



## Alfred Barham Johnson M.M. (Military Medal)

22435 Private, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in action on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1918 in France, aged 37

Alfred was buried at Tannay British Cemetery, Thiennes, France

1881. 28 <sup>th</sup> August Born:- 5 <sup>th</sup> May, 1881. No. 455	Alfred Barham	Alfred William Johnson Mary Maria	William Johnson	Redenhall, Groom	J. J. P... Rector
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Alfred Barham Johnson first appears in the 1891 census as a 10-year-old lad in the Depwade Union Workhouse – now a rather nice development out on the Norwich Road. His life had begun steadily enough, he was the third child of four born to Mary Maria Welton and Alfred William Johnson, although his father, a groom, went by the name of William. Slightly oddly, whilst Mary had her three sons with her, the whereabouts of her oldest child, Julia, who would have then been 13 is a bit of a mystery; I strongly suspect the young girl was already out working as a domestic servant somewhere although precisely where remains unsolved at the moment!

(Alfred) William Johnson and Mary Maria had married in in late 1877; although, according to the 1881 census, William had been born in Syleham, and Mary in Peasenhall, both across the border in Suffolk. In this 1881 census they were living next door but one to the Yew Tree Public House in Redenhall. William was a Groom, Mary Maria must have been heavily pregnant with Alfred Barham, our Harleston Hero and life was looking rosy. Mary had named her oldest son and second child after her younger brother Herbert William Welton; this young man was also living in the household! Mary was to pop out another child after Alfred and was basically all set to pop out one baby for each year of her marriage. Sadly, that marriage ended very suddenly only a year later, when her husband died aged only 40 in 1882. I hope he is one and the same as the W. Johnson who was part of the very successful Harleston Cricket Team in 1876!

*Norwich Mercury*  
19 Jul 1876

With four children aged 4 and under and no husband, it is not too surprising that Mary and her three younger children were in the Workhouse by 1891.

### HARLESTON.

CRICKET.—On Saturday the fifth match of the present season was played by the Harleston Club on the Wilderness Ground. The opponents were an eleven of Diss, who were, however, quite unable to hold their own against the superior play of the Harleston team. The home team scored in the first innings 70, 19 being made by W. Johnson, 14 not out by D. Wright, and 16 by W. Boyce. Against this the Diss scored 43, the highest score, B. Bishop's 15. In the second innings the home team scored 85, of which Mr. A. Pontifex, by some splendid play, made 36 not out. The Diss eleven made 37 in its second attempt, thus losing the match by 85 runs. This is the fifth time in which the Harleston Club has during the present season won a victory, and is the result of having two or three good all round players, who can invariably be depended upon.

Claiming birth in Syleham does rather confuse matters as to who this Alfred (William) Johnson, father of our hero, actually was. If he had not been claiming Syleham birth, I would have assumed him to be the William Johnson, son of a brick layer who was living at the foot of Duke William Lane (now known as Candles Lane) in 1861. This seems increasingly as 10 years later, by which time the family were at Crowes Yard (possibly Keeley's yard) and William, the only child still at home (aged 30!) gave his trade as ostler, tying in with him being a groom when he appeared as a married man 10 years later.

Assuming these to be one and the same man, William was born and raised in Harleston; although his mother Maria/Mary nee Scales was born out in Pulham, his father George (one of a high number of bricklayers living in the town in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century) was also a proper Harleston lad.

The family appear on Tower Hill, close to the old mill up on Jay's Green, in 1841 when there were already 6 children in the family, aged between a year and 15 years of age. There would have been 7 but I am not sure where Naomi, baptised in 1829, has got to. To add to the confusion, young Samuel from 1841 had, by 1851, become an Elijah much the same as Alfred William later become plain old William and another Samuel entirely now appeared in the family. It is difficult to tell if this was down to the census taker being confused or down to the parents mixing and matching with first and middle names! 10 years later and the family were in much the same area having added another 3 children to the family, the youngest of whom was our William, only a few months old in the 1851 census. With an ever-expanding family it is understandable if George went out to top up the pot with a bit of poaching!

*Norwich Mercury*  
5 Oct 1859

Our hero's mother Mary Maria Johnson nee Welton had been born in Peasenhall and raised south of the border in Suffolk appearing in the 1861 census as the second of three children of Samuel and Susan Welton nee Copin a fairly footloose agricultural labourer. I say footloose but that is purely by the standards of the time, neither he nor his wife were born in Peasenhall and his children were all born in various parts of Suffolk.

By 1871 Mary Maria was a house servant for a middl-sized farmer at 'Little Lodge', Framlingham, essentially an isolated farmhouse in the middle of nowhere; I wonder where and how she met her husband to be?

Whilst we can't tell if the family had an extended stay in the workhouse after the death of William, until the children were old enough to go out to work, freeing their mother to do the same or if we just 'caught' them institutionalised for a short period but Mary and William Johnson's children seem to have been ambitious for themselves within the limited opportunities available to them. If they had spent some time in the workhouse, they would have received a thorough, if limited education, possibly more so than their peers in small rural schools with the lure of work on the land always calling.

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### HARLESTON.

**AT THE petty sessions held on Friday last, before the Revs. A. M. Hopper and G. France, George Roberts, of Harleston, was charged, on two informations, with trespassing in search of game. Fined £3, and 22s. costs.—George Johnson, of Harleston, charged with a similar offence, was fined 10s., and 15s. costs, or in default committed for fourteen days' hard labour.—Wm. Sharman, of Wortwell, charged with trespassing in search of conies, was fined 1s., and 14s. costs.—John Adams, of Weybread, farmer, charged with gross cruelty to a pony, in Brockdish, was fined 20s., and 17s. costs.—Robert Minister, of Brockdish, dealer, charged with being drunk, was fined 5s., and 12s. costs.**

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5 Lee Terrace Lewisham

*Julia Johnson's 1901 workplace – spot the top of the basement windows where the servants would have lurked during the day time!*

By the time of the 1901 census, the family had well and truly scattered, our suspicion that Julia had gone into service is reinforced by her appearing in this census as a 23 years old parlourmaid working for a retired East Indian Merchant in Lewisham. Rather grander than the farmhouse her mother had been working at 30 years earlier! The widower had three unmarried daughters, in early middle age, all born in various parts of the far East and all still at home. I suspect these ladies were destined to remain spinsters.



The oldest son, Herbert, then 22 was also up in London, following the rather shady calling of Billiard Marker; not an iffy job in itself and requiring a reasonable amount of numeracy but a job that included pushing the sales of booze (commission paid), probably a spot of illicit gambling, a bit of impromptu pick-pocketing in some of the lower taverns, definitely a lot of smoking and possibly obtaining female company for the gentleman players; this was a job for the young, personable and not too picky fellow. The wages were low, so tips and commission were a major part of the income stream for a Billiard Marker. Chances are Herbert was employed at 'The Enterprise' only next-door-but-one to the house he was living in. The houses to the side of the pub do look rather splendid but the reality was they were overcrowded albeit not so badly as some other districts. In 1901 there were three households living at No 65 Tachbrook Street: 3 people in two rooms, 6 people in three rooms and another family of four with three boarders, including our Herbert, in the remainder of the building. This row of houses has since disappeared, not due to the bombing this area suffered from during WW2 but due to the destructive efforts of redevelopers.

Like his older sister, the middle of the brothers, Alfred B Johnson had also gone into service, in his case as a footman indicating he was both presentable and of a decent stature. Miles away from London (or Norfolk), in 1901, he was working at Shot Lodge, Oxfordshire for Artillery Captain Anthony Thornhill. A modest establishment, the husband, wife and 8-year-old son had a housemaid, a lady's maid, a kitchen maid, a cook a coachman and our Alfred, the footman to look after them.





The youngest of the children, Samuel, was working down in Essex – in a little enclave of East Anglians far from home. The household was headed by Mr and Mrs Strutt from Eye and Mendham respectively with Mr Strutt's mother also in residence, along with a mixed bag of lodgers: a stationer's assistant, a book seller's assistant, a journalist/writer and our jobbing gardener from Harleston, Samuel Johnson. Oh yes and a 50-year-old visitor, Eliza Rouse, also Harleston born!

*128 Varty Road, Home of  
Herbert and Alfred Johnson in 1901*

Shortly after the 1901 census Herbert married to a local lass from Lambeth, got himself a proper job as a Tram Driver and settled down to raise his children in Tottenham. In their 3-room half of a 7-room dwelling the couple had 3 children, surviving of the four born to them, plus brother Alfred, still a man servant but quite far from the grandeur of 10 years earlier. In the larger half of the house a tripe seller was living with his wife, his brother and his child.

Herbert was not the only one of the brothers to have embraced the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and modern transport; his younger brother Samuel had given up the gradening and also moved to London, as a domestic chauffeur. He was living in Acton in the household of a 3 generation 6 person family along side 2 other lodgers, both working for a motor manufacturer!. Oh, and there was also a nursemaid to help out with the family's baby.

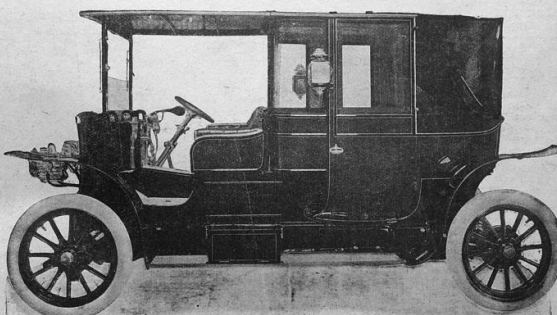
*6 Nemore Rd, Acton  
Samuel's 1911 home*



I was intrigued as Acton is hardly famous for its car production although I believe in later years Renault had a plant in the area. Chances are that Samuel's fellow lodgers were working for the New Engine Company Ltd who operated between 1905 and 1921 and also made aeroplane engines!.

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Whilst her children had well and truly flown the nest, their mother Mary continued to putter around the Waveney Valley living as a house keeper with an elderly farm labourer and his son, a non-domestic gardener. This son was much the same age as Mary who was still only in her late 40's; this arrangement may have been purely a working one or may, as was very much standard practise at the time, have been a polite fiction for something rather closer.

10 years on, with her three boys up in London, Mary's oldest child and only daughter Julia had well and truly returned to her home town and was raising her family on the London Road, round by the old Three Horse Shoes pub, roughly where the petrol station stands today. Married 5 years to Frederick Burgess, local groom/gardener, with three children to her name and both her mother and her mother-in-law in the household, this was quite a cosy set up. I say Frederick was local, in fact he too had come from south of the border, and was a child of his mothers' first marriage.



I am not sure how much of a success Frederick's mother's second marriage was; her new husband was a bit of a boozier as pointed out by the magistrates in 1880 when he was in court, again, for being drunk in charge of two horses and a wagon. Also, somewhat embarrassingly for all concerned, Frederick's younger half-brother, George Nichols was, in 1890, at the age of 18 charged with assaulting a local child – details not given, so it could have been anything from a slap round the ear



upwards! He was obviously found guilty as in the 1891 census this young man was one of 65 prisoners in St Helens Street Prison, Ipswich whilst his parents and half-brother carried on in Weybread, by 1901 Fred and his Ma had moved to the house in Harleston that was to remain their home. Meanwhile, young George married, settled down and had moved to Redenhall

*Courts, Town Hall and Prison  
St Helen's Ipswich*

3 years after this census when Mary and her oldest and only daughter were happily settled in Norfolk and her three boys were scattered around London, making steady headway in the world, tragedy struck the Harleston house hold with the death of Frederick Burgess in May 1914, aged only 50, less than 2 months later WW1 was declared and this loss paled in comparison.

I am at the moment a little unclear as to when Alfred actually enlisted, he would have been 33 when war was declared and although older than many, with no dependents he may well have joined up for the adventure. At the time he gave his address as Piccadilly, one of the more select parts of London, indicating he had found another good posting as a footman. Alternatively, the upper classes rather thought it their patriotic duty to chase their male staff off to war, perhaps Alfred was a reluctant soldier. A third option of course is that Alfred, like so many others, waited until he was called up and went philosophically off to do his best. Either way, I am glad he wound up serving with the Norfolks, his county Regiment, and was certainly in the field by September 1916 when he received a wound stripe.

Later on in his military career, Alfred received the Military Medal, a true honour for bravery in the field, this being Gazetted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1918.

We know the family remained on the London Road as this is the address given when mother Mary Johnson chooses the epitaph for Alfred's Memorial, 'until the daybreak'. Mary did move to Suffolk at some point she died there in 1931. We also know that Julia went on to marry Ernest Aldous, in 1919 and went on to have a long and presumably happy marriage as when she was buried at Redenhall the respectable age of 68 in 1947 (living at Station Road Tivetshall) her bereaved husband chose a double plot as her final resting place.

So, with this being the only town with which the Johnsons could really claim a sustained link, with both Alfred's mother and sister still being in the town after the war ended, why does Alfred's name not appear on our memorial? There are men with, it could easily be argued, more tenuous links with the town, was this a considered decision by Alfred's family or did he just fall through the cracks. For whatever reason he is not marked on our memorial it is fitting we remember him today.



By a strange coincidence or possibly a very distant link (branches of families did slide up and down the social scale), also in the Norfolks but rather at the opposite end of the social scale was Cambridge Graduate Geoffrey Barham Johnson, Captain, 7th Norfolk Regiment. Geoffrey Barham Johnson was also killed in action, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1915.