

Albert George Lawrence

Private

3092

1st/4th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment



George Samuel Lawrance was a painter from Leominster who moved to Kington in search of work. What he found was in fact the love of his life, a Kington girl called Lucy Homer. George married Lucy at St Mary's church, Kington, in late 1880. Their son Albert George Lawrance was born shortly after in March 1881. At the time of the 1881 Census the family were living at Balls Yard, Kington and next door were Lucy's parents Benjamin and Emma Homer. George and Lucy's happiness was sadly cut short when tragedy hit the family in 1885, with the death of George, at the age of just 27. He was buried in Kington Cemetery but of course this left Lucy to fend for herself and her four and a half year old son Albert.

However, Lucy, still living in Kington, found happiness again when in 1887 she gave birth to a daughter called Annie whose father was a Thomas Wesson. Lucy and Thomas strengthened their relationship when they married at St Mary's in 1890. A second daughter, Lizzie, followed in 1893 whose birth was registered in Hay-on-Wye. By the turn of the century the family appears to have moved away from Kington and are to be found living in Gloucester. By now Albert, aged 20, is leading a single life away from the family home and is a boarder at 44 Sinope Street, Gloucester and is employed as a Railway Porter. But family ties are strong and ten years later, in the 1911 Census, Albert is again found living at the family home, now in Rosebury Avenue, Gloucester and his calling is recorded as a Carpenter and Joiner. There is another pleasant

development at this time with Thomas and Lucy adopting a 12 month old baby called May Moss.

Albert's military records do not survive so it is unknown when he enlisted. However we do know that he enlisted into the 1st/4th (City of Bristol) Gloucestershire Regiment as Private 3092 Lawrence. This battalion was formed before the outbreak of war as a Territorial Force and was made up of men who had signed up for Imperial Service overseas. The battalion were based at Queen's Road, Clifton in Bristol and served within with the Gloucester and Worcester Brigade in South Midland Division. When war was declared in August 1914 the unit had just departed for their annual summer camp. They were immediately recalled to Clifton and mobilised for war service on 5 August. The 1/4th with the 1/6th Gloucestershire and 8th Worcester Regiments formed the Gloucester and Worcester Infantry Brigade. Later they were to be renamed 144th Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division. The unit was swiftly transferred to Swindon and from there to Maldon in Essex by the second week of August. Here the Brigade gathered and commenced Divisional training. They moved to France, via Folkestone, landing at Boulogne on the 30th of March 1915. As stated earlier Albert's official military records do not survive but we are able to glean from his Medal Index Card (MIC) that he first entered the war on 31st March 1915 thus confirming he was present with his battalion when they entered France.

The Division concentrated near Cassel and following intensive instruction in trench warfare the 1/4th Battalion first took over front line trenches on 15th April 1915 in the Ploegsteert Wood Sector, part of the Ypres Salient. Ploegsteert had been savagely fought over during 1914 and little had changed by April 1915. 'Plugstreet', as it was affectionately known, was not an easy assignment. Although uncomfortable the next few months passed quietly with the battalion moved in and out of the line as they were relieved and they suffered few casualties. At the end of May a new form of destruction was unveiled by the Germans, mining. They tunnelled under No-Man's Land and blew up their mine which, being a novelty at that time, drew spectators from far and near to witness the resultant crater. The crater, which stretched from the British frontline trenches into No-Man's Land, caused very little damage to British lines and fortunately resulted in few casualties. There was a scramble from both sides to consolidate the newly formed crater. The British, armed with Mills Bombs, won this confrontation and successfully assimilated the new crater into British held territory. As is always the case in war, shortly after the British retaliated in kind, by exploding their first mine opposite a strongly fortified German position known as the 'Birdcage', just north of Ploegsteert.

At the end of June the Division handed over responsibility for their trenches to the Canadians and were withdrawn for rest and recuperation (R&R). They were billeted in the village of Hurionville to the north west of the mining area of Loos-en-Gohelle, (Loos). Here they undertook training until the end of July in comparative safety and then moved into the trenches at Loos. From here the whole Division was entrained south to trenches at Serre, which had been won by the French the previous month. They were then moved again and on the 5th of September the 1/4th went into trenches at Hebuterne, a village 10 miles north of Albert on the Somme. Responsibility here was alternately shared with the 8th Worcestershire Regiment. The period of September and

October was a period of trench warfare and rest periods behind the lines. Fighting in the closing stages of 1915 was limited and with the onset of winter the greatest challenge facing the 1/4th battalion was the state of the trenches they were occupying. Most of their time was spent reinstating derelict trenches and getting them ready for a winter occupation. Few incidents are recorded in the war diary between October and December but clearly working and living in the trenches was an extremely dangerous occupation.

Albert George Lawrence was 'killed in action' on the **23rd November 1915**, while in the trenches at Hebuterne. How he died is unknown and his death might rather glibly be recorded as 'just another casualty of war'. He is laid to rest at Hébuterne Military Cemetery, grave reference I.M.13. The cemetery lies to the west of the village and was first opened, by the 48th (South Midland) Division, in August 1915. It was mainly used by fighting units and field ambulances in the area until the spring of 1917. Reopened in 1918 there are now 750 casualties commemorated on this site.

Little is known of Albert's early years in Kington but we do know he attended Kington Boys' School on Gravel Hill. On the 24th May 1924, Empire Day, a ceremony took place where the Kington Boys' School, Roll of Honour was unveiled. A report in the Kington Times describes the Roll of Honour as follows: *The roll evolved from the words, "Still stands His cross from that dread hour to this, like some bright star above the dark abyss". Above these words is a star and a cross while Gothic Pillars carry the structure. At the sides are drawn the badges of the Regiments to which the boys belonged and there are faithful representations of the fighting in the trenches, in the air, and on the sea and operations by a British "Blimp".* The Roll of honour was designed and executed in black and white by Miss Lois Maxwell, a late member of school staff. The work is beautifully done and forms a unique memorial to the fallen. Albert's name is include on the Roll.



While researching Albert I came across a very sad coincidence but I suspect not an uncommon coincidence. Albert's mother, Lucy was formerly Lucy Homer. In 1881 Lucy's family lived next door to her parents, Benjamin and Emma, in Balls Yard, Kington. Benjamin senior had a son, also named Benjamin Homer, Lucy's younger brother. Benjamin junior married Elizabeth Williams from Lyonshall and together they had eight children. The family emigrated to Australia in 1910. Two of their children Harry and Herbert Homer served in the Australian Army during the conflict and both

died while serving. Harry and Herbert may have had a different name to Albert, but they were in fact, cousins.

As for Albert's mum Lucy, she continued to live in Gloucester and passed away in 1932 at the not inconsiderable age of 76. To remember her one and only son, Lucy received his medals, the Victory and British War medals and the 1914/15 Star.

