

John Henry Bowles

The next name on the Rownhams memorial is John Henry Bowles, who served as a private, (or pioneer) in the Road Construction Company (319th), part of the Royal Engineers. He'd previously served as a Private in the Hampshire Regiment. He was either 34 or 35 when he died, the records being, as usual contradictory. This becomes a bit of a theme with researching this particular man.

He was born in Rownhams, the son of Augusta Bowles, who at the time of the 1891 census was a 28 year old laundress, living with her widowed mother Eliza Bowles in Lords Hill, Nursling. I wonder if they lived on what was known as "Soapsuds Alley" because the washerwomen living there threw their soapy water on to the road where it ran down to mix with the spring water. There are five other Bowles living at the address, Rose (22), William (11), Charles (9) and Florence (4), as well as Henry (not John Henry), who's aged 7 at the time.

They were still at Lords Hill in 1901, but Henry – an agricultural labourer – is listed as Eliza's son, which I think is a mistake, giving that she was 70 and he only 19.

By 1911, there's another conundrum. There's a J H Bowles living at a cottage in Ampfield, and a John Bowles working as a farm carter and living with his wife Lilly, mother-in-law and two children in Ampfield. The second would tie in better with John H Bowles being listed as husband of Alice Lilly Bowles of Ampfield, where his name is also displayed on the village war memorial.

He was killed in action on 25th September 1917, another casualty of the 3rd Battle of Ypres. He is buried in La Clytte Military Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium. He holds the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Ann Laird - Rownhams October 2013