

Private Henry Francis Roberts[©]
Regimental number: 205010
2nd Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

born: 9 March 1889–died: 14 July 1917

Henry Francis Roberts, generally called Harry, was the fourth of eight children born to James Arthur (known as Arthur) Roberts and his wife Ann, née Reynolds.¹

Arthur Roberts was born in 1863 in Twyning, Gloucestershire, between Cheltonham and Worcester, about 5 km north of Tewkesbury; he was the son of William Roberts, a cordwainer.² (A cordwainer is a shoemaker who makes shoes from new leather, as opposed to a cobbler, who only repairs shoes.)³ By 1881 Arthur was working himself, employed as a groom for William Warden at 7 Westbourne Road in Edgbaston, a suburb of Birmingham.⁴

How exactly Arthur met Ann Reynolds is unknown. Ann was born in the village of Ruddington, just south of Nottingham; she was the daughter of George Reynolds, a framework knitter.^{5,6,7} By 1881 she too had left home and seems to have been working in the laundry of Knowsley Park, Lancashire, 220 km north of Edgbaston.⁸ Regardless of how they met, Arthur and Ann were married on 10 December 1883 in St. John the Evangelist Church, Carrington, a suburb of Nottingham.⁹ Arthur and Ann moved north to the Peak District of Derbyshire more or less immediately after they were married, because their eldest daughter, Florence Ada, was born in the village of Ashford in the Water near Bakewell early in 1884.¹⁰ All of their subsequent children were also born in Ashford: William Arthur (b. 1885),¹¹ George Reynolds (b. 1887),¹² Henry Francis (b. 1889),¹³ Martha Amy (b. 1891),¹⁴ John Wilfred (b. 1893),¹⁵ Ethel May (b. 1895),¹⁶ and Arthur Frederick (b. 1900).¹⁷ Unfortunately, Arthur and Ann's eldest son, William, died in 1891 shortly before his sixth birthday.¹⁸

By the time he was in his early 20s, Harry was working on a farm near Hassop,¹⁹ just outside of Ashford. Harry married Edith Alice McEvoy on Christmas Day, 1912 in Brightside, Sheffield, Yorkshire.²⁰ It is likely that they met through Edith Tupling,²¹ who worked as a laundry maid at the same farm as Harry and whose father, William Tupling, boarded with the McEvoy family.²² Harry and Edith's son, Arthur Alfred Roberts, was born on 16 July 1914²³ and baptised in the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul in Sheffield on 2 August 1914,²⁴ practically on the eve of the outbreak of WW I.

Harry enlisted in the 2nd Battalion of the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on 23 February 1917.²⁵ He may have volunteered, but he may also have been conscripted, conscription having been extended to married men in May 1916.²⁶

When exactly Harry was injured isn't clear. His battalion was in action at Nieuport, Belgium, about 35 km west of Dunkirk, between 5 July 1917 and 12 July 1917 before retiring to a camp behind the front lines. His injuries were described by the chaplain at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station as shrapnel wounds along the spine; it was also noted that both feet were amputated. Harry died on 14 July 1917²⁷ and is buried in Grave 838 of the Adinkerke Churchyard Extension in Belgium.²⁸

Harry was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²⁹

Edith, Harry's widow, married John T. Mawkes in 1919³⁰ and had another son, Eric, a year later.³¹ Edith died in January 1931,³² shortly before her 40th birthday, still living in Sheffield where she grew up.

Some time before the war, Harry's parents and his two youngest siblings moved south from Derbyshire to Kent, specifically to Pembury (about 15 min south of Tonbridge), where **Arthur** worked as a chauffeur.³³ His mother, **Ann**, died in the spring of 1919.³⁴ Though only speculation, it is possible that she died of what is commonly but incorrectly referred to as the Spanish flu, given that it was in its third wave in the spring of 1919.³⁵

Harry's eldest sister, **Florence**, married a photographer, Samuel Richard Birley Kitson, also from Ashford,³⁶ in the parish church on 4 September 1907.³⁷ Unfortunately, the couple lost their first child, a son they called Richard, at birth³⁸ or very shortly thereafter, in 1913, when they were living in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire.³⁹ Early in 1915, Florence gave birth to their second son, Cyril, likely in Ashford, because the birth was registered in Bakewell Parish, Derbyshire,⁴⁰ and when Samuel enlisted in the Royal Engineers as a sapper on 7 June 1916⁴¹ his address was Church Street, Ashford. At some time during Samuel's absence Florence and Cyril relocated to be near her parents, because when Samuel was demobilized in July 1919 his address was High Street, Pembury, Kent.⁴² Florence and Samuel had another child, a daughter named Iris, in 1921⁴³ but tragically she was only a toddler when she died.⁴⁴ Samuel died in Brighton, Sussex, in July 1957.⁴⁵ Florence lived to the ripe old age of 92 before passing away in 1976.⁴⁶

While Harry's brother **George** did not immediately follow his parents to Pembury, he was there when he married a local girl, Dorothy Helen Ratcliffe, in October 1916.⁴⁷ George and Dorothy had three children: a daughter, Freda Joyce, born in 1918 in Kent;⁴⁸ and two sons, Eric Arthur, born in 1919⁴⁹ and Kenneth George, born in 1931,⁵⁰ both in or near London. George died on 25 July 1958, still in the London area,⁵¹ and Dorothy in the fall of 1977, also in the London area.

The fifth of the Roberts children, **Martha**, married Thomas Caveney in 1921 in Bucklow, Cheshire.⁵² They too had three children: Lilian Yvonne Barbara, born in 1921,⁵³ Thomas James, born in 1922,⁵⁴ and Alan, born in 1923.⁵⁵ All the children were born in Bucklow. Unfortunately, Martha and Thomas's son Thomas was killed on 3 March 1943, like his uncle, serving his country. He was a gunner with Volunteer Reserve 15 Squadron, Royal Air Force Bomber Command.⁵⁶ Martha died in Macclesfield, Cheshire, in 1960;⁵⁷ her husband in Bucklow in 1967.⁵⁸

It appears that Harry's brother **John** may also have relocated to Pembury at some point, because in the summer of 1921 he married Rhona Kathleen Ratcliffe,⁵⁹ the younger sister of Dorothy Ratcliffe,⁶⁰ who had married his elder brother George. The couple were married in Brighton, Sussex, where they appear to have lived throughout their married life, though their eldest child, a daughter named Vera Kathleen, was born in Kent in 1922,⁶¹ perhaps so Rhona could be close to her family. Their second child, Dennis John, was born in Brighton in 1923.⁶² John died in October 1979,⁶³ his wife having died in February of that year.⁶⁴

Nothing is known with any certainty about what happened to Harry's youngest sister, **Ethel**, except that, as noted earlier, she moved with her parents to Pembury sometime between 1901 and 1911.⁶⁵

The last of the Roberts children, **Arthur**, enlisted in the Royal Navy on 9 September 1918,⁶⁶ shortly after his 18th birthday. It does not appear that he ever saw combat, as he died of pneumonia on 4 November 1918.⁶⁷

Beyond the fact that Henry's son, also **Arthur**, was living with his mother, stepfather and half-brother in Sheffield, Yorkshire, as a child in 1921,⁶⁸ it has not been possible to trace him further, as there were a number of Arthur Roberts's (including several with the middle initial "A") in Yorkshire during his likely lifetime.

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¹ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 February 2024), entry for Harry F Roberts, Registration district: Bakewell, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 2773, Folio: 138

² "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 February 2024), entry for Arthur Roberts, Registration district: Tewkesbury, Sub-registration district: Tewkesbury, Enumeration district institution, or vessel: 10, Piece: 2860, Folio: 30, Page: 4

³ "Cordwainer," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 26 February 2024)

⁴ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 February 2024), entry for James Roberts, Registration district: Kings Norton, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 20, Piece: 2956, Folio: 94, Page: 49

⁵ "1861 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 February 2024), entry for Ann Reynolds, Registration district: Basford, Sub-registration district: Wilford, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 6, Piece: 2446, Folio: 77, Page: 32

⁶ "Rank, profession or occupation," UK, *National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk: accessed 26 February 2024), research guides, census records

⁷ Note: "The frame was intended for use in the home and the whole family was involved, the men working the frame while their wives and children wound bobbins and seamed stockings... Working a hand frame was a strenuous occupation. The knitter used both feet to operate the treadles and both arms to move the heavy iron carriage on its wooden frame... Knitted fabric differs from woven fabric in that it does not have a separate warp and weft but is composed of a regular series of interlocking loops made from one continuous thread. This gives it a much greater elasticity than woven fabric, so that it moulds more readily to the shape of the human body and is therefore particularly useful for closely fitting garments such as stockings, socks and vests." Source: "History of Framework Knitting," *Barrow Upon Soar Heritage Group* (<https://www.barrowuponsoarheritage.org.uk>: accessed 26 February 2024)

⁸ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for Ann Reynolds [sic], Registration district: Prescott, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 8, Piece: 3722, Folio: 137, Page: 5

⁹ "Nottinghamshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for James Arthur Roberts

¹⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for Florence Ada Roberts, Registration place: Bakewell, Derbyshire, England, Volume: 7b, Page: 771

¹¹ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for William A Roberts, Registration district: Bakewell, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 2773, Folio: 138

¹² *Ibid.*, entry for George R Roberts

¹³ *Ibid.*, entry for Harry F Roberts

¹⁴ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for Martha Amy Roberts, Registration district: Bakewell, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 3263, Folio: 61, Page: 4, Household schedule number: 25

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, entry for John W Roberts

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, entry for Ethel May Roberts

¹⁷ Ibid., entry for Arthur F Roberts

¹⁸ "Derbyshire, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813–1991," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 February 2024), entry for William Arthur Roberts

¹⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 28 February 2024), entry for Henry Roberts, Registration district number: 439, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Household schedule number: 78, Piece: 21179

²⁰ "England, Yorkshire, Parish Registers, 1538–2016," *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org/en/: accessed 28 February 2024), entry for Edith Alice McEvoy, Document type: Marriages, Page: 212, Reference: PR-46-2-9

²¹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 28 February 2024), entry for Edith Tupling, Registration district number: 439, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 13, Household schedule number: 78, Piece: 21179

²² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 28 February 2024), entry for William Tupling, Registration district number: 510, Sub-registration district: East Brightside, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Piece: 27972

²³ "England, Yorkshire, Parish Registers, 1538-2016," *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org/en/: accessed 28 February 2024), entry for Arthur Alfred Roberts, Document type: Baptisms, Page: 298, Reference: PR-138-2-65

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 5 March 2024), entry for Roberts, H

²⁶ "Conscription in the United Kingdom," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 5 March 2024)

²⁷ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for Roberts, H

²⁸ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 5 March 2024), entry for Roberts, H, Service No: 205010

²⁹ "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 March 2024), entry for Harry Roberts

³⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 7 March 2024), entry Edith A Roberts, Registration district: Sheffield, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9e, Page: 738

³¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 7 March 2024), entry for Eric Mawkes, Registration district: Sheffield, Inferred county: South Yorkshire, Volume: 9c, Page: 1467

³² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 7 March 2024), entry for Edith A Mawkes, Registration district: Sheffield, Inferred county: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9c, Page: 596

³³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 7 March 2024), entry for Arthur Roberts, Registration district number: 50, Sub-registration district: Brenchley, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 08, Piece: 4100

³⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 7 March 2024), entry for Ann Roberts, Registration district: Tonbridge, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 851

³⁵ "Spanish flu," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 12 March 2024)

³⁶ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Samuel R B Kitson, Registration district: Bakewell, Sub-registration district: Bakewell, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 3263, Folio: 70, Page: 20, Household schedule number: 123

³⁷ "Derbyshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1931," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Florence Ada Roberts

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- ³⁸ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Richard B Kitson, Registration place: Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, England, Volume: 6b, Page: 1118
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- ⁴¹ “UK British Army World War I Service Records, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Samuel Richard Birley Kitson
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Iris M B B Kitson, Registration place: Tonbridge, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1621
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- ⁴⁶ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Florence Ada Kitson, Registration place: Tonbridge, Inferred county; Kent, Volume: 16, Page: 2673
- ⁴⁷ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for George R Roberts, Registration district: Tonbridge, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1831
- ⁴⁸ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Freda J Roberts, Registration place: Tonbridge, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1233
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- ⁵⁰ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Kenneth G Roberts, Registration place: Uxbridge, Inferred county: Middlesex, Volume: 3a, Page: 128
- ⁵¹ “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for George Reynolds Roberts
- ⁵² “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Martha A Roberts, Registration district: Bucklow, Inferred county: Cheshire, Volume: 8a, Page 366
- ⁵³ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Lilian Y Caveney, Registration place: Bucklow, Inferred county: Cheshire, Volume: 8a, Page: 335
- ⁵⁴ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Thomas J Caveney, Registration place: Bucklow, Inferred county: Cheshire, Volume: 8a, Page: 288
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- ⁵⁶ "UK and Allied Countries, Index of International Bomber Command Losses, 1936–1966," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2024), entry for Thomas James Caveney
- ⁵⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 14 March 2024), entry for Martha A Caveney, Registration place: Macclesfield, Inferred county; Cheshire, Volume: 10a, Page: 339
- ⁵⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 14 March 2024), entry for Thomas Caveney, Registration place: Bucklow, Inferred county; Cheshire, Volume: 10a, Page: 119
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- ⁶² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 14 March 2024), entry for Dennis J Roberts, Registration place: Brighton, Inferred county: East Sussex, Volume: 2b, Page: 273
- ⁶³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 18 March 2024), entry for John Wilfred Roberts, Registration place: Brighton, Inferred county; East Sussex, Volume: 18, Page: 0319
- ⁶⁴ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 18 March 2024), entry for Rhona Kathleen Roberts
- ⁶⁵ Based on 1901 and 1911 England census records
- ⁶⁶ "UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services, 1848–1939," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 18 March 2024), entry for Arthur Frederick Roberts
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ "1921 Census of England and Wales," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 20 March 2024), entry for Arthur Alfred Roberts, Registration district: Sheffield, Registration district number: 510, Sub-district: East Brightside, Sub-district number: 8, Enumeration district: 13, County: Yorkshire (West Riding), Piece: 23098