



## Robert Joshua Turner

21248 Corporal, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Border Regiment, formerly 18314 Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1917 in Flanders, aged 33

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

When investigating this family, once again the habit of using a name, other than the one you were baptised with, caused all sorts of confusion. Way back in 1836, young Joshua, son of Sophie and John Turner Snr was baptised at Redenhall, he appeared aged 4, with his parents, an older brother, an older sister and one younger sister at Pecks Farm in Redenhall in 1841. Ten years later in 1851, Josh had already left home and this 14-year-old farm boy was living in with his employers at Wortwell. In 1861 Joshua was fully launched into married life with his wife Jane and two daughters on the Norwich Road, Hedenham. Indeed, at that point all the children had left home leaving his 50 years old parents living in Reeves Yard with just a lodger in the household.

In 1871, the only census when Joshua was living in Harleston, and the only census when our heroes' father, John Lockwood James Turner, then aged 6 appeared in the same household as his father, Joshua had decided to use the name John! Five of Joshua and Jane's six children, aged 13 to 2, were still at home, living in one of the small cottages that still stand at the junction of Station Road and Station Hill, whilst the oldest, at the age of 14, was helping look after the children of the Magpie's landlord. She was the same age Joshua (or John as he appeared in this census) was when he was working away from home in Wortwell, children working away from home in their early teens was perfectly normal and continued to be so for another 40 years or more.

John Jnr Lockwood James Turner, the father of our Harleston Heroes, was the first son and fourth child of his parents; rather a lot of name for the baby of a Coal Merchants Porter but perhaps his parents had despaired of having a boy and threw everything at young John when he did finally arrive!

Sadly, their (then) youngest child, Robert Snr, died shortly after the 1871 census, aged only 4 and their mother, Jane, herself died in 1874, aged only 39. Joshua Turner followed the common route of prompt remarriage in order to care for his children; at the time of Jane's death, 3 of her surviving youngest children were aged 11 or under. It is highly likely that John and Jane's seventh child contributed to Jane's death. It was quite normal for a housekeeper to move into a bereaved household; if the pair suited, marriage would eventually follow, possibly hard on the heels of the arrival of a new addition to the family, possibly respectably before any such event.

Either way, Joshua married Maria Hurren, daughter of a very small farmer (10 acres in 1861) in 1876. Now, considering Joshua's mother, Sophie had, by the 1871 census (when she was living on Duke William aka Candler's Lane) already been abandoned by her husband, you might have thought that Joshua and his new wife might have stayed in the area to help support her. Actually no – it seems that no sooner had they married, then they hightailed it for Norwich appearing there in the 1881 census with Robert Jnr aged 8, born in Redenhall, 4 years old Maria Jnr and a one-week old

boy. Robert Jnr was born in Redenhall and his age suggests that it was his arrival which caused his mother's death, and yes, he had been named for his brother who had died 2 years before his birth, a common practice at the time. Maria Jnr had been born in Norwich so they really must have made tracks from Harleston pretty sharpish. We can't tell if they took Joshua's existing children, Martha and Emily, aged 7 and 11 at the time of their mother's death, with them to Norwich but we do know they left John L.J. Turner behind in Harleston.

In 1881 John L.J. Turner was living on Candler's lane with an unmarried Aunt Sarah, (his father's sister) and her illegitimate daughter who, aged 15, was concisely described as 'a cripple'. His Grandmother Sophie Turner snr had died at the start of the year but had been living here with his Aunt Sarah in 1871. Then aged 65, Sophie Turner was described as the 'wife of a Carter who has deserted her.' Also, in 1871, with 5 years old Sophie jnr in tow, Aunt Sarah was described as a 'servant out of place'. Crippled Sophie died, aged only 20, in 1886, life was tough for the physically impaired. Perhaps having young John boarding with them helped keep this little family out of the workhouse, perhaps others of John's siblings had also been left here with their grandmother, aunt and cousin

More significantly for this history though, was the presence next door of the Goldsmith family, including young Anna Goldsmith, aged only 15 in 1881, the future wife of John and mother to be of the eleven children they raised to maturity more or less one every two years for the first 22 years of a marriage that had taken place back in early 1884 when John would have been at the most 19 and Anna just 18. Our Harleston Heroes, Robert and Ernest were the oldest and the 6<sup>th</sup> of the eleven children that Anna and John had churned out,

Anna's parents had had a tough patch back in 1861 when her whole family, including 5 children, had wound up in the Pulham Workhouse. Tough times: if the bread winner fell ill or had an accident the workhouse was the only form of social assistance. Luckily, they got over this patch and, by 1871, the Goldsmith's rapidly expanding family had added another 3 children and a grandson to the mix. H(Anna) was one of the younger ones, with the 5-year gap between her and her baby brother partly filled with a grandson imported from London! This little lad stayed on in Harleston, by 1881 (when I suspect Hannah had caught John Turner's eye) he was one of two grandchildren in the household along with Hannah and one remaining sibling.

Young John and (H)Anna Turner started their married life in Harleston but, judging by their children's birth places and the census entries, spent a spell in Wortwell sometime between 1887 and 1894. The family eventually wound up out in Lush Bush appearing there in the 1901 census.

10 years later, the 1911 census reveals that the then 15 years old Ernest William Turner, the oldest child still at home, was a brickyard labourer following in his brother's footsteps and working in his shadow. That brother, Robert Joshua – named after his grandfather, had a similar first job, working as a labourer in a brick yard in 1901.

By 1911, Robert was 5 years married, still working as a brick maker, his wife Phoebe Cordelia nee Smith from Hemphall, had been a domestic servant in Norwich before her marriage. The couple

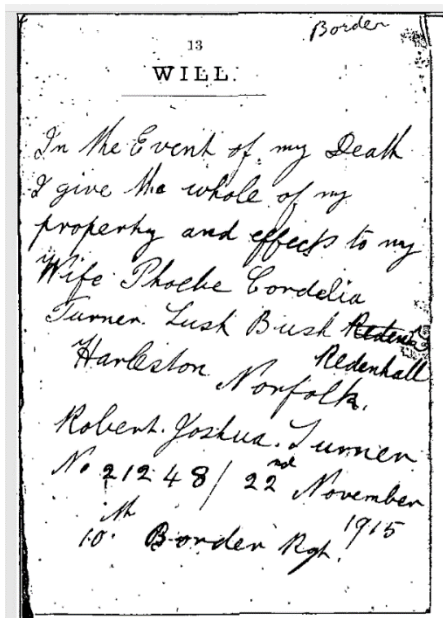
had had two children, little Lillian Agnes Elizabeth Turner (who appeared in this census aged 3) but their son, Robert William James Turner, had died as infant 4 years before. Robert Turner's young family set up house only a few yards from Robert's parent's house in Lush Bush. Violet Turner was added to the family in 1912.

#### SHELTON.

On Saturday a wedding took place at the parish church between Miss Phoebe Cordelia Smith, second daughter of Mr. Robert Smith, of Shelton, and Mr. Robert Joshua Turner, eldest son of Mr. John Turner, of Lush Bush House, Redenhall. The Rev. C. B. Smith officiated. Mr. Robert Smith, father of the bride, gave her away, and Mr. John James Turner acted as best man. The bridesmaids were Miss Emily Maud Turner and Miss Ethel Sheldrake. The bride was the recipient of many valuable presents.

*Eastern Daily Press*

In January 1915, Robert's military career started with his attestation, when he swore to his willingness to fight, starting off in the Norfolk Regiment. It is a bit tricky to work out the precise details but it looks as if, after his basic training, he was transferred to the Borderers in November when, some two years before he died and 11 months after he attested in Norwich, Robert wrote one of the brief soldier's wills leaving everything to his wife, Phoebe Cordelia Turner, of Lushbush. It is very poignant reading these brief documents, really no more than a handwritten sentence on a standardised form, and trying



to imagine the circumstances in which they were written. These wills often slant across the paper, one can imagine the soldier in a brief respite behind the lines balancing the War Department form on their knee.

He left Britain on the last day of 1915 to join his battalion 2 weeks later although his first stint of duty was to be very short. Like many of the men in the waterlogged trenches of the rich farm lands that were churned into the muddy morass of the Great War, Robert suffered from issues other than those of battle. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1916 he was in sick bay with suspected flu, his condition was later diagnosed as Rheumatism and the severity was such that he was transferred out of sick bay on to the Divisional Rest Station four days later. After a fortnight more illness, he was sent back to Britain to spend almost 10 further weeks in hospital. Although older than many of the men, Robert should have been in the prime of his life, he must have been both physically and mentally exhausted.

Slightly more chunky than many of our Harleston Heroes, 30 years old Robert was just over 5ft 5" in height but had a respectable 37" chest – his trade of Brickmaking would have built up those muscles. His widow received a War Gratuity of £13 10s in addition to his back pay and widow's pension of 24s per week.

Robert rejoined his regiment's reserves on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1916, a fortnight after his discharge from hospital and was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Borderers on the last day of August 1916, barely two weeks after the death of his brother Ernest. He returned to France via Folkestone on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1916, perhaps his recent sustained illness had entailed him being in the Service Arm at GHQ rather than the front lines, there does seem to have been a 4 month gap between his arrival in France and his actually joining his unit in March 1917. He must have been determined to make up for lost time, either that or his being an older steadier married man acted in his favour, but he was promoted to L.Cpl on joining the unit, did a good job, became an acting Cpl two months later was sent to the front line on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July and was Killed in Action 3 months later.

Robert Turner may not have seen much action but he had been a touch war.

Robert's family remained in Lush Bush; daughter Lillian had a bit of a mishap whilst riding pillion on a gentleman's motor cycle in the 20's – very racy! I am delighted to say the couple married three years later – reputation saved?

*Diss Express*  
16 Sep 1927

**TOUG.**  
Lillian Turner, of Lush Bush, Redenhall, domestic servant, said she was riding on the pillion seat of Mr Sutton's motor cycle. As they got just round the bend referred to there was a car coming that they did not see until it was on them. They heard no hooter. The motor cycle was not going very fast. She was riding astride. The back of the car struck her leg, which was bruised. The car was going at 25 to 30 miles an hour, a lot faster than they were travelling.

By 1911 our Harleston Heroes parents, John and Hannah could proudly state they had raised all eleven of their children to maturity. This is in marked contrast to John's father who, having been the watchman at a Vinegar factory in Norwich since at least 1901, could only claim 4 children surviving from the 8 arising from his 32-year marriage to Maria, this number being in addition to the at least 6, possibly 8, from his first marriage.

I have an image of John Lockwood James Turner being a very uxorious man. His father had left him, and possibly other of his siblings, to disappear several hours travel away with a second wife following the death of his mother. He had been raised by a grandmother who herself had been abandoned by her husband and an aunt who had been left unmarried to raise a handicapped child. He found love with a younger member of a large close-knit family who were living next door to the house where he was being raised by two mistreated women and a crippled child. I suspect he made some comparisons with his situation, drew some conclusions, married early and raised a large and loving family. The fact that his son, Robert, chose to set up home next to his parents says a lot.

Other neighbours in Lush Bush in 1911 included the Waller household. John and Anna were to lose two of their sons, their neighbour Jacob Waller lost a son, had a son injured and lost two nephews, Anna's brother, Henry, lost a son, John Goldsmith, all in the war that was to follow only 3 years later, These lads would all have known each other, indeed on the small hamlet of Lush Bush, 20-minutes-walk from the town, they would have spent much of their childhood together. Like the Turners, Jacob Waller and his wife had successfully raised a large family without any loss, 14 in their case. Both families had fought against disease, infection, accident and bad luck, nothing could counteract the devastation of the first 'modern' war. As each of these biographies are completed, it becomes plainer how closely linked these lads who died far from home were, some by blood, some by links of neighbourliness. Each of these deaths would have impacted not only the household they were raised in nor just the homes they were making for themselves, but many other homes throughout the town; fear and sorrow would have been felt by many people who would have both grieved each death but been all too aware of the peril of their own boys abroad in the theatre of war.

Although one source indicates that Robert's mother, Anna Turner had moved up to Aslacton, I suspect not as she was also described as being a widow – which she most certainly was not. However, one of Robert and Ernest's sisters, Anna Agnes Turner was living in Aslacton just after the war ended. John himself lived to the grand old age of 81, dying in 1947 and surviving another war, fortunately with a lower casualty rate than the first. His wife, Anna, is a little less easy to track down– a lady of approximately the right age died in 1918, another, also of about the right age, died in 1946; I hope it was the latter lady and they had achieved their diamond wedding.