

Private Harry Cecil Mills

Harry's great grandfather (born around 1801 in Feckenham, Worcestershire) was Joseph Mills a nail maker. He married Mary Fowkes on 15th April 1821.ⁱ

In 1841 Joseph lived with Mary and five of his children at Crabbs Cross, a hamlet partly in Feckenham Parish and partly in Ipsley Parish. His eldest children are twins,ⁱⁱ John and Elizabeth, both 15 years old (born 1826) followed by William, aged 13 (born 1828 and baptised 3rd August 1828ⁱⁱⁱ), Charles aged 11 (born 1830) and Michael aged 2 (born 1839). A son, Joseph was born on 22nd July 1827, but was not recorded. on the census.^{iv}



Figure 1: 1848 newspaper announcement of the marriage of Joseph's only daughter, Elizabeth, and naming his 'brewhouse'.

By 1851 only the youngest two children still lived at home at Crabbs Cross. Charles had taken up the trade of nail maker but William was still a scholar. Joseph had set up and ran, with the assistance of Mary, a beerhouse called the Royal Oak Inn (see Figure 1). The idea of a beerhouse goes back to the reaction



Figure 2: Ceramic sign for West Country

against the serious effects of widespread gin drinking in the early 19th century, when Parliament made it legal for any householder to open his house for the sale (and consumption) of beer on payment of a modest fee to the licensing magistrate, subject to good conduct. The new Act had its effect, and thousands of beerhouses were opened in the 1830s, regardless of the suitability of the premises. The Royal Oak Inn is now a private house, next door to Crabbs Cross chip shop but it retains a ceramic plaque featuring a castle and: 'WEST COUNTRY ALES - 1760 - BEST IN THE WEST' set into the front wall.^v

Joseph's youngest son, Michael, married Elizabeth Martin in 1860.^{vi} The census carried out the following year recorded the newly married couple in their own accommodation at Crabbs Cross and that Michael was employed as 'a needle maker' and Elizabeth as 'a milliner'.

By 1871 Michael was the foreman at his needle works. Elizabeth was still making hats for a living. The family lived at Astwood Bank, two miles from Crabbs Cross where their two children, Blanche and Joseph Rupert were born, in 1866 and 1888 respectively.

The 1881 census recorded Michael and Elizabeth's move to Redditch. They lived at Court 5, Britten Street. The family had increased to four children with the arrival of William Boulton (Boulton was later spelt without the 'u') and Charles Harry born in 1871 and 1875 respectively.^{vii}

On 20th October 1890, Michael and Elizabeth's son, William, aged nineteen years old, married Elizabeth Aston at St Stephen's Church, Redditch.^{viii} On 16th February 1891, Harry Cecil was born. At the time of his birth, Elizabeth and William lived in Britten Street, Redditch.^{ix} The 1891 census confirmed that William, Elizabeth and one month old Harry lived at Court 5, House 7, Britten Street, the home of William's parents. , William was a bricklayer journeyman and Elizabeth a 'fish hook bender' Fish hook making was started in Redditch at the beginning of the 19th Century by companies such as Henry Millward, Samuel Allcock and William Bartlett, a tradition that lasted nearly 200 years.^x

After the birth of their next child, William Alfred, in 1892, William and Elizabeth relocated to Birmingham where they lived in a three bedroom terraced house at 3 Farquhar Road, Moseley. William was a bricklayer by trade.^{xi} A further child, Richard, was born there in 1897. A previously unrecorded son, Edwin H A Mills, born in 1889, appears on the 1901 census

At the age of nineteen, Harry Cecil Mills, a brick layer by trade, married Amy Crompton in the summer of 1910.^{xii} When the 1911 census was taken, Harry was at his parent's house with his three brothers and a sister Fanny Elizabeth (born in 1903) at 50 Coldbath Road, Billesley.^{xiii} His wife, Amy was at 36 Coleville Road, Balsall Heath, a tenement dwelling where she was lodging with the Wright family.

Harry was a conscript in Lord Kitchener's New Army in 1916.^{xiv} He joined the Rifle Brigade as a Private, No S/11106 before he moved to the 166th Coy of the Machine Gun Corps (MGC) with a new Regimental No 8559.^{xv} The 166th MGC Coy was formed on 1st March 1916 and was part of the 55th Division.

At the beginning of October 1916 the 166th MGC moved to the Ypres Sector where it spent its time in and out of the front line in the Ypres salient interspersed with periods in reserve and training.

The war diary for the 166th MGC for June 1917 reports considerable enemy artillery but the only casualty reports were between 6th and 10th June. The war diary reads:

Considerable activity on our trenches by the enemy and one direct hit was obtained upon a MG dug out (Hell Fire Corner) causing two casualties.

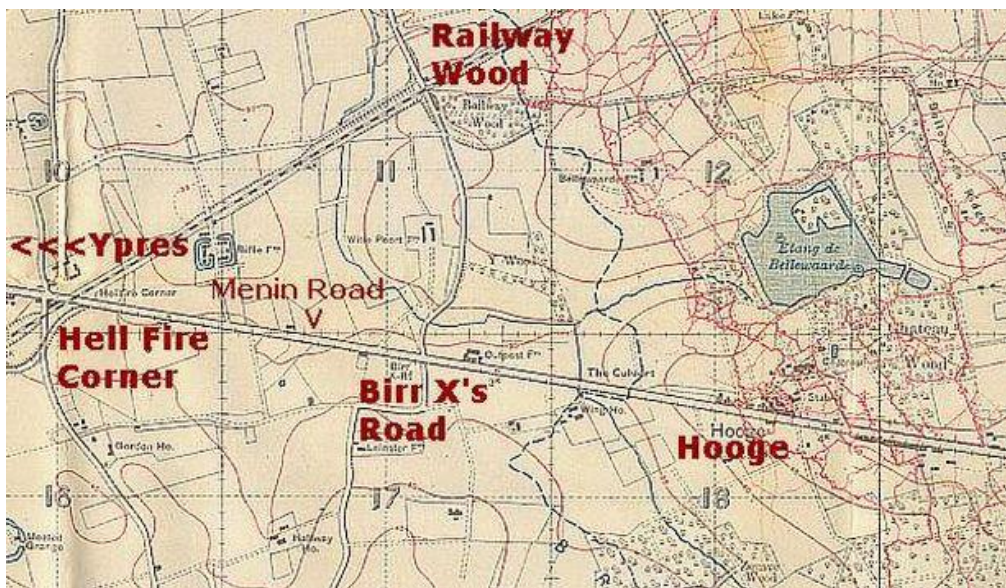


Figure 3: The notorious intersection known as Hell Fire Corner

Harry must have been one of the two casualties as no further men were reported as killed or wounded after the relief of the MGC the following day. The surviving men returned to temporary accommodation under canvas, in relative safety behind the front line, and then proceeded to Quelmes, near Poperinge, for a period of training at the end of the month.^{xvi}

Harry died from his wounds on 21st June 1917, aged 26 years. He is buried at Mendinghem Military Cemetery, 10 miles NE of Ypres.



Figure 4: (Left) Mendinghem Military Cemetery (Right) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial

Harry is commemorated on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley and is on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham's Hall of Memory.

Amy was left to bring up their two daughters Amy, aged 5 and Joan, aged 1, alone. At the time of Harry's death, Amy was living at Walnut Cottage, Billesley Lane, Moseley.^{xvii} The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cites Amy's address as 268 Brook Lane, Kings Heath, Birmingham, around 1919.

Two of Harry's brothers served in France and survived the war.

Written and researched by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

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Endnotes

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- i England, Select Marriages, 1538–1973
Hoult family tree, Ancestry
 - ii Hoult family tree, Ancestry
1841 census records both their ages as 15
 - iii England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975
 - iv Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers
 - v Worcestershire Defunct Brewery
<http://www.breweryhistory.com/Defunct/Worcs.htm>
 - vi England & Wales marriages 1837-2005 show a Michael Mills marriage to Elizabeth Martin Ref Bromsgrove 1860, 2/4, 6C, 571. The England & Wales Births 1837-2006 for William Boulton* Mills born Alcester, 1871, 4/4, 6D, 561 (*note Boulton with a 'u') names 'Martin' as his mother's name and also for Charles Harry Mills born Alcester, 1874, 4/4, 6D, 561.
 - vii See iv
 - viii England Select Marriages, 1538-1973
 - ix Birth Certificate for Harry Cecil Mills gives his mother's maiden name as 'Aston'
 - x *Redditch and Alcester Advertiser*, 18th November 2012
 - xi 1901 census

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- xii England and Wales Civil Marriage Index, Kings Norton, ¾, 6C, 699
- xiii There is no number written on the address for the Mills family in Coldbath Road, but the previous and subsequent numbers of their immediate neighbours were recorded as 49 and 51
- xiv British Army Medal index records he was only eligible for the British War Medal and the Victory Medal
- xv UK WW1 Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920
- xvi National Archives War Diaries for 166th MGC, Ref WO 95/2930/2
- xvii *Birmingham Mail*, 9th July 1917

Illustrations

Figure 1 *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 13th June 1849

Figure 2 Livery sign by Duncan Hall <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dullhunk/5996596967>

Figure 3 *The Sentinel*, 2nd August 2013

Figure 4 Commonwealth War Graves Commission