



William Websdale

C/7564 Rifleman, 10th Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corps

He died on 4th October 1917 in France

William was buried in St Sever Cemetery, Rouen, France

Now, you would think a name like William Websdale would be very easy to track down, familiar enough to be spelt by the record taker and recognisable enough to be safely transcribed but not so common that there are dozens of chaps to wade through with this name. However, as it transpired, I have had to just take a best guess as to who this chap was and, if I have got it wrong, I apologise to all those parties concerned and their families.

It was a bit of a struggle to find out who this fellow was, we had no date of birth, no parent's names nor names of wife and children. What we did know is that he had some connection with Linstead, a few miles from Metfield, his sole legatee was a Lucy A Peacher and, apparently, he lived in Harleston when he enlisted, although it is also possible that Harleston was the town where he rocked up to a recruiting sergeant and asked to be enlisted.

The candidate I settled on was William Websdale, baptised in Tibenham on March the 3rd 1894, although this baptism introduced the first red-herring as William was actually 3 when his parents got around to baptising him; he was born in early 1891, appearing in his first census as 'infant boy', one month of age! Another William Websdale, son of William Websdale, was also born in Tibenham in 1891, this lad appearing up at Goose Green, Winfarthing in 1901 but he seems a slightly less likely candidate.

1894	March	3	William	James and Ellen	Websdale	Tibenham	Laborn	Mr Thompson
No. 491			Son of					Vicar

The arrival of William meant his parents, James Websdale and Ellen Saxby, now had five children aged 10 and under; par for the course at the time. James' wife's name 'Saxby' you might think to also be fairly easy to track down. Not at all, in various transcribed censuses the family appear as Sexsby, Sealey, Selby and (most surprising of all) Newbery – oh and a few variations on these options when the front 'S' has been misread as an 'L'!

James Websdale and Ellen nee Saxby had married in Tibenham in 1886; although Ellen came from across the border in Metfield they both gave parish of residence at Tibenham indicating Ellen was working in the area. His mother's home town of Metfield gives the link with Linstead that we were looking for. Both parents came from Agricultural backgrounds, Ellen's family were possibly slightly rowdier than James', or maybe less good at not getting caught!

1856. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of *Tribhall May* in the County of *Norfolk*

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
104	Novem 21 st	James Websdale	full age	Bachelor	Labourer	Tribhall May	John Websdale	Labourer
		Ellen Saxby	full age	Spinster	—	Tribhall May	Charles Saxby	Labourer

Married in the *parish church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Church of England* by me, *J. Daniels*

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *James Websdale his & mark* In the Presence of us, *Charles Saxby his & mark*
Ellen Saxby his & mark *Jane Bather his & mark*

Ellen's family had certainly endured a degree of poverty we would find it difficult to imagine today. Back in 1841, Ellen's grand-parents Robert Saxby Snr and Sarah nee Barnaby, were struggling to raise 5 children on the wages of an Agricultural Labourer in Metfeild. At this point their oldest child at home was 16 (and would have been born when his parents were only 19 or 20 years of age), the space between the siblings indicate some older girls were away in service, and some younger children may have died in infancy.

10 years on, Robert Saxby Snr and wife Sarah were still plugging away with only their two younger children at home, the older one, Robert Jnr, being a pauper picking oakum. A thankless task that shredded the fingers but ensured that 'Outdoor Relief' was both avoided and slightly funded by the efforts of the recipients. Also, in this household on the Harleston Road was mother-in-law Susan Barnaby, a pauper, whilst next door was another family of Barnaby's. I think we can presume this is one of Susan's sons, sister to Sarah Saxby nee Barnaby and he too is struggling. Although Jonathan Barnaby is a middle-aged adult male, he too is a pauper picking oakum, a task usually reserved for women and young lads. Perhaps he is suffering from ill health?

Meanwhile, Ellen's father Charles Saxby next door but one to his father's household has started married life with Mary Anne and they already have two children, one aged 2 and one only a month old and he too is an agricultural Labourer picking oakum. In fact, there is a whole row of houses all inhabited by paupers picking oakum, all around the village more households are relying on outdoor relief earned by this degrading task.

The 1850's were indeed a time of Agricultural hardship, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars there had been a general decline and Suffolk was hit harder than most; this was a time of huge exodus to the city of London, where builders were particularly in demand, to the industrial cities of the North, to feed the insatiable greed of the Industrial Revolution and also to the New Worlds of Australia and the Americas.

However, the Saxbys stayed put and 10 years on, in 1861, father Charles was back at work, not too surprisingly poor baby William, a month old when most of his village seemed to be teetering in poverty, seems to not have survived but another 4 children had been added to the household, including Ellen who was to go on to marry James Websdale in Tibenham.

THE BROTHERS SAXBY.—Frederick Freestone v. Charles Saxby. This was a claim of 3*l.* 10*s.* for balance of rent of cottage at Metfield.—Defendant said he only owed 3*l.*, as plaintiff had charged 4*l.* 10*s.* per year instead of 4*l.*—His Honor, believing defendant's statement, made an order for 3*l.*, and on asking how the money could be paid defendant said he had six children and his wife was dead. His earnings were 12*s.* 6*d.* per week, and it cost him 11*s.* per week for flour. To pay 10*s.* in six weeks, 2*s.* per month for six months, and then 3*s.* per month.—The same v. William Saxby.—In this case plaintiff claimed 2*l.* 17*s.* for rent of cottage.—Defendant said he never paid more than 2*l.* 15*s.* per year for the cottage, which plaintiff said he was willing to take. Defendant said he had eight young children. Had 12*s.* per week, and paid 12*s.* per week for flour. Judgment for 2*l.* 15*s.* at 2*s.* per month.—The same v. Robert Saxby.—Plaintiff claimed 18*s.* 6*d.* for rent, which defendant admitted, and said he had one child living, and had buried seven.—Ordered to pay 18*s.* 6*d.*; 10*s.* in six weeks, and 4*s.* per month afterwards.

A small article in the paper of 1867, when the landlord is dunning brothers Charles, William and Robert Saxby for rent at Harleston Court reveals how parlous finances still were. Widower Charles Saxby, 6 children to support, William Saxby 8 children, Robert Saxby 1 child living, 7 children buried and all with as much money going out as the head of the house was earning. No wonder children missed school in those days to be sent out to the fields to earn pennies clearing stones or scaring birds.

Not too surprisingly in 1868 Charles remarried to a younger lady, Eliza Kemp who had the energy to look after his children still at home as well as her own child that she had brought into the marriage.

With money so tight it is not surprising that Charles was hauling one of the village lads off to court in 1872 over a matter of less

than half a crown. However, in those days, whilst being quite lax about casual violence, courts took theft very seriously and the miscreant would up with seven days hard labour.

I am afraid some of Ellen's brothers were also a little wayward; in 1870 Robert Saxby, only 15 years of age, got send off for three months hard labour after snatching some money of an 8 years old girl. One - cowardly, two – dumb! However, when one realises the crashing poverty of the family, the temptation is understandable.

Four years on and Robert, his brother and a few other lads from the village were back in court for ganging up on and harassing a lass passing through Withersdale. Still, with age comes wisdom and after this the family seem to keep themselves clear of the courts!

and passed.
Robert Revell, 13, Metfield, was charged with stealing $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. thread, and 2*s.* 5*d.* in coin, the property of Charles Saxby, of same place. — Convicted and sentenced to 7 days imprisonment with hard labour.

A YOUNG HIGHWAYMAN.

Robert Saxby, of Metfield, a juvenile of the age of 15 years, was brought up in custody of Policeman Reeve, charged with having on the 12th March, at Linstead Magna, feloniously stolen fourpence-half-penny, the moneys of one James White. On the day named a little girl, about the age of eight years, daughter of White, had been delivering letters at Linstead Magna, as is her custom on a Saturday, of which Saxby appears to have been cognizant. She was returning home when she was accosted by the youngster, who gave her a slap on the face, put his hand into her bag and took out the money and coolly walked off. He afterwards absconded, but was ultimately apprehended.

Prisoner pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to be imprisoned in Ipswich Gaol, and to be kept to hard labour for the space of three calendar months.

*was fined 10*s.* and costs 7*s.*—*
William Sadd, 19, Robert Saxby, 19, Geo. Borrett, 18, Alfred Borrett, 15, and William Saxby, 17, all of Metfield, labourers, were charged with assaulting Anna Girling, of Redenhall, on the 4th inst., at Withersdale, by stopping her upon the highway, pulling her about, and using disgusting language.—Sadd was fined 10*s.* and costs 7*s.*, in default 14 days' imprisonment with hard labour; the others were each fined 5*s.* and costs 7*s.*

I cannot find Ellen in the 1881 census but a few of the Saxby lads chose to take the classic rural way out of poverty in Victorian times and enlisted. In 1881, George Saxby, was a Driver in the Exeter Barracks – country lads, used to the ways of heavy horses were ideal for the artillery, drawn as it was by horses although it seems that the Exeter Barracks were mostly used by Cavalry Regiments. The Exeter Barracks, built in 1794 were used by the Army for 200 years before being redeveloped for housing. 10 years on, in 1891 and Ellen's brother Charles Saxby was out in Yarmouth billeted with a fisherman's wife along with some of his comrades, part of the Prince of Wales Militia.

Meanwhile Ag. Lab. James Websdale and his wife Ellen nee Saxby got married life off with a rapid



start and by 1891, 13 years after they married, they were the proud parents of 5 children including infant William (as yet un-named).

Their children's entries reveal that the family had moved to Pulham sometime in 1881 and then back to their father's hometown of Tibenham by 1888. By 1901 two more children had been added to the family,

one had moved out giving a household of 8 squeezed into the 4 room Red Cottage in Tivetshall.

By 1911, the family were back in Tibenham again with just the parents and three sons including our William Websdale (agricultural labourer) in the household although it was still mightily crowded as the family seem to be in a three-room house plus kitchen – essentially a two up, two down. Still in spite of undoubted overcrowding and some hard times, in the 23 years of marriage, of the 8 children they had brought into the world, only one had died.

HEMPNALL and FRITTON, NORFOLK.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
By J. SHARPE and SON,
 At the King's Head Inn, in Hempnall,
 On Monday, the 26th day of August, 1892,
 At Three o'clock in the Afternoon.
 (Unless previously disposed of by Private Contract,
 of which due notice will be given),

THE FOLLOWING
Valuable SMALL ESTATES,
 IN LOTS:—

Lot 1. A Desirable COTTAGE, with yards, gardens, and excellent orchard, a new barn, stable, cow-house, and out-buildings, and 10 acres of superior arable and pasture land, adjoining Silver Green, in Hempnall, and now in the occupation of Mr. T. Flint.

Lot 2.—An excellent Double Cottage, brick and tile, situate in Hempnall Field, with large yards and well-planted gardens, now in the occupation of Mr. J. Read and — Peacher.—All Freehold.

We have now traced William's family from the early 19th Century up to the eve of war, but who was Lucy A Peacher? Well, Peacher turned out to be another of those names that you would think would be perfect to follow but no – Packer, Beacher, Peatcher, Peacker, Vacher and some other variations I have not yet worked out as there are some years that I have completely lost the family!

Peacher was a far from common name – perhaps a corruption of the French ‘pêcheur’ or fisherman, either way I could only find two Peachers living in Norfolk in 1841: William Snr, aged between 15 and 20 and living in Hempnall, James aged between 20 and 25 and living in Denton, both live-in Farm Servants – no Peachers to be found in Suffolk at all!

It was James Peacher (Peacham) who appeared in the 1851 census living in Hempnall with a wife 5 years his senior and four children aged 8 and under, the youngest of whom, William Jnr was to become the father of Lucy A Peacher. By 1871 James and three of those sons were all working as Agricultural Labourers, by 1881 son William was married with two little girls, unfortunately the younger died young and in 1891 William and wife Sarah had two daughters Eliza and our Lucy A Peacher, in 1901, William had gained the title of Hrseman – more skilled and better paid than just a labourer, 2 boys had been added to the family, Lucy was working as a servant, but living at home whilst her older sister Eliza was working a cook and living out.

Roll on 1911 and this is when things get a little tangled, Eliza’s illegitimate 8-year-old son was living with William and Sarah, Eliza was 6 years married to a labourer in Lowestoft with two of their daughters and her sister Lucy A’s 11-month-old illegitimate child, Laura Irene, in her household whilst Lucy was also in Lowestoft but working as a live-in cook for a Physician and his family. It seems that Laura Irene was one of twins, her sister being Lucy Tatiana Peacher – both being baptised at the same place and the same time, but little Lucy dying very shortly after their birth in 1910. Sadly, little Laura died only a month or so after this census but one cannot help but wonder who was the father of the little girls.

Whilst it is perfectly possible William, who would have been 20 when the twin girls were born, was their father it seems more likely he left all to Lucy due to a later relationship – perhaps he was the father of Peggy H Peacher born to Ms Peacher in Romford Essex, perhaps Lucy was the mother of this child born in mid-1917, a few months before William Websdale’s death, perhaps they had planned to marry on his next leave, perhaps . . .

It might be argued that this young man’s links with Harleston were too tenuous for us to remember and mark his passing – it is debateable whether he ever lived in Harleston or merely enlisted there. However, I have not been able to find any memorial to him other than the one erected by the CWGC at the St Sever cemetery extension where he lies amongst almost 8 and a half thousand other soldiers who passed through the Rouen Hospitals before, like him, succumbing to wounds or illness or gassing. Perhaps it would be more appropriate if his sacrifice was marked at Tibenham but under the circumstances I feel it only right that the town of Harleston adopt him as one of theirs.