



Frank Walter Johnson

C/JX 128624 Chief Petty Officer, H M Submarine 'Triad' Royal Navy

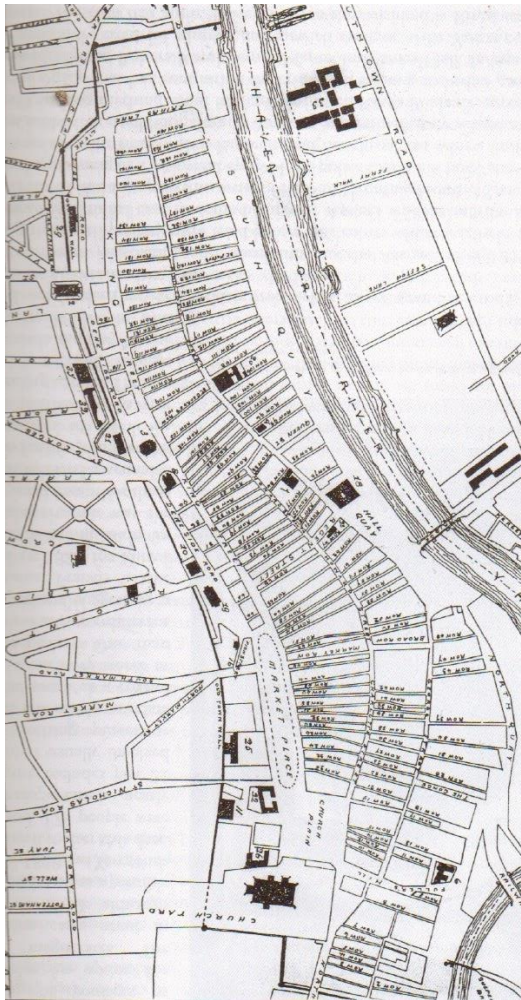
He died on 20th October 1940 at sea, aged 29

Frank is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial



1t

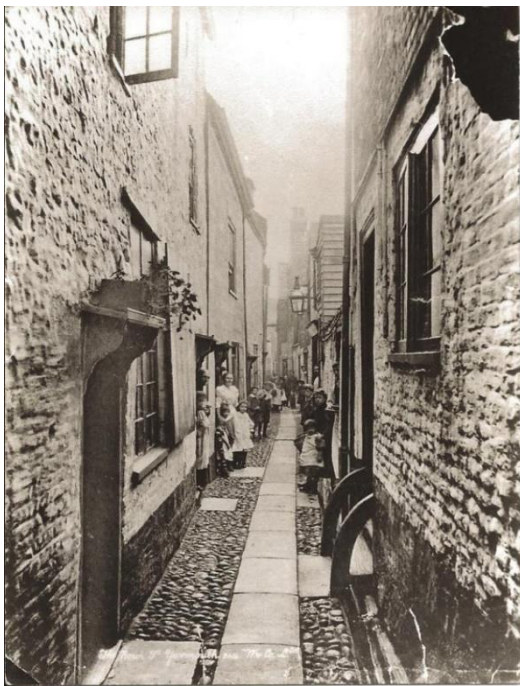
F W Johnson



The Johnsons were another of those families who quietly got on with life, but a life that in many ways is impossible to imagine now. With most of our Harleston Heroes, we can see the streets they saw and the buildings and pubs they frequented. Yes, there are cars about the place, the shops sell goods undreamed of in their time, manners and mores have changed but the physical environment would be recognisable to most.

However, Frank Johnson came from the coast; a family of men who although they may have imported brides from outside, had deep roots in Yarmouth. Their trades were typical of a busy port, the family were more concerned with shore-based activities than with going to sea although doubtless the salt tang on the air was a constant reminder of the Ocean; I said the family had deep roots in Yarmouth, more specifically they had roots in the Rows of Yarmouth.

The Rows of Yarmouth were incredibly narrow streets, some barely more than 2ft wide, originally built to house the whole range of Yarmouth residents from the poorest, in cramped lean-tos, to the wealthy in Mansion Houses. However, as Yarmouth development escaped the confining walls of the medieval town, even these grand houses became subdivided and occupied by the poorer elements of the town. By Georgian and Victorian times, this was a solidly working-class enclave of the port of Yarmouth.



Because this family kept their heads down, worked hard, stayed out of the courts, stayed out of the papers, caused no trouble, but made no great waves either, and a few people have asked about looking into their families, in this biography I have left in more of the workings out and false trails. Methodical working out is essential, a brain good at retaining snippets of information which can

provide links is helpful, but even so it is very easy to go haring off down the wrong path.

Gower is not one of the normal given names one would expect at this time; often when one finds a 'surname' being pressed into use as a given name rather than a patronym, it will either reflect a renowned antecedent or some kind of link with the mother. A quick search of the census revealed that in 1841, widowed Hannah Johnson was raising two sons, Gower, an 18 years old Carter, and George a 14 years old Errand Boy. They were living, in row 117, now redeveloped and also known as Dorset Close. I say redeveloped but in fact the bombs of a war 100 years after this first census

laid waste to the rows, post war developers finished off the job leaving only a handful of the original houses and road signs echoing the old lay out.

The 1851 census revealed that Hannah had originated from Weybread, at the time she was a servant who was visiting friends on Broad Row; lo and behold, Hannah Gower had married widower Hugh Johnson in Weybread on the 12th of October 1808 when she would have been just 18. Hugh's death record at the age of 63 in 1835, reveals that he would have been 36, exactly double the age of his bride when he married. I think we can assume there would have been a few older children from Hugh's first marriage as well as from his second, to Hannah Gower – other than the Gower and George who appeared in the 1841 census we don't know how many children Hannah was left to raise on Hugh's death.

Hannah's son, labourer Gower Johnson and his wife Elizabeth from Melton had set up home in Row 34 and were raising 4 children. A marked gap between Maria, aged 5 and baby Harriet, just under the age of 1 indicates illness had recently cut a swathe through the family; previously they had produced a child a year for three years. The lack of any sanitation and the exceeding narrow, densely packed, cobbled alleyways of the rows led to frequent outbreaks of contagious illnesses. Gower's mother.

Come 1861 and Gower's household on Row 34 must have been fairly packed, Gower still had 3 of his children at home (although Maria, 5 in 1851, was now described as being 13!), a new wife Margaret ex Daniels, her 8 years old son, his mother, Hannah, his sister in law, Joanna, and her two children. George, who had appeared with Gower in 1841, had married Joanna nee Todd in late 1847. In all this household consisted of 4 adults, 2 teenagers and 4 other children. Gower Johnson's oldest son, 16 years old William, like many of the neighbours, was starting his working life as a mariner and actually managed to appear twice in this census, his other appearance being on the Jessie, a small boat that had made its way down to Poplar with just him and the ships master on board!

Gower's new wife, Margaret nee Daniels, had been an unmarried mother; back in 1851 she was working as a live in servant on North Quay in the employ of a 51 years old Porter and Spirit Merchant, a perfect candidate to take over the household following the death of Gower's wife.

By 1871, Gower and Margaret had moved around the corner to Row 36 with Gower working as a Warehouse man and the family supplementing their income by hosting a married lodger, Mary Ann Rainer and her teenaged son, George, aged 18

Having followed a Gower/Johnson trail downwards through the descendants of Hannah nee Gower's son Gower, we need to leap forward to the father of our Harleston Hero Frank Walter Johnson's, William Gower Johnson, and now work our way back.

In 1881, our Harleston Hero's father, William Gower Johnson, age 14 was already working as a Coal Hawker and was living with his parents, William H(amelin) Johnson, Brewer's Labourer, mother Mary Johnson Snr and his younger sister, Mary Jnr – a very compact family and not living in the Rows!

We have the couple's marriage certificate from Boxing or St Stephen's Day 1864, William, fisherman aged 20, can sign his name as can his witness; his wife, Mary Bartram, can't but at the time of her marriage she had the splendid address of Rainbow Corner! What this also reveals is that William Hamelin's father was not, as I had assumed, Gower Johnson (though he did have a son William of the right age) but in fact William's father was Hugh Gower Johnson – kerching and rewind!

1851. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Great Yarmouth 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. |
|-----|---------------|--------------------------|------|------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 47 | Dec 26 1851 | William Hamalton Johnson | 20 | Bachelor | Fisherman | Row 36 | Hugh Gower Johnson | Houseman |
| | | Mary Bartram | 22 | Spinster | | Rainier Corner | William Bartram | Gardener |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by *W. Johnson* or after *Days* by me, *W. Johnson*

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *William Johnson* & *Mary Bartram* in the Presence of us, *E. Gower* & *Elizabeth Johnson*

Back we go to 1851, Mariners wife, Joanna Johnson, has a one-year old son Hugh Johnson! I hope you are keeping up with all this because 10 years later, in 1861, it is this Joanna, nee Todd who appears in Gower's household without her husband, Gower's brother George! In 1851 George is obviously at sea, sharing Joanna's little household is a sister (in law?) Mary Johnson and two more one-year old children, a niece Amelia Rainer and a nephew Henry Todd. Must have been a bit like a creche in there and with little Amelia we come full circle – it was Rainers who were lodging with Gower and his wife in 1871!

In a mirror image of this situation, in 1881, it was widower Gower, labourer at a tallow chandler, who was lodging with Rainers, in row 30.; Mary Ann Rainer's husband is back from sea or wherever he had been in previous years. I wonder if Johnson and Rainer worked on the same Vessel? The Rainer's lodger Gower Johnson was born in the rows, raised in the rows, raised his

On the 17 inst., at Row 93, Gower Johnson, aged 62 years. family in the rows and finally died in the rows, in 1885.

Yarmouth Independent
21 Feb 1885

Who was our patriarch's name sake who, the same year as the old boy died, was in court for stone throwing? I suspect a few local Johnsons incorporated Gower in their name! At his second hearing Gower Johnson, a 'little boy' was fined 5s!

Gower Johnson, a little boy, appeared to a summons for throwing a stone on Saturday last. The case was adjourned until Saturday next in order that defendant might call a witness. Eastern Evening News
12 Nov 1885

Exciting as it was to locate little Hugh Johnson it was

not much help since Hugh Johnson, born in 1850 is hardly likely to be the father of a lad who was born in 1864! However, it would be quite reasonable for Elizabeth Gower and Hugh Johnson to have named one of their children born before either Gower or George, Hugh Gower Johnson!

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|---------|-------|-------------|-----------|
| June 24 | Hugh Gower | Hugh Gower | Johnson | Gower | Coal Heaver | In Davies |
| No. 1794. | | | | | | |

Searching for this fellow and finding his baptism record, it is interesting to see that Hugh was not, as I lazily assumed because he came from Yarmouth, a fisherman but was in fact a coal heaver, a chap who manually unloaded colliery boats! Hugh had been born in 1823, bearing in mind Johnson and Gower had been married 15 years by this stage, I can only wonder how many more children

had had the name Gower crowbarred in on their baptism documents! I will say at this point that many transcribers when confronted with Gower, translate it to George, but I did find a Francis Gower, in 1816 and a James Gower in 1819. I then discovered George Johnson (Gowers younger brother) was actually a George Hemblin, later to be corrupted in William's name to Hamelin! There was also a Samuel Gower Johnson, born 1844 and almost certainly related to this crew, he was an Oysterman who died of a heart attack in 1899 and it was the report of his death that alerted me to his presence. It only took a moment's research to discover Samuel Gower Johnson was the son of Gower Johnson, older brother of William Hemblin.

And then with a sickening crunch a flickering lightbulb came on in my head; Hugh Gower was the same age as Gower Johnson, they were one and the same person, William Hemblin was indeed the son of (Hugh) Gower Johnson

Aaaaargh! Blindingly obvious really and chances are you are now as confused as I was when I wasted an excessively long amount of time sorting this out!

Anyway, in spite of all this kerfuffle I can't actually find William Hemblin Johnson's family in 1871, their next appearance was in 1881 when William had left the sea and was working as a brewer's labourer. Harking back to the job of his great grandfather, William Hemblin/Hamlyn/Hamelin Johnson's son, William Gower Johnson was working as a coal hawker, most likely (since he was only 14), probably going through the rows with a hand cart rather than one of the narrow 'Troll' carts especially designed to fit through the narrow passages.



Yarmouth Troll Cart –

More confusion appears with the 1891 census when it appears that some other siblings of William Gower Johnson, Helen and Elizabeth, had been left off the 1881 census; the reason for this is probably connected

with the arrival of young James H about the time the 1881 census was being taken, Helen H and Elizabeth H, then aged 7 and 2, were most likely packed off to relatives. John arrived 2 years later. All very confusing but the 1911 census reveals that Mary actually had 10 children in all, 3 of whom had died at the time of the census. The 1891 census also reveals that Mary was running a grocery concern, probably a small business run out of the front room.

Mary remained at 8, Victoria Terrace/Street for at least the next 20 years, in 1901 it was just Mary, her husband William, still working for the brewery, and baby of the family, John aged 17, at home. In 1911, Mary, aged 68 and her 93 years old mother, Elizabeth Bartram, Mary on parish relief, Elizabeth on a state pension, were rattling around in the 6-room house on Victoria Street, you'd think she would move in some more family or lodgers but perhaps Mary had enough on her plate! Elizabeth had had 11 children, at this stage only 4 survived but since a number would have been in their 60's and 70's – not that surprising really. Crazy as it may seem, London born Elizabeth Bartram had taken up the green grocery some time in her 70's and was still trading aged 81 in the 1901 census! Mind you her husband, rather older than her as she was his second wife, still claimed to be a general labourer when aged 80, anything to keep out of the poor house.

Time to focus back on our William Gower Johnson, father of Harleston Hero Frank Walter. Whilst his mother was running a small grocery and, across town, his maternal grandmother was doing the same, in 1891 William had recently married to Eliza nee Barber from Caister and was living on the

glamorously named Cemetery Road. He was working for a maltster, not too far removed from his father's work for the brewers. At this stage there were no children in the family, they were to have three daughters before their fourth child and first son, William George Johnson Jnr was born. Rather nicely, in 1901, the family had moved into No7 Victoria Terrace/Street next to William Gower Johnson's parents!

By 1911, the couple had produced 10 children, all 9 of the survivors were living in a 7 room house out on the Palgrave Road, the older girls were making nets and William Gower Turner was no longer working for a maltster but was now a coal porter, harking back to his job as a teen ager 30 years previously and his great grandfather's job almost 100 years previously!

It is quite feasible that Eliza and William Gower Johnson had more children, our Harleston Hero, her 11th child was born in 1911, shortly after the census, when Eliza was only 41 years old. William lived until the age of 74, dying in 1941, Eliza, or Emma Elizabeth as her full name was, did not outlive her husband by much, dying aged 77 in 1947, both having survived Frank Walter.

By the time he was 15, Frank was out at work, as a bench boy in a sawmill – scarily dangerous, but I suspect teenage lads had learnt to have greater powers of concentration in those days then they seem to possess now! Like many lads who had grown up with the sea around him and doubtless hearing tales from his grandfather who had started off at sea before settling for family life and a brewers' dray, Frank joined the Navy, enlisting as a boy second class in November 1926. Like most East Anglian recruits, he started off at HMS Ganges (see Allan Ives Denny's for more details about HMS Ganges) and spent 6 months there before being sent off to HMS Vincent on the first of July 1927, part of the first intake of boys to be trained at this newly commissioned establishment at Gosport. The lad did well, was promoted to Boy First Class within two months and at the end of his training his conduct was described as Very Good and his 'efficiency' as satisfactory. He then spent on HMS Benbow and was then transferred too HMS Dispatch during which posting he became 18 and signed on for a 12 year commission It seems that when he joined as a lad at 15 it may have been fair to say he was a late developer, less than 5ft 3 in height he had a reasonably stocky 32" chest and with his grey eyes, fair hair and fresh complexion, probably looked more a lad than a Naval man.

1934. Marriage solemnized at the parish Church of Redenhall with Harleston & Wortwell in the parish of Redenhall 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. |
|-----|------------------|-------------------------|------|------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 80 | April 22 1934 | Frank Walter Johnson | 22 | Bachelor | A.B. Royal Navy | R.N. Barracks Chatham | William Gower Johnson | Coal Merchant |
| | | Dorothy Ethel Frost | 22 | Spinster | — | Redenhall | James Frost | Labourer |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by Frank Walter Johnson or after Banns by me.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Dorothy Ethel Frost in the Presence of us, William Turner, Rosa Dobbins, Herbert Irons, Emma Johnson

In 1933 Johnson volunteered for the Submarine Service and a year later married Dorothy Ethel Frost of Piccadilly Corner Alburgh. Dorothy's father, James Frost was the cousin of William David Frost, a local lad who had emigrated to Canada, and returned to fight for his country in WW1. James' father Giles was the brother of William's father, Ambrose Frost Jnr. William David Frost is remembered on both our war memorial and in our Harleston Heroes biographies. Intriguingly, on the night of the 1911 census, James Frost's wife Laura nee Pearce, was at home on Candler's Lane with her 3 youngest children, her husband James was visiting his parents out at Lush Bush with the three older children!

At the time of his marriage, Frank was at the Chatham Docks; Dorothy, like many working-class Norfolk girls during the previous 70 years, had gone away to London for service. The pair met, they fell in love, they married and they set up home in Dorothy's hometown of Harleston. Most precisely they rented Holly Cottage, demolished to make way for what is now the co-op car park.

I see no point in transcribing all Ruth's stuff – do you have the wherewithal to cut and paste

Whilst the Markwell family (see previous Harleston Hero Biographies) came from a vanishing world as the basket making trade which had supported their extended clan for countless years, was replaced by mass-produced products, the Johnson's also came from a world that was to disappear. Although many of the family had moved out of the rows, they would have still known the maze of small alleys intimately and this would have made a backdrop to their lives. The war and the developers destroyed this unique community, if Frank had survived it would have been a different world he would have come back to.