

NATHANIEL SAUNDERS

Nathaniel Saunders was born on 19th January 1891 in Wanstead, Essex. He was the youngest son of Elizabeth Saunders, whose maiden name was Thompson.

Elizabeth Thompson was born on 10th October 1847 in the Parish of St George-in-the-East, Stepney. She was one of the thirteen children of William Thompson, a French Polisher, who was born in the City of London in 1818 and his wife Elizabeth Thompson née Richards who was born in Enfield in 1817. They lived at 8, Chapman Street in the parish of St George-in-the-East. At the time they were residing in the area, the population in St-George-in-the-East was dense, extremely poor and by 1866 was slowly recovering from a severe outbreak of cholera.

On the 2nd May 1868 at St Giles Church Cripplegate, Elizabeth Thompson aged 20 married Henry Joseph Saunders aged 27, a Groom, whose address was 116 Fore Street in the City of London.

Henry Joseph was the son of Henry Saunders born in 1818 in Romford Essex, who was a labourer/ gardener by trade and Elizabeth Susan Root born in Leyton Essex in 1818. In 1851, when Henry Joseph was aged 8, the Saunders family were living in Wanstead Park. (UK Census 1851)

In 1871, Henry Joseph Saunders, who was born in Wanstead in 1842, was aged 29 and employed as a coachman. He was living in Grove Cottage, George Lane, Wanstead with his wife Elizabeth and their first child, also called Elizabeth who had been born in Leytonstone in 1869.

The couple had six children in total but by 1911, only three had survived infancy. They were Elizabeth Emily Saunders 1869 – 1935; Henry Victor Saunders 1873 - 1931; Joseph William Saunders 1875- 1954.

Tragedy struck this young family when Henry Joseph died in November 1878 at the age of 35. Elizabeth was pregnant at the time with the couple's 6th child, Alfred Leonard who sadly died in 1880 aged one. In January 1877, Wanstead Congregational Church had already stepped in to help the family and the Deacons had awarded Mrs Saunders 5 shillings per week.

By 1891, Elizabeth (Saunders) Wright was living at 12, Cowley Road Wanstead with William Wright, a Boot maker by trade who was born in Ipswich, Suffolk in 1850. Living with them were their sons, Joseph (Saunders) Wright aged 15, employed as a Van Boy carrier and two month old Nathaniel Wright born on 19th January 1891 in Wanstead.

By 1901, Elizabeth Saunders was living at 24, Cowley Rd Wanstead with ten year old Nathaniel, whose surname was now Saunders. Now aged 53, Elizabeth was employed as a Charwoman.



Elizabeth Saunders nee Thompson (Photograph courtesy of Elaine Cave)

In 1911, Nathaniel and his mother were still living at 24 Cowley Rd but now Elizabeth aged 63 was retired and 20 year old Nathaniel was the bread winner, being employed as a labourer / plumber.

Elizabeth's eldest son Henry Victor Saunders aged 37 and employed as a cowman for a dairy was living close by with his wife Sarah Ann Saunders nee Smith and their 3 children at no 10, Cowley Rd Wanstead.

Elizabeth Emily Saunders, Nathaniel's eldest half-sister married William Thomas Parrish a bricklayer in 1896. They had 10 children together and lived at no 61, Cowley Rd.

Joseph William Saunders, Nathaniel's other half sibling emigrated to New South Wales, Australia in 1911 to begin a new life, as did many others at this time. Joseph's wife, Alice Welham and their 3 children, Alice, Joseph and Alec followed in 1912.

The Western Front

Nathaniel did not arrive on the Western Front until after 1916. He enlisted in Stratford and became L/29568 Gunner Nathaniel Saunders in the Royal Field Artillery, 379th Battery, 169th Brigade.

This Brigade had been broken up in 1916 and reformed in May 1917 and then was sent to the Western Front on 14th May 1917. (Under 3rd Army) It was made up of 376th, 377th, 378th, and 379th Battery R.F.A. (all with 18- pounders).

The Royal Field Artillery provided the 18- pounder gun and the 4.5inch howitzer batteries which supported the infantry divisions. The First World War was dominated by the artillery of all the belligerents. By far the greatest loss of life and also the huge number of terrible injuries were caused by artillery fire.



Nathaniel Saunders' family believe that the R.F.A Gunner holding the horse steady for the Army Farrier is their relative Nathaniel. He wears the Farrier's Proficiency Badge on his right sleeve. (Photograph courtesy of Elaine Cave)

In November 1917, Nathaniel's 379th Battery was part of the British offensive against the German Hindenburg Line in the region of Cambrai in Northern France. Led by tanks and making innovative use of artillery, the operation achieved a short-lived breakthrough. The offensive got bogged down in a struggle for Bourlon Wood.



Gunner Nathaniel Saunders 1891-1917 (Photograph courtesy of Elaine Cave)

In the photograph, Nathaniel is wearing the leather bandolier of ammunition pouches diagonally across his chest and spurs on his boots. It indicates that he was a driver who sat astride the left horse in a pair of horses within the team of six horses which pulled the gun. (3 drivers per gun) The Artillery Battery had to be mobile and move their guns quickly into position.



British artillery in action in France, about 1917 (Photograph courtesy of Redbridge Information and Heritage)

By 30th November, German commanders had moved fresh troops to Cambrai and organized a successful counter offensive. Nathaniel, one of many exhausted British men was insufficiently prepared for the defence. Nathaniel was killed in action on that day. He was 27 years old and his body was not recovered.

Nathaniel is commemorated on Panel 1 of the Cambrai Memorial, Louverval. Departement du Nord. Pas de Calais, France. He is also commemorated on the Wanstead United Reformed Church's Great War Memorial and the War Memorial in Wanstead High Street.


Nathaniel was awarded the War and Victory Medals.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
SAUNDERS Nathaniel	R F A	Gnr	429568


Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	RFA/149B9476		Dead 30-11-17
BRITISH	"	"	
STAR			

Theatre of War first served in
Date of entry therein

Victory Medal



British War Medal



K 1380.

Medal Record Card for Gunner Nathaniel Saunders

The Family Story

The Saunders family story has been written and very kindly provided for the Wanstead United Reformed Church's Heritage Lottery Funded, 'Our 15: Remembered Lives' Project by Elaine Cave, Nathaniel Saunders' great niece.

“My family like so many other families in Wanstead lost many young men during World War One. In my own family my Grandmother lost a son, a brother and a nephew.

My Grandmother Elizabeth Emily Parrish nee Saunders lost her eldest son and second child, William Henry Parrish. He was born on the 17th August 1897 and he enlisted in Stratford, probably in 1915 and was subsequently posted to the 7th Battalion of The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. William was possibly in Belgium for Christmas 1916, as I have in my possession a photograph of Elizabeth Parrish, on the back of which she had written a few words to Will and dated this 20th December 1915.



Private William Henry Parrish (Photo courtesy of Elaine Cave)

She probably did not see him again as he died of wounds on the 5th April 1916 aged 18. Another photograph that she cherished was the one she received of the wooden cross that marked his grave in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium, on the back of which she had written, *“My Dear Will’s grave somewhere in France.”*



Mrs Elizabeth Emily Parrish (1869-1935) Photo courtesy of Elaine Cave.

Elizabeth’s half-brother who also died was Nathaniel Saunders, who was born on the 19th January 1891. Nathaniel was the youngest son of my Great- Grandmother Elizabeth Saunders nee Thompson, and William Wright of Wanstead

Essex. Nathaniel, like William also enlisted at the local Army Recruiting Office in Stratford. He was a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery and was killed in action on the 30th November 1917. Nathaniel has no known grave and is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial in France.

Elizabeth's nephew John James Parrish born in 1893 also died in WW1. He was one of the sons of Arthur Charles Parrish (1867-1947) and his wife Annie Elizabeth Parrish (1871-1950) whose maiden name was Butcher. Arthur was Elizabeth's brother-in-law. *(Editor's note: Arthur Parrish is mentioned in the Wanstead Congregational Church Archives and the family may have been part of our congregation)*



Lance Corporal John Parrish (Photo courtesy of Elaine Cave)

John Parrish was a Lance Corporal 9687 in the 2nd Battalion Prince of Wales South Lancashire Regiment and I believe he had enlisted in 1911. *(Editor's note: The 1911 Census shows that John Parrish aged 17 was billeted at the Wesley Barracks in Brentwood.)* John was killed in action on Saturday 25th September 1915 aged 22. It was a day on which his battalion were under heavy bombardment by the enemy. John too has no known grave and he is commemorated on Panel 37 of the Menin Gate in Ypres.

All three young men have their names inscribed on the War Memorial in Wanstead High Street.”



Elaine Cave visiting the “Our 15: Remembered Lives Exhibition” at Wanstead United Reformed Church in November 1914(Photo W.U.R.C.)

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Margaretha Pollitt Brown for Wanstead United Reformed Church.