

William George Harle

Once we get to combatants who served during World War Two, easy access to online records becomes much more difficult. For example, the most recent census detailed on the Ancestry site is that of 1911. My father fought in WWII; like many people who saw action then, he wasn't alive in 1911 and neither was this month's soldier, William Harle, who is buried in Rownhams churchyard. I've had to track him down through his family and while I'm 90+% certain I've succeeded, I'm not so confident as with previous casualties. The information I've gleaned is a lot sparser, too.

William George Harle was born in Kingsclere, Hampshire, on 30th April 1912 to Thomas and Elizabeth Harle. Thomas was himself born in Kingsclere in 1876, and married Elizabeth Ellen Wells of Basingstoke in 1898, and in 1911 the family was living in The Marsh, Kingsclere. William's elder siblings were Annie, Elsie, Rose, John and Tom. Thomas was working as a waterproof cloth dresser. Thomas died on March 22nd 1922; Elizabeth died on Christmas day 1947.

William was married to Monica Evelyn Harle who is listed on the Commonwealth War Graves site as being of Bishopston, Bristol. William's address at death is given on the probate register as Parklands, Westcliffe Gardens, Herne Bay. His effects were £291 18s.

William was a Corporal in the Royal Air Force (auxiliary) and died on 13th August 1944. I've yet to establish his connection to Rownhams; his brother John died in Southampton in 1960 and they also had a younger brother, Frank, who passed away in 1994 in the registration district of Romsey. Maybe one of them was living locally and wanted him close by?

Ann Laird - Rownhams October 2015

Postscript.

Thanks to everyone who's given me extra information about William Harle. The Harle family, two sisters and their brother Frank, lived at 1 Horns Drove. Sheila Bulpit reminisces, "One sister was very outgoing and entered into everything going on in the village whilst the other was the housekeeper. I seem to recall that one of them was named Elsie."

another postscript

I was contacted by Angela, the daughter of William Harle, who has filled in some of the blanks in her father's story.

Her grandfather, Thomas Harle, apparently caught pneumonia while queuing for work at the docks and died as a result. The family moved to Rownhams on 8 December 1937 (she has a bill for delivery of furniture etc). Angela went to live with her aunts, Elsie and Rose and her uncles, Jack (John) and Frank (all unmarried) from 1953 to 1961 at 'Narrowdale', 1 Horns Drove. She says they were all wonderful towards her.

The certificate of her father's death states that he died at Horton Kirby near Dartford from injuries as the result of an accidental electric shock. A letter from the Air Ministry informed her that, at about 9p.m. on 13 August 1944, it was found that the auxiliary cable of a balloon had become severed by contact with some high tension wires and had become entangled in some trees above them. It was decided that the winch should first be paid out in order to get the lower end of the cable clear of the trees and should then be brought in, the remainder of the auxiliary cable being cut away in doing so.

An officer was holding the auxiliary cable taut as the winch was brought in whilst William Harle was cutting the end pieces of the cable away. Before making the final cut he went to a position below the high tension wires to make sure that the clearance between them and auxiliary was sufficient. As the final cut was made however, there was a flash and both Harle and the officer were thrown to the ground. The officer recovered consciousness in a matter of seconds and hurried over to Harle to apply artificial respiration which was of no avail.