



Charles Henry Chamberlain

5767244 Warrant Officer, CSM, 4th Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment

He died on 26th February 1942, possibly at sea, aged 34

Charles is commemorated at the Singapore Memorial, in Kranji war cemetery

Back in 1939 Charles Chamberlain's wife, Evelyn P Chamberlain, 8 years old daughter Kathleen and baby June were all living up at the Drill Hall House, a sort of grace and favour accommodation for either the Hall Caretaker or for a leading light in the Volunteers.

Further investigation filled in the gaps on this one. Evelyn and Charles had moved to Harleston in 1935; a slightly uncomfortable court case in 1947 provides a deal of detail of their life in the town. Sgt. Chamberlain and his wife had been let the married quarters at the Drill Hall when Chamberlain had been appointed as the Drill Instructor by the War Office, this in the period before war broke out. Following Chamberlain's death in service in 1943, Evelyn had remained rent free on the premises until 1947 when she was asked to leave as the T.A unit was being reformed, post war. The new instructor, another married man, would need the quarters for himself and his family. There was a crushing shortage of housing after the war, rural areas were less affected than cities but families, desperate for accommodation, were spilling out into the countryside surrounding bombed cities in search of somewhere to live. The case coverage detailed how Chamberlain was not only an instructor, but the caretaker of the weapons and ammunition stored at the Drill Hall. Because he was paid by the War Office, not the TA it was decided that the Chamberlains had no right of tenancy, instead occupying the premises by virtue of services; essentially the accommodation was a tied

cottage and the Chamberlains no longer filled the criteria. Evelyn had already been given 3 months' notice; she was given another 4 weeks to find a home for herself and her two daughters. I hope a kind soul stepped in to help her.



Harleston 'New' Drill Hall, opened 1902, (up behind the station and later part of Blackburn's Builder's Yard), with two of their, then, new horse drawn gun carriages.¹

¹ Early 20th Century printed postcard

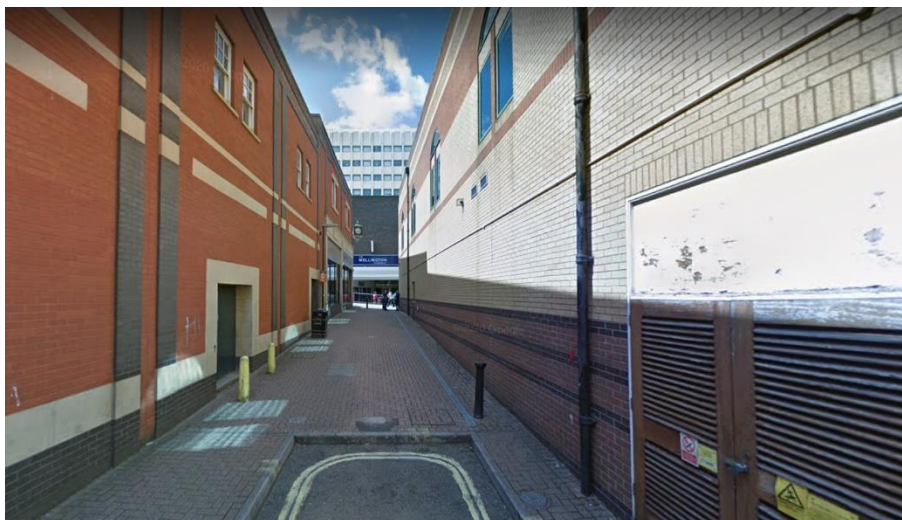
Charles and Evelyn nee Fox had married in Devonport at the start of 1931, the same location as the birth of their older daughter Kathleen P. A second child, June E born in Depwade did not arrive until 1939. It is a little tricky to work who exactly these people were, they may have got married in Devonport but as this was one of the major Naval Bases and had a constant flow of people from all over the country this give little clue to Evelyn's ancestry.

The best bet for Charles' wife seems to be Evelyn Patricia Fox whose father, in 1911, had a General Stores in the thriving settlement of North Camp – yup originally a tented camp on the northern edges of Aldershot, home of the British Army, which during Victorian times had developed into a prosperous area with many business and a number of large houses amongst humbler dwellings. Evelyn appeared there in 1911, the older of two children from Alfred's second marriage, to Elizabeth, a lady originally from Ireland. While Evelyn had been born just across the border in Badshot Lea, Surrey, (the other side of Aldershot), her baby brother had been born in North Camp and an older half-sister had been born in Aldershot.

Evelyn's father Alfred Charles Fox was not born local to Aldershot, instead he came from Kent, with his roots deep in Shepherdswell, or as the earlier censuses referred to it 'Sibbertswold' and in 1871 was, aged 8, the second of 5 children of Michael and Harriet Fox, who were also both born and bred in Sibbertswold. The oldest child was named Alma, a reference to the Crimean War, hinting at a previous military tradition. By 1881, Michael and Harriet had had at least 9 children, the youngest only a month old, 8 of whom were still at home including our Evelyn's father Alfred. Harriet's mother, Mary Beer, was also in the household. The 1911 census reveals that the couple had had 12 children in total, of whom 10 were still alive. Other than a brief period when Michael was a plate layer (taking advantage of the higher wages offered by the railways?) he, like his father before him was an agricultural labourer, the same route his son Alfred set out on.

Mind you, Alfred may have been double logged in 1881 as a chap of exactly the same age, also from Shepherdswell was lodging with 4 other farm workers above the 'crush house' on a substantial farm about 3 miles away as the crow flies. I have not been able to find what a crush house was, I can only assume it to be some sort of mechanical mill, power or animal driven as opposed to wind or waterpower. The oldest son of his employer's household was a 'Farm Engine Driver' so they were at least partly steam driven.

Farm boys were rich pickings for the recruiting sergeant and by 1891, Alfred Fox was a Gunner in the Royal Artillery and had collected himself a wife. Elizabeth O'Shaugnessey born in Aldershot, was most likely the daughter of one of the many Irish troops enlisted in the army at the time. The family, including their 1 years old daughter Alice, were living up in Woolwich presumably attached to the Arsenal. Unfortunately, life as a soldier's wife was hard and childhood mortality was high, although still lower than that of children from inner-city working families. When the family reappear in 1901, they had three daughters under the age of 9, two born in in Woolwich and two years old Ellen, the child who appeared in the 1911 census, born in Aldershot. Alfred had then left the army and was working as a Fruiterer's Porter, living in one of a group of 5 'Broadbent Cottages' on Little Wellington Street in the centre of Aldershot. This is now a bleak wasteland of car parks and backs and sides of featureless monolithic retail premises and offices. Then I have no doubt it would have been tightly packed with fairly basic terraced houses.



Little Wellington Street as it is today – the rest of it is really no more attractive if a little less claustrophobic!

I think it must have been Alfred's wife who was interviewed by the census taker as someone had confused his birthplace of Dover with the county of Dorset! Elizabeth O'Shaugnessey died in 1906, aged only 41 to be replaced two years later by another

Elizabeth, who unlike her Aldershot born predecessor with an Irish name, actually came from Ireland; she was to be the mother of the bride of our Harleston Hero!

Quite how and when Evelyn got from North Camp to Devonport I do not know, nor do I know what her husband Charles Henry Chamberlain was doing in Devonport either! I can't imagine he had enlisted in the Navy, if he had done so he would not have been conscripted into the Army when the war broke out or even been a TA Sergeant Instructor. He was one of the later children of Henry, a horseman on a Norfolk farm and wife Florence. In 1911, after 16 years of marriage they had delivered 10 children into the world, of whom 9 survived; Charles Chamberlain was their ninth child with only Gilbert younger.

Charles' father, Henry, was born into the family of a coachman, Daniel, living and working on the Shotesham Park Estate, a very grand house indeed with 19 servants and a governess looking after the Fellowes family.

Grandfather, Daniel Chamberlain had experienced crashing poverty as a boy, he was the youngest surviving child of widowed Elizabeth Chamberlain. In 1841 she was, quite unusually for a woman, described as an Agricultural Labourer as was Daniel, aged only 10; following the death of Daniel's father, Daniel Snr, all income would have been essential. In late 1847 young Daniel received a prize of 10s as a reward for staying with the same employer between the ages of 12 and 18. Possibly from an even younger age in Daniel's Case.

Norfolk News 16 Oct 1847

CLASS 7.—Agricultural Labourers—who never received parochial relief except in sickness, &c. Fifth prize, 10s. to James Symonds, recommended by Mr. T. D. Aldred, (this man received £2 10s. in 1842.)
CLASS 8.—Lads—who have lived the whole period, between the ages of twelve and eighteen, with same masters, &c. First prize, £1 each, to Wm. Osborne, aged seventeen, recommended by Sir J. P. Boileau; and Thomas Ramsby, recommended by Mr. G. H. Murrell. Third prize, 10s. each, to Daniel Chamberlain, recommended by Mr. William Bateman; George Fymar, recommended by Mr. Matthew Sallett; and



4 years later and by 1851 Daniel, now aged 19 was a stable boy at the Fellowes' country seat, the grand Shotesham Park that was to support him and his family for many years. Also working in the house, in the Still Room, was 18 years old Ann Blazey who Daniel was to marry two years later at the local church – both seem to have confidently signed their names. Ann came from a similar background to Daniel; in 1851 her mother, Hannah Blazey, like Daniel's mother in 1841, was described as being an Agricultural labourer as were her two sons, William and John, aged 14 and 12. By 1861 Hannah was a char – almost as hard work.

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1853. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Shotesham, Wiltshire in the County of Wiltshire

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.
53	October 14 1853	Daniel Chamberlain	of full age	Bachelor	Servant	Shotesham, Wiltshire	Daniel Chamberlain	Labourer
		Ann Blazey	of full age	Spinster	—	Shotesham, Wiltshire	William Blazey	Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church of the Kingdom of Great Britain by me, Charles Thomas, Vicar

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Daniel Chamberlain and Ann Blazey in the Presence of us, William Mann & Co. Mann & Elizabeth Mann

By 1861, Daniel had been promoted to Under Coachman and had three children, the oldest aged 7. 10 years later, Daniel was then an actual coachman and the family were living in the 'Dogs Kennels' along with another family headed by a groom. Mother in law Hannah Blazey was also in the household. In 1881, whilst Daniel was still working as a coachman, he had moved to Mulbarton and was heading a four-generation household: mother in law, himself and wife, 3 sons and a granddaughter. Like his own father and namesake Daniel died young, in 1883 aged only 52 leaving his wife with the younger children to raise. In 1881, Ann and Daniel had a young grandchild in the house, 20 years later and history was repeating itself; in 1901 our Harleston Hero's oldest sister, 2 years old Lily was staying with widowed Granny Ann Chamberlain and a married older uncle.

Informal fostering arrangements were quite normal at the time but I suspect Lily Chamberlain was staying with her Grandmother purely due to the fact that her parent's household had another 4 children as well as the parents and a lodger to help make ends meet.

So, briefly, two young people both from rural backgrounds (although in Evelyn's case one generation removed) met in the Naval town of Devonport. Evelyn's father, originally from Kent had spread his wings in the Army, Charles' father had stayed true to his agricultural roots in Norfolk. Both families would have had tales and memoirs of hard times but this couple were modern 20th C folks. I suspect that Charles had joined the Army at some point and on finishing his term, had got employment as a Sgt Instructor with the Harleston Territorials. He could play the bugle, sounding the Last Post and calling Reveille at funerals in the late 1930's.

It is right that Charles Henry Chamberlain is remembered on our memorial although he may have only been in the town 4 years and neither he nor his wife were from the area. His work as an instructor in the Territorials was important and doubtless if war had not broken out he would have remained many years raising his children in the town. He was one of ours, if only for a short while; it is a shame his wife and children had to leave the town, after 12 years, to find a home in Norwich as life got back to normal after the war. Indeed, Chamberlain's name would have barely been carved on our Memorial before his wife and daughters were evicted from their home at the Drill Hall behind the station.