



## Henry Preston

13251 Driver, 'C' Battery, 4 Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery

He died on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917 in France, aged 33

Henry was buried at Dernancourt Cemetery, Somme, France

The Preston family had roots in hard times; John and Ann Preston nee Rodwell (probably) had moved across the border from Weybread and Fressingfield respectively to raise their family in Pulham Mary appearing there in 1841 with their first-born son, Robert aged 1.

More children were to follow, Emma, John Preston Jnr (robustly described as an imbecile in the 1861 census), George Preston Snr, and Elizabeth. Unfortunately, John Snr died in 1856, aged only 48 leaving widowed Jane Preston to appear in 1861 struggling to raise the three children left at home, John Jnr a 15 years old 'imbecile' George Snr, at age 11 already working as a Farmer's boy, and 9 years old Elizabeth – a Sunday Scholar getting the minimal free education that was then available. Oldest sister Emma was a 19 years old dairy maid working for a large farmer on the Tivetshall Road, Oldest brother Robert had probably already joined the Army, appearing as a 32 years old Private in the Coldstream Guards at the Chelsea Barracks in the census of 1871.

According to the 1881 census, Robert married a lady 18 years his senior, his younger brother George Preston Snr's wife, Maria Allen, was also older than her husband but only by 6 years. George Preston Jnr was the first child of George and Maria Preston, baptised in Pulham Market on the 20<sup>th</sup> february 1871, about a month after his birth on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January. He appears with his parents, George and 'Last' Maria Preston on the Tivetshall Road in the census of that year when he was but 2 months old. His father, as might be expected, was an agricultural labourer but his mother, slightly more unusually was a gloveress! This marriage was slightly on the 'better late than never' side of romance as it had taken place almost exactly 3 months before the arrival of George Jnr.

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1870 Marriage solemnized *at the Parish Church* in the *Parish of Pulham St. Mary* 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.
179	October 25	George Preston	23	Bachelor	Labourer	Pulham St. Mary Norfolk	John Preston	Labourer
		Maria Allen	24	Spinster		Pulham St. Mary Norfolk	John Allen	Labourer

Married in the *Parish Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Established Church* after Banns by me, *Spencer Sellon*.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *George Preston* and *Maria Allen* in the Presence of us, *Charles Tyrrell* and *Elizabeth Preston*.

Both George Snr and Last Maria (a name she uses again in 1881) were literate, at least sufficiently so to sign their names on their wedding certificate.

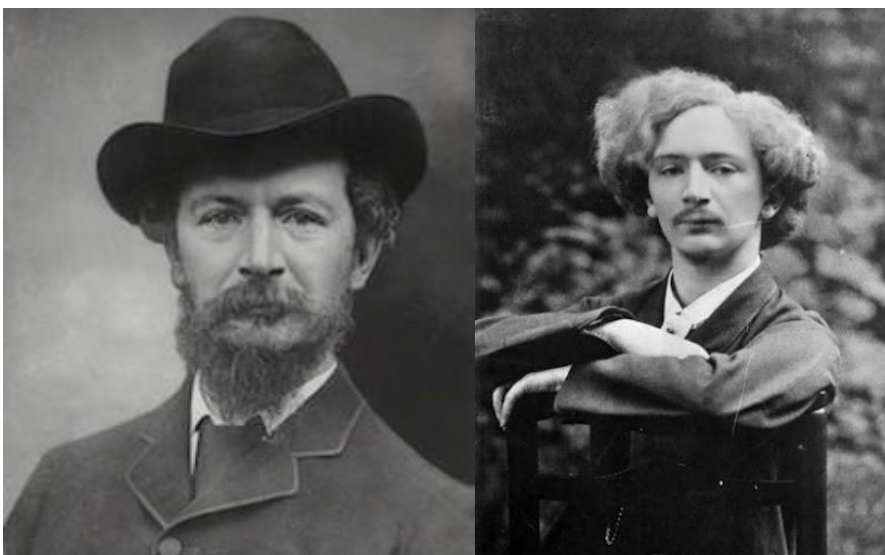
The family was to be small, in 1881 as well as George Jnr, there were a 3 years younger brother Robert (named for his uncle) and 3 months old baby Elizabeth, named for her youngest aunt who 10 years earlier was working as a kitchen maid in a large establishment in Catton. Elizabeth Preston Snr did well, winding up in London running a Coffee Lodging House at 42, Minories although it might have been a little on the rough side as the Odgers were all labourers or seamen!

As the rest of his siblings were going off to work, marrying, raising children, what had happened to John, the lad with learning difficulties? Well, by 1881 his mother Ann had returned to Suffolk, Pixey Green, and got remarried to Charles Kemp, 6 years her senior. This elderly agricultural labourer had not only taken on Ann but also her son, John Jnr, described in this census as an idiot, rather than an imbecile! I hope the elderly couple enjoyed the years they had together as by 1891, twice widowed Ann Kemp ex Preston nee Rodwell and her now 46 years old dependant son John Jnr had moved back to Pulham, into the house of her son George Snr and his family. Ann was on the Parish whilst John Jnr was working as an agricultural labourer, perhaps under the close supervision of his younger brother John Jnr. Young Henry Preston, 8 years old, had been added to the family; this lad was the one to fall in WW1.

By the time we get to 1901 though, things had hugely changed. George Preston was now a widower and living by himself whilst his brother John had removed to the Pulham Workhouse; described as an agricultural labourer there was no mention of his intellectual impairment. Where the other members of the family had got to is a bit of a mystery but in 1911, Harleston Hero Henry popped up again but in London, Holloway.

He was then a Postman working for the GPO and had been married for 2 years to Martha Emma Ralph, no children and 7 years his senior – the Preston men did seem to like the older woman! Martha was the Middlesex daughter of a Factory Engine Fitter, a skilled job. By 1891, 15 years old Martha was still at school like her 5 siblings still at home, supported by her father's wages as a metal turner, most likely at the nearby Woolwich Arsenal.

However, the girl needed to earn a living and by 1901 she was the cook at the Rose and Crown on the High Street North Wimbledon. Perhaps it was there she met her husband to be, the young postman Henry Preston from Rural Norfolk. The Rose and Crown is one of the oldest pubs in Wimbledon and was the favourite hangout of Algernon Swinburne, enfant terrible and gifted but shocking poet of the late Victorian Era. He had his own drinking chair at the Rose and Crown and although I would not think for one minute, he ever stuck his nose in the kitchens, perhaps the cook, and wife to be of Henry Preston, delivered the odd plate of food to the then elderly poet and artist.



Swinburne died 5 years before the outbreak of WW1, the slaughter of which would provoke poetry more shocking in its honesty than anything Swinburne could have imagined.

*Swinburne as Martha Emma Ruth would have known him and in his youth.*

Although Henry and Martha had no children in 1911, three were to be born in rapid succession, so by the end of 1914 and a few months into the war, Kathleen, Henry Jnr and Martha Jnr had been added to the

family. Kathleen may have died in 1915, aged just 3 but without getting the actual death certificate we cannot know for sure that this is one and the same child.

The Preston family moved to Durrants Rd during or just after the war period and there they stayed reappearing there in the 1939 register. Martha Emma had not remarried, younger daughter Martha Jnr was obviously a bit of a go-ahead girl, albeit one in her mid-20's. Following in her maternal grandfather's footsteps she was secretary to an Engineering Firm who then went on to join the Land Army. Only son, Henry Jnr, had followed his deceased father and his maternal grandfather and joined the GPO as a Telephone Enquiry Engineer. Doubtless he would have been diverted into war work if not the Military Forces within a few months of the register.

I do not know if Henry Preston is commemorated on a memorial close to his Holloway home or his wife's home town of Ponders End to which she returned after the war, the Imperial War Museum has no record of him appearing on a British War Memorial, nor can I find him on the Post Office Memorial Records. Henry Preston's links are far stronger to Pulham Market than they are to Harleston, I suspect he popped up in a register of Harleston Men only due to Pulham Market having been in the Harleston Postal district; we still acknowledge and respect his sacrifice.