



## Frederick Kirk

40280 Private, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment

Frederick was killed in action on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1918 in France, aged 31

He was buried at Bouzincourt Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France

Frederick Kirk was one of the lads who lived on the outskirts of the town although doubtless, living as he did at the Halfway Cottages on Mendham Lane in 1911, he did a lot of his socialising in the town.

His parents, James Kirk and Ellen Butters had married in Nov 1872 in Beetley although in earlier censuses Ellen was careful to establish she came not from Beetley but Hoe, a full mile and a half down the road! As was the norm for rural workers of the time, both were illiterate.

1872. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Beetley — 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.
77	9 <sup>th</sup> November 1872.	James Kirk Ellen Butters	27 21	Bachelor Spinster	Labourer —	Beetley Beetley	William Kirk Thomas Butters	Labourer. Labourer.

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

This Marriage was solemnized between us, James <sup>his</sup> Kirk & Ellen <sup>the</sup> Butters.

in the Presence of us, John <sup>his</sup> Stacey & Elizabeth <sup>the</sup> Butters  
Henry Collison Rector.  
William Payne

She brought a child into the marriage with her, born 18 months previously but since the child was baptised James Kirk Butters, as was the tradition, I think we can confidently say that James Butters was the son of James Kirk – the parents just took a while to get themselves wed! This delay in marriage and indeed the 4-year-gap after the marriage before any more children were baptised, may have been due to James Kirk pursuing a military career – wives did not always get to go along in those days. This is not just an idea plucked out of the ether (he could equally have been carted off to prison) but is suggested by the fact that in the baptism records of his next two children, born in 1876 and 1878 respectively but baptised only a few weeks apart, James Kirk is listed as a militia man in the first entry and a labourer in the second – looks like Ellen waited for her man!

1878 May 26 No. 749.	Arthur James Lewis son of Ellen	James and Ellen	Kirk	Beetley	Militia man	Herbert Edwards Curate.
1878 June 9 No. 750.	Anna Monia daughter of	James and Ellen	Kirk	Beetley	Labourer	Rowland Wilson officiating Minister

I suspect that Ellen and James had grown up knowing each other – the small village of Hoe was full of Butters and Kirks in 1841. Thomas Butters and his wife had 5 children, Richard and wife had one child, James and wife 3 children and widowed Sarah was working as a schoolmistress to support her 5 children – 21 Butters in total. The Kirks consisted of Hannah and 3 children, David Kirk and his wife were raising David's son and his wife's 4 children, Harry and Rose had 8 children, between them, 41 out of 220 residents in total!

Whilst James Kirk's parents had indeed been born in Hoe, looking at the 1851 census it looks as if they had spent their married life in Gressenhall.

Ellen was one of many daughters (no sons, or none that survived) who grew up not far from the Angel Inn in Hoe, her older sister, Harriet, actually had two illegitimate children in 1871; her parents had merrily baptised their youngest child and these two grandchildren in a sort of mass baptism a few years previously but since Harriet later had to rebaptise these children, I guess gossip caught up with them! Three years later, Harriet and her children decamped to Yaxham where she settled down with a husband 9 years her senior.

By 1881, after the slightly staggered start to their relationship, James and Ellen Kirk were down in Beetley, where they appeared with their four children, but sometime around 1887 they drifted back up to Gressenhall where they appeared in 1891. By 1901 they had moved to Mendham, Hollow Lane, and by 1911, via Redenhall, the family had moved to the Halfway House on Mendham Lane which was quite convenient for Briar Farm where Frederick, at least, wound up working for Mr Dimmock. This family seem to mostly keep their heads down and get on with life although one of

the younger lads, Isiah, was fined a total of 6s 6d for obscene language in 1903.

*Norfolk News*  
6 Jun 1903

**Interests of the public may be served by the summons of Isiah Kirk, labourer, Mendham, was summoned for using obscene language at Harleston, on May 2nd. Police-constable Carter proved the case, which was admitted by the defendant. Fined 1s. and costs 5s. 6d.**

Our hero, Frederick, was one of the middle of the 11 children his parents produced during their marriage, plus of course don't forget James Jnr (Butters) who, galloping rapidly up to the age of 40, was still unmarried and living in his parent's house in 1911 along with Frederick, a younger sister Roseanne and a grandchild, Alexandra May Kirk. I believe it was the little sister Rose(anne) who was involved in a scrappy knife fight between the man who was to become her husband, Ernest Francis, and a local wide boy, George Oakley, in 1913.

It may just be a co-incidence but a Francis Kirk, mother's maiden name also Kirk, was born and died in Depwade in 1914, a marriage between Rose Kirk and Ernest Francis followed in 1915.

This link with George Oakley is quite interesting as in 1916 Frederick wound up in the local court and was convicted of stealing a 1s bag of chaff from his employer, Dimmock, whilst George Oakley was convicted of receiving the bag, knowing it to be stolen. Frederick, in spite of being the one who commissioned the original crime, got 14 days hard labour. George, with a terrible reputation and from a family with a pretty bad reputation too, got double that with a sentence of 28 days hard labour.

*Frederick Kirk, of Redenhall-with-Harleston, labourer, was charged by Alfred Hipperson, of the same place, farmer, with trespassing on his land at Redenhall on 12th January in search of conies.—Supt. Southgate deposed to seeing defendant on prosecutor's meadow. He was digging at a rabbit hole, into which he afterwards put his arm. Two other men were there. On seeing witness they ran away.—Defendant was fined 5/-, and costs 10/-.*

*Diss Express  
24 Jan 1908*

Mind you, I don't think we can totally blame George for leading Frederick astray as Frederick was not himself entirely a saint; in 1908, he was caught poaching on a local farmer's land, although I suppose it is possible that Oakley was one of the other two men who managed to scarper!

Frederick had started off, as you might expect, in the Norfolks but, at some point, was transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire and was first wounded some-time in August 1917, was patched up and returned to his unit. The next time he was wounded, somewhere in the region of Bouzincourt, was rather more serious. He was received into the 150<sup>th</sup> (Royal Navy) Field Hospital on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1918 suffering from both a shell wound and the effects of being gassed. The combination of these two physical insults were too much for Kirk and he died 7 days later and was buried, like another 20 or so other men who had died in the hospital under a rough wooden cross bearing his name.

The usually very efficient military clerical machine seems to have failed Frederick as, in spite of dying in the hospital and being buried in a grave marked with a wooden cross, his status was originally posted in April as 'wounded', he must have been separately described as missing as his status was changed from 'missing' to 'wounded and missing' four months after his death; it was not until the 12<sup>th</sup> of October that year that Kirk's status was finally changed from wounded and missing to reported killed.

I suspect it was only after the war had finished and the CWGC work started logging and rationalising the numerous marked and unmarked burials in the region that the mystery of Frederick Kirk's end was solved. In March 1919, he and the other men buried beside him, were disinterred and reburied in the Bouzincourt extension cemetery. So many of the men who perished in the war, never did have their remains formally buried with a permanent memorial, or their burial site was destroyed as battles raged over the ravaged lowlands of France and Flanders. Hence the number of memorials that stand apart from graveyards to mark those whose remains were lost or unidentified.

Kirk's War Gratuity Payment, left to his mother as his sole legatee, indicates he had survived 19 months before his death – he must have been about 29 when he enlisted, one of our older soldiers.

Frederick's elderly parents, James and Ellen Kirk, died in 1921 and 1924 respectively, it seems as if (with the exception of Rose who remained in Harleston with her husband Ernest Francis) the family scattered after the war. I have found no record of Frederick appearing on any other memorial and, although he may not have been born in Harleston, he was living here by the time he was a teenager, he worked here, got into a spot of trouble as a youth here and probably would have, like his younger sister, settled down and married here.

His sacrifice is marked on no other memorial in this country, descendants of his nieces and nephews are still in this area; I do not know why he is not on our memorial, but I suspect his parent's limited literacy may have had something to do with this. People had to apply to their local memorial committees to have their loved ones names inscribed; if the Kirks had moved away they may not have known how to apply to have Frederick's name inscribed in their new parish.