

Charles Frederick Harold Biles

By Sam Biles

Charles Frederick Harold Biles 1898-1961 was a well-known horseman, cattle dealer and knackerman.

Born in 1898 in West Street Newport, the second son of Charles Henry 'Fred' Biles (1870-1943 Y/249) and his first wife Lydia Ellen Biles (nee Wiseman) 1871-1901, Harold was an accomplished horseman and worked in his father's cattle dealing and knacker business based at Park Green, Forest Side near Newport. His mother died when he was 3 from throat cancer and is buried at Mount Joy (G/223). He was called to the barracks at Albany when he was in his teens to shoot his first horse and had to stand on an upturned orange crate to do so. He went off to War in 1917 and served in Egypt and Palestine where he was Groom to Gen. Allenby holding the reins of the general's horse when he famously walked through the Jaffa Gate into Jerusalem when the British took the Holy City. Harold returned from WW1 and went back into the family business working in the knackers yard, buying and selling cattle and horses and fattening pigs. . His father had re-married (in 1902) Mary Susan Moon (1869-1936 Y/249) (his housekeeper) and they had moved to Trafalgar Cottage 13A Union Street, Newport – a fine town house with large garden and stables. Harold rode point-to-point races on the Island and in the south of England with success – particularly on a horse called Edomite which won the Isle of Wight Farmers Race 3 times in the early 1930s. He married Annie Gilbert (1901-1988 buried alongside him) in 1924 at St John's Church, Newport. Harold's half-brother Horace Henry 'Donald' Biles (1903-1932 Y/273) was killed by a bull at Week Farm Ventnor. His father stood guarantor for 2 brothers who farmed near Chale but they got in financial difficulties and the loan was called in by the bank. Harold helped Fred pay off these enormous debts and became his heir – much to the annoyance of some of his siblings - particularly Douglas (1902-1956 Mount Joy Y/38A). Douglas and Harold had a real rivalry for much of the 1940s and 50s often both bidding the price of a calf up in Newport Market just so the other couldn't have it. Early in WW2 Harold was recruited by Sammy Watson, the well-known Auctioneer, to join the Auxiliary Units – known variously as the 'Special' Home Guard, the Scallywags and Churchill's Secret Resistance. These men were chosen because of their in depth knowledge of the countryside – many were farmers, gamekeepers or hunting folk. They were trained at Coleshill House in sabotage, assassination and other guerrilla warfare techniques. In the event of a German invasion they were to disappear into pre-prepared secret bunkers well stocked with explosives, detonators, guns, ammunition, truncheons – and rum. Harold's bunker was on the slopes of St George's Down near Garretts Farm/Newport Golf Club. They also had an envelope to open if the invasion came. In it were the names of local people who it was thought might assist the Germans – these were to be assassinated and sadly included the name of the local Chief of Police who, though innocent was the only man to know all their identities and could not be allowed to live.

Harold had 2 children David (1935-2015) and Joyce (1929-2017). His wife Annie was a stalwart of the business; every night she wrote up, from Harold's pocket diary, the deals he had noted down and entered them into the cashbook. She did the wages, ran the family home and ran the pets' meat shop at the rear of Trafalgar Cottage cutting up the meat, weighing it out and making up parcels in newspaper for her customers. Harold expanded the business, taking on the tenancy of Gotten Leaze Farm, Calbourne in the 1930s and then buying Somerton Farm, Northwood just after WWII. He was a supporter of the Isle of Wight Hunt and the Royal Agricultural Society's County Show for many years where he was the Steward of the Main Ring. He was joined in the business by his son David when the latter had finished National Service, they did not work together long because Harold's health

deteriorated – he may have had diabetes – and he died in July 1961 after having a row in Newport Market. The Show Committee offered to cancel the Show as a sign of respect but the family asked them to carry on and they won many of the classes that year with their cattle and pigs.

