



## William Henry Peck

25397 Lance Corporal, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917 in France, aged 32

William is commemorated on the Arras Memorial at Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery

Whilst there had been Pecks in and around Harleston for many years, William Henry Peck came from a family that had made their way up from Suffolk and were several rungs higher on the social ladder than the Pecks that had been living around Harleston previously.

In 1911 William's parents, Henry and Martha Peck were living in a degree of comfort in an 8-room house on Broad Street although I have not identified for certain which house, the censuses indicate it might have been Broughton House, or possibly the adjacent one. I have a directory from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which has Henry living at Crown Villa, today a house in the Old Market Place but maybe not then! Henry had come from Aspell in Suffolk, a rural background but with his father acting as a Farm Bailiff

(sort of middle management land agent) he would have been used to a degree more comfort than the average farm worker; in fact, in 1861, when Henry was 7, their household boasted a live-in house maid. A tradition of caring for one's elderlies was already in evidence as also in the household was the maternal Grandmother, blind Lucy Hall from Ixworth.

In 1871, Robert and Mary Ann Peck's 3 oldest children, all boys and including Henry, were in shop work; the oldest son a draper, middle son Henry (like the next son down) was a grocer's apprentice. Unlike today, when most shop work consists of loading pre-packed items onto shelves or passing them over a bar code scanner, back in the Victorian times being a grocer was a skilled trade. One had to learn how to assemble mixes, store various goods, slice, present and deal with numerous fresh and perishable goods along with early preserved goods. This was a respected profession!



By 1881, Henry was at the start of a long stay in Harleston appearing on Broad Street with his bride of almost 2 years, Martha Snelling who came from nearby Tivetshall.

Henry was then a Wine Merchant's Clerk. A hard-working fellow, 10 years later Henry was a merchant's manager but was also doing some trading on his own account and with 4 children seems to have already settled in Broughton house where they remain for years to come. This house is now slightly awkwardly divided into 2 dwellings but at the time would have been a pleasantly commodious establishment!

*Broughton House  
Broad Street*



By 1901, Henry's elderly parents, Robert (91) and Mary (81) Peck, were living next door to him; not too surprisingly by 1911 (when Henry Peck was a General Accountant and Commission Agent), his mother was a widow. She at age 92 had moved in with her son and family.

The couple had six children in their 32 years marriage, five of whom were still living in 1911 and all of whom were born in Harleston. Only the youngest, 18 years old Lilian May Peck was still living at home in 1911; William Henry their only son was actually living up in Loughborough, pursuing his trade as a shop assistant in readymade and bespoke men's outfitters. However, in the same census a certain young lady, Cissie Bessie Grice and her sister Mary Elizabeth, had come down from Norwich and were helping their uncle, the widowed John Edwards, a baker on the Thoroughfare. Although the sisters were born in Norwich, they had strong local roots but also a strong hereditary health weakness expressed on the male side.

In 1881, Cisse and Mary Grice's grandfather, George Grice Snr was living on Harleston Common; in 1861 George and his wife Elizabeth were living at the 'Toy Shop' in Brockdish. By 1871 they had returned to Harleston, living on the Bungay Road, in the cottages by the factory, with their five children before making their way to the Common.

In 1887, George Grice I came to an unexpectedly sudden end, the poor old boy 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 Common'<sup>1</sup>. George Grice I 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' but, presumably on arrival at the Common, he was given some brandy 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 at least two of George Grice I's sons, making at least three generations haunted by heart issues.

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<sup>1</sup>The Ipswich Journal 19 Feb 1887

Shortly after the 1881 census one of those sons, Ephraim Grice was working as a currier, or leather curer, for a furrier in Norwich, we know this as his name is mentioned in passing when he bears witness for his master in an 1883 case of theft. By 1891, Ephraim, still in Norwich on Synagogue Street had a Hackney born wife, by 1910 they had popped out four children including Mary Elizabeth and Bessie Cissie who were living with their uncle John Edwards in Harleston in 1911.

In both the earlier censuses, the family were living in Synagogue Street an area that suffered badly during WWII air raids and I believe was finally demolished in the 1960's. This photo found on the internet shows quite a modest terrace but, with a small front garden and some detailing around the porch, a far from basic dwelling.

*Old family photograph c. 1925 of Synagogue Street in Norwich, now demolished. From family of Stephen Harper-Scott*



This modest but comfortable life came to a sudden end in 1905 with Ephraim's unexpected death at the age of 44. At his inquest, wife Mary said he had been in good health except for occasional shortness of breath. The evening of his death he had been teaching a young lady to ride a bike but did not appear to be unduly fatigued. He then went off to walk his niece home from a house in Mountergate Street. Although the niece, Madeline Fisk, was staying at Mountergate St, for a few nights past she had been sleeping at her uncle's house. They had just left the house when Ephraim returned to collect a jug he had forgotten, his niece heard a thud, calling out she heard no reply but a groan. On Madeline fetching a light, she found Ephraim on the floor and, in spite of neighbours coming to assist, poor Ephraim died almost immediately.

During the inquest, the newly widowed Mary Elizabeth Grice nee Woods gave evidence that not only had Ephraim's father fallen down dead in the street, (to be precise The Common, but the suddenness of his death was more relevant than the location), but that two of Ephraim's brothers had also died suddenly. One I believe was brother George Jnr the other might have been William who was actually living up in Wallsend and very much alive. Flying a bit of a kite, perhaps William LeGrice had badly blotted his copy book, legged it as far away from the family as he could, and a

#### **WIFE ATTACKED AT NORWICH.**

At Norwich, on Thursday afternoon, a grocer named William Le Grice, carrying on business at the corner of Vauxhall Street and Horace Street, attacked his wife with a poker and a hatchet, inflicting such injuries as necessitated her removal to the Hospital. A man intervened, whereupon Le Grice made off, but was subsequently given into the custody of the police.

story of his early death had become believed within the family? Very confusing!

*Evening Star*  
16 Nov 1900

It appears that no one at the inquest was aware that Ephraim's grandfather had also died prematurely, as described by Ephraim's father, George Grice Snr on the day he, himself, died. It is no great surprise that the postmortem discovered congenital, probably hereditary, heart disease. 'The heart was very small and very flabby and the aortic valve was defective.'

Mary Grice's new career was as a boarding house landlady, in a seven roomed house on Chalk Hill

where in 1911 her three younger children, a sister and a niece were sharing with three boarders. Not particularly interesting except, in 1911, one of the boarders was a certain John Mackenzie, an unmarried professional footballer playing for Norwich City F.C. This Scottish footballer's place of birth was Douglas, Lanarkshire so not a local lad who had worked his way onto the squad! In fact, he appears to have been the backbone of the club who 'can always be depended on to do his best for his club'.

Under the circumstances it is quite understandable that two of the orphaned Grice girls had been sent off to their Harleston relatives to earn some money and help out their uncle.

Henry Peck's only son, William married younger sister Bessie C Grice in 1915: William was 30, his wife was 22. I wonder if young Bessie caught his eye when he was visiting home. As was traditional the marriage took place in Bessie's home city of Norwich.

Although, I believe that in 1916 William Henry Peck was living at the Red House on the junction of Wilderness Lane and London Road, when, 18 months after their marriage, a son, William John Henry Peck (Jnr) arrived, the child was born in Smallburgh. This is possibly where some of Bessie's relatives were living and able to support the young wife about to have her first baby whilst her husband was away fighting on the other side of the Channel. This lad was born in the first 3 months of 1917, his father died in the fourth month of 1917 and may well have never met his son. Charles was one of the many men whose actual end is shrouded in the confusion of the war, his death was assumed and he has no known final resting place.

Poor Bessie had lost both her father and her husband however she did remarry, in 1925, to an Albert Juler who appeared in the 1939 census with a very modern job as an Electric Petrol Pump Fitter. Between them they had had a little girl Jean E Juler; also in the household was Bessie's son, William Peck (jnr), and Bessie's mother, Mary Grice, aged 72 and helping in the house.

William Peck Jnr, 22 years old in this 1939 register, was a stenographer; hopefully this skill would have kept him in a more technical and safer role in the upcoming war. I could find no record of his not surviving the war so I do hope he went on to have a long and happy life and managed to avoid the hereditary heart issues that dogged his grandfather's family through at least three generations.