

John Henry Cowling 1897 - 1918

Bombardier John Henry Cowling (75452) of the 177th Siege Battery, 3rd Siege Battalion, Royal Garrison Artillery was born in Mary Tavy in April 1897, the son of John, a stone mason, and Melleny (Greening) Cowling of Woodford House.

His occupation on enlistment was stonemason.

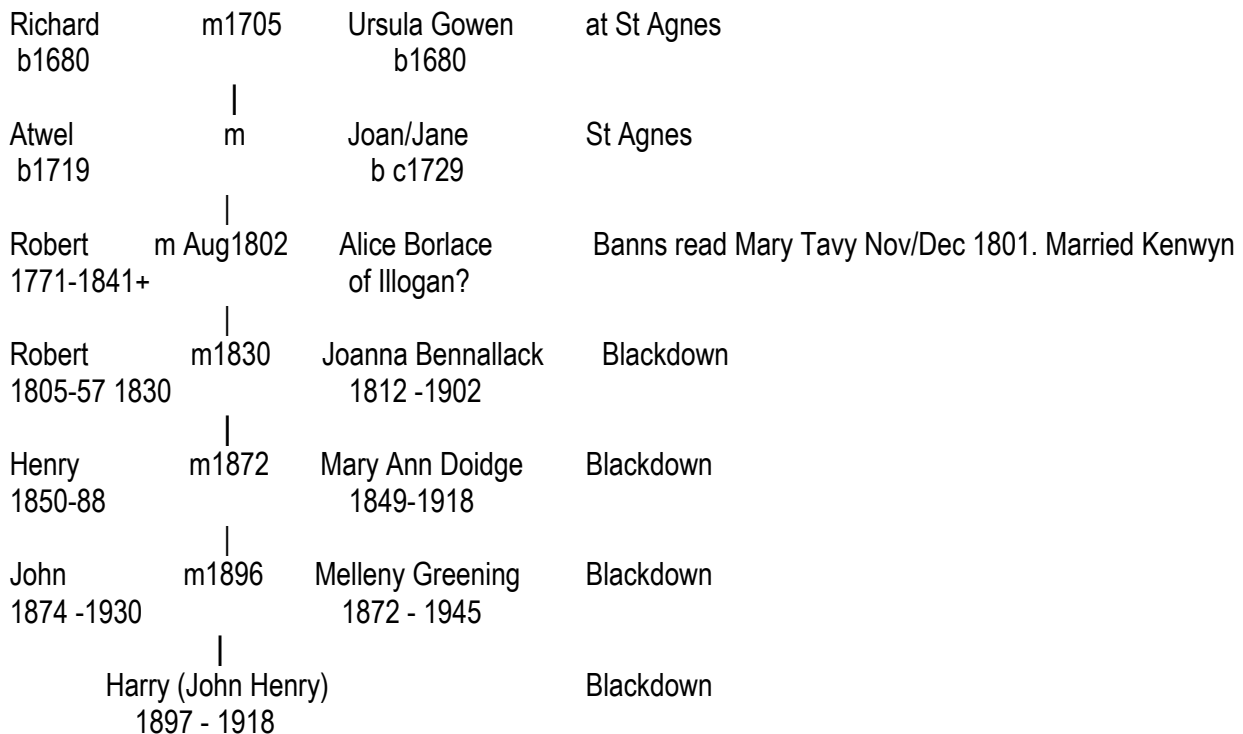
He went to France in February 1918, suffered shrapnel wounds in a gas attack in April 1918, recovered, but died of subsequent wounds on 5 October 1918 aged 21.

He was buried in the Templeux-Le-Geurard British Cemetery (Somme).

John Henry or **Harry**, born in April 1897 was the eldest child of John and Melleny Cowling of Woodford House, Brentor. His siblings were William Francis (Frank) b1900, Melleny Olive (Olive) b1902 and George b1904. Older Brentor residents will remember George (Swisher), who was quite active in village affairs.

The Cowling family was long established in Lamerton parish and the Blackdown area, with the family being traced back earlier to St Agnes in Cornwall, through Harry's ancestors born in 1680.

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Richard Cowling and his wife, **Ursula Gowen**, both born in 1680, were married in 1705. They had six children, two daughters and four sons: Emblen, John, Richard, Atwel (died in infancy), Eulalia and another **Atwel** (born 1719).

Between 1750 and 1774, **Atwel** and his wife, **Joan or Jane**, had ten children: William, John, Richard, Atwel, Leah, James, Mary, Thomas, **Robert** and Elizabeth. Many of these children stayed in the St Agnes area and increased family numbers substantially!

Their youngest son, **Robert**, married **Alice Borlace** in 1802 in Kenwyn. Their son, also **Robert**, was born in 1805 in Lamerton. Robert snr was a copper miner and listed in the 1841 Census as living with his son.

In 1830 the younger **Robert** (b1805), also a miner, married **Joanna Bennallack**, whose birth had

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been recorded in Tavistock in 1812. They had seven children, William, Mary, Thomas, John, Elizabeth, **Henry** and Frederick between 1835 and 1853. Their oldest son, William, died when he was 17 just before the birth of their youngest son, Frederick. Robert, the father, died in 1857 when Frederick was four years old.

The 1841 Census for the Parish of Lamerton shows **Robert** Cowling (35) a manganese miner, his wife Joanna (29), children William (6) and Mary (2) and his father Robert (70) a copper miner.

Robert's brother, John (b1810), married Joanna's sister, Mary Bennalack (b1817). In 1841 they were living at the Toll House. John (25) a manganese miner, Mary was 23 and their children were Elizabeth (5) and John (2). They were living with Anne Blee 45, the toll collector. Unfortunately, tragedy struck the family: Brentor parish records show that Mary was buried on 11 October 1842 aged 25 and John on 21 January 1849 aged 39.

The 1851 Census shows **Robert** and his family living at Worth Mill. Robert was a copper miner aged 45, Joannah 37, her mother Mary Benalack 60, and their children William 16, Mary 12, Thomas 9, John 6, Elizabeth 3 and **Henry** 3 months.

As Robert had died in 1857, the 1861 Census shows Joanna as a widow aged 41, living in Cowellings Buildings with her sons Thomas 19 and John 16 both copper miners, two younger sons Henry 10 and Frederick 7 and her mother Mary Brunnalack (her age was given as 73 and she was described as being Joanna's mother-in-law). Parish burial records show the burial of Mary Benalack aged 84 of Blackdown Mary Tavy on 25 April 1867 and also William Benalack aged 59 of South Brentor on 22 October 1837.

In 1871, Joanna 56, **Henry** 20 and Frederick 17, both miners, were living in Mary Tavy by Wortha Mill. In 1872 **Henry** (1850-1888), married **Mary Anne Doidge** (1849-1930?). They had at least 7 children including William (April-May 1872), **John** (1874-), Harry (1877-), William George (1878-), Rosina (1880-), Frederick (b Feb 1881- listed in 1881 census as 1 month), Frederick (22 May 1882- 24 Mar 1885 Family Bible) and Charlie (1884-).

In 1881 Henry and Mary Anne (who were **Harry Cowling's** grandfather and grandmother) were living in North Blackdown. Henry was 31 and a railway packer. They had five children living with them, **John** 7, Henry 6, William George 3, Rosina 1 and Frederick, who was 1 month old. Great grandmother, Joanna, (Henry's mother) lived on her own not far from the family. In 1887, Henry, who had in earlier years worked as a copper miner, went to India as a gold miner. He died there in 1888. His brother, Frederick (b1853) worked as a gold miner in New Zealand.

The 1891 census records show that Mary A Cowling, **Harry's** widowed grandmother, aged 42, was farming and living at Bridge Cottage, with her children **John** (17) (Harry's father) a mason's apprentice), Harry (14) a railway worker, William G (13), Rosina (11), Charlie (7) all at school. Also living with the family were Mary's mother in law Johanna Cowling (b1815) and Mary's niece Mary E Doidge (5). Mary Ellen was the daughter of Mary's sister Emma; she had been born in Bodmin Workhouse and was raised by her aunt Mary.

In the census of 1901 **Harry's** father, John, was 27 and married to **Melleny** (recorded in the Census as Melory) Greening (29). They had married in the Summer of 1896. John was a Stone Mason employing men. Their two children were listed as **John Henry** aged 3 and William F 1, both born in Mary Tavy. The family lived at Woodford House, West Blackdown which was opposite the station and close to John's mother Mary Anne. Her two sons, William (22) and Charles (17) were both Stone Masons living at home with her and probably working for their brother. Also living with her was Mary Anne's mother-in-law, **Harry's** great grandmother, Johanna Cowling, who was 88 and Mary Anne's niece, Mary Ellen Doidge 15.

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On the night of the 1911 Census Mellony was listed as 39, married and head of the household. She had been married for fifteen years and had had four children, all of whom were still living. Her four children were **Harry** (14), Frank (11), Olive (9) and George (7). Husband, John, was not at home that night. He was listed in the Canadian census of 1911 at St Thomas, Elgin West, Ontario with Ernest Martin, also of Brentor. They had sailed in March 1911. It is reported that he went to Canada in 1914 with Christopher Postlethwaite, son of the Doctor. Interestingly, Robert French Smith, the Vicar's son, also lived in Canada, probably prior to the 1911 Census. John Postlethwaite, another son of the Doctor, went to Australia on 19 March 1911.

Harry's grandmother, Mary Anne was 60 and still farming. Daughter Rosina (31) was living at home, a farmer's daughter doing dairy work and youngest son Charles (26) was also working on the farm. Mary Anne's niece Mary Ellen Doidge was 25 and working as a general domestic servant. Joanna Cowling, Harry's great grandmother had died in 1902.

Mary Anne's second son Harry or Henry, had continued his career in the railways rising to the rank of Station Master at the age of 35. He was living in Totnes with his wife of 12 years, Ethel Elizabeth Barnicoat (aged 30) and their four children James Maddock (10), Ethel Barnicoat (8), Henry (3) and Mary (1). Station Master Henry, **Harry's** uncle, went on to be station master at Princetown and died in 1923 aged 48, from complications after being kicked by a horse.

His son, another Henry/Harry was killed in action over Brest on 15 February 1941. Sergeant Cowling (526616) of 217 Squadron of the RAF was 33 when he died and is commemorated on the Walkhampton war memorial and in the St Eval Church Book of Remembrance for air and ground personnel who lost their lives while serving at RAF St Eval.

Harry enlisted in the army at Tavistock on 19th November 1915. In his Attestation for enlistment, **Harry** recorded that he was a British Subject, aged 18 years and 7 months, a Stonemason (like his father), was willing to be vaccinated and enlisted for General Service, had received a Notice, and had understood the meaning and was willing to serve as long as His Majesty required his service.

He enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery in 3rd Siege Battery but he wasn't actually called up until 14th April 1916, as soon as he was 19. He was allotted to the Royal Garrison Artillery and initially sent to 3 Depot R.G.A. The Citadel, Plymouth. After initial training Harry appears to have spent some time at Prees Heath Camp in Shropshire where 3 Reserve Brigade (Siege) R.G.A. was stationed. He didn't actually reach France until 15th February 1918. By this time he had been promoted to bombardier and was sent to 3rd Siege Battery, which appears to have been fighting in the area of the Somme. During the war the R.G.A. became mobilised and was equipped with howitzers, guns that fired large shells at a high trajectory into enemy positions. Because of their weight and cumbersome nature they were usually sited some way behind the front, but were still open to counter attacks from enemy artillery or from the air.

After only a couple of months (10th April) Harry was admitted to 56 General Hospital, Etaples, suffering from the effects of mustard gas and shrapnel wounds. When he was pronounced fit he returned to the front, although whether with the same unit is unknown. On 5th October he was again wounded and he died aged 21 at 2/2 Lowland Field Ambulance. The fact that he got no further along the medical chain than a field ambulance suggests that he died fairly soon after being wounded. He was initially buried in the grounds of the chateau at St. Emilie Villers Faucon, near the army hospital, but in 1930 he was re-interred in the British Cemetery at Templeux-le-Guerard.

This link takes you to the Commonwealth Graves Commission certificate commemorating Harry Cowling. <http://www.cwgc.org/search/certificate.aspx?casualty=337430>

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His father wrote asking for his belongings to be returned to him at Brentor, especially his watch. That never turned up, but letters, cards, photos, a wallet and a case were delivered. Rather intriguingly in 1920 his father also received a nine carat gold ring set with a diamond and two sapphires. In his will Harry left £36 8s 0d. It is not know whether this included his £12 War Gratuity and other money owed him by the army. His service overseas entitled him to the British War and Victory medals.

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