

Harry SEALEY (Tony Hadland's maternal grandfather)

3 June 1892: Born Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset. Nickname 'Tiny'.

His father was Charles SEALEY (1855–1918), born Broomfield, Somerset, variously recorded as a farm labourer and carter. His mother was Marianne (or Mary Anne) BERRY (1857–1951), from Kingston St Mary, Somerset. (Broomfield, Kingston St Mary and Norton Fitzwarren are all at the south-east end of the Quantock Hills.) Harry had 8 siblings who survived infancy.

1901: Schoolboy, living at home with parents at 3 Rectory Lane, Norton Fitzwarren.

1911: Valet to William Houlton WORRALL (b.1850, Salford, Lancashire) at Eastcombe House, Tawstock, near Barnstable, Devon.

Pre-1915: Harry SEALEY moves to Bitham House, Avon Dassett, Warwickshire, to be chauffeur to Miss PERRY, a relative of the Worralls. The Worralls and Perrys were Roman Catholics.

(A Catholic church, presbytery and convent had been built in the village in the 1850s. Joseph KNIGHT, a nurseryman from Lancashire who had made his fortune in Chelsea in the early nineteenth century, financed these buildings and had Bitham House built. He planted the surrounding parkland with exotic trees, including early specimens of monkey-puzzles and giant redwoods. Joseph Knight's business partner was Thomas Aloysius Perry, who married Knight's niece, hence the Perry family connection with Bitham House.)

8 May 1915: Harry SEALEY marries Mildred Mary FISHER (born Dublin, 6 November 1888) at St Joseph's RC church, Avon Dassett, having converted from the Church of England to Roman Catholicism, his bride's faith. She had come to Avon Dassett as head parlour maid. Mildred immediately becomes pregnant and moves to Ireland, to live at her parents' home, 14 James Terrace, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, near the Curragh Camp.

28 May 1915: 20 days after getting married, 23-year-old Harry SEALEY enters WW1 as an ambulance driver with the British Red Cross Society on the Western Front.

27 November 1915: From the British Red Cross Society, Harry SEALEY enlists in the Army Service Corps, as an ambulance driver (rank Private), making his attestation 'in the field'. Serves with the Expeditionary Force on the Western Front.

4 February 1916: Son Charles Harry SEALEY born at Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

3–11 June 1916: On leave, presumably visits wife, son and other family in Ireland.

30 October 1916: Admitted to hospital.

9 November 1916: Discharged from hospital and rejoins his unit.

9 April 1917: Confined to barracks for three days for disobeying orders dated 1 April 1917.

4 August 1917: Personal details recorded – height 5 foot 8 inches, weight 147 lb, chest girth fully expanded 38 inches, range of expansion 3 inches, physical development ‘good’. Slight scar on left eyelid, concealed by hair.

6–20 November 1917: On furlough.

9 April 1918: Harry’s brother-in-law, 26-year-old Company Sergeant Major Robert FISHER of the 21st Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, killed leading an advance at Ploegsteert, Belgium. (Awarded posthumous Distinguished Conduct Medal.) According to family tradition, Harry SEALEY was passing nearby, on his way to take leave, and dropped in to see ‘Bobby’, only to discover he had been blown to smithereens. Harry is said to have been able to notify the family of this sad event before they received official notification from the War Office.

29 November – 13 December 1918: On furlough.

17 May 1919: Posted to 22 MT (ambulance convoy).

1919: With occupying army in north-west Germany (including Osnabruck).

18 August 1919: Examined for demobilisation at Calais. Deemed medical category A, general ability ‘very good’.

22 August 1919: Issued with ‘Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity’ for reservists by No.1 Dispersal Unit, Fovant (Salisbury Plain). Address now given as Avon Dassett. On the Class Z army reserve for possible call-up if the situation in occupied Germany deteriorates. (Class Z existed from 3 December 1918 until 31 March 1920.)

21 August – 18 September 1919: Listed as ‘home’, presumably using up leave due to him before demobilisation.

(Harry SEALEY was awarded the Victory and British medals for his service with the Army Service Corps. He was also granted the British Red Cross medal for his service with the society before enlisting in the army.)

September 1919: Resumes work as chauffeur at Bitham Hall, Avon Dassett.

13 October 1922: Daughter Winefride Mary born (TH’s mother) at Avon Dassett.

9 August 1928: Daughter Mildred Mary born at Avon Dassett.

(1 September 1939: Britain declares war on Germany.)

c.1942: Harry is too old for military service but is directed into employment at the Northern Aluminium Company sheet rolling factory, to the north of Banbury. During the war, this plant supplied about 60% of the aircraft industry’s needs and, at its peak,

employed some 4,000. It worked with an aluminium recycling plant near Adderbury, which processed metal from crashed English and German planes. The factory was on the Southam Road by the Banbury Canal and existed until 2009. Shepperton film studios built a decoy factory two miles to the north. This is bombed on 3 October 1940 but the well-camouflaged real factory never is. Harry has a difficult journey to work, especially as he is on shifts. He has to cycle to Farnborough then catch a bus. The family continue to live in their tied cottage, Bitham Lodge, and Harry still does jobs on the estate, such as keeping the gashouse running and looking after the geese.

December 1944: Harry, his wife Mildred and younger daughter Mildred move to High Street, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. They have been evicted by Mrs Worrall, the chatelaine at Bitham House, as there is no longer a need for a chauffeur. Harry becomes under porter at St Paul's, an Anglican Teacher Training College. This is in the expectation of rapid promotion to head porter, with family accommodation provided. The promotion comes quickly but the accommodation is not forthcoming, as Harry's predecessor does not move out.

(2 September 1945: World War 2 ends.)

December 1948: After four years in the High Street, Harry and family move into a new council house in Priors Road, Cheltenham. Harry continues to work at St Paul's Training College for the rest of his life.

27 March 1958: Harry SEALEY dies at Cheltenham, aged 66.

*Compiled by Tony Hadland
This revision: 4 February 2011*