

# George Beddoes Howells

Acting Lance Corporal

235356

**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Herefordshire Regiment**



George Beddoes Howells was born in Kington towards the end of 1894. He was the fourth and youngest child of William Jones Howells and Fanny Howells, nee Beddoes. Edith, born 1890, was his oldest sibling, swiftly followed by William Beddoes Howells 1891 and another sister, Alice, born in 1893. George's father was a coal merchant who hailed from Weobley while his mother Fanny was from Bishops Castle. In 1891 the family were living at 47 Bridge Street, Kington but by 1901 had moved to 27 Church Street with views overlooking the market square and later the location of Kington War memorial. George's name is recorded on both Kington Boys and Lady Hawkins' School's Rolls of Honour, suggesting George was academically capable, moving from the Boys School up to Lady Hawkins'. By 1909 the family had moved again, this time further up Church Street to Cambridge Cottage, a larger property located beyond the Royal Oak public house. It was here the family encountered tragedy when, towards the end of 1909, the Kington Times reported the death of Fanny, aged just fifty-two. It appears the family started to drift apart after losing the matriarch of the family, the 1911 census recording just William and Edith still living at Cambridge Cottage. George had moved out, having enrolled on a building trade apprenticeship in Hereford and was living

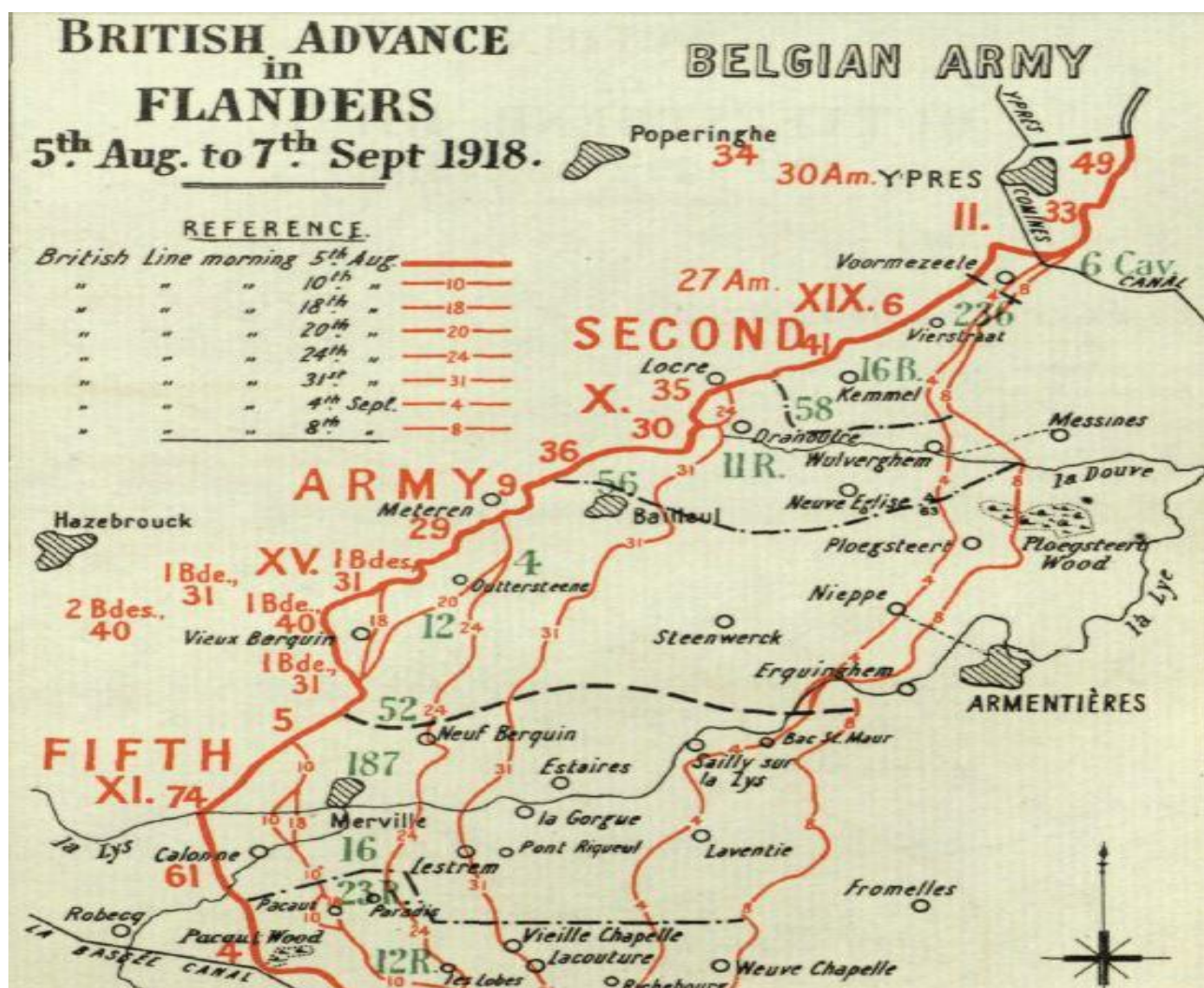
at 35 Laburnum Villas, Green Street, Hereford. Sadly, William did not survive his wife very long and he too died, at the relatively young age of 56, in September 1913. So, having lost both his parents, in August 1914 when the call went out for the young men of Great Britain to fight for their country, it was probably not a difficult decision for George to make.

George enlisted in Hereford joining the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Herefordshire Regiment as Private, 1635 Howells. George served during the Gallipoli campaign and was with the regiment when they were withdrawn from the peninsula and transferred into the Palestine theatre of war. At a later date George's service number was changed to 235356 and he was advanced to the rank of Acting Lance Corporal. With success in the middle east virtually secured the expertise of the Herefords was required on the Western Front. The German army were making a final push across France in what became known as the Spring Offensive, repelling the advance became a top priority. On 17<sup>th</sup> June the battalion boarded the HMT Kaiser-I-Hind troopship at Alexandria. The following day the ship sailed as part of a large convoy, escorted by Japanese destroyers. The official war diary reveals an alarming incident on the 21<sup>st</sup> June when a torpedo, fired from an enemy submarine, narrowly missed the stern of the ship. Later that day they entered Taranto harbour in Italy. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the who regiment boarded trains and spent the next seven days moving across Europe, arriving in Proven on the 30<sup>th</sup> June. From here they were marched northwards to Les Cinq Chemains where they undertook much needed trench warfare training in very different terrain from that they were used to. Gone was the dust and sand of the desert, replaced by the mud, filth and desolation of the Western Front.

Attached to the 102 Infantry Brigade of the 34th Division, on 17th July the regiment took up positions behind the French frontline, at a place called Berest. The following day Marshal Foch, newly appointed Commander-in-chief (Generalissimo) of the Allied Armies, launched the allied counter-offensive, initially designed to halt the German advance and then push them back towards Germany. At 11pm on the 20th July the 1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire's silently moved up through woods and relieved troops of the French 58th Division. What followed was a succession of battles through July and August until in September, with the enemy in retreat, they took part in the Battle of Kemmel.

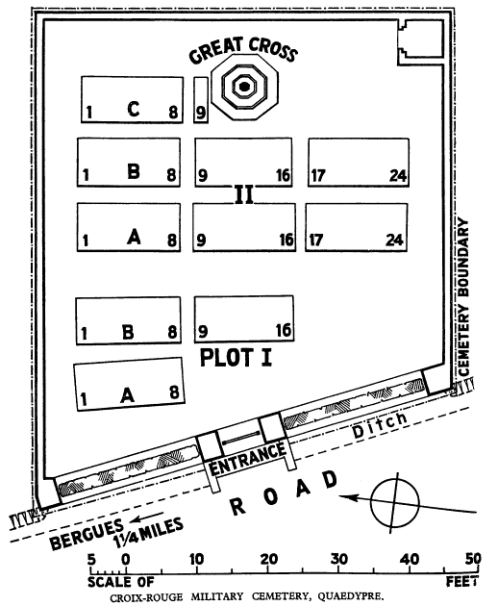
Some five miles south of Ypres lay the Messines and Wytschaete Ridges. Command of these strategically important high points had ebbed and flowed throughout the war, their raised positions ensuring military advantage. Hence, throughout the war these ridges were fiercely attacked and staunchly defended by whichever army occupied them. The

engagement through September was an advance to occupy the ridge and Mont Kemmel (Kemmel Hill), from which the enemy was believed to be retiring. The enemy were indeed



withdrawing its main force and making for Wytschaete Ridge to the east of Kemmel. To protect the managed evacuation the enemy left machine gun nests and ensured the entire area was kept under constant artillery fire. On 15th September the 1st Herefordshire's relieved the 2nd Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. The following five days saw continuous probing operations, steadily establishing outposts, occupying old enemy trench systems and inhabiting the myriad crater holes. On the 20th they were relieved and sent into divisional reserve on the 22nd. Respite was short lived and in atrocious weather conditions the advance continued until on the 30th September the whole of Kemmel Hill and Wytschaete Ridge was in allied hands. On 1st October Wytschaete itself fell with the Herefords in the vanguard of the relentless advance.





At some point during this desperate struggle George Howells was wounded. He was taken to 44 Casualty Clearing Station where he succumbed to his injuries, losing his fight for life on **24th September 1918**. George was laid to rest at Croix-Rouge Military Cemetery, Quaedypre, plot II.C.6. Quaedypre is a village seven miles south-east of Dunkerque and about three miles from Bergues. The 44th Casualty Clearing Station was located at Bergues from May to October and used the cemetery from June-September, 1918. George is buried with eighty-six other comrades, casualties of the fighting to repel German forces once and for all.



When his effects were calculated each of his surviving siblings, William, Edith and Alice received £7 2s 0d to remember their brother by and towards the end of 1919 William received a further £19 war gratuity. William's war experiences are obscure but the 1939 Civil Register reveals he was a Methodist Minister, living in Helston, Cornwall with his wife Nellie. He continued to live in the west country until his death in 1981, aged 91.



Unbeknown to George he so nearly made it all the way through the war. For his efforts and sacrifice he was awarded the 1915 Star, Victory and British War medals.

May his memory live forever.



Biography researched and produced by Mark Wheatland