



## Michael Francis Farley

G/37736 Private, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment

He was killed in action on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1917 in France, aged 29

Michael is buried at Regina Trench Cemetery, Somme, France

Unlike so many of the men commemorated on our War Memorial, Michael Francis Farley, although he married a local lass, had only the shallowest roots in this area. He came from a large family headed by a harness maker, Michael Farley Snr who had come across from Dublin to Kent sometime during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Michael Snr met and married a lass called Jane who came from Whitstable, home of the famous oysters on the Kent coast but their first child was born 20 miles inland in Ashford in 1882. They went on to have 9 children over a span of 23 years, all of whom were still alive in 1911. In 1891, when they were still in Folkestone, another two girls, aged 10 and 6, were being fostered in the household. At this time, the practise of fostering street or abandoned city children with respectable families in the country or by the seaside where good healthy air abounded was quite common; many Barnardo's children were fostered out this way; there were other, smaller, independent establishments like the Dickleburgh Home for Waifs and Strays that followed similar practices.

Although Michael Jnr's oldest sister was born in Ashford, the next four children, including Michael Jnr, were born back on the coast, but a little further round in Folkestone. Shortly after the 1891 census the family picked up sticks again, but this time moved to the other side of London; Michael Jnr's four younger siblings were all born in Sutton, Surrey.

Michael Snr was a skilled tradesman and at this time when most transport relied on horsepower, a man whose skills were always in demand. With a steady income coming in, his children did not have to be forced out to manual or unskilled work at an early age; the oldest son James, was at age 17 working for a clothiers, a trade the second son, our hero Michael Jnr was also to follow. The third and fifth sons also went to work in shops, but as grocer's apprentices, the fourth son became that very modern thing, a private chauffeur. I wonder if Michael Snr ever suspected that those petrol driven machines would, eventually, render his trade obsolete?

No. 86	Banns of Marriage between	
	<i>Michael Francis Farley Bachelor</i>	
	<i>of the Parish of Sutton Surrey</i>	
	<i>Gertrude Elizabeth Vincent Spinster</i>	
	Were Published as follows:— <i>of this Parish</i>	
1st, on Sunday	<i>6<sup>th</sup> July</i>	by <i>John Clegg</i>
2nd, on Sunday	<i>13<sup>th</sup> "</i>	by <i>Forbank Packer</i>
3rd, on Sunday	<i>20<sup>th</sup></i>	by <i>John Clegg</i>

Somehow Michael Jnr wound up in Harleston; drapers assistants and their allied trades were quite a mobile population at the time. Whilst, in 1913, he married local lass Gertrude Elizabeth Vincent at Redenhall, I do wonder if the couple had actually met in the south-east as Michael's home parish was given as Sutton, where his

family had been residing for a number of years. I would not be surprised if they may of returned to Sutton after their marriage so Michael could return to his work as a shop assistant.

1813. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of <i>Rodenhall with Harleston and Westwell</i> in the County of <i>Norfolk</i> .								
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.
130	<i>August 6<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Michael Francis Farley</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Shop Assistant</i>	<i>Sutton, Surrey</i>	<i>Michael Farley</i>	<i>Saddler</i>
	<i>1813</i>	<i>Gertrude Elizabeth Vincent</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Spinster</i>		<i>Rodenhall</i>	<i>George Vincent</i>	<i>Labourer</i>

Married in the *Parish Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Church of England* - by *George Vincent* - or after *Banns* by me, *George Vincent* *ATB Creed*

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *Michael Francis Farley* and *Gertrude Elizabeth Vincent* in the Presence of us, *Edith Mary Vincent Robert James Vincent Daisy Olive Vincent* *officiarius*

The parents of Michael Jnr's wife, George and Rosa Vincent nee Etheridge, came from Fressingfield across the border in Suffolk but by 1891, the family were in a house at the

bottom of Mendham Lane. George Vincent was described as a 'Letter Carrier' not sure what the subtle difference between that and a postman was! By 1901 the family had extended to 5 children whilst next door but one, a 15 years old Rosa Etheridge was working as a servant; also coming from Fressingfield I think we can assume she is some sort of relative of Gertrude's mother, Rosa Vincent nee Etheridge.

Gertrude's mother, Rosa was the daughter of Robert Etheridge, a wheelwright working for Robert Feaviour in Fressingfield in 1871 out in Fressingfield. Robert Feaviour's grandson, William Clancy Feaviour, appears next to Michael Farley on our war memorial having died 8 months after Michael. Like her daughter 30 years later, in 1881 Rosa was working in service far from home, in her case out near Seven Oaks in Kent

In 1911 Gertrude's father described himself as a Job Master. I had to look this up (having confused it with 'Gang Master' which then as now means a man in charge of a group of labourers) but basically this is a man who hires out horses and equipages by the hour as it were; he was the Victorian equivalent of a car rental company! Gertrude was not at home for this census, but it transpires that her slightly older brother, Robert was a tailor - I wonder if he effected the introduction between clothier Michael Farley and his sister Gertrude? She was away for this census, working as so many girls of her age did, as a servant in London. Gertrude was one of 5 servants, in a 14-room house, 15 Kensington Park Gardens. These were, and indeed still are, very grand houses.

The couple went on to have a son, Leonard George Farley, baptised in 1916, when his father was still a civilian, his work as a clothier, would imply he dealt in readymade, off the peg clothes as opposed to made to measure, made to order clothes. Michael and his wife most likely returned to Sutton after their marriage, it appears that they may have wended their way back to Harleston or more likely Gertrude returned to the bosom of her family whilst her husband was serving away. It is quite feasible that the young couple and their baby made a special return trip to Harleston for young Leonard's baptism; Michael Jnr enlisted in Camberley but in later records he gave his hometown as Harleston. If this is what happened, I have no doubt both Michael and Gertrude were pleased she was back home to enjoy the support of her family whilst her husband was away at war; at the moment this is all rather vague but seems highly likely.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of <i>Rodenhall with Harleston and Westwell</i> in the County of <i>Norfolk</i> in the Year One thousand <i>nine</i> hundred and <i>sixteen</i> .						
When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents' Names.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Christian.	Surname.			
<i>1916</i> <i>June 27<sup>th</sup></i> <i>Born</i> <i>9<sup>th</sup> April</i> <i>1916</i> No. 529	<i>Leonard</i> <i>George</i>	<i>Michael</i> <i>Francis</i> <i>Gertrude</i> <i>Elizabeth</i>	<i>Farley</i>	<i>Harleston</i>	<i>Clothier's</i> <i>Assistant</i>	<i>ATB Creed</i> <i>Prot. Creed</i>

We can work out approximately how long Michael had served before he met his untimely end: with a gratuity of £8 10s it seems he had only been 7 months in service, i.e his little lad Leonard would have been about 14 months old, only a toddler. This ties in with his writing a standard soldier's will in mid-November 1916. By then he would have done his basic training, and either be freshly posted abroad or just about to be posted; Michael's wife, Gertrude, was his sole legatee.

18  
WILL.

In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to my wife Gertrude Farley Mendham Terrace Harleston Norfolk

Signature Michael Francis Farley  
Rank & Regiment Private 37736 Sussex R.I.F.  
Date 19/11/16

The will gives Gertrude's address as Mendham Terrace, Harleston, this combined with Michael enlisting in Surrey tends to confirm that his wife had returned to the family 'for the duration'.

Michael's body was one of those that were exhumed from one of the many impromptu burial sites scattered across Europe and beyond, although his grave was properly marked and logged in the battalion records. The majority of those who were exhumed by the Canadian Burial Party (who dealt with Michael's remains, in April 1919) rested below simple wooden crosses. The men's bodies were relocated to the Regina Trench Cemetery, a number of those who had previously been unidentified in the melee of war being identified by those who removed and reburied their bodies. A grim job and those who undertook it have never really received the recognition of the work they had to do conscientiously and thoroughly in order to be able to give a name to the bodies hurriedly buried by comrades or other work parties in the preceding years and thus to give some

form of consolation to thousands of relatives hitherto left in the limbo of ignorance.

Unfortunately, I have not really been able to track down what happened to Gertrude and her son. Having met very few Farley's myself (actually none at all that I can remember) I was surprised to find several Leonard George Farleys of the right age and several Gertrude E Farleys, also the right age to match our mother and son. There is of course the added joy of Gertrude having possibly remarried; a few Gertrude E Farleys, and indeed Gertrude E Vincents married within a likely time period but none leap out as being definitely 'our' Gertrude.

It has proven very difficult to find original records of the Farleys: Farley does exist as an English name but also as an Irish name from a different root entirely. The Farleys were Irish and may well have been Catholic; although in Victorian time official prejudice against and impairment of Catholic Worship was reduced, after centuries of persecution Catholic records were held centrally as were those of the Church of England or even of the disestablished churches

So, my apologies to any descendants or relatives of Michael Francis Farley. He came from a decent hard-working family of Irish extraction. This family had ambled gently around the south east although Michael married and had a son baptised in Harleston. He joined the Army in Camberley, the same county his family had settled in and he had been partly raised in. At this distance, unless more information comes to light, I cannot say if the Farleys moved back to Surrey and his wife's family asked that he be remembered on our memorial or if widowed Gertrude remained in Harleston for some time after the close of war and it was at her request that Michael's name became engraved on or memorial. Either way, his name is upon our memorial and we are proud to claim him as one of ours.