

# Arthur Cowdell

Private

27720

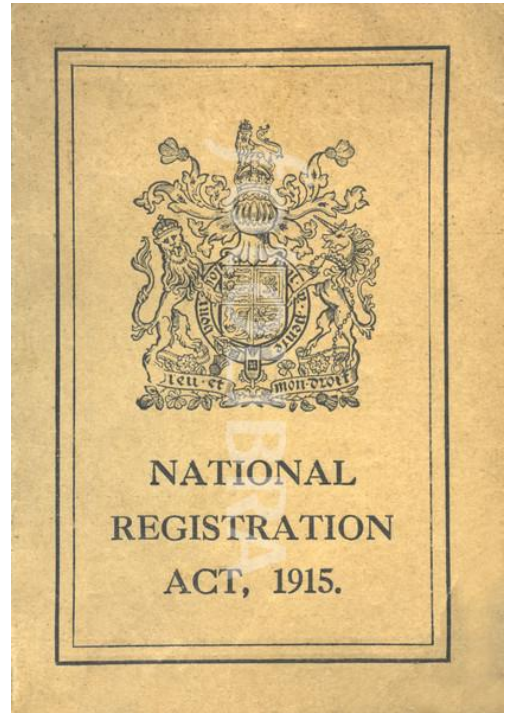
11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Border Regiment



Arthur Samuel Cowdell was born toward the end of 1895, the only son of Richard and Margaret Cowdell, who lived in Lower Lilwall, Woodbrook on the outskirts of Kington. Arthur had four sisters but sadly one of these, Eva Winifred, died at the age of just three in 1903. Richard and Margaret were both born in Kington and in the 1901 Census Richard is recorded as a well sinker. In the 1911 census Richard had moved up in the world and was then recorded as a farmer living and working at Lower Lilwall. Arthur had been educated at Kington Boys School and by the time he was fifteen had started working as a waggoner, moving materials and supplies, using a horse and cart, on the family farm.

When war broke out in August 1914, Britain had a small but very well trained and effective regular army. This was supplemented by volunteer Territorial

Forces such as the 1<sup>st</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Regiment. Early in the conflict these Territorial Forces were mobilized. Hundreds of thousands of young men volunteered and were to become known as 'Kitchener's new army'. It quickly became evident that even with the Territorial's there were insufficient men to repel the German aggressor. In July 1915 the National Registration Act was passed in Parliament. This provided for compulsory registration of all men and women, between the age of 15 and 65 years of age and not already engaged in the military, with a view to discovering trades and types of employment. Some 29 million registration forms were issued and on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915 all eligible persons were expected to register. Registration revealed that five million men of military age were not serving in the military, however 1.6 million of those were considered to be working in what were called reserved occupations, those who had particular skills vital to the operation of the nation. On the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1915 Lord Derby was appointed Director General of Recruiting and shortly after unveiled the Group Scheme which was effectively halfway to conscription. This scheme later became known as the Derby Scheme. The Derby



**THE  
MILITARY SERVICE ACT,  
1916,**

APPLIES TO UNMARRIED MEN WHO, ON AUGUST 15th, 1915, WERE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER AND WHO WILL NOT BE 41 YEARS OF AGE ON MARCH 2nd, 1916.

**ALL MEN (NOT EXCEPTED OR EXEMPTED),**  
between the above ages who, on November 2nd, 1915, were Unmarried or Widowers without any Child dependent on them will, on  
**Thursday, March 2nd, 1916**  
BE DEEMED TO BE ENLISTED FOR THE PERIOD OF THE WAR.  
They will be placed in the Reserve until Called Up in their Class.

**MEN EXCEPTED:**  
SOLDIERS, including Territorials who have volunteered for Foreign Service;  
MEN serving in the NAVY or ROYAL MARINES;  
MEN DISCHARGED from ARMY or NAVY, disabled or ill, or TIME-EXPIRED MEN;  
MEN REJECTED for the ARMY since AUGUST 14th, 1915;  
CLERGYMEN, PRIESTS, and MINISTERS OF RELIGION;  
VISITORS from the DOMINIONS.

**MEN WHO MAY BE EXEMPTED BY LOCAL TRIBUNALS:**  
Men more useful to the Nation in their present employments;  
Men in whose case Military Service would cause serious hardship owing to exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position;  
Men who are ill or infirm;  
Men who conscientiously object to combatant service. If the Tribunal thinks fit, men may, on this ground, be (a) exempted from combatant service only (not non-combatant service), or (b) exempted on condition that they are engaged in work of National importance.

Up to March 2nd a man can apply to his Local Tribunal for a certificate of exemption. There is a Right of Appeal. He will not be called up until his case has been dealt with finally. Certificates of exemption may be absolute, conditional or temporary. Such certificates can be renewed, varied or withdrawn. Men retain their Civil Rights until called up, and are amenable to Civil Courts only.

**DO NOT WAIT UNTIL MARCH 2nd.  
ENLIST VOLUNTARILY NOW**

The other provisions of the Act, above made for Ladies, are in the second Part. Officer, Police Station, or Recruiting Office.

Scheme called for young men between the age of 18 and 40 to voluntarily enlist and to be prepared to serve for their country when called upon. The last day for voluntary subscription was the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1915. The scheme resulted in 215,000 men volunteering for immediate service with a further 2.2 million opting for deferred enlistment. Those who deferred were grouped by age and marital status and in January 1916 the first deferred volunteers were called up. But the supply of men was still woefully short of the huge number required. On the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1916 the Military Service Act was passed. All voluntary recruitment was stopped and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916 all eligible British males between the age of 18 and 51, were deemed to have enlisted into His Majesty's Regular Forces. CONSCRIPTION.

Arthur's service record does not survive but from other sources we know he enlisted in Leominster and can make the assumption it was toward the end of 1915 or early 1916. It's worth noting that men who joined under the Derby Scheme could not guarantee which regiment they would be sent to. Arthur initially enlisted as Private 4480 Cowdell, into the 3<sup>rd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Regiment. The regiment had been formed in the autumn of 1915 and served as a reserve battalion, primarily for the 1<sup>st</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Regiment, but not exclusively. Probably after his initial training he was transferred to the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, service number 20449 and then on to the 11th Battalion, Border Regiment, the Lonsdales, as Private 27720 Cowdell.



The 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Border Regiment was paid for and established in September 1914 by the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lonsdale, Hugh Cecil Lowther. The Lonsdale family seat was at Lowther Castle in the county of Westmorland, now part of Cumbria, and it was from here that he established a Pals Battalion consisting of volunteers from the surrounding towns and villages. The battalion was adopted by the War Office in August 1915 and became more commonly known as the Lonsdale's. Earl Lonsdale was known for indulging his wealth in ostentatious pleasures, a keen sportsman and hunter he is particularly remembered for the Lonsdale Belts trophies awarded for boxing prowess. Less well known is

that he was a founder member, and first president, of the Automobile Association. He had a penchant for the colour yellow and ensured all staff were distinctive in their yellow livery. It was he who proposed the vivid yellow colour utilised by the Automobile Association to this day.



The Lonsdale's landed at Boulogne on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1915 but it is unclear when Arthur was attached to them. The battalion were heavily involved on the first day of the Battle on the Somme, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, at a place called Authuille. That day they suffered 500 casualties out of 800 who entered the field of battle. The battalion were reinforced and ploughed on through the horrors of The Somme. By November 1916 they were stationed near the town



ready for the assault. At 6.10am, zero hour, British Artillery opened up and the assault began. The Lonsdale's emerged from their trenches and started toward Munich Trench. Conditions were appalling with the ground in 'no man's land' having been churned up by previous artillery fire, sleet and snow was falling and it was bitterly cold. The artillery barrage in front of the Lonsdale's had fallen short and many men were taken casualty at this point but, despite the numerous problems, the battalion were able to take Munich Trench and forged on to take their second objective, Frankfort Trench. Here they joined up with men from the 16th Highland Light Infantry who had also made good progress. What followed was a period of fierce hand to hand combat where positions were captured and consolidated. By the end of the initial assault Munich and Frankfort Trenches were taken but at a huge cost. With numbers depleted in Frankfort Trench the men were unable to withstand a large counter attack by the Germans and were forced to retreat back to their original positions at Wagon Road, abandoning Munich Trench as they went.

However, during the retreat some 120 men from the 11<sup>th</sup> Borderer's and 16<sup>th</sup> Highland Light Infantry became isolated in Frankfort Trench. Surrounded by the enemy, they barricaded themselves in and resolved to defend their position. For several days they held out with many of their number being killed or wounded by repeated German assaults. Despite repeated attempts to relieve the stranded men, eventually on the 25<sup>th</sup> November the few remaining able bodied men were forced to surrender. The Battle of Ancre, of which Redan Ridge was just one small action, was to be the last battle of the 1916 Somme campaign. Arthur Cowdell was 'killed in action' on the **18<sup>th</sup> November 1916** during the assault on Redan Ridge, he was just 21 years old. Exactly when or how Arthur was killed on that day will never be known for sure, but his body was recovered and he now lies at rest in Waggon Road Cemetery, Beaumont-Hamel, grave reference D23. There are 195 brave men buried in this cemetery, 46 of them having served with the 11th Battalion, Border Regiment.

In the confusion of war, initially a report in the 23<sup>rd</sup> December edition of the Kington Times stated that Arthur was merely 'missing'. However, almost eight months later the paper updated this status recording that Arthur Samuel



Cowdell had in fact been killed. His effects were sent to the family on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1917 along with his outstanding pay, £4 5s 7d. A further War Gratuity of £3 was dispatched in October 1919. The people of Kington did not forget his sacrifice and on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July 1919 his name was read out, along with all the other Kington men who had perished, at a Peace Service held in St Mary's Church. For his service to King and Country, Arthur was awarded the Victory and British War medals. As for Richard and Margaret, they had lost their only son, and were left with memories of a life lost too early.



Researched and produced by Mark Wheatland