



James Ernest Hammond

S/8760 Rifleman, 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's)

He was killed in action on 20th June 1917 in Belgium, aged 25

James is remembered with Honour at Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium

James Ernest Hammond was born across the border in Fressingfield, the oldest surviving child of Frederick and Esther Hammond but in the last census before the outbreak of war, the family were living at Pied Bridge Farm where his father was the Bailiff. This is a substantial and ancient Farm



on the corner of Low Road and Burnt Oak Lane, Redenhall. Very much a working farm, the main house is set back from the road, but the working buildings come more or less to the verge of the lane running past them.

I mentioned above that one of Frederick and Esther's children had not survived

to maturity and had assumed that, as so often happened, this was a child who had died in infancy. I would have been wrong as in 1901, an older brother, 13 years old Frederick Hammond jnr. appeared in the family's Fressingfield home. The father, Frederick Hammond Snr was then a Bailiff or Farm Steward working for the Hon. Walter Vanneck of Heyward's Farm.

Young Frederick William died, aged just 18 in 1905 following what was, quite rightly, described as a 'Terrible Accident'. Frederick Jnr fell on to the prongs of a hay fork which entered the heart and both lungs; I am not sure the almost instantaneous death would have been much comfort but at least no blame was ascribed to anyone.

YOUNG MAN'S TERRIBLE DEATH AT FRESSINGFIELD.

Frederick Hammond, aged 18 years, son of Frederick Hammond, residing at Hayward's Farm, Fressingfield, met with a fatal accident on Monday morning. He was riding on a tumbril laden with straw, on which also was a fork; when the tumbril was entering the farmyard, the straw slipped, and the young man fell on to the fork, which ran into his chest, killing him instantly.

The inquest was held at Hayward's Farmhouse, on Tuesday, before Mr. Coroner Chaston.—

Walter Vanneck, employer of both William Hammonds, Jnr and Snr, obviously rated the men highly as he not only 'defrayed' all the expenses of the funeral which took place at the Fressingfield Baptist Chapel, but also attended the actual funeral too.

The remains of the unfortunate young man, Frederick William Hammond, who met with such a sudden and untimely death by falling from a tumbril laden with straw on to the tines of a pitchfork, which penetrated both lungs and heart, on Hayward's Farm, Fressingfield—belonging to and in the occupation of the Hon. Walter Vanneck—were interred in the graveyard at the Baptist Chapel on Thursday. The service was conducted by the Pastor (Mr. Samuel Willis), who delivered a sympathetic address. The coffin, which was of oak, with black furniture, was supplied, and the entire arrangements were carried out by Mr. James Vincent, jun. Beside the deceased's parents, relatives, and fellow workmen, those who attended the funeral included the Hon. Walter Vanneck (in whose employment the deceased had been for the past three years), the churchwardens (Messrs. Ingate and Fisher), Mr. J. Belderson, Mr. H. Colbeck, Mr. J. Scoggins, Mr. B. Byles, and many others. The entire expenses of the funeral were defrayed by the Hon. Walter Vanneck.

Our Hero, J. E. Hammond would have been 14 when his brother died so suddenly and violently, and I have no doubt this would have had a major impact on the young lad.

Perhaps this accident triggered the move from Fressingfield, across the border to Redenhall?

The family's roots were deep in Suffolk soil; although Frederick Snr's parents Richard and Mary Hammond nee Mattocks actually came from Cratfield, all but the oldest of their large family (10 and counting) were born in Fressingfield. Frederick Snr had done well to become a respected bailiff, both his father and grandfather and most likely many more generations tracking backwards had been simple

Agricultural Labourers. The Hammond family's first appearance in Fressingfield was in 1851 when the 20 years old labourer Richard was lodging in the house of another labourer in Chapel Green.

Two years previously Richard Hammond was peripherally involved in an arson case. In essence a Linstead farmer had a stubble stack standing adjacent to a footpath leading from the Greyhound public house. After half a morning picking rushes Hammond and his follow worker, 17 years old James Preston, headed to the pub but just before they got there Hammond sold Preston three matches and a couple of rushes. Hammond who had these about his person for lighting his parent's fire, ambled off to the pub had a pint or so and in court stated that when he left, at 11 am, the stack was still intact. In spite of some further corroborative evidence, the Preston was acquitted – surprisingly as arson was viewed very seriously.

Richard married his Cratfield bride Mary Mattocks (or Muttox), also the daughter of a labourer, in 1855, when she already had a 2 years old son Robert, although by 1871, the lad had quietly become a Hammond too. In this 1871 census he appeared both at his parents' Fressingfield home and also at the Rummer Inn, Stoke Holy Cross in where he was lodging overnight whilst carrying out his job as a drover!

Anyway, the family settled down in Fressingfield, in 1851 Richard was the only 'Hammond' in the village. 30 years on with his wife and their children plus his parents and his aunt, there were 13 of them! By 1901, as his children married and had their own children, there were 40 Hammonds in this compact village, all closely related! When the grieving family moved to Redenhall after their son's death, they left a huge extended family behind them.

Frederick did not long survive the death of his second son a dozen years after that of his oldest son. Frederick Hammond died in 1919 aged only 56. Doubtless, following his death, his wife and family would have lost the home that came with his job as Bailiff of Pied Bridge Farm. It was about this time that the only daughter, Edith, married Walter R Bush, a labourer's son living in Starston in 1911, although by 1939 Walter 'a disabled publican' and his wife were running the Jolly Farmer in North Creake with 6 of their children in the household. During WW1 Edith spent at least some time in Coltishall, probably working in service.

*Alburgh Home of
James Hammond's
Widowed mother.*



The rest of the family stayed local, very local; in 1939, widow Esther was one of four widows living in the row of four Bungalows on the High Street Alburgh, just a few doors away from her third (and oldest surviving) son, a Threshing Machine Proprietor. Left in the aftermath of the first world war with her

three remaining children all young adults and with no husband, I presume she survived on her widow's pension. Her youngest son, Albert, also remained in Alburgh, in the council houses near the King's Head where this 'team man' raised his family. In 1949 when he was working as a Cowman, he was the witness to an acquaintance's horrible death when that friend accidentally shot themselves with a fumble dropped shotgun.

In looking at the later history of the two of her four sons that did survive, we can probably guess what sort of life this young man who perished in Flanders would have had after the war. Chances are he too would have worked on a farm in or near Alburgh; when he was conscripted in 1915, this 24 ½ year old lad was a Horseman working at the Pied Bridge Farm, alongside his brothers and parents. Like many of the men who enlisted, he was by modern standards really rather short, only 5' 4 ½". Also like the majority of the Harleston Heroes, he was positively wiry, weighing in 8 ½ stone but with a 36" chest. These men showed the tough physical work they did day to day working on the land in the very shape of their bodies. As might be expected for a rifleman, his vision was perfect.

Called up in March of 1915 he had a couple of weeks leave before being sent off to basic training at Sheerness. Possibly not a natural soldier, he made heavy duty of this: 3 day's pay docked and confined to barracks for 7 days for being late on parade, 2 days confined for being unshaven on parade and then a further 7 days confined for hair being untidy?dirty? on parade.

Having made it through training, even if spending more time stuck in Barracks than the average new recruit, he was off to the front in August of the same year, 1915, where he more or less kept out of trouble although scooping up in February 1916, another 7 days confinement for once again being unshaven on parade. Hammond received a 'Blighty Wound' in August 1916 (Gunshot in his right arm) and, I am sure much to his relief, was sent back to England for treatment. I say gunshot as this is what his records state but there appear to have been a number of small wounds on his inner elbow which may have become infected or contained foreign matter causing injury to the joint and surrounding muscles as hot formentations were applied. After he was patched up, following some 38 days in hospital, and almost certainly a few weeks leave at home, James returned abroad where, in November 1916, he was reunited with his battalion and within a week posted to his company. He was nevertheless promoted to Private 1st Class at the start of June 1917 only a few weeks before he perished in Belgium during the mess and confusion of 1917.

It seems highly likely he was interred in one of the battlefield burial grounds that were destroyed in later conflict over the same ground as someone took the time to collect and return his personal belongings to his family. The cigarette case, steel mirror and comb arrived in the same package as the pencil, cards and letters that kept him tenuously linked to the family at home at Pied Bridge Farm.

It is reasonable to assume he had a decent if hurried burial on or near the battlefield, best not dwell on the effect later shells may have had his grave, suffice to say when the CWGC got to work after the war, he was one of hundreds of thousands whose bodies could not be located, and he is commemorated on the Menin Gate. His family were living in Redenhall at the time of his death and, had the father survived longer, they would have probably remained there during much of the interwar period. However, this was not to be and it was to Alburgh that the family had moved by the time the memorials were being erected locally and it is on the Alburgh Memorial we see his name today and where his mother and brothers would also have seen his name every-time they attended the village church.

If Mr Hammond had lived longer J. E. Hammond would have been marked on the Broad St Memorial and whilst it is right, he is commemorated in Alburgh I think it honourable that the town of Harleston cum Redenhall also acknowledge his sacrifice.