



Bertie Wottell Wittaker

25394 Private, 2nd Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He died on 8th January 1917 at Mesopotamia (Iraq), aged 31

Bertie is commemorated on the Amara War Cemetery, Iraq

Bertie grew up in a large family and when I say 'large family' I do not just mean him, his parents and his siblings. When Bertie made his first census appearance, in 1891, the adults in the household at Delf's Farm, Redenhall included: his parents, his widowed paternal grandmother and a paternal uncle. As well as 6 other siblings there were also 2 teenaged cousins, neither the children of the uncle who was sharing the household! Now, it is a little tricky to tell but it seems from circumstantial evidence that 'Delf' was a temporary name for the much more well-known Coldham Farm – the relevance of which will become apparent later on.

In brief, in 1891, Delf Farm was housing 4 adults and 8 children. I think under the circumstances we can understand why it took Bertie's parents, Walter and Elizabeth, over 20 months to get around to baptising him!

No. 500	1887.	11 th April	Bertie	Walter	Whittaker	Redenhall	Farmer	S. S. Perouing
		Born	Wottell	Elizabeth				Rector
		14 th Aug.						
		1885						
No. 567								

MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of <i>Hempnell</i>		in the County of <i>Worfolk</i>		in the Year 1887	
<i>John Whittaker single Man</i>		of the Parish			
of <i>Hempnell</i>					
and <i>Mary Lake single Woman</i>		of the Parish			
were married in this <i>Church</i>		by <i>Reverend</i>		with Consent of	
		this <i>seventeenth</i>		Day of	
<i>January</i>		in the Year One thousand eight hundred and		<i>Twenty seven</i>	
		By me <i>Reverend John Rice</i>			
This Marriage was solemnized between us {		<i>John Whittaker</i>			
		<i>Mary Lake</i>			
		<i>John Lake</i>			
In the Presence of {		<i>Charlotte Whittaker</i>			
No. 106.					

Going all the way back to 1841, we find a John Whittaker Snr running a Lime Kiln in Stoke Holy Cross. John and his wife Mary nee Lake had four sons: William, Samuel, John Jnr and Walter. This youngest son, Walter, was to become our Harleston Hero's father.

At the time, with transport difficult and costly, you dug your pit to retrieve your raw materials and set up your kiln by your pit. These pits were dangerous, the sides were not scientifically tanked out, instead the diggers would tend to

rely on experience and occasionally push their luck. Norfolk was (and to some extent still is) dotted with ponds that filled the old marl pits. Way back in 1847, John Whittaker, another employee and a 16-year-old lad by the name of Gooch were excavating such a pit for either clay or (more likely bearing in mind he had a lime kiln) chalk when the side collapsed and completely buried the lad. So

deeply was he covered that it took the men two hours of desperate digging to extricate the boy by which time he was, of course, long dead. Accidental death.

Moving on to 1851 and John Snr, whilst still keeping on the lime burning part of his business, had now started farming, still In Stoke Holy Cross. A fifth son, Charles, a daughter, Charlotte, (heavily outnumbered by 6 brothers) and a sixth son had been added to the family. This last son, aged 3, would have been born when his mother was 41 and had been named Last! I wonder if that was a prayer or a lament! Whichever, they were proved to be wrong as by 1861 a seventh son, little Wortwell, had been added to the family, 7 years old in 1861, his mother would have been about 46 when this son was born, he was the actual 'last' child!

Young Last broke the mould and unlike all his siblings struck out away from farming and became a watchmaker, winding up with a shop and a large family in Aylsham, next to the Black Boy's hotel. He kept close to his rural roots though, being caught poaching in Hempnall in early 1878!

By the time of the 1861 census, John Snr (now claiming birth in Newton Flotman) had moved his family to a 121 acre farm in Hempnall, birth parish of his wife. Employing only 1 boy, I think we can safely assume that whilst the youngest two children were scholars, the three adult sons and one adult daughter were all working on the farm. It was this year that a bit of a feud between John Snr and the Pearce family seemed to start; a Robert Pearce was convicted of stealing two of Whittaker's chickens, 7 years later a Joshua Pearce and his wife Mary were fined 7s each and bound over to keep the peace for 6 months (for an extraordinary sum of £10 per head) following threatening behaviour to Whittaker.

In 1871 John Snr explicitly states that he was employing his 3 sons as well as 2 boys. One of these sons, Wortwell Whittaker got himself caught up in a bit of a brawl in 1874. A group of rural fellows had been to an auction at Saxmundham, doubtless thirsty work not helped by a further evening retirement to the Chequers. A general melee broke out, the upshot of which was:

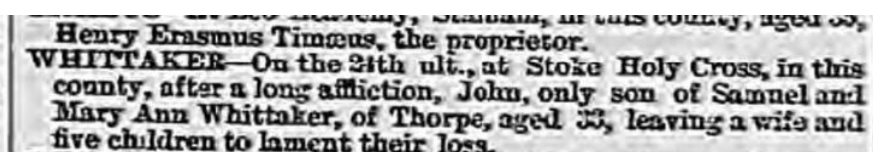
Samuel Flint summoned Robert Dade the elder, Robert Dade the younger and Selim Dade for assault; Robert Dade the elder, Robert Dade the younger and Selim Dade summonsed Samuel Flint; Selim Dade summonsed Hastings Syer, Hastings Syer summonsed Selim Dade, Selim Dade also laid information against Wortwell Whittaker for assault and William Buck for throwing a stone.

Untangling this lot took 5 hours of the court's time, most of the cases were dismissed including that against Wortwell! Let's be honest, drunken fracas, general confusion, some bruised dignity and a few headaches the next day!

Don't be too judgemental, this was a time when settling differences with violence was much more normal than it is today! In fact another of the sons appeared in an intriguing snippet in 1877; James Atwill, an excise officer, was charged with assaulting James Dix of Stoke (8s and £1 4s costs) whilst Charles Whittaker, farmer, of Hempnell, was charged with assaulting James Dix's wife, at Stoke, on the same day, also 8s and £1 4s costs. The Dixes were a respectable middle-aged couple, in 1871 James was a well-established farmer in charge of 320 acres, 8 men, 3 boys and 1 woman! I would love to know the story behind that little snippet!

So, what happened to the Lime Kiln? I think it no co-incidence that the Lime Kiln in Holy Cross was being run in 1861 by a completely other (Cousin) John Whittaker, more or less the same age as John Whittaker Jnr. This young man, Brick and Lime Burner, living with his sister, had been born further north in Thorpe St Andrew and I think we could moot him being a nephew of John Snr. via John's brother Samuel Whittaker. He is doing well, only 24 and employing 5 men and a boy at the

kiln. Mind you his father Samuel Whittaker was also a farmer/lime burner so I suspect Cousin John had been raised in the trade and



Henry Erasmus Timæus, the proprietor.
WHITTAKER—On the 24th ult., at Stoke Holy Cross, in this county, after a long affliction, John, only son of Samuel and Mary Ann Whittaker, of Thorpe, aged 33, leaving a wife and five children to lament their loss.

parachuted in to run this business owned by the older members of the family. Cousin John Whittaker may have been a fairly rough chap, in 1866 he agreed to pay £5 for a case to be dropped against him brought by a chap whose retriever had been injured by two of Whittaker's dogs which, in spite of being known to attack men and animals, he allowed to roam freely. I am afraid that Cousin John died tragically young, one of several in the family to do so. Having married local lass Elizabeth Tillet in 1862, he passed away in October 1870, aged only 33, and already the father of five children. Yup, 5 children in 8 years of marriage! By this time, he had, like his uncle, moved into farming and his splendid wife Elizabeth took over the St Sebastian farm and carried on leaving the neighbouring Lime Kiln to be run by others. In a nice little bit of symmetry, also in 1862, Cousin John's sister Elizabeth Whittaker married Elizabeth Tillet's brother William!

This Cousin John Whittaker was involved in another tragic accident in 1867. At the time he was running a farm at St Holy Cross occupied by his father, Samuel Whittaker, whose main focus was on another farm at Thorpe. Another, younger chap, William Dye aka Whiffler (nick names were ubiquitous and necessary in this time when half the family was named after another half of the family!) went out shooting rabbits. Whiffler Dye was poking around at a burrow, involving him being low to the ground, Cousin John saw Dye's black hat moving at low level and mistaking this hat for one of the black rabbits that lived in the plantation promptly shot at it. It is a little vague as to whether the two had gone out together; Whittaker had the right to shoot rabbits there, Dye did not, or whether this was just a tragically bad co-incidence of timing. Verdict – accident.

HEMPNALL, NORFOLK.

MESSRS. SPELMAN have received instructions to SELL BY AUCTION, on SATURDAY, the 25th day of JUNE, 1864, at Twelve for One o'clock in the Afternoon, at the Norfolk Hotel, Norwich, in the following or such other Lots as shall be determined on at the time of Sale, and subject to such conditions as are attached to the particulars, the following

DESIRABLE ESTATE.

Lot 1.—A Valuable SMALL FARM, situate at Hempnall, in the County of Norfolk, and comprising Ten Inclosures of productive ARABLE, and One Inclosure of PASTURE LAND, containing altogether 61a. 8r. 23p.

Lot 2.—All that excellent Piece of LAND, called "The Allotment," situated at Hempnall, near the Horse Shoes public-house, and containing 3a. 0r. 30p., or thereabouts.

Of Lot 1—54a. 2r. 11p. is of Freehold tenure; 1 Root Copyhold of the Manor of Tasburgh Uphall (Fine arbitrary); and 7a. 0r. 11p. Copyhold of the Manor of Hempnall (Fine arbitrary).

Of Lot 2—1a. 3r. 34p. is of Freehold tenure, and the remainder, Copyhold of the said Manor of Hempnall.

The entire property is in the occupation of Mr. John Whittaker, who is under notice to quit at Michaelmas next.

The Tenant will show the property and plans thereof, and particulars and conditions of sale may be had of the Auctioneers, at their Offices in Norwich and Great Yarmouth; and of Messrs. Stamp and Jackson, Solicitors, Hull. (5826)

John Whittaker Snr's Hempnall farm was sold out from under him in June 1864 but, since he was farming a Hempnall farm of matching size in 1871, I think the new owners kept him on when they bought the farm, indicating he was a good tenant, even if he occasionally had a drink or three too many – got nicked for being drunk and incapable whilst in charge of a pony and cart in Ber St, Norwich in 1877.

John Whittaker, farmer, Hempnall, was charged with being drunk and incapable of taking care of a pony and cart in Ber-street on Tuesday evening last. He was fined 5s. and 4s. 6d. costs.

Norwich Mercury
10 Aug 1877

One can't help but wonder if he was also one over the eight when he did the Victorian equivalent of a hit and

run, head on collision in late 1859. When trying to overtake another vehicle he hit Mr Browne's oncoming pony and cart on the New Lakenham Road with his own light weight horse and gig. Whittaker, being somewhat injured himself, carried on merrily down the road, leaving Mr Browne prone in the road suffering from the injuries that were to kill him shortly after. Although it was decided Browne's death was accidental, the fact Whittaker neither stopped to render assistance nor come forward to give evidence (a passing drover reported him to be the driver) did not go down well at the inquest.

Norfolk Chronicle
14 Jan 1860

Adjourned Inquest.—The inquest touching the death of Mr. Brown, landlord of the Clarence Harbour Inn, was resumed before Mr. T. H. Palmer, deputy coroner, on Monday last. A drover of Hempnall, named John Pitchers, stated that he was present when the accident occurred, and that the person driving the vehicle which came into collision with the deceased's cart was Mr. Whittaker, of Hempnall. Mr. Whittaker, he said, was at the time passing a cart in front of him, and could not see Mr. Brown's cart, which was coming in the opposite direction, until it was too late to avoid a collision. Mr. Whittaker was himself severely hurt, and drove off as soon as he could. The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death," but strongly censured the conduct of Mr. Whittaker in driving off without making the least inquiry about the other party injured, or giving his own name and address.

John Whittaker's youngest son, Wortwell Whittaker also died young; July 29th, 1878, aged only 25. Slightly oddly, the notice in the local newspaper does not give his name, merely describes him as the youngest son of Mr John Whittaker, farmer. I am beginning to wonder if John Snr was a somewhat forceful personality! This is even more surprising as by then Wortwell was a married man with two children of his own.

This turned out to be a double tragedy; 4 months after Wortwell's death, his wife, Eliza nee Banthorpe, was buried in the same church, at Hempnall. It seems the Whittaker family took on Wortwell and Eliza's children as in 1881, when the family first appear at Coldham Hall, (2/3 the size of the Hempnall farm) the household consisted of John Snr and his wife Mary nee Lake, John Jnr (an unmarried son), another son, Walter and his wife, Elizabeth, 3 of Walter and Elizabeth's children and two more of John Snr's grand-children John III and Ellen Matilda, both born in Hempnall.

Eastern Daily Press
2 Aug 1878

WHITTAKER—July 24, at Hempnall, Wortwell, youngest son of Mr. John Whittaker, farmer, in his 25th year. He leaves a wife and two small children to mourn their loss.

These last two, John III and Ellen Matilda, Wortwell's orphaned children, also appeared in Walter's 1891 household. These censuses reveal that Ellen would have been a babe in arms when her mother died whilst her brother would have been barely a toddler. It seems that when Walter inherited the tenancy of the farm, he also inherited his mother, his older brother and his niece and nephew! Slightly surprisingly, John III married a Gloucester farmer's daughter and wound up down there, working as a Jeweller's Assistant; perhaps uncle Last the watchmaker had taken on his nephew as an apprentice! His sister, the other of Wortwell's orphaned children, Ellen Matilda (Maggie) died in the spring of 1892, at the Norwich and Norfolk Hospital after a 'long and painful illness'. It could be this is code for T.B which may also have taken her parents.

It took a while, but the penny finally dropped; Bertie's slightly odd middle name, Wottell, was actually a corruption of his deceased uncle Wortwell's name. Local folks will know how to pronounce 'Wortwell' and not only had census takers struggled to transliterate Wortwell Whittaker's name over the years (the truth only outed with his marriage certificate) but I suspect, one step removed, at Bertie's Christening, 8 years after Wortwell's death, and possibly with limited literacy Wortwell became Wottell!

In 1901, the family had become tighter, only parents and children but there were 3 more children; the three oldest boys were working on the farm whilst the oldest girl was dressmaker. Not really a great family for the nuptials, by 1911 out of the 12 children born in their 37-year marriage, 9 survived and of those, 7 were living at home. One of the daughters, Gertrude, had died in early 1905 after an operation for an 'internal trouble' that had been carried out up at the Norwich and Norfolk Hospital. Aged 24, she was not, as one might have expected, buried at the Redenhall Church but at Hempnall. This was most likely the last resting place of her grandfather, her uncle Wortwell and various other members of the family. Walter, father of Bertie, came from Stoke Holy Cross, his wife Elizabeth nee Goodrum from Tacolneston (or possibly Bunwell), and only the second son, Edward had been born in Hempnall.

Gertrude was unmarried at the time as were all but one of the 8 other children old enough to marry by 1911! In fact, it was only the second son, Edward who had tied the knot and left the family home. He appeared in the 1911 census with his wife, Emma nee Flegg, their 4 years old son Jack, and Emma's mother, the elderly widowed Mary Flegg. Edward was by then a farmer in his own right, living and working in Denton.

4 of the other 8 surviving children were working at the farm, 2 of the girls were living at home but working in a drapers shop and the youngest, at 14, had no employment. The other child not at home was Florence, then aged 25 and one of 13 female assistants living over Bonds on Ber Street. This was a dept store that started from a single shop in Ber Street in 1879. Robert Bond slowly expanded his store over the years until stretched to the corner of Ber Street. The splendid store that emerged in the 1930's was destroyed during the blitz although it was trading within days from old buses in the store's car park. It was the grandson of Robert Bond, working in his father's architectural practise, who designed the new store that rose from the, literal, ashes of the original one and it is this store that will be familiar to generations of Norfolk shoppers! The store continued to trade under family management until taken over by John Lewis in the 1980's, finally losing its independent name in 2001.



Bonds in the early days



Bonds in the interwar years as Florence would have known the store



Clockwise from above left Bonds in the 30's, in the aftermath of the Blitz and in its post war re-incarnation. Below left, an amazing composite photo by Nick Stone on Flickr



The Whittakers were, as so many were at the time, Tenant Farmers. The tenancy of Coldham Hall which had passed from John snr to his son Walter, was described as a desirable, small farm of 91 acres. Walter must have been a fine farmer to support his family on this modest sized farm but at least he did not have to pay much for labourers, instead employing his own family. Perhaps it was this lack of cash that had hampered the family's marriage prospects?

REDENHALL

WEDDINGS

Steventon — Whittaker

The wedding took place at the Parish Church on Boxing Day, of Mr. Harry Steventon, second son of Mr. and Mrs. Steventon, of 49, Frederick Street, Werneth, Oldham, Lancs. and Miss Joan Whittaker, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. Whittaker, of Villa Farm, Alburgh. Both bride and bridegroom served in the Forces during the war, the bride serving in the W.A.A.F. for 4½ years and the bridegroom for six years in the R.A.F.

The ceremony was performed by Canon B. M. Pickering, Mrs. Bryant being at the organ for the hymns "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden" and "How welcome was the call."

The bride, given away by her father, wore a white figured satin gown and carried a bouquet of pink carnations.

The matron of honour was Mrs. Helen Appleton, the bride's friend. The bridegroom's brother, Mr. Frank Steventon, was best man.

A reception was afterwards held at Alburgh Village Hall and on leaving for the honeymoon, the bride travelled in a brown check suit and camel coat, with brown accessories. Many presents were received.

For whatever reason the delays in marriage had occurred, it looks if a few weddings followed the 1911 census: Annie to James Sporle in 1913 when she would have been almost 30, Laura to Edwin Casewell in 1919 when she would have been 28, Ellen to George Murray in 1919 when she would have been 26, Eva to Ernest Alexander in 1928 when she would have been 33, Walter jnr to Edith Cox in 1919 when he would have been 41. So not a family to rush into marriage but there must be some descendants somewhere in the area?

Diss Express
3 Jan 1947

In 1919, the farm was sold from under Whittaker; he seems to have moved on to a farm at Bush Green out in the Pulhams.

**REDENHALL AND ALBURGH,
NORFOLK.**

JOHN SYMONDS has received instructions to Sell by Auction,
AT THE ROYAL HOTEL, NORWICH,
On Saturday, June 7th, 1919,
at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, in One Lot, a very
DESIRABLE SMALL FARM,
known as
COLDHAM HALL,
with pleasant standing Farm House, Ample Farm Premises, and
91 ACRES
of good Arable and Pasture Lands, with a large proportion of fine Pastures, and now let to Mr. Walter Whittaker, whose tenancy expires at October 11th, 1919.

Vendor's Solicitors,
Messrs. STEVENS, MILLER, & JONES,
Bank Chambers, Norwich, and at Long Stratton and Kenninghall.

This is a very typical family of the time: working hard to earn a living on the land; tough manual labour; getting by; marrying into other families of tenant families and looking after each other when needed. Like other families, they lost relatives to illness and disease long before their three score years and ten were up, buried them, mourned their passing and got on with life. They may have been involved in more accidental deaths than the average family but farming, digging marl and piloting horse driven vehicles (even when sober) always had an element of risk. With a little bit of

Four cases under the Military Service Act came before a special sitting of the Harleston Bench on Friday, the magistrates in attendance being Mr. H. J. Yallop and Mr. W. R. Smith.

Bertie Whitaker, Redenhall, was represented by Mr. Miller, of Norwich, who admitted the receipt of notice to appear on March 27th at Britannia Barracks, Norwich. The young man he said, was "starred," and was under the impression that he would not be required to leave his father, who was 77 years of age, and had only another son to assist him on 91 acres of land. Defendant had been doing essential work on the farm, ploughing, drilling, and milking. In answer to the Bench, defendant said he had no objection to serving, but he was anxious to see the farm work completed. He was ordered to be handed over to the military escort.

poaching on the side and the odd bout of fisticuffs to resolve disagreements they were again typical of their time. Unusually the girls did not go into service but aimed a little higher for the less arduous work (still involving long hours stood on your feet) in Draper's shops.

Diss Express
12 May 1916

By the time Bertie was called up his elderly father was not far off 80 and Bertie was expecting to carry on working on the family farm along with another brother doing

essential work. Unfortunately, the magistrates felt differently, Bertie was handed over to the military escort and went off to start his very brief military career.

Had Bertie survived would he have married, would he have continued working for his father or would he have struck out on his own like his older brother?

As it was, Bertie died far from home in the alien environment of Iraq, Mesopotamia as it was then known, and was buried alongside another 3,700 troops. Due to the current political instability in the region it is not advised that these soldiers' last resting place is visited, instead the troops buried out in the region continue to be honoured and remembered by means of a Roll of Honour, available for public viewing at the CWGC offices in Maidenhead.