonder if this was an office romance?

Although Leonard was a full grown man of almost 30 when he enlisted, he was as slim as a lad; at 5ft 8" he weighed only 8 ½ stone, with a thirty three inch chest (although he got an extra 3" when he took a deep breath). Slightly weedy he may have been, but he qualified as a 1st Class Shot, doubtless helped by the fact his eyesight was perfect. He did have a hammer toe, certainly not enough to disqualify him from marching! .

We actually have a very clear timeline for his (brief) military career. Leonard attested (officially registered his willingness to serve) on the 9th of Dec 1915 at Harringay but was put into the reserves.

Almost a year later and on 7th Nov 1916 he was called before the Medical Board at Mill Hill, the Approving officer cleared the paperwork on the 25th April 1917 and he was officially enlisted on 26th April 1917 at the Armoury House, Finsbury

He then enjoyed two months training, qualifying as a 1st Class shot on the 15th June 1917 before

leaving Southampton on 17th July, to arrive at Le Havre on 18 July BEF.as part of the British Expeditionary Force.

He was transferred from the 1st to 2nd battalion on 8th August 1917 and was promptly sent out to the field on 10th August 1917. Less than 2 months later on the 9th October he was reported missing, then presumed dead, then officially believed dead on the 22nd of August 1918. The only personal effects returned to his wife were a small Leather Photo Case with Photos and Visiting Cards. The pathos of imaging Leonard gazing at images of his family during the very short time he was abroad, combined with the visiting cards, an anachronistic remnant from a more civilised time and place, is incredibly touching.

At the time of his death, Leonard had one child, Arthur Martin Rayner born in Middlesex on the 12th March 1916, thus entitling his widow to a 20 shilling weekly pension as well as a £3 war gratuity and £2 back pay. During the war, it seems Doris and little Arthur lived, for a while at least, in Bognor but after the war Doris returned to her hometown of Ilford.

In many ways we can draw parallels between Leonard Rayner and another Harleston Hero (Herbert) Charles Markwell. Their grandfathers, Henry Rayner and John Markwell had set up businesses which their sons had followed them in; indeed, Henry's son Arthur had started his business on the corner of John's yard and later bought the yard from John's estate. Arthur's only son, Leonard Rayner, potentially the third generation of tradesmen in Harleston chose to go his own way; John's son, Henry Markwell, had many sons but none of his third generation followed in the family trade. Whilst (Herbert) Charles Markwell remained local and Leonard Rayner left town, they had both left the family trade.

Leonard had only been in France for six weeks when he disappeared; sadly, Leonard was one of the many men who never had a proper grave, instead his death, originally just presumed, was memorialised on both the Tyne Cot Memorial and Harleston Memorial.