



Leonard George Howard

5769861 Private, 5th Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment

He died in a Prisoner of War Camp in the Far East on 31st August 1943, aged 34

Leonard was buried at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand.

Leonard George Howard was first buried at Takanoon Cemetery in Thailand following his death on the 31st of August 1943 at the Malai 2 prisoner of war camp in Thailand. This was some 2 ½ years after he, and many of his companions, were taken prisoner of war following the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese invading force. After the war in the far East drew to its painful conclusion, the CWGC had the task of rationalising and combining many small impromptu grave sites of those who died during the construction of the notorious Burma Railway. Kanchanaburi (in some records abbreviated to Kanaburi) was one of these larger, more manageable and organised grave sites and was where Leonard was reburied at on the 7th of February 1946 to finally rest in peace amongst almost 7000 other Commonwealth and Dutch troops many of whom were originally buried along the southern half of railway, from Bangkok to Nieke.

Aged 34 when he died, Leonard would have been one of the older of the troops. In the 1939 register he was working as a married 'Overhead Linesman' living in lodgings in Pimlico with two other men in related trades. It is surprising bearing in mind his existing skills, that he was not sent to REME or the Signals regiments, but this might have been part of a determined plan to join the Norfolks. It could be that he returned to Norwich to enlist, he then gave his employment as labourer, hiding his electrical skills!

His birth in Harleston on the last day of 1908 would certainly have entitled Leonard to be part of this regiment who were to suffer so disproportionately during and after the collapse of Singapore. Leonard was the oldest child of George and Louisa Howard nee Amies who had married rather less than 9 months before Leonard's arrival! In 1911 the young (ish – both in their 30's when Leonard was born) couple were living in the small cottage set back from Exchange Street, just down from the Corn Exchange. Also in the household, were a widowed Eliza Amies, described as 'stepmother' and 10 years old Kate Amies described as 'daughter', which she certainly was of Louisa although possibly not of George! Young Louisa had been born in 1900 and eventually baptised when she was about 7 – doesn't do to rush these things!

Both George and his wife Louisa claimed birth in Redenhall and Harleston respectively, but their roots were elsewhere; both were second generation migrants to the town.

Way back in 1851, maternal great-grandfather, Robert Amies Snr and his wife Mary were raising 3 children aged 6 and under, including Robert Jnr. in the village of Frettenham. 10 years later, in 1861, Louisa's father, Robert Amies Jnr was, aged 15, working as a stable lad/groom, a stage up from his father, Robert Amies Snr's, occupation as an Agricultural Labourer.

This training in horse care was to stand Robert Jnr in good stead for most of his working life, offering employment that was still hard work but less vulnerable to the extremes of weather or dips in the economy. Robert Jnr started off married life in South Ruston where he appeared in 1871 with his first wife, C(S)elina nee Howard from Wilby, and their two children, 3 years old Britannia E and 3-month-old Frederick. Robert Jnr was then described as a Groom and Gardener, indicating he was working for a middling comfortable domestic establishment. Wealthy enough to run a horse or trap but not busy or grand enough for a coach, such establishments would often combine the role of groom with that of a basic gardener, we are talking grass cutting and weeding rather than formal gardens and prize-winning blooms here!

In 1881, their oldest child, the distinctively named 12 years old Britannia Amies was living back in Frettenham with her grandparents, Robert Amies Snr and wife Sarah, along with their daughter, the 20 years old Aunt Britannia after whom she had been named! This was a little surprising as the rest of her family had hoofed it off to Harleston sometime between 1871 and 1875. It maybe she was just visiting her grandparents, but this seems unlikely as when Britannia married 6 years later, Frettenham was given as her home parish.

The rest of her family settled in Harleston; living in Queen Anne's Yard, with four children to support it may well have been that Robert (groom gardener) was working at neighbouring Caltofts. By 1891, the family had moved to the house on Exchange St where the family remained for at least another half century, close enough for Robert to have been working at the Old House. By then their three oldest children at home, all boys, were working in various manual jobs. Along with the parents and their 7 children, a sick Nurse, Mary Jex, from Pulham was also in residence. Mary would not have been a medically trained nurse as we would know it, in fact this 66 years old lady had previously been a cook. Whatever her skills may have been they were not sufficient as, shortly after the census, Selina Amies died, leaving Robert with 3 teenaged lads and 4 school age (just in the case of the youngest) girls to care for.

In time honoured fashion, Robert Amies promptly got himself another wife, Eliza from Weybread; by the time the 1901 census rolled around only his youngest daughter Mary, and her older sister Louisa, mother to be of our Harleston Hero were at home. Also in the household was a grand-daughter, baby Kate Amies, who turns out to be Louisa's child. Robert died in 1905, the women of the house would have kept things going in this little cottage set back from Exchange Street until, 3 years later with another baby on the way, Louisa married George Howard who moved into and became head of the Amies' household. Eliza, the stepmother stayed on, Kate Amies was absorbed into the family although she kept her birth name and young Leonard George, in 1908, was the couple's first (official?) child together. At the time of Leonard's birth, George described himself as a carman, essentially a delivery driver, although on all other census entries he had described himself as a gardener, maybe like his deceased father-in-law, he was combining horse work with gardening.

More children followed, Winifred in 1911, William in 1913 and Irene in 1917. By 1921 George was supporting his family by working as a Maltster down at the Watney Maltings near the Railway Station; this may well reflect societal changes in the post war period when fewer servants, and male servants in particular, were employed. Dear old step-ma Eliza Amies must have been well loved as she too was still in the household, contributing her bit by charring for Ada Buckenham at the Laundry on Redenhall Road.

Our hero's father George Howard was also the son of migrants to Redenhall. Back in 1851, we find Thomas Howard Snr from Suffolk, living in Banham with his Cambridgeshire born wife. The couple's three oldest children, including Thomas Jnr, had also all been born in Cambridgeshire whilst the next three including 3 years old Selina Howard were all born in Banham. Sadly, only a few years later and aged just 50, Thomas Snr had died. His widow, Ann, left with young children to raise, remarried: Thomas Youngs on Christmas Day 1859.

18 months after this marriage, the 1861 census shows the mature, couple living in Kenninghall with just 13 years old Selina, 23 years old Charles and an 11 months old grandson Thomas at home with them, the rest of the family had scattered.

Not too sure where Thomas Jnr was in 1861, but by 1871 he was married to Mary from Old Buckenham and working as an agricultural labourer living out on the Bungay Road between Harleston and Redenhall with 4 children to his name.

In 1881, George made his first appearance as the third son and fifth child of Thomas and Mary Ann Howard. There was a brickworks out on the Redenhall Road on the low-lying land between Harleston and Lush Bush, Thomas Howard was one of several men living on the Redenhall Road who were employed there. The Gas Works were also close by and between at least 1891 and 1911 that was where Thomas was working, hard work stoking the coal into the fires. By 1891, as the older children moved out, two lodgers had moved in. In 1911, the Howards had a grandson living with them, the offspring of one of the 8 children they had brought into the world, 6 of whom were still living.

And this is where things get complicated so let's have a quick re-cap; Thomas Howard Jnr (father of George) may have been born in Cambridgeshire, Sandbach to be precise, but his parents, Thomas Howard Snr and his wife Ann, were living in Banham by 1851. Ann Howard and her three older children, including Thomas Howard Jnr were born in Cambridgeshire, but the three younger children were born in Banham.

The youngest of those three children, aged only 3 was Selina Howard, yup that is right, the wife to be of Robert Amies (father of Louisa Amies). So:- just to get this clear, Robert Amies married Selina Howard, Selina's daughter Louise Amies married George Howard, son of Thomas Howard, Selina's brother – they were first cousins in fact! And I must admit with this Harleston Hero's grandparents having been born in all those various places, when families were just not that mobile – I did not see that one coming!

Anyway, when cousins George Howard and Louisa Amies married in 1908, they reunited the two families and produced Leonard, Winifred, William and Irene. Leonard and at least one of his sisters, Winifred, spread their wings and set off elsewhere, London to be precise, although not before Winifred had a daughter in 1930. This little girl appeared with her grandparents in the 1939 register living in the little house that had sheltered the Howard/Amies families for half a century by that point.

It was probably in London that Leonard met Ruth E Potheary; a Hampshire girl with a splendid name indeed. Emily Ruth was the 10th child of Emmanuel and Emily Potheary, 10 children in 21 years of marriage! Ruth was from a much more footloose family than the Howards, or indeed the Amies; her father was a carter born in Warminster and whilst Emmanuel Potheary's adult years involved a lot of flitting about Hampshire his ancestors were well entrenched in Corton Wiltshire. Back in 1851 four Potheary households lived there next to each other along with other Pothearys scattered in the area - Potheary was a very Corton name!

All of the 6 Potheary children who appeared in the 1911 census had been born in different parts of Hampshire, the 1901 census shows that the family had settled in Romsey (home of Emmanuel's wife) for a while before getting on the move in about 1892.

Rather exotically in 1891, Emmanuel (one of the younger of at least 7 children of James and Anne from Wiltshire and Somerset respectively) and Emily Potheary had a 14 years old immigrant, De deo Palmerini, from Naples boarding with them to help out with the finances. Brave and desperate launch by what was barely a lad from a poverty struck part of Europe – I hope he did well.

Ruth Potheary may well have gone to the capital in search of domestic work. Her slightly older sister seems to have previously done rather well in this field, claiming in the 1921 census to be

working as a kitchen maid for the then elderly Lady Mary Ashburnham, Viscountess Knutsford. I guess if you are going to be stuck in a kitchen peeling potatoes and scrubbing pans it might as well be a well-appointed kitchen with a large and structured staff to provide company. This 1921 census also shows that Emmanuel was working for his brother in Frimley, his nephew Rony was also in his household with the rather plaintive entry that it was not then known if both his parents were alive or not; I think we can assume that Ronald's mother was then very unwell hence Rony being dispatched to his Uncle's house.

It was not until later years that the remnants of the Emmanuel Pothecary's family settled in Lower Froyle where Leonard and Ruth married in St Mary's, Upper Froyle on the 24th of April 1937. My suspicions that the couple had met in London is reinforced by their first child, John, being born in Westminster in 1938.



*St Mary's Church
Upper Froyle*

Leonard's younger sister, Winifred, had also married in London, to William Keywood, in Lambeth in the mid 30's. Winifred had four children in all: Margaret Joan, June Margaret, William George Jnr and Jimmy. Jimmy is the Chairman of the Harleston Branch of the British Legion who are driving this series of

biographies of the Harleston Heroes. By 1942, Winifred had wisely taken herself back home to Norfolk, escaping from the London Blitz for the birth of June.

Winifred's sister-in-law, Ruth, had followed the same strategy slightly earlier in the war appearing in the 1939 register at the 'Workhouse Cottages' in Froyle with her widowed father, her married sister and husband and of course her son John. Emmanuel was described as a retired Roadman, a steadier but less well-paid job than that of an itinerant carter. Emmanuel actually survived to the age of 90, dying in 1950!



*Workhouse Cottages
Lower Froyle*

By the time their second child was born, in early 1940, the war was in full swing and London was a dangerous place to be, quiet Froyle must have seemed a true refuge, even if only a temporary one.

During the war, the cottages were requisitioned by the RAF (based in nearby Odiham) necessitating a move by the Pothecary family. By one of those bizarre coincidences, sometime in the late 80's or early

90's, when the end cottages were being sold (showing many traces of military décor and as an army brat you can spot this stuff) I fitted a kitchen for the new purchasers, discovering an entire and vast fireplace with built in bread oven and copper during the process. The new owners were very happy to share that not only had these cottages once been the workhouse but also had been barracks for troops being mustered for the Napoleonic wars!

The 5th Norfolk, that Ruth's husband Leonard Howard had joined, was assigned home defence duties for the first part of war allowing the family to reunite during Leonard's periods of leave and resulting in a second child, David A. Howard being born in early 1940 to join 2 years old London born John. The family had already been heaved out of the former workhouse but not far; the Howard/Pothecary family's enforced move took them down the road to 'Mount Pleasant', still in Lower Froyle. Mount Pleasant was a row of workers cottages near a beer house, the Travellers Rest which had been there for at least 100 years, supplied by the local Alton Brewery.

. Mount Pleasant, Travellers Rest and Oak Cottage, Lower Froyle.



Travellers Rest closer up/.

As the 5th Norfolks were a home defence unit it is highly likely that Leonard was given leave to visit his new baby son – I very much hope so! However, by the time this little lad was a toddler in late 1941, Leonard would have been on his way to Singapore to be involved in the catastrophic Japanese attack in early 1942 when Leonard was taken prisoner. Leonard would have suffered two and a half years of deprivation and maltreatment before finally succumbing to Beri Beri (a disease of vitamin deficiency), or possibly Cholera depending on which source you use.

DIED IN FAR EAST

News has just been received from the War Office that Pte. Leonard Howard, 5th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. George Howard, of Exchange Street, Harleston, died in a Japanese P.O.W. Camp in 1943. Pte. Howard, who had previously been reported as missing, leaves a widow and one child, at present residing in London.

Diss Express Norfolk, England

12 Oct 1945

His family would have suffered four and a half years of alternating hope and despair before finally receiving the confirmation of his death several months after the war ended. Leonard had originally been reported missing, actually taken prisoner in early 1941. By the time this confirmation arrived, his widow Ruth had returned from the

safety of rural Hampshire to a London damaged and scarred by the blitz. Surprised to see that she was described as only having one child I looked further; tragically Ruth and Leonard's first-born son, John, died on the 12th of November 1944, aged only 6, and was buried in the graveyard of the church where his parents had married, 7 years previously. Unless Ruth remarried, and I can find no record of her doing so, she died aged only 50, in 1959 in Battersea, having returned to London. However, judging by the fact a David A Howard married Annie Larkins, also in Battersea, in late 1963, it seems she may have had her son nearby when she died.

It seems right that Leonard Howard is commemorated on our memorial, he was born and raised in this town and although he left for London where he met, to later marry, a girl from the home counties, he had family left in the town grieving him.



This scroll commemorates

Private L. G. Howard
Royal Norfolk Regiment

held in honour as one who served King and Country in the world war of 1939-1945 and gave his life to save mankind from tyranny. May his sacrifice help to bring the peace and freedom for which he died.