

STEVE'S ODYSSEY

The Green Howard Museum's Assistant Curator, Steve Erskine took himself off to walk in the footsteps of the young Henry Parker, and to see if he could find out more about him and his pre-war life in the countryside...

"I think it was Francis Bacon – the 16th Century philosopher and statesman, not the artist of more recent years – who said "Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder, a part of experience."

So, whilst books and archives can tell us much, it is in travelling to 'the ground' which can add so much more. This philosophy led to me, one Sunday morning, armed with notes and a sat nav, heading firstly for Weaverthorpe, birthplace of Henry Parker.



After a drive through mists from which Brigadoon threatened to emerge at any moment, and made scaling Sutton Bank an interesting experience, I arrived at a very quiet and very deserted Weaverthorpe.

Parking near the village war memorial I paid my respects, noting it held no mention of Henry.

Until now Henry has been commemorated on the monument to the missing at Thiepval on the Somme and in St. Mary's Church in Wansford (built by another

connection to the Green Howards, Sir Tatton Sykes, father of Mark Sykes). The best place to start in a quest like this is the local church so I climbed the hill to St. Andrew's.

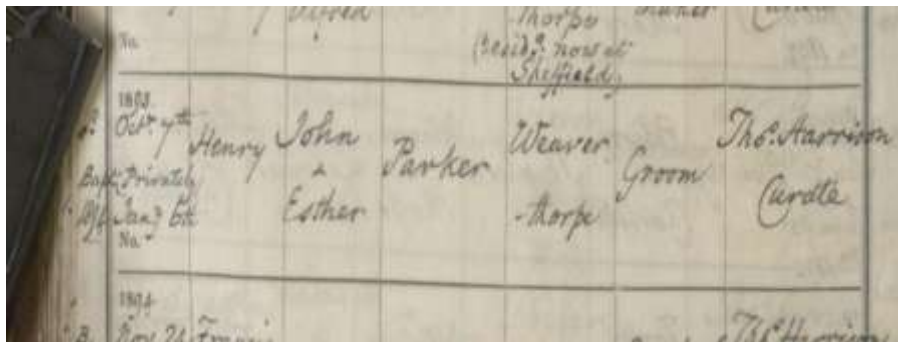
Having visited so many cemeteries on the western front and churchyards in Britain I can now spot a Commonwealth War Graves headstone at 100 paces and the first thing to catch my eye was the grave of, wouldn't you know it, another Green Howard - this time from the Second World War.

4396531 Private H Dobson was the son of Harry and Hilda of Scarborough. He served with the 11th Battalion and died on 25th May 1942 aged 29. His headstone carries the poignant inscription, 'In beloved memory of a son and brother. He gave that others may receive.' But that's a story for another day.

Back to Henry ...

Initial archive searches had shown that Henry was christened at Stillingfleet. In a salutary lesson about the veracity of archives, this turned out to be incorrect. Having left a note in the church visitor book I was subsequently contacted by a local church official who provided a copy of the Weaverthorpe Baptism Register for October 1893-4. This clearly shows that Henry was baptised at St. Andrew's in Weaverthorpe,

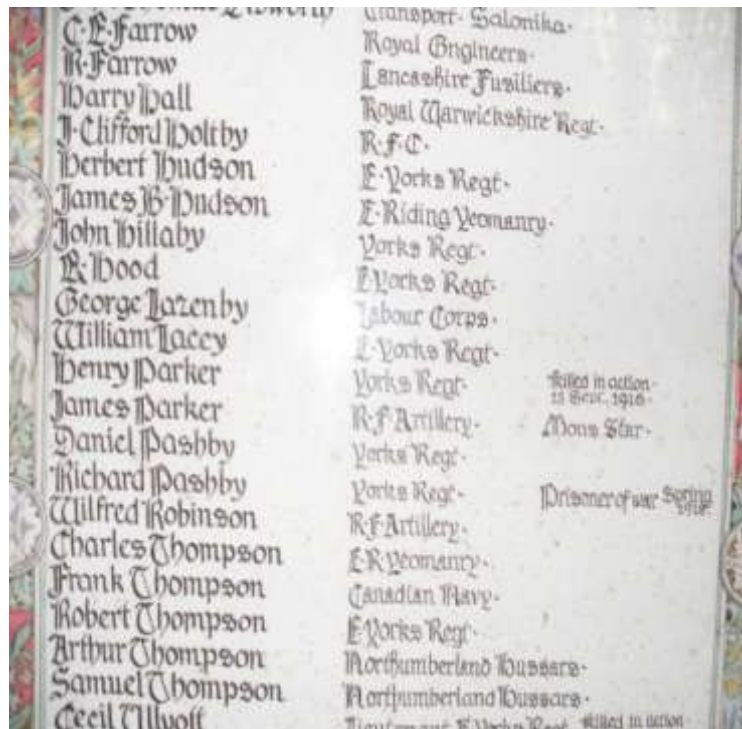
by the Curate Thomas Harrison on 6 January 1894.



I moved on to Wansford, where in 1901 Henry was recorded as living with his parents and siblings (Henry was one of twelve children, who had been born all over the country – from Liverpool to Suffolk!)

I visited St. Mary's church - another of Sykes's legacy - and saw Henry's name on the War Memorial.





Also in the church was a scroll listing all those from the village who had served including James Parker, Henry's brother. This gave us the identity of the brother mentioned in the death notice for Henry from the Drifffield Times of 21 October 1916 which stated '....Another brother has been at the front since the commencement of the war.' James served with the Royal Field Artillery.



The death notice also mentioned the hymns 'Rock of Ages' and 'O, God our help in ages past' as well as the Death March being played by Miss E. Holtby '..who presided at the organ.'

I couldn't help but sit at that organ and think about that moment, and Henry's family

gathered in that church following news of his death.

They had placed these notices in the Drifffield Times on Saturday 28 October 1916.

PARKER - Killed in action in France on September 26th, 1916. 318[3] Private H. Parker, Yorkshire Regiment, son of Mr and Mrs J Parker, The Square, Wansford, near Drifffield.

**We often sit and think of him,
And wonder how he died,
To think he could not say good-bye,
Before he closed his eyes**

From his loving FATHER, MOTHER, SISTERS and BROTHERS

Mr and Mrs JOHN PARKER, of Wansford, thank all friends and neighbours for their sympathy and kindness towards them in the loss of their son.

Leaving the church I headed towards The Square where the 1901 census showed Henry and his family lived. It being Sunday, the locals were washing cars, clearing out garages: the usual Sunday tasks.

I asked whether any houses in the square dated from the turn of the century and particularly where number 10 was situated.

A stranger in town asking questions isn't usual, and, in answer to a raised eyebrow, I explained the background to my visit.

And so began a tour of various people's houses, numerous offers of tea and cake and a growing local interest in one of their own.



My first and most productive stop was the home of Sheila Cadman, local historian and author of 'Wansford: Back to its roots.' The first connection was Sheila's address, The Old School House (above).

This was the school where Henry was a pupil, confirmation came from Sheila when she showed me a copy of the School Accession records showing Henry entering the school on 12th July 1897 (the record confirmed his actual birth date as 10th June 1894; we previously only had the year.)

It also showed Henry's brother James joining the school on 9th November 1896 and one of his younger sisters, Alice, joining the school on 1st November 1898.

The ultimate result when researching a soldier from the period is to find a photograph. This is something that continues to elude us but, thanks to Sheila we do have a picture of Henry's father, John.



Gardener John Parker at Wansford Vicarage 1926

The Square in Wansford has been re-developed with few of the cottages from the early 1900s having survived. When talking to Sheila she kept referring to the Square as 'Ireland Square' a local epithet to reflect the fact that many of the original inhabitants were Irish navvies employed on digging the nearby Driffield canal.

No 10, sadly, no longer exists but from the deeds of one of the current cottages (it's amazing what people will dig out in pursuit of a story) we could locate where No. 10 once stood.



The only other original feature still in situ was the stand-pipe for the spring.

Whilst the pipe may be more recent this is where Henry would have drawn the family's water.

Another conversation elicited the history of other village locations, including the Methodist Hall.

Another Sykes legacy, the Hall was given to the village with the specific condition that the residents maintained a rifle range at the back of the hall. Surely, as a pre-war Territorial soldier, Henry would have shot at this range.



Wansford Methodist Hall, which opened in 1864.