



Brothers George and Harry Rayner

George Rayner

33511 Private, 5th Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment

George was killed in action on 13th September 1918 in France, aged 24

He was buried at Hermies Hill British Cemetery, France

Harry Rayner M.M. (Military Medal)

5364 Lance Bombardier, Royal Field Artillery

Harry died on 20th December 1918 in Italy, aged 38

He was buried at Dueville Communal Cemetery Extension, Italy

Pte George Rayner and his older brother, Lance Bombardier Harry Rayner came from a long established Harleston family of builders, boozers, rogues and heroes – an interesting mix indeed.

Going back to 1861, we find George and Harry's father Bob Snr living with a number of his siblings



at the Three Horse Shoes, near the junction of London Road and Wilderness Lane. The boys' grandfather, Robert Rayner Jnr, was a builder employing 3 men whilst his Fressingfield born wife Mary Ann was running the pub.

This early 20th Century photograph depicts very clearly the buildings demolished with the expansion of Knights works, now the site of the Petrol Station and retail units. The Horseshoes is to the right and behind the lady cyclist, next to Harmonay Cottage and still stands there today. You can see one of the buildings behind the pub still has a thatched roof.

10 years later, I think we can assume that Bob was working for George Grimwade a very successful builder in Weybread. At the time of the 1871 census, Grimwade, as

well as farming 80 acres, employing 3 men and a boy, Grimwade was also employing 15 men and three apprentices in his building company! This was a very busy man. Bob (logged in this census as Robert) was one of three young carpenters lodging next door to Grimwade – I suspect this is no co-incidence!

Meanwhile, in 1871, Bob's three younger sisters who appeared with him in the 1861 were scattered about working as servants whilst the youngest sibling, Rowland and three more later additions to the family were living on Harleston Common in a terrace of four small houses which was demolished and replaced by a modern bungalow after the war. No sign of either of the parents, Robert Rayner Jnr and Mary Ann nee Smith – very intriguing and definitely a situation that needed investigation!

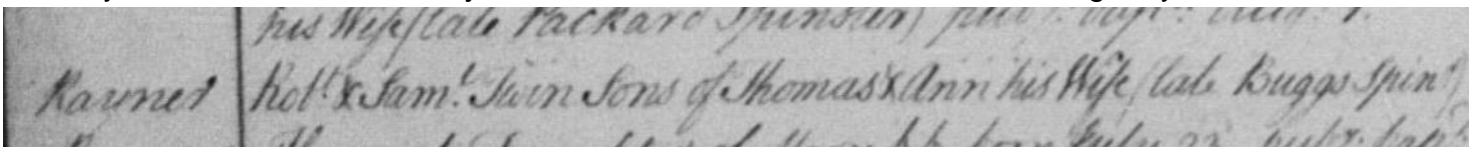
In 1871, John Smith (postal messenger) was in residence in one of a terrace of 4 small dwellings on the Common with his wife Mary, 2 of their own children, 4 'Rayner' nephews and nieces¹, plus a 'visitor' William Smith II- only 3 months old! The presence of all these nieces and nephews, from a quite mature 11 years old to a tiny 2 years old, is intriguing; had there been some family tragedy with the Rayner children being taken in by their kind aunt and uncle? Luckily one name - 'Rowland Rayner'² was unusual enough to track down and identify in the 1861 census when he appeared as a one year old at the Horseshoes, along with his parents and four older siblings, Bob Rayner Snr , Anna M, Clara and Rose, in addition to the 4 younger siblings living her in 1871



This image shows the two right hand houses of the terrace of four, the Rayner children were living in the dwelling adjacent and to the left of this image – small!

These were the 4 youngest children of Robert Jnr and Mary Ann Rayner - nee Smith and lo and behold, way back in 1851, John Smith appeared in the

newly wed Robert Jnr and Mary Ann's Mendham household as a visitor – logically John Smith would



have been Mary Ann's brother. Just to muddy the waters a little further, Robert Rayner Jnr's father, Robert Rayner Snr, had also married a Smith, Sophie!

¹ Rowland (11), George (5), Laura (9), Flo 2

² In traditional style, Bob Rayner I named one of his own sons Rowland Rayner II. When this member of the larger than life Rayner family died aged 57 in 1949, he was described as being a well known personality in the Brockdish area. When Rowland's older brother, Sam, died three years previously, aged 65, he had lived at Brockdish for many years and was a well known and respected resident.

Robert Rayner Snr was one of twins, both he and his brother, Samuel, were baptised by parents Thomas Rayner Snr and Ann nee Buggs at Redenhall on August 6th 1802.

Robert Snr's twin brother Samuel also survived into old age but followed the basket making trade whilst another brother, Thomas Jnr, went on to become a tailor.

Unfortunately, the children of Samuel Rayner, basket maker, managed, with the assistance of Robert Ward, from another family from the yards of Harleston, to get themselves into a mountain of trouble.

Robert Ward (born in or about 1821) was convicted in 1850 of being an incorrigible rogue! This was not his first offence so, intrigued, I tried to track him down, stumbling once again through a tangle of

labour.

LEAVING A WIFE CHARGEABLE.
Robert Ward, (29.) was charged with having been an incorrigible rogue and vagabond, he having been convicted before the magistrates of having left his wife and family chargeable to the parish of Redenhall-cum-Harleston. The Clerk of the Peace read several convictions against the prisoner, for similar conduct; and he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour.

peers within a small town sharing the same names!

Norfolk Chronicle 19 Oct 1850

It transpired that the man I was perusing was a Robert Ward Jnr, servant, who, having joined the 77th Foot in 1839, aged 20, promptly deserted. Robert Ward Jnr who had been baptised just across the border in

Weybread Suffolk was living with his grandfather Robert Ward Snr, various siblings and a possible sister in law at the Cardinal's Hat in 1841.³ A fishmonger then, he reappeared as such along with his wife, Jane, in Chapel Yard in 1851 and again in 1871 (renamed Vipond's Yard); by 1881 the widowed Robert Jnr was lodging at the slightly dodgy Royal Oak on the corner of what is now Union St and Broad Street. This all seemed fairly respectable until I found him in Norwich Castle Prison in 1861, as a prisoner. There can't be that many Weybread born fishsellers of that age and that name around so I think we can assume them to be one and the same as our gent married to Jane. – was this the incorrigible rogue detailed in 1850? Certainly, checking back to Chapel Yard in 1861, there is his poor wife Jane, with three girls to raise, described as 'Fishmongers Wife Deserted'. By 1891 Robert Ward Jnr, incorrigible rogue and fishseller was in the Union Workhouse just outside Pulham Market, one of approximately 150 inmates. All very scandalous but how does this link to the Rayners?

Having dug a bit deeper to see what Robert Ward Jnr had done to get himself into jail, a rather tangled case comes to light.

It appears that Robert Ward, who in 1851, at 31 was 2 years younger than Jane his wife, and mother of his children, had cast his eyes towards Emma Rayner Snr, 23 years old and living in the Thoroughfare with her parents, basket maker Samuel Rayner Snr⁴, siblings and little Emma Rayner Jnr, the illegitimate daughter of older sister Jane Rayner. Jane went on to marry James Hales, a bricklayer, who took on her illegitimate daughter and gave her his name; In the normal way of the time, Emma Rayner Jnr, went on to have her own two illegitimate children, twins like her father and uncle Samuel Rayner Snr and Robert Rayner Snr (another Emma and a Laura) baptised when she

³ According to 'Norfolk Pubs' Elizabeth takes over the Cap in 1841; Same day, after long and painful illness, Mr. H. Ward, of the Cardinal's Cap Inn, Harleston, aged 43. Norwich Mercury 29 May 1841

⁴ Rayner had a narrow escape in 1850 when fetching a load of osiers (willow whips for basket making) in a cart on the road at Weybread the vehicle .. upset and he received great injury from the fall so that slight hopes are entertained of his recovery. Norwich Mercury 7 Dec 1850 He evidently survived for another 20 or so years when On the morning of Tuesday an old man by name of Rayner, a basket maker in Harleston, was discovered on his wife coming downstairs to be lying dead on the floor. He had only risen a short time previous. Norfolk News 15 April 1871.

was 19. Sadly, the twins do not survive but Emma does marry in 1870, to a John Kent, they set up home on the Bungay Road and then finally wind up on the Common in 1881.

Jane and Emma's younger brother, Samuel Rayner Jnr, also a basket maker, was visiting with another branch of the family. Although the 3 months sentence for being 'an incorrigible rogue' and failing to support his family, seemed to have chased Robert Ward back to his wife for the 1851 census; this did not last long and Robert Ward and Emma Rayner eloped off to Kings Lynn. Trading as Hawkers they soon settled down, running various pubs together.

How do we know this? Basically, a tale of chaos that runs through the regional press, this summarised version is taken from <http://norfolkpubs.co.uk>.

White Swan 110 Norfolk Street, Kings Lynn

On Monday 5th May 1856, Robert Ward was accused of an assault on beerhouse keeper William Dennis who had entered the White Swan and wrung a customer's nose. Causing a disturbance and offering to fight Ward, Dennis was knocked down and kicked.

Case dismissed.

On Monday 13th October 1856 Emma Rayner and Samuel Rayner were accused of stealing £63 and a silver watch from Robert Ward. It was heard that Emma Rayner was housekeeper to Mr. Ward and had been asked the previous week to place the money in an upstairs room. On Thursday 9th October Ward had returned from a sale and found that his housekeeper and her brother had decamped and the money and watch were gone.

Case dismissed owing to insufficient evidence.

This does all tie in very nicely, Emma did have a brother Samuel Rayner, a basket maker, 7 years her junior; as things panned out it became apparent that describing Emma as a 'house keeper' was a euphemism. The light-fingered brother and sister headed back to Harleston where the law caught up with them. Ward refused to prosecute, and the reconciled Robert Ward III and Emma Rayner settle down again in King's Lynn. Reading between the lines it sounds as if Robert Ward and Emma Rayner had fallen out, Emma had grabbed what she could and hightailed it back to Harleston.

This reconciliation did not last, in 1858 Robert Ward lost his house and thus his income whilst Emma Rayner got her own license and set up at The Cattle Market Tavern, being the licensee there between 1860 and 1861. A determined lady, when, in 1860, two customers would not pay their bar bills, she took them to court and received satisfaction.⁵ After about 10 years together, the romance was wearing thin. Again <http://norfolkpubs.co.uk>.

In court Monday 10th December 1860 it was heard that at one time Robert Ward, alias Farmer, had lived with Emma Rayner as man & wife. On 27th November Ward had entered the house and sat next to Miss Rayner and asked if she was to marry anyone. Before she could answer, Ward drew a razor across her throat saying 'Before you shall marry anyone else, I will do you.' Miss Rayner called her sister Mary Ann who assisted her and called for Doctor Smythe. Ward then threw the razor onto a table in front of Charles Parr, William Rungay, Edward Raby and the charwoman, Sarah Colman. Ward expressed satisfaction with his deed saying that 'no one else could have her' and that he would not run away. Constable Tungate took the prisoner into custody. Doctor Smythe

⁵ Norfolk News 11 Aug 1860

stitched up the wound and it was only by 10th December that Miss Rayner was able to attend court.

Ward was fully committed to Norwich Castle for trial at the next assizes

Emma's sister, Mary Ann Rayner, who had come to the assistance of Emma after her throat had been slit, had also appeared with Emma in the 1851 Harleston census, only a year younger than Emma, the two were probably very close.

Emma was extra-ordinarily lucky both in the angle of the cut and in having a doctor attend her fast enough to prevent her bleeding to death. Luck stayed on her side as she also managed to avoid infection of the wound. Another article describes the

Wound six inches in length .. extended upwards from the collar bone to the chin .. it is strange that the windpipe and important veins escaped uninjured.⁶

After the attack Ward seemed strangely calm, sitting by the fire until taken away by the police. Emma was not well enough to attend the first committal hearing but did give evidence at the second hearing. I suspect that Emma did indeed, certainly in the earlier days of their relationship, want to marry but of course Robert Ward was still married. At the end of their affair, he seems to have adopted the toxic principal if he could not marry Emma, he would prevent anyone else from doing so. The blade was so sharp that Emma had felt no pain and, until she saw the blood, had thought Robert had just drawn his thumb across her throat.

Charwoman Sarah Coleman gave evidence of the lead up to the evening attack. All started normally with Robert Ward cleaning his boots in the morning, although he refused breakfast. All through the day he was in and out of the house, becoming steadily more drunk as he repeatedly received the cold shoulder from Emma, who basically told him to leave. Half an hour later, the attack occurred; in the court Ward made no denial of the events but claimed I did not do it with intent to do any harm to her. Really?⁷

Three months later and the case had got to the Assizes when Robert Ward alias Farmer (40) was described as a fish seller. Emma starts her evidence by stating she was a single woman who had known Rayner for 13 years – indicating it was her who provoked Rayner's initial desertion of his wife Jane. Apparently, Rayner had disappeared for 5 weeks before the assault and was only intermittently around for the three nights before the attack. Emma may have had enough of his drinking, he was always very kind to me when sober, but he had suffered from delirium tremens in May and Emma had refused to share a bed with him about a month before the attack.

Ward's defence was that he had no intention of actually cutting her throat, his counsel claimed

The wound was the result of an accident from the incautious holding of a razor by a person who was intoxicated.

The jury found him guilty of wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm, when passing sentence, the judge commented the prisoner ought to be thankful all the days of his life that death did not follow from his offence. Two years hard labour.⁸

⁶ Bristol Daily Post 4 Dec 1860

⁷ Norwich Mercury 12 Dec 1860

⁸ Norfolk Chronicle 30 Mar 1861

Emma continues to have tough times, on the 28th of March, the Norwich Mercury reports that Joseph Meal, landlord of the Plumbers' Arms was convicted of assaulting Emma Rayner, landlady of the Cattle Market Tavern – 11s 6d expenses.

Emma stayed, along with her sister Mary Anne Rayner, at the Cattlemarket Tavern long enough for them both to appear there in the '61 census Mary Anne helping landlady Emma behind the bar. Emma Rayner's baby niece, Emma Jane Rayner, is also there, presumably Mary Anne's illegitimate daughter. Little Emma Jane barely survived the census whilst her aunt, Emma, was buried in Yarmouth at the end of 1862⁹. After surviving everything else, she probably died of some infectious disease shortly before Ward left prison, having completed his two years sentence. If she had not died, would Emma, the woman that he threw everything up for before, and in a confused and besotted jealous state had tried to kill, have been there waiting? I suspect that it was at this point he returned to his long-suffering wife after an absence of over 10 years. I wonder how that first meeting went!

I think we are already getting a picture of the Rayners as perhaps being a less than straitlaced family!

As a side note, an unmarried Sarah Rayner baptised her child Robert Rayner Edwards Rayner at Redenhall in Nov 1821 thus indicating Mr Edwards to be the father! Not too surprisingly Sarah Rayner married Robert Edwards a mere 5 months later at Redenhall in March 1822

Let us return from Uncle Samuel's family to that of his twin brother Robert Rayner Snr. Certainly, the Rayners, who had previously been at the nearby Three Horse Shoes where they were combining running the pub with running a building business, had a tough time in the 1860's; where was Robert Rayner in the 1861 census when his family were either scattered or being cared for by their maternal uncle living on the Common?

I am afraid that Robert Rayner was up in Norwich caste appearing there as RR, a 46 years old married Carpenter from Harleston! Quite why he was there we do not know but later investigation into the activities of this family would indicate anything from persistent drunkenness, through petty theft to brawling!



Robert Rayner Jnr was declared bankrupt in February 1863¹⁰. The following month, March 1863, his father, Robert Rayner Snr, appeared in court trying to hang onto sheds he had built at the Four Horse Shoes some 22 years earlier. Claiming the sheds had been neither sold nor given to his son, merely lent when he handed over the business, he rather felt they should not be disposed of as part of his bankrupt son's assets but revert to him. The owner of the pub, in turn replied they should be his since Rayner Jnr had rented the use of them

from him when he took over his father's business in 1858. Eventually it was decided that as the

⁹ An Emma Rayner at any rate and since I was unable to trace her after this point, I am assuming this to be her.

¹⁰ London Gazette 27th February 1863.

sheds could be lifted straight off their brick footings, they were not part of the freehold and should go into the Robert Rayner Jnr's creditor's pot.¹¹

Exterior of Thorpe Asylum in 2010¹²

Whether this bankruptcy was caused by the impact on his business of his wife's mental health or whether his wife's mental health had been affected by the failure of the business is unclear but in April 1863 Robert Rayner II appeared before the magistrates charged with refusing to support his wife who was 'a lunatic in Thorpe Asylum'¹³

Thorpe Asylum, temporary refuge for Mary Ann Rayner, was an unusual building and forward thinking when originally built:-

'a vast complex arrangement of traditional H shaped buildings all linked with a straight trunk corridor. It's rumoured that St. Andrews is only one of two original asylums that has a curved corridor.... A two-storey 'H' shape with large and rather barn-like male and female wardsintended specifically for pauper lunatics and (it) was only the second institution of its kind when completed in early 1814 ...originally designed for the reception of 40 male patients, followed by female patients in June of the same year.... Extensions in 1831 and 1840 allowed this number to double....more substantial additions in the late 1850s as well as .. an auxiliary asylum, completed in 1881, some 700 inpatients could be accommodated.' In April 1889, the institution was re-titled the Norfolk County Asylum, and after its modernisation into 'a hospital for mental disorders' (with reorganisation into distinct male and female asylums), there was room for more than 1,000 patients...¹⁴

Modern Photographs of the County Asylum at Thorpe St Andrew¹⁵



Robert Rayner II was ordered to pay 5s a week and costs. Bearing in mind this was in April, it is interesting that Robert and Mary Ann Rayner's son George Snr was baptised in May of that year – also the month Rayner was discharged from Bankruptcy. Perhaps Mary Ann was suffering from peri-natal depression /psychosis? There must have been some sort of reconciliation as George's baptism was followed, in 1869, by those of

¹¹ Norfolk Chronicle 21 Mar 1863

¹² <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2255403> courtesy Evelyn Simak

¹³ Norfolk Chronicle April 1863

¹⁴ www.geograph.org.uk/snippet/4751

¹⁵ Photos from 'Urban Explorers' www.28dayslater.co.uk/norfolk-county-asylum-norwich-may-2010.t51152

Florence and Laura, 12-year-old Florence appeared with her parents on Candler's Lane in 1881.

14 years later, this younger son, George Rayner Snr, whose birth may have triggered Mary-Anne's mental health issues, along with George Jolly. "both of Harleston, were charged with breaking into the shop of Bryant, confectioner and stealing from there four bottles of sweets and other items"¹⁶

The boys' case was transferred to the Norfolk Sessions where both the "father of Rayner and mother of Jolly attended but the Chairman declined saying anything to the former as he was the worse for drink".

Oh dear – shame on Robert Rayner Jnr!! Bearing in mind Robert Rayner's proclivities it is not that surprising that he was fined £1 10s a couple of months after the teenage George wound up in court, in Robert Jnr's case for being drunk and disorderly.¹⁷

In contrast, Mrs Jolly told a heart rending of how her husband's ill health had obliged her to "go out nursing and thus neglect her home so that her son had got into bad company."¹⁸ In spite of Mrs Jolly's pleas, both lads, "audacious boys", were sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment and threats of more severe punishment if they ever appeared in the Court again.

It seems that this short sharp shock shook George Snr out of his bad ways and poor company (although obviously Mrs Jolly seems to have put George Snr in the category of bad company) – either that or a stint in the British Navy did the job!

BRITISH PLUCK.—That the old spirit of pluck and daring is not yet extinct in the British blue-jacket is once more evinced by the clever and courageous conduct of a young sailor named Geo. Rayner, belonging to Her Majesty's ship Kingfisher, cruising off the east coast of Africa. It ap-

Norwich Mercury
5 Dec 1885

Young George Snr was a crew member of the steam cutter Kingfisher which was actively campaigning against the Arab/African slave trade. "Seaman Rayner, a Harleston man", had been left on watch with an interpreter whilst the Kingfisher tootled off down to Pemba to stock up on coal. His instructions were to watch, mark down the arrival of any dhows, observe their antics but not run into any danger.

Shortly after the cutter left, a dhow hove into view and dropped anchor. Rayner and his interpreter got hold of a canoe and aimed towards the ship however their reception was rather hostile with five Arab crew members loading their guns and waving swords at the two men. "The blue jacket with true British impetuosity was for making a dash and boarding the slaver". Luckily the two men settled for discretion over valour and pulled into a nearby bay where the interpreter essentially shouted very loudly for some 'imaginary friends' to come to their assistance. It really does show how up close and personal this interchange was, since this pantomime was clearly audible to the crew of the dhow who promptly

Jumped overboard and swimming ashore bolted into the bush, leaving the captain to shift for himself.

¹⁶ Norfolk News 10 Feb 1877

¹⁷ Norfolk News 14 Apr 1877

¹⁸ Norfolk Chronicle 17 Mar 1877

The dhow's captain, obviously being a cooler headed character,

cautiously advanced towards Jack¹⁹ for the purpose of firing on him. The tar was however equal to the occasion and whenever his enemy took aim Jack flung himself down on the sand. On the other hand, the Arab who was up to his waist in water, quickly ducked whenever he was covered by Jack's rifle. This somewhat ludicrous scene went on for some time, when the sailor, seeing an opportunity, shot his enemy in the chest and the latter mortally wounded threw up his arms and exclaiming Allah sank beneath the waters. Jack then proceeded to seize the dhow ..found 35 slaves on board, all of whom were subsequently set free.

There was an inquiry, after all the Captain of the Kingfisher certainly had not left his single lookout behind in order that he board and take possession of smuggler's vessels. The upshot of the inquiry was that George Rayner Snr was exonerated of any wrongdoing, was complimented by the admiral and promoted to the rank of leading seaman. Well done Jack!

Rather less impressively, the month before the reports of George Snr's heroism, his father, Robert Rayner Jnr was in the paper when George Snr's mother, Mary Ann Rayner, charged her husband Robert Rayner Jnr, carpenter, with assault,

Defendant, who was the worse for drink, threw a lamp at her cutting her face. Her head was very much bruised. The lamp was alight. The bench dismissed the case.²⁰

Another report states that

the parties were advised to arrange matters with each other.

Robert Rayner Jnr was in trouble again a few years later²¹; charged with stealing a deal scantling²², value 1s. It appears that Wm Hubbard, of Fressingfield, had bought and duly marked with his name, 18 boards at a Harleston auction. Rayner Jnr bought some similar ones at the same sale, so next morning when eight of Hubbard's were found to be missing, Rayner's yard was the logical place to look. One named board was found along with several that bore signs of Hubbard's name having been rubbed out. Rayner, presumably realising he was caught bang to rights, claimed not to have any idea how the boards got there but offered to settle the matter, telling Hubbard he might take anything he liked out of his yard. Much to my surprise the Bench decided that

There was no attempt at concealment²³ (and) that the conduct of the prisoner was not at all consistent with guilt. The case was accordingly dismissed.

Personally, I think he had tried an opportunist theft, got caught and hoped to just deal with the whole thing out of court. His 'brass neck' in court swayed the magistrates - Hubbard must have been mightily annoyed!

¹⁹ Jack being a widely used generalised name for a naval rating.

²⁰ Evening Star 7 Nov 1885

²¹ Diss Express 6 Jun 1879

²² Pine plank

²³ This in spite of Hubbard's name being rubbed off several of the scantlings!

Robert Jnr certainly was not the first Rayner to demonstrate light fingered tendencies; it seems that his grandfather Thomas Rayner was caught pilfering from Browne and Clowes back in 1829 ; the (related) predecessors of Denny's Ironmongers.

Esq.—(By the Rev. J. Oldershaw and Rev. W. P. Spencer) George Barber and S. Gardener, charged with having stolen a quantity of wheat from Mrs. Walne, of Starston; and Thomas Rayner, charged with having stolen a quantity of files from Messrs. Browne and Clowes, of Redenhall.

Norfolk Chronicle 16 May 1829

There was a slightly confusing item in the paper of 1870 when “Robert Rayner of Harleston bricklayer” was trying to reclaim a watch from a Robert Goodwin of Hoxne.²⁴ Essentially Rayner (Jnr?) had pawned a watch in Yarmouth to raise funds for working away from home. William Goodwin, was described as Rayner’s brother-in-law, normally a wife’s brother, but in the flexible Norfolk terminology of the nineteenth century this could equally be the brother of any of his siblings’ spouses, as well as the spouse of any of his female siblings or indeed an adopted brother, had redeemed the pledge and held it as security for Rayner repaying him. However, William died before Rayner could repay him, and the watch was passed onto William’s brother Robert Goodwin by William on his deathbed. All pretty plain and simple but, Rayner claimed William had previously directed the watch should go to him. With two witnesses to back up Robert Goodwin’s story the judgement was essentially – tough luck, Rayner had no claim, watch to stay with Goodwin.

Robert Jnr’s son, and father of our Harleston Heroes, although following in his father’s footsteps tradewise, initially seemed to be a different sort of chap entirely. He was actually baptised ‘Bob’ and appears both rather more successful and more respected than his father namesake - this theory is reinforced by Bob’s obituary in 1926. Bob Rayner had, at various times, held the contract to supply the Union Workhouse with basic pauper’s coffins, I see he was at pains to ensure his own was rather smarter!

HARLESTON.
Mr. R. RAYNER'S DEATH.—The recent death of Mr. Bob Rayner, Harleston's oldest builder, removes a figure who was widely known throughout East Anglia. Deceased had been indisposed for a long period prior to his death on the 20th ult., at his Needham home, at the age of 74 years. The funeral service took place last week at Redenhall Church, conducted by the Rector (Dr. O. D. Inskip). The family mourners were:— Mr. Bob Rayner, Mrs. Florence, Inggs Mr. Tom Rayner, Mrs. L. Shanks, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Rayner, Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Rayner, Master Peter Shanks, and Master Jeffrey Rayner. The polished oak coffin had been prepared in deceased's workshop at his special request.

Disaster was narrowly averted by the efficiency of the local fire brigade when fire took hold in Bob's stable in 1885.

Diss Express

HARLESTON.
FIRE.—A fire broke out on Wednesday night in a stable in the occupation of Mr. B. Rayner, builder. It had evidently been smouldering for some time before it was discovered, which was about nine o'clock. The fire engine was brought into operation, and the flames were prevented from communicating with adjoining buildings. No considerable damage was done.

6 Nov 1885

In Feb 1891²⁵, Bob Rayner was advertising for 6 bricklayers and by April 1902²⁶ for painters, two apprentices, and two carpenters. During much of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, a number of adverts appear recruiting labour for the Rayners, I suspect he took on and laid off workers as he needed them for each project.

²⁴ Diss Express 14 Jan 1870

²⁵ Thetford & Watton Times and People's Weekly Journal 28 Feb 1891

²⁶ Norwich Mercury 12 April 1902

Later that year Bob had his coat stolen from him; much of a small-town builder's day seemed to include visiting various pubs. Having met up with a labourer, John Gardiner from Bungay, in the Yard of the Star, Diss, Rayner offered Gardiner a lift to Harleston. On the way home they stopped at the Greyhound in Brockdish. Bob popped in to get some ale but when he came out, Gardiner had legged it. A particularly observant local had spotted that whilst Gardiner had been stood holding the horses, his coat had transformed from a short jacket to a long mackintosh – with previous form taken into account Gardiner got three months. Another ridiculous, not really worth it, never going to get away with it sort of crime that the drunken rural fellows of Victorian times were quite prone to!²⁷

Four months later, in Dec 1891, Bob's fortunes went from steady to almost disasterous when Bob and his son Thomas (17 or 18) were lucky to survive a terrible train crash at Lowestoft. Three men were killed outright, numerous sustained injuries, some were transported to the Lowestoft hospital, the Rayners rested at Carlton Colville whilst receiving treatment for serious internal injuries

Mr. B. Rayner, of Harleston, is reported to have been internally injured: he is lying at the Waveney Hotel, - Carlton Colville.²⁸

TERRIBLE RAILWAY CATASTROPHE near Lowestoft.²⁹

Three men killed and more than thirty injured.



One of the most alarming and .. disastrous railway accidents with which this district has been visited for years, ... recalls .. terrible incidents ... took place at Barnby siding on Christmas Eve, Dec .24th (1891), and caused the utmost consternation amidst the inhabitants of Lowestoft and the neighbourhood ... Mist from the nearby marshes had obscured all vision. The down train from London was late arriving. The up train from Lowestoft left the siding at Barnby, proceeding onto the single track, and "... the Lowestoft train dashed into the other with such force as to deal out death and disaster in every direction, and by which three of our fellow creatures ... were suddenly deprived of their existence. ... Being a festive season, in the cottages at Barnby the villagers were lingering over the 'cup that cheers but not inebriates'... At the local pub, too, there was a considerable number of visitors at the time, and these hurried with all

possible speed to the place ... Foremost amongst these was Mr Amos Beamish, a man of almost gigantic strength, which he turned to such good account as to make one believe it was specially increased for the occasion. Those present who witnessed his exertions and were undoubtedly stimulated by them, speak in the highest possible manner of the service he rendered. It seems his wife had been visiting a sick relative, and had nearly reached her home, when she heard the fearful collision of the two engines, and she rushed into the house telling her husband what had taken place and the heart-rending screams to which she had been compelled to listen. The brave fellow at once rushed out with an implement which lay at hand which he soon wielded with such effect as to be the means of rescuing numbers from their perilous position, and which might possibly have ended in their case also fatally. By this time fires, made with portions of the wreck had been kindled, and amidst the cruel fog, which had been the prime cause of the disaster, might be seen his massive form moving from place to

²⁷ Norwich Mercury 29 Aug 1891

²⁸ Birmingham Daily Post 30 Dec 1891

²⁹ Lowestoft Journal 2 Jan 1892.

place, here assisting one from a quantity of debris and again with his axe cutting away the woodwork of the wrecked carriages and releasing the sufferers who had been literally embedded in the wreck of the ill-fated train. Search was naturally initiated for any who might have been pitched out of the train as the fearful concussion occurred. In this, too, as well as with others, Mr Beamish was successful. Some were found in a dazed condition, severely perfectly helpless because of fractures, broken limbs, wounded scalps, benumbed frames and other sufferings, but eventually the full extent of the disaster was fairly well gauged, and when the medical men arrived and they had little to do but attend to their numerous patients.”

By the census of 1891, the now widowed Robert Rayner Jnr was living with his son, Bob Rayner Snr, and Bob’s growing family but within a few years Robert Jnr had wound up in the Pulham Workhouse. We know this as his son, Bob Snr, wound up being summonsed for not contributing towards his father’s upkeep³⁰ Unpleasant as this financial abandonment must have been for the old boy there is a certain poetic justice; back in April 1863 Robert II was summonsed for failing to maintain his wife, again, in 1886, he was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment for refusal to pay the poor rate and was described as acting very obstinately.³¹ Having seen a Bob Rayner featured in the papers for various drunken offences, I assumed this must be Bob Snr’s son, Bob Rayner Jnr, having inherited grandfather, Robert Rayner Jnr’s slightly wild streak:-

Bob Rayner, builder, was fined 16s . and costs, for being drunk, at Harleston, this being his second offence within twelve months.³²

The size of the fine indicates just how fed up the magistrates were with him; at the same hearing another repeat offender, “George Oakley, dealer, pleaded guilty to being drunk, at Needham, and was fined 4s, and costs”. This case was tried in Oct 1899 but two months later Bob was back in court again, this time his long-suffering wife (or was it Arthur Feaviour’s wife – tricky to tell) had been on the wrong side of him!

Bob Rayner of Harleston, builder, was charged with using obscene language on the highway at Harleston on 25th November. Arthur Feaviour stated that he heard defendant use bad language towards his wife. Gertrude Hurry and Inspector Southgate corroborated. Defendant was fined £1 and 9s. costs, and the Chairman informed him that as that was the third time had been before the bench within a few months he would be on a re-appearance, fined the maximum penalty.³³

³⁰ Norfolk News 27 Nov 1897

³¹ The Ipswich Journal 5 Jan 1886

³² Diss Express 27 Oct 1899

³³ Norfolk News 23 Dec 1899

case, and dismissed it.

Bob Rayner, builder, Harleston, was charged with being drunk and disorderly at Harleston on the 25th ult. It appeared that defendant's language was of a filthy character. The Chairman said the defendant had been frequently fined for similar offences, and the last time he was before the Bench he was warned that a further offence would result in imprisonment. He would now have to go to prison for 14 days' hard labour.

About nine months later Rayner was back in trouble again – thirsty work being a builder!

8 Sept 1900

Bob does not learn quickly and in 1903,³⁴ yet again, was up for drunkenness featuring in a slightly odd story; Mrs Shibley of the Magpie Hotel said that back in September Bob Rayner had come in at about ten to nine and leant against the bar counter. Apparently, his behaviour was so unpleasant that Mrs Shibley sent for a policeman who removed him from the premises at which point she realised some liqueur glasses, that were on a glass shelf within his reach, had gone missing. Another customer bore witness that when Rayner left the pub, he had something in his pockets that could have been glasses and that Rayner was drunk. Interestingly, the landlady claimed that Rayner was not drunk but was being very annoying to customers, a statement confirmed by P.C.Carter, who said Rayner 'was not drunk but had had some drink' when removed from the Hotel.

When P.C.Carter heard that the glasses had gone missing, he paid a visit to Rayner's house; Rayner said "May the Lord strike me dead if I know anything about them".

They arrested Rayner anyway and paid a return visit to Rayner's house, with Sgt Parsley there to add force and gravitas. On their arrival, Rayner's daughter handed him the two glasses from the kitchen table. At this point it becomes apparent that it is Bob Rayner Snr who was the miscreant as at that time Bob Jnr was unmarried and certainly had no daughters living with him whereas Bob Snr did!

Rayner himself was more than happy to claim he was drunk stating he had been out driving that day and called at several public houses where he had had drinks, then toured some of Harleston's pubs where he had more drinks before winding up at the Magpie. He could not recall what had happened there, he remembered the police calling at his house but could not remember about what, to the extent he was surprised when he woke up the next day, not in his own bed, but in the Police Station (Laughter in Court).

Rayner claimed no intent to rob Mrs Shibley and his counsel argued that the defendant's condition at the time of the offence "justified the belief he took the glasses when in a muddled condition of mind and without any felonious intent" ; Rayner's failure to dispose of or hide the glasses supporting this claim. The bench were not very sympathetic to this argument and fined him the hefty amount of £5 plus costs of £1 2s.

³⁴ Diss Express 17 Oct 1903 & Eastern Daily Press, 19 Dec 1903

In May 1904, 'Robert' Rayner, bricklayer of Harleston was again up before the magistrates, this time for obscene language; 8s fine in total.

Theford & Watton Times and People's Weekly Journal
25 Oct 1894

Fire again hit Bob Snr's premises, in 1894, once again the splendid Harleston Fire Service came galloping to the rescue. Although Robert Rayners Snr and Jnr were based in and around the Horseshoes, their descendent, Bob Snr moved his premises to the other end of town. When, in 1895 following his death, Henry Lombard Hudson's estate was up for sale³⁵, Bob Rayner Snr's yard was described as being adjacent to the Hudson's house and facing Station Road. I suspect this to be next to the Old Mill House and roughly on the corner of Everson's Way, opposite Stow Hatch.

WORTWELL.

On Monday afternoon Mr. Robt. Rayner's tiled barn was struck by lightning, and was speedily in flames. The Harleston Fire Engine was summoned by Mr. Allrod, and without loss of time set to work, but the supply of water was small. The fire was happily prevented from extending beyond the barn, which is the property of Mr. J. Sancroft Holmes, and is, we believe, insured. The tenant, Mr. Rayner, is not insured, and his loss will be heavy.

FIRE.—On Monday afternoon a fire broke out in a barn belonging to Mr. Rayner, farmer, of this place. A message was at once despatched to Harleston for the fire engine. The alarm bell was rung, and with as much speed as possible the men with the engine were on the scene of the conflagration. The barn was destroyed as well as an outhouse with a waggon and other implements. The origin of the fire was unknown. The buildings were insured, but it is said the implements were not.

In spite of all Bob Snr's drunken shenanigans, Bob Snr and Jane Rayner seemed to generally do a good job of both raising and training their children. When sober, Bob was a hard worker, the size of the projects he embarked on is indicated by adverts appearing in the local press for extra tradesmen. In 1900, he was selling, on the southern side of the London Road,

A well-built Red Brick and Slated Villa ... in the occupation of H Knights
A similar residence adjoining ...in the occupation of Mr F G Aldis
A similar residence in the occupation of Mr W Searles
Two Red Brick and Slated Villa(s) .. adjoining .. in the occupations of the Rev H Crowe and Mrs Weavers
Two Similar residences adjoining ... in the occupations of Mr F Betts and Mrs Barber
A valuable building site adjoining .. frontage of 41 ft and a depth of 104 ft, now in the occupation of the proprietor.³⁶

He was also selling a smithy and forge in Duke William Yard; perhaps he needed to liquidate some assets for another building project?

I rather hope that it was Bob's son Bob Rayner Jnr who, having yet again blotted his copy book, by knocking down a garden wall in a laddish escapade, was described by the local magistrates as having

Been before them on several previous occasions for serious offences and was a disgrace to the town and himself. He would be sentenced to twenty-one days hard labour.

However, on previous form and bearing in mind the magistrate also said that

They were very sorry to see a man in the defendant's position before them on such a charge

³⁵ Norfolk Chronicle 15 Jun 1895

³⁶ Eastern Daily Press 20 Jul 1900

I rather suspect it may have been Bob senior!

HARLESTON.—To be Sold or Let, with Immediate Possession, TWO FREEHOLD Semi-detached VILLAS, each containing Nine Rooms, with convenient Offices; pleasantly situated at the entrance to the town. —Apply, Mr. B. Rayner, Harleston.

In spite of Bob Rayner Snr's fondness for the booze (and he appeared in the courts on many other occasions than the ones detailed above) with the undoubted support of his wife he did a pretty good

job of raising their family. In 1905, when his nephew Christopher, Carpenter, joined the local Militia, his Uncle Bob was his employer. Six years earlier, Bob Snr's own son Sam, (also a Carpenter and also working for his father Bob) also joined the Militia. When Bob Rayner Snr and wife Jane were recorded living in Needham in 1911, they had raised 9 of their 10 children to adulthood and still had living with them four unmarried adult sons, ranging in age from 17 to 35 and all in the building trade.³⁷ The youngest son, George Rayner Jnr was to become our Harleston Hero as was Harry, still unmarried and living with his parents at the age of 32.

The older brother Sam Rayner, who had earlier joined the militia, had set up in his own home on the Needham Road, with a London born single lady and her illegitimate 1 years old Harleston born child keeping house for him. No great surprise when in early 1912 Sam marries this lady and Mary Shakespeare becomes his wife!

Despite some of the large building projects Bob Snr had undertaken, the 1911 census reveals that their current house only had 4 rooms, including kitchen so it must have been a rather cramped two up/two down with parents in one room and the four lummocking great adult men squished into the other room. I suspect Bob's trading history probably had many ups and downs and I suspect within a few years, as the war appeared on the horizon, the family fortunes would have been on the up again.

Sadly, the war was to intervene, George Rayner Jnr's military records show he had been scooped up in the conscription that was introduced in early 1915 – he enlisted in March 1915. It is a little tricky to exactly follow the trail but it seems this diminutive chap, only a little over 5ft 2 in height and weighing in at 7 ³/₄ stone, may, with his building skills, (he was listed as a Carpenter), have been diverted into the Service Corps. These chaps were, essentially the builders and labourers required by a large Army on the move and Rayner would have been ideal for this work. Maybe this role led to Driver Rayner having only a very short training period – his actual Service started on 18th March 1915, he was on the A.S.Munich to France by the 3rd of April 1915!

6 months later and life was taking its toll on Rayner, winding up in Hospital in October of 1915 – reasons not given. Two months later and he was back in Hospital with influenza, a potentially deadly disease before the days of anti-biotics. Hopefully he had a reasonably cheery Christmas behind the lines that year but on New Years Day he was dispatched by Ambulance Train to another Hospital being admitted this time with Constipation added to his woes, although this may have been a function of pain killing opiates rather than his main issue since they hung on to the chap for another 2 ¹/₂ weeks before discharging from the No 6 General Hospital, a Hospital under Canvas in Rouen, or possibly Harfleur – all a bit confused.

³⁷ Bob Jnr - Bricklayer, Tom - carpenter, Harry – Builders Labourer, George – Carpenters Apprentice.

Anyway, after 4 months of illness, George was deemed fit enough to return to the fray and on Valentine's Day 1916 he was posted to the 6th Reserve. He seems to have been an unremarkable soldier although losing his cap and comforter through negligence got him a week's Confinement to Camp in July 1916, perhaps he had left them at a café somewhere? After this somewhat rocky start of illness and failure to care for Military Property, George improved his record somewhat getting his first Good Conduct Badge in May 1917 and two weeks much needed leave between the 24th of November and the 7th of December 1917.

Tiny though Rayner may have been, this young fellow was probably reasonably physically fit once he had recovered from the bout of influenza and as the ranks of the Service Corps filled with the elderly and less fit recruits, he was transferred to an active combat unit, the Duke of Wellington's West Riding to be precise. On the 11th of January 1918 he was with the 2/6th West Riding, wound up with GCHQ on January 13th, who two weeks later sent him off to the 2/7th West Riding with whom he spent 4 months in the field between the 11th of February and the 5th of June.

On the 17 of June 1918, he was back in the field again, this time with the 5th West Riding and, on the 27th of July he received a minor gunshot wound in his left arm and was sent off to Rouen to be patched up. A few days later he was sent off for light duties as the base depot and then returned to the field on the 30th of August 1918.

A fortnight later and George Rayner was Killed in Action on the 13th of September 1918, his temporary battlefield burial, was amongst 8 of his colleagues, 7 killed on the same day as him, one the day before. These burials were all marked with named crosses, but as part of the rationalisation of burials post war, all were exhumed and re-interred at Hermies. His prayer book and 'disc' (identity disc?) were returned to his father in Needham.

George's name does not appear on our War Memorial, instead he is commemorated on his mother, Mary Jane Rayner's stone in Redenhall Churchyard. This headstone marked the passing of mother Mary Jane Rayner, the 'dearly beloved wife of Bob Rayner' in October 1919, and the 'Beloved Sons' Harry Rayner, 40, died in Italy 20th Dec 1918 and George Rayner Killed in Action in France Sept 13th 1918. Bob Snr's own name was added to the memorial following his death in 1926. It was only at this point we became aware of the death of Bo and Mary Jane's other son, Harry. This then raises the question as to what Harry Rayner was doing out in Italy – a long way from home for this man who was one of Bob's adult children living with his parents in Needham in 1911. The clue appears when the census from 10 years previously is checked out. Harry Rayner was then a Driver with the Royal Field Artillery and in this 1901 census was one of many men at the Preston Barracks, Steyning in Sussex.



When Harry finished his stint, he would have put his name down for a term with the militia and doubtless would have been one of the first men called up again when war was declared. It is a little-known fact that both the British and French sent troops to Italy in late 1917 to support them against German backed incursions. Unfortunately, we do not have many details of Lance Bombardier Rayner's Military career but we do know he was awarded the Military Medal in December 1917, a year before he met his death. His battery was heavily involved in the second Battle of Passchendaele and it was probably his conduct in this action that gained the Military Medal. By January 1918 the Battery were in Italy.

Checking through the Commonwealth War Grave Commission website and there is Lance Bombardier H Rayner, buried in the Dueville Communal Extension Cemetery. The following is taken from the CWGC website.

Commonwealth forces were at the Italian front between November 1917 and November 1918, and rest camps and medical units were established at various locations in northern Italy behind the front, some of them remaining until 1919. From April 1918 to the early months of 1919, the 9th, 24th and 39th Casualty Clearing Stations occupied the village school at Dueville and used the extension to the communal cemetery for the burial of those who died of wounds or disease. The Allied front on the Asiago Plateau was about 22 kilometres distant; the Piave front, to which the XIVth Corps was moved for the final attack on the Austrian positions in October 1918, was about 64 kilometres from the village. The cemetery now contains 134 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, some of which were brought into the cemetery from other burial grounds after the Armistice and in the following years. The extension also contains two French war graves.

Certainly, there is a wide range of regiments depicted amongst the casualties buried at Dueville which is as one would expect from a hospital of if graves had been concentrated from other sites.

So why do neither George nor Harry appears on our War Memorial? It is hard to say; perhaps their father was bitter and resentful about the war that had taken his sons from him, perhaps he felt the family head stone that was erected in Redenhall was more appropriate. Alternatively, and we have no evidence for this, but decisions as to whose names would appear on these memorials, that were put up piece meal and independently around the country, was very much left in the hands of those organising the memorial. Maybe some jobsworth objected to Harry being included since he had died after the cessation of hostilities and probably of disease rather than an injury and, in justifiable rage, Bob declared unilaterally to boycott the memorial and have his sons' names recorded on the family stone.

However belatedly we are proud to acknowledge the sacrifice of these men and hope that in the future when the passing of our local Heroes is marked, that the passing of these men will also be included.