

Lancaster
Private Thomas Lancaster
17078, 7th Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Died of Wounds 15th January 1916 Age 24



Thomas was born about April 1891 to William and Mary Ann Lancaster of Biddulph Moor. He was the youngest of three children with elder siblings Charles and William. Educated in Biddulph, Thomas then worked underground as a coal miner. On 5th June 1911, he married Sarah Ettie Hall, known as Sally, and later that year, on 29th November, their son Jack was born. The family lived at Well House Cottage, Biddulph Moor.

Thomas enlisted on 8th March 1915 with the North Staffordshire Regiment at Stoke-on-Trent. In his service records he was described as follows: Age 23 and 11 months, Height 5' 4", Chest measurements 35 ½" with 3" expansion range. Distinctive marks: brown eyes, brown hair, mole on back of neck, scar on front left forearm and scar above right shoulder.

On 12th March 1915, with the 3rd (reserve) Battalion, Thomas travelled to Devonport, Plymouth and was stationed there until 6th May. The Battalion was then billeted at Seaham, Co. Durham from 7th May to 14th September and then, from 15th September, at Forest Hall, North Tyneside until the end of the year. Before the year was out, Thomas was drafted into the 7th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, as part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, and embarked on his posting from the UK to Gallipoli on 14th November 1915. No further details of his involvement in the Gallipoli Campaign were recorded in his service records, but an estimated transit time of 2 weeks would have placed him at his destination by the end of November.



Thomas Lancaster and wife, 'Sally',
1915.

As a reserve soldier, Thomas would have made a welcome addition to the casualty hit 7th Battalion North Staffords after they had already seen 4 months of action in Gallipoli as part of the 39th brigade of the 13th (Western) Division. After landing at ANZAC Cove at the beginning of August, this Division was involved in 3 significant battles (Sari Bair, Russell's Top and Hill 60), followed by further action at Sulva Bay from early September until the time of Thomas's arrival.

By the end of November conditions at Sulva had deteriorated rapidly after three days of rain had flooded the lines, drowned soldiers and washed unburied corpses into the trenches. Then, at the beginning of December, the area was hit by a blizzard and further soldiers died of exposure. From 7th December plans to withdraw from ANZAC Cove and Sulva Bay were initiated. On 19th-20th December the Division was evacuated from Sulva and, after resting for a week, was transferred to the Helles Bridgehead from where, after repelling an Ottoman attack in the morning at 'Gully Spur', a final evacuation took place on the night of 7th and early hours of the 8th January 1916. By 9th January, with the last troops withdrawn, the Gallipoli Campaign ended without achieving Allied control of the Dardanelles, the narrow strait connecting the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara. The human cost of the conflict to both sides totalled almost half a million casualties, which included 130,000 dead.

The fighting continued for 7th Battalion North Staffords in Mesopotamia after first landing in Egypt, but for Thomas, his war came to an end in a military hospital on the island of Malta. His service records concluded with the line 'Died of wounds Mil Hospital Floriana Malta 15.1.16'. Though the conditions at Floriana Hospital were good for the time, without the advantages of more modern treatments such as antibiotics, the survival of many injured soldiers often depended more on avoiding serious infection than recovering from the actual injury. No additional details relating to the circumstances of Thomas's death were recorded in his service records, but further research identified his later burial at the Pieta Military Cemetery, Malta.

Back in England, on Sunday 30th January 1916, a memorial service for Thomas was held at Biddulph Moor Church. This event was reported in the local newspaper, The Chronicle, on 6th February. In addition to his photograph, the report also, for some unknown reason, incorrectly stated that Thomas had died 'from wounds in France on the 17th January 1916'.

Though the body of Thomas was not repatriated, in June 1916 his belongings were returned to his widow, Sally, as itemised below:

Red Cross brooch, writing case, photos, postcards, letter, purse, 2 metal rings, charm pendant, bullet belt, 2 shaving brushes, razor, strop and memorial card.

The Weekly Sentinel reported on January 29th 1916 that "*official information has been received by Mrs. T. Lancaster of Well House, Biddulph Moor that her husband died on January 15th in a military hospital at Floriana, Malta, from injuries received on December 7th 1915.*"

Between 1919 and 1921 Sally received Thomas's posthumously awarded 1914-15 Star, Victory medal and British War medal. She raised their son Jack on Biddulph Moor staying in close contact with family, in particular that of her brother-in-law, Charles.

Jack grew up, married and had two children, Irene and Roy. This brief history is dedicated to the memory of the grandfather they never knew.

On Sunday last a solemn service was held at the Biddulph Moor Church, in memory of Pte. Thomas Lancaster, of the 7th North Staffords Regiment, whose death occurred from wounds in France on the 17th January. Deceased, who was a native of Biddulph Moor, was highly respected in the district, and the news of his death was received with profound regret.

The memorial service was held on Sunday evening, and was impressively conducted by the Rector (the Rev. E. Wheeldon). The Church was crowded, many being unable to obtain admission. The procession of the clergy and choir down the aisle was headed by the Flag Bearer (Master C. B. Wheeldon), who was immediately followed by a buglar from the Stoke Church Lads Brigade and the Biddulph Moor Boy Scouts (under the command of Assistant Scout Master Warrender.) As the procession proceeded down the church the organist (Mr. T. Chaddock) played "O Rest in

PTE. T. LANCASTER.

the Lord," and during the service the following hymns were sung: "For ever with the Lord," "Lead Kindly Light," "Nearer my God to Thee" and "Peace Perfect Peace."

The Rector, preaching from the text, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course," delivered an impressive sermon in which he emphasised the importance of duty and self-sacrifice.

The closing hymn "For all Saints who from their labours rest" having been sung, the Last Post was sounded, and during the singing of the National Anthem, Master C. B. Wheeldon proceeded to the chancel and unfurled the Flag. At the conclusion of the service, which was most impressive throughout, the Dead March was played by the Organist.

Private Thomas Lancaster now rests in the Pietà Military Cemetery at Valletta Malta. He is also remembered on the Biddulph and Biddulph Moor memorials.

Bruce Wright

Powell
Driver Harold Thomas Powell
1721 (or 1727) Royal Field Artillery
Died 16th January 1916

Little is known of Harold Powell. It would seem that he lived in the North Staffordshire area and enlisted at Hanley. Harold joined the Royal Field Artillery and with his draft unit moved to the Luton area where he was to train as an artillery driver. This involved caring for and handling the horses and was a most important role, as was the driving of the team and limber.

Following his training Driver Powell served in the 3rd/2nd North Midlands Brigade. This was a second line unit which may have been based at Chelmsford. His service records have not survived so details are sparse. Harold served in England and it is not known if his death, on the 16th January 1916, was a result of an accident or sickness. Confusion also surrounds Harold's service number. On 'Soldiers' Died' it is recorded as 1727 and on the Commonwealth War Graves site his number is recorded as 1721.

Harold Thomas Powell is at rest in the Leeds Harehills Cemetery. During WW1 there were two major hospitals in Leeds: the 2nd Northern and East Leeds War Memorial, the latter seeming to be the most likely place where Harold died. No further information is available and sadly his link with Biddulph is unknown. It has not been possible to identify him accurately on any census returns.

Harold is also commemorated on all of the Biddulph memorials.

Elaine Bryan & Michael Turnock.

Copeland
Private Charles Copeland
13661 8th Bn North Staffordshire (Prince of Wales) Regiment killed in
action January 17th 1916 Age 39

Charles Copeland was baptised on July 3rd 1877, the son of George and Alice, née Nixon. George and Alice were both born in Biddulph. In 1881 Charles was living in Bridge Street, Biddulph, with his parents and siblings: John, George, Mary, Betsy and Harry. By 1891 the family had moved to Goldenhill and were living at an address in High Street.

He married Ellen Downing in 1898 at St. John's church in Goldenhill. In 1901 they were living at 4, Wesley Street, Goldenhill with their two daughters, Doris born 1898 and Alice born 1900. Another daughter Hilda was born in 1902.

Ellen died early 1911 and so did not appear on the 1911 census. Charles was working as an ironstone miner and living at 39, John Street, Goldenhill with his three daughters.

Charles enlisted in the early days of the war. On September 29th 1914 he enlisted at Stoke-on-Trent in the 8th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. The address he gave was 36, Navigation Road, Burslem. Not a tall man, he was just under 5ft 4in. He gave his age as being 34 when he was in fact 37. As young men said they were older than they actually were it seems that older men said that they were younger. They all wanted to serve their country. He obviously rectified this later as at the time of his death his age was given correctly.

After his goodbyes to the family he travelled south to Bristol where all the new recruits were to carry out their basic training. More intensive training then followed at Weston-super-Mare and Tidworth.

With training complete, the battalion attached to the 19th Western Division. King George V inspected them on June 20th 1915. Many of the men from the Biddulph area who served in the 8th Staffords would have been known to Charles. Soon after the inspection the division received orders to prepare for war. ID tags were issued and kit packed, the mates boarded a troopship to cross a dangerous English Channel, taking all night and they arrived in France on July 18th 1915, moving forward to their assembly at St. Omer.

Placed in the line they soon became accustomed to the trench warfare routine and late September found the infantry troops in a supporting and diversionary role during the action in the Battle of Loos. The 8th battalion spent their first winter defending their line in the Bethune area of Flanders. Four days in the trenches, four days in the back area and four days in a safe rest area was the normal routine. There was no Christmas truce this year.

In January 1916 the pals remained in the Bethune, La Bassee and Laventie district of Flanders, and it was whilst in this area during an enemy artillery bombardment on the January 17th that 39 year old Private Charles Copeland

sadly died from shellfire. He is now at rest in the St. Vaast Post Military Cemetery at Richebourg-L'Avoué.

The following is an extract from the Chronicle: ***Chronicle Feb 5th 1916 – Soldier killed by a shell***

Pte Charles Copeland of Goldenhill, brother of Mr J. Copeland of High Street, Biddulph has been killed in France.

He was killed in his dug-out by a shell on 17th January. Pte Copeland was about 40 years of age and leaves three children. Writing to Mr J. Copeland, Sergt. A Chell, a native of Biddulph now stationed with no. 2 Company, NSR says: "I feel I must send you a few lines to express my sorrow at the death of your brother and my dear comrade. I can assure that he will be greatly missed by all his comrades at the front as he was a very brave soldier and was always ever ready to give a helping hand and cheery word to others. He was held very dear by the officers, the NCOs and men of his company."

His effects were sent to his eldest daughter, Doris, who was 18 at the time of her father's death and still living in Goldenhill, presumably with her sisters aged 16 and 14. He was posthumously awarded the 15 Star, Victory and British medals.

Charles is not commemorated on any of the Biddulph area memorials.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock.

Evenson
Private Joseph Evenson
2582 8th Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 6th March 1916 Age 24

Joseph was the son of John Evenson and his wife Mary Ann (nee Leech). Although the census returns of 1901 and 1911 indicate that he was born in Brown Lees, his birth was registered in 1892 in Congleton. The 1911 census gave their surname as Eveson. In 1911 Joseph was working as an 'Iron-Moulder' labourer. The only marriage found for a Joseph Evenson took place in 1913 in Macclesfield to Jessie Podmore. It is unknown if this is the Joseph from Railway Cottages.

Joseph enlisted at Biddulph in August 1914 and gave his address as 84, Railway Cottages. He joined the 8th Battalion of the Prince of Wales North Staffordshire Regiment. The twenty two year old left his parents' home at Brown Lees and took the train south to Bristol, where he was to carry out his basic training. This was followed by more intensive training at Weston-super-Mare and Tidworth. His battalion was attached to 19th Western Division and they were inspected by King George V on the 20th June 1915. Joseph would have known many of the men

from the Biddulph area who also served in 8th Stafford's. The division received orders to prepare for war and with ID tags issued and kit packed the men boarded an old troopship to cross the Channel. They arrived on the 18th July and then moved forward to their assembly point at St Omer.

Late September 1915 found the infantry troops in a supporting and diversionary action in the Battle of Loos. The battalion spent the winter defending their line in this area of Flanders; four days in the trenches, four days in the back area and four days in a safe rest area was the normal routine. There was no Christmas truce this year. By spring 1916 the men were in the La Bassee and Laventie district of Flanders. Although in various companies of the battalion, the comradeship of the Biddulph men would bring a sense of togetherness to the lives of these brave soldiers: Jonathan Barlow, Harry Bailey, Arthur Lacey, Jack Moss and Harold Simpson. Soon these mates would sadly lose their pal Joe; he was the first to fall on the field.

It was on 6th March 1916 when Joseph Evenson died in battle at Laventie. Private Evenson is now at rest in the Rue-de-Bacquerot, No 1 Military Cemetery, Laventie. He is remembered on the Biddulph memorials and also on the Brown Lees memorial board.

Elaine Bryan & Michael Turnock

Smith
Private William Smith (John W)
8069 1st Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Died of wounds 17th June 1916 Age 26



Details of Private Smith's family life have been supplied by an article that appeared in the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel on Saturday July 8th 1916:

“Official information has been received by Mrs. Smith of 2 Barlow Street, Congleton that her husband, Private W Smith of North Staffordshire Regiment has died of wounds on June 17th.

Smith was the eldest son of Mr and Mrs John T Smith of 64 High Street, Biddulph and was the first to enlist from Biddulph on 6th August 1914 at Shelton. He went to France in March 1915. He was 26 years of age and worked at the Victoria Pits, Black Bull previously. He leaves a widow and one child aged two years.” In a Chronicle report of July 1st it is stated that William enlisted on 5th August and thus *‘had the distinction of being the first recruit to join up at Biddulph’*. The CWGC confirms details of his widow and provides an address in Congleton: *‘husband of Mrs May Smith of 32 Spring St. Congleton’*.

William Smith married May Timms on May 4th 1914 at St. Stephen’s, Congleton. William was aged 25 and a collier living at 28, Spragg Street, Congleton. His father was John Thomas Smith, a carter. It would seem that his mother was John’s first wife, Alice Cumberbatch, who he married in 1889.

A photograph of Private Smith appears alongside both the Sentinel and C Chronicle reports of his death.

An article that appeared in the Weekly Sentinel in late July 1916 reported on a memorial service for fallen Biddulph soldiers. This also makes reference to Private W. Smith.

The Great War had only been declared two days when William Smith gave up his pit job at the Victoria Colliery Black Bull. On a visit to Shelton Barracks on 5th or 6th August 1914 he enlisted into the 1st battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. He is said to be one of the first Biddulph men to enlist. This battalion went to the Western Front with 6th Division on the 12th September 1914 and without service records it can only be assumed William Smith joined his battalion at a later date. His medal card records a date of entry into France as April 1915 which confirms the newspaper article.

Training details are sketchy; it is unknown as to where the replacement men received their training; William as part of a draft crossed the channel on the 31st March 1915 to join the battalion in Flanders, there gaining final instruction. In the Ypres salient at Hooge, William would see his first action. In October the 1st Stafford’s became part of 72nd Brigade, 24th Division; not that it would make any difference to the lads in the trenches. The battalion spent the winter of 1915-16 in the Ypres and Hooge area of Belgium and continued to defend their lines.

The routine of trench life continued through the miserable winter months. The ground was frozen and the cold and wet got to the lads with many suffering with trench foot. Trench maintenance and sand bagging work was carried out during quiet times. The snipers were always a deadly threat causing many a casualty, as did the enemy mortars. Waiting for relief, the battalion normally spent five days in the front line, then a long walk to spend five days in a back area. William would now understand why they trained in the dark to follow the man in front.

Early in 1916 still in the Ypres area at Wulverghem, the division experienced an enemy gas attack resulting in many casualties. Into summer the brave 1st North Stafford’s defended their line from attacks and with the occasional raid their casualty rate increased. In June, one of these casualties was William who was seriously wounded and sadly on the 17th June 1916 died. No details have been uncovered; we only know he is now at rest in the Dranoutre Military Cemetery

Heavelland. The historical records of the cemetery show many burials from 72nd Brigade 24th Division. In close proximity to the cemetery were two Casualty Clearing Stations where William may have been treated for his wounds.

The Chronicle printed part of Private Smith's last letter home to his wife, which he wrote on June 16th, the day before he died. In this he refers lovingly to his only child: *"she is before me as I write these few lines; and in imagination I can hear the prattle of her tongue."*

He also reassured his wife that despite having a slight cold he was all right and *'hoped the day was not far distant when he would be able to come to dear old Blighty.'*

There are a number of intriguing questions: The Biddulph memorials all record a John W Smith and not William Smith and yet all references so far, even the entry in the marriage register of St. Stephen's, indicate that he was known as William. Indeed, according to the 1911 census, William had a younger brother named John Thomas. It is therefore unlikely that William's full name would have been John William. A recruitment article in 1914 refers to *"Reservists and men serving with the colours"* and includes *"William Smith - High Street"* in the list. This leads us to question if there was, in fact, also a John William Smith who died in battle that we have not been able to find details for. This highlights one of the many problems that we are encountering as we research this project.

Private John W Smith is remembered on the St. Lawrence churchyard cross and memorial board and he is also recorded on the cenotaph in Albert Square. Private William Smith is also remembered on Congleton War Memorial.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Yorke
Lance Sergeant Charles William Yorke
13938 12th Bn. Northumberland Fusiliers
Died 22nd June 1916 Age 37



Born around 1879 at Madeley, Shropshire, Charles William was the eldest son of William R. Yorke and his wife Eliza. William had been born in Dawley, Shropshire and in 1891 was a signaller at Hough, Nantwich. The family seemed to have

moved frequently – from Shropshire, to Fenton in Stoke-on-Trent, then on to Shavington, Cheshire and finally Lawton Gate. John Henry, younger brother to Charles, also worked on the railways and in 1901 he was employed as a railway goods guard. Another brother, Richard, was also a railway signalman.

Charles initially gave employment on the railways a wide berth – enlisting instead in the militia and the Cheshire Regiment. On the 25th January 1896 in London, he transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers. At his attestation he was described as 5' 4 ³/₄" with grey eyes and dark brown hair. Private 4882 began his career with the Northumberland's in Portsmouth. He was appointed to Lance Corporal in January 1899 and in 1903 he rose to Corporal. He served in Malta, Crete, South Africa and Mauritius and received the Queen's South African medal with clasp and the King's South African with clasp (1901 & 1902). From 1903 until 1908 he remained in the Reserve.

In 1907 he married Betsy Dale at Odd Rode. The 1911 census records Charles as a married, 32 year old railway signalman, at Railway Cottages, Biddulph. His wife Betsy was visiting relatives at Church Lawton at the time. With her were their two daughters Norah (3) and Ruth (1). Both daughters had been born at Cheddleton. As a seasoned traveller he probably kept his fellow railway workers amused with tales from his trips around the world.

The list of names of those who came forward at the first recruiting meeting at the Public Hall in Biddulph included that of Charles W. Yorke of Station Houses, Biddulph. It appears though, that like many others on that list, he actually enlisted at Macclesfield. For unknown reasons "*Soldiers Died*" states that he initially joined the Army Cyclist Corps. In October 1914 the Sentinel reported that he was with the Northumberland Fusiliers at Aylesbury and in November that:

"Sergeant Charles Yorke, one of the signalmen from Biddulph Railway Station, a reservist of the Northumberland Fusiliers, has been stationed near Harrow for some time. He came home last Saturday on four days leave, and looks remarkably well. He says that since his promotion (he was a corporal when he re-joined his regiment in August) he has been kept very busy drilling new recruits."

The 12th battalion Northumberland Fusiliers trained at Halton Camp Tring, High Wycombe and Witley camp Maidenhead and with training complete the men were now battle ready. Attaching to 62nd Brigade 21st Division the troops were inspected by Lord Kitchener on the 12th August 1915. The following month the division crossed the channel, landing in France on the 8th September, and assembled in the Tilques area. The battle of Loos was where Charles was to see his first action on the Western Front. After a long night march, the morning of the 26th September brought the battalion to an area known as Bois Hugo, Chalk Pit Wood and Hill 70 redoubt; at the latter the enemy held strong defensive positions. The 12th Northumberland's attacked this redoubt and although the fusiliers fought bravely, the assault which was under unbelievable deteriorating conditions failed, with many casualties.

The division were withdrawn to recover - being deployed in a defensive role until spring 1916. In the Somme district during early summer the battalion was busy preparing for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme. Charles as a Lance Sergeant would have had extra responsibilities for the preparations; his battalion were in an assembly area north of Becordel-Becourt.

Following an enemy artillery bombardment on their position they endured many casualties. Evidently it was in this area that Charles Yorke was to fall on Thursday 22nd June 1916. Newspaper reports state that he was killed instantly by a bursting shell. In little more than a week, the Battle of the Somme was to open on 1st July.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of July 22nd 1916 reported that *“previous to enlisting he served all through the Boer War and when the present war was declared he was anxious once more to serve his King and country. He enlisted at the end of August 1914 and went to France in September 1915.”*

Charles left a widow and four little girls.

The Sentinel also reported that Mrs. Yorke had received a letter from him on the 28th June (written on the 21st) the day after she had received notification of his death from the chaplain, the Rev. Stanley Keene, in which he wrote to cheer her up, and to tell his little girls that *“Daddy will soon be home now to take them for walks.”*

The Sentinel continued to inform the reader that Sergeant Yorke’s father was Mr. William Yorke, signalman at Alsager station and his brother John was a goods guard at the Junction, also Alsager.

Mrs. Yorke received a letter from Lieutenant J. Brunton in which he wrote: *“At such time as this when you have suffered such an irreparable loss, words of sympathy seem so very inadequate, but I know you will believe me when I say that your husband’s death was a very serious blow to myself personally, and also to our company. As his immediate officer your husband and I came very much in contact and I am proud to have had the honour of commanding such an N.C.O.”*



L/Sgt Yorke now lies in the Dartmoor Cemetery, which today is situated in a beautiful wooded area on the outskirts of the village of Becordel-Becourt. A unique addition to Charles’s grave is an old ceramic plaque, presumably placed there by a French person in the 1920s when the cemetery was laid out. The text reads: ***Le Temps Passe Le Souvenir Reste*** (as time passes the memory remains). At home Charles is commemorated on the memorial at Stoke on Trent railway station, which is dedicated to the men of the North Staffordshire Railway who died in the Great War. He is also commemorated on the Biddulph war memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Millward
Private Abraham Millward
12825 9th Bn., Cheshire Regiment
Killed in action 1st July 1916 Age 18



Abraham's birth was registered in the third quarter of 1897 at Wolstanton. When he enlisted at Macclesfield on the 31st August 1914, he gave his age as 19, when it seems likely that he was still only 17 years of age. From this we must assume that Abraham (also known as Abram) was determined to join the army even though he was not yet old enough.

He was one of at least twelve children born to bricklayer, John and his wife Elizabeth (nee Blease). John originated from Newport in Shropshire but Elizabeth and all of their children had been born at Harriseahead. Of the twelve children only one had died – possibly Harriet who may have been a twin to Charles. In 1901 the family lived at Newchapel and by 1911 had moved to Welsh Row – number 25. Abraham must have been one of the first living at Welsh Row to enlist:

Weekly Evening Sentinel – 17th November 1914

Well Done, Welsh Row

“Welsh Row, a small isolated hamlet of Biddulph, lying snugly under the shadow of Mow Cop, has done magnificently in responding to the country's call for men. There are not many houses on this bleak hillside, but nearly every house has sent its man, either as a reservist or as a recruit in Lord Kitchener's Army. John Henry Smith, a reservist of the Royal Field Artillery is with the Cheshires, and Albert Smith and James Barlow, both reservists, are with the 4th North Staffords. These three men

*write home to say that they expect to go to the front very shortly. **Abraham Millward** is with the Cheshires, and Joseph Higginson enlisted with the North Staffords at Lichfield last week. Three other Welsh Row men – Albert Cliffe, George Savage, and James Maxwell – are with the Territorials at Butterton Hall. Few localities around Biddulph can boast such a list.”*

On enlistment, Abraham was described as of fresh complexion, with blue eyes. He was 5' 4 ½" tall and he gave his occupation as bricklayer. The photograph above is of Abraham with two of his sisters. This was taken at Rowley's on his last leave before going to France.

Rosa Rathbone is Abraham's niece. She recalls that :

“Two of his sisters, (one of whom was my mother), took him to have a photograph taken at Rowley's shop. At that time Mr. F. Rowley was the photographer. Abraham is seen standing with his two sisters sitting either side. On the back of the photograph the name F. Rowley, Biddulph, Stoke on Trent, is printed. When Abraham was found the photograph was discovered in the breast pocket of his tunic and because the photographer's name was on the back of the photograph, it was returned to Rowley's in Biddulph. They displayed it in the window and it came to the notice of my father, Jonathan Nixon, and was returned to my family.”

The Cheshire's trained at Basingstoke and Salisbury Plain in drill, marching, shooting and discipline. Training, identity discs and inoculations completed, the battalion were ready for the battlefield and were attached to 19th Western Division. Orders came to embark at the channel port for their crossing to Boulogne on 19th July 1915.

On arrival the troops marched up the hill to their rest camp before moving forward to their concentration area at St Omer. The next few months found them holding the line in Flanders until Abraham took part in the divisions' first action at Pietre in a supporting role during the Battle of Loos through September and October. His service records show that during February 1916, Abraham was in number 58 Field Hospital, suffering from scabies.

Late spring was a time when the division were preparing for a forthcoming battle; intensive activity ensued in readiness for this vital action, the Battle of the Somme. On the 1st July 1916 the battle opened. The division were in lines close to the Lochnagar mines which were exploded at 7.30am and were followed by the initial attack on the enemy trenches. At this time the 9th Cheshire's were held back in reserve in the Tara-Usna line, near Becourt Wood.

At 10.30 pm orders came for the battalion to move forward to attack at La Boisselle. Again unbelievably heavy shelling and murderous machine gun fire took an immediate toll on the valiant men. The day had been a disaster for the British army and this late action fared no better. Sadly, it was in this action that our brave young Mow Cop soldier, Private Abraham Millward, fell on the battlefield.

Private Millward is buried in the Gordon Dump Cemetery at Ovillers-La Boisselle. He is remembered on the Biddulph memorials (as Abram Millward) and the Mow Cop memorial at St. Thomas.



Thanks to Rosa Rathbone for information.
Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Bowers
Private John Thomas Bowers
3316 1/5th North Staffordshire Regiment
Who Died 1st July 1916 Age 23

John Thomas Bowers enlisted at Biddulph soon after war commenced, joining the 1/5th North Staffordshire Regiment. He was aged 21, a local lad, and a prominent member of Biddulph Unionist Club. He had been born in Biddulph in 1893, the son of ironworker Thomas and his wife Mary. In 1901 the family lived in Well Street but by 1911 they had moved to 4, Cromwell Street. The census of that year tells us that Thomas and Mary were no strangers to tragedy - as they had already lost three of their seven children. In this year, John Thomas shared the family home with his younger brother and sister, Alfred and Annie. At 17 years of age, John was employed as a collier.

Saying goodbye to his parents Thomas and Mary at Cromwell Street, John along with his pals started their initial training at Butterton Hall before moving to the

Luton-Bishops Stortford area; here the intensive training began - squad drilling, marching, bayonet and shooting practice.

By March 1915 the 46th North Midlands Division was ready for war. The soldiers embarked at Southampton for France, which was to be for most, their first experience of a foreign country. On their arrival the 1/5th Stafford's moved to their concentration area and then on to the Ypres Salient, fighting in July at Hooge.

Whilst in the trenches, Private Bowers wrote to his friends at the Unionist Club, and his letter appeared in the Chronicle:

Dear Friends,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am in the best of health, hoping to find you all the same. I have just come out of the trenches and have had a jolly time. We are only about 50 yards from them. They got up on the top of their trench and challenged us out for a game of football, but we did not have any. We told them that there was a tin of tobacco if they would come for it, but they shook their heads. We should have answered with 'fire rapid' if they had come for it. We have come out without having any killed or wounded this time. I think our chance out here is like me playing Jackson 50 up off a mark. I think this is all this time, with love from the old member. J T Bowers.

By late September the division moved south to fight in the Battle of Loos, John Thomas Bowers unlike many of his pals was more fortunate, surviving the terrible attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt on 13th October. Following this battle the battalion were withdrawn to recover.

At some point during 1915, John became ill and wrote from his hospital bed to the local newspaper representative in Biddulph. He had been suffering from an attack of 'enteric fever, supervening gastritis, contracted owing to the bad smells in the trenches'. Private Bowers paid tribute to the wonderful care he had received from the nurses in France. At this point he was at the 'General Hospital at Camberwell Schools, Denmark Hill, London'. In a letter to the Biddulph Unionist Club he said 'there are many soldiers in the hospital, and they enjoy motor rides three times a week.' Later correspondence from Addlington Park War Hospital, Croydon, from Private Bowers to the Chronicle reported that 'thanks to the doctors and sisters in France and England he feels like a new man, and hopes to be home next week.'

By mid-December, 46th Division were ordered to make ready to entrain on the 23rd and John Thomas and his pals would spend Christmas on board French Railways travelling to Marseilles in the south of France. Away from the shelling and in warmer climes the men were to board a troopship for a journey to Egypt. The division arrived on 13th January 1916 and for some reason within a few days their orders were countermanded and the division were to return to France.

Their pleasant adventure and experience was over; the men were returning to the front line and soon the division were to prepare for the Battle of the Somme. They were to be deployed in a diversionary attack at Gommercourt on the opening day of the battle on 1st July 1916. Heavy shelling occurred on the communication trench where the 1/5th Battalion was waiting, and within the first minutes of the attack, Pte J T Bowers and over 300 brave men were lost.

Almost eleven months later, on May 19th 1917, the Chronicle reported on the death of Private Bowers. It would appear that he had been listed as *'missing'* and it was not until 30th April 1917 that he was officially reported as dead. A service had been held at St. Lawrence the previous week in memory of Private Bowers. The Chronicle reported on the large congregation which had included representatives of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows. Hymns sung included *'Nearer my God to Thee'* and *'Thy Will be Done'*. Private Bowers had been a member of the Bible Class and former Curate, Rev. Cosser spoke of his friendship with John: *'It is about nine years ago since I met and knew dear Bowers, now known as Private J.T.Bowers of His Majesty's Forces, and one of those brave lads, who responding to the call of their country, have made the Great Sacrifice.'*

Sadly John Thomas was never recovered from the battlefield and has no known grave being remembered on the Somme at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing. His name also appears on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Barlow
Lance Corporal Jonathan Barlow
17568 8th Bn., North Staffordshire (formerly 12174 R.A.M.C.)
Died on 23rd July 1916 Age 18

Jonathan Barlow had been born c. 1897, the son of Jonathan and Harriet. His childhood was spent in Gillow Heath but by 1911 the family had moved to Congleton Road. His father was a collier and some of his sisters went to work in the fustian mills.

At the age of eighteen years, on the 19th April 1915, Jonathan enlisted at Tunstall. He joined the Royal Army Medical Corp, although he only spent a short period in this unit before transferring to the 8th Battalion North Staffordshire regiment on the 18th May 1915. We believe this was at Aldershot. His service records have survived in part but are in poor condition.

Basic training began at Aldershot and continued in the north east at Seaham and Wallsend. By March 1916 this draft unit was ready for war and were soon to join their battalion who were already attached to 19th Western Division; the division had served in France since July 1915. Sailing on the 13th March 1916 Jonathan would soon be with the battalion.

On his arrival he would have found many Biddulph men in his battalion. They were preparing for their next action; the Battle of the Somme was to open on the 1st July. Though not having taken part in the advance on the first day, the division was to play a major role in the capture of La Bosselle on the 4th. Two weeks later on the 20th they were engaged in the attacks on High Wood, another costly battle. Then within a few days the battalion advanced on the Pozieres Ridge - this was on the 23rd July 1916. It is believed it was in this attack that Jonathan Barlow was to sadly fall on the battlefield.

Lance Corporal Jonathan Barlow was never recovered from the field and has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme. He is also commemorated on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock

YATES
Private Joseph Yates
16366 10th Bn., Lancashire Fusiliers
Killed in Action on 24th July 1916



Details of the life of soldier Joseph Yates have proved difficult to accurately pinpoint. From his service records it would seem that he had been born in Stoke-on-Trent whilst living in Biddulph when he enlisted in Congleton, Cheshire. A report of his death from the Congleton Chronicle seems to substantiate his residence when he joined up:

"Prior to 'joining up' he was employed by Mr. John H. Clowes, of Biddulph Hall Farm, Biddulph, and was greatly respected in the immediate vicinity in which he lived."

Joseph was not living at Biddulph Hall Farm in 1911. The photograph supplied by the Chronicle seems to indicate a birth date of around the mid-1890's. From the 1911 census this would seem to point to Joseph being the son of Samuel (a collier/hewer who had been born in Biddulph) and Elizabeth, nee West. In 1911 the family was living at 11 Sun Street (now St. Aiden's Street), Tunstall. The census indicates that Samuel worked at Goldendale Ironworks owned by Williamsons who had business interests in Biddulph.

No marriage for Joseph Yates is listed on Staffs. BMD from 1911 to 1916 so it would seem that Joseph was unmarried.

Joseph became a private in the 10th battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, a regiment with its headquarters at Bury. On leaving Biddulph, Joseph travelled south to

Dorset for his basic training; this was at various locations in the county. In May 1915 the battalion transferred to Winchester to complete their preparations for war.

Attached to 52nd Brigade, 17th Northern Division, this was a division originally destined for Home Defence duties - this was until orders were countermanded and the lads were to see action in Flanders. The division crossed the English Channel landing at Boulogne and moving to St Omer for concentration. The 10th Fusiliers had their first action in an area south of Ypres defending their lines. Throughout the winter of 1915-16 Joseph and his mates remained in the Ypres salient. Springtime saw the battalion fighting actions at the Bluff, on the Comines canal.

In early summer the 17th Division travelled south into France to prepare for battle; our farm labourer Joseph would now see the beautiful rolling countryside of the Somme district before it deteriorated into the battlefield of the Somme. The wiring, trench strengthening and general preparation occupied the battalion making ready for battle.

The division were held in reserve at first, and then used to defend their lines. During this part of the Somme offensive known as the Battle of Albert, 10th Lancashire Fusiliers fought bravely in attacks at Bernafay Wood. Under a bombardment of shelling the battalion suffered many casualties. It is believed that it was in this action our gallant soldier, Pte Joseph Yates, fell in battle.

The Chronicle headline ran: **“Biddulph Soldier Killed In Action – Officer’s Tribute To A Brave Soldier”**:

‘The third phase of the battle, which has occupied over a month, has seen us steadily eating our way up the final slope, and over the bare shell-swept summit of the ridge. Some of the places mentioned will be indelibly stamped on the minds of Congleton and Biddulph people, as soldiers hailing from both Congleton and Biddulph have earned undying fame while fighting there. What tales they could tell were it permissible. Some there are whose lips are sealed for ever, who lie at peace within the sound of bloody strife, yet, although their tales remain untold, the Recording Angel has put ‘paid’ to their account. Another name to be added to those who will not return – Private Joseph Yates, of the 18th Lancashire Fusiliers, who, to coin the words of his superior officer ‘died a soldier’s death like the brave fellow that he was’ in the battle of the Somme, on July 24th.’

The Chronicle also printed a letter to his mother from Lieutenant H.D. Williams: *‘He was one of a party I had in a most important part of our line. A German shell fell amongst us, and I am sorry to say that Yates and his friend were hit. Death was instantaneous and he cannot have felt any pain. I can only say how sorry we are and how deeply we sympathise with you in the loss you have sustained.’*

Joseph is another of the many soldiers without a known grave; he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme and the Biddulph memorials.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock

Note: The Chronicle article states that Joseph served in the 18th Battalion but the CWGC records that he was in the 10th.

Fox
Private Frank Ernest Fox
8641 Cheshire Regiment
Killed in Action 28th July 1916 Age 26

Frank's childhood and early life remains a mystery. Even his widow, in reply to a letter from the regiment requesting family details after his death, was unable to provide even basic information. It would seem that Frank had arrived in Biddulph from Crewe in search of work, met Florrie Birch, married her and settled in the town. Attempts to find him in census returns of 1891, 1901 and 1911 have drawn a blank. From service records it appears that Frank Ernest Fox was born in Coppenhall, Crewe, in 1890. He enlisted for 6 years in the 3rd battalion Cheshire Regiment- Special Reserves at Chester on the 10th June 1910. In December 1911 at St. Lawrence, Biddulph, he married Florrie Birch. He gave his age as 21 and his occupation as a forgerman. His father was not named in the marriage register. They lived at 36 Stringer Street and later at 48 and 15 The Square.

In her letter to his regiment, Florrie wrote:

"I am sorry to say that I cannot fill the form in as I do not know any of my husband's relations, only that his mother is dead – he told me that himself. I suppose you will think it very strange but he was a Crew fellow and he came to Biddulph to work and he stayed in the same street as me. I do not know any of his people at all only that he has one brother at Crew his name is Joe Fox. I do not know him. I cannot say any more. I will remain yours. Florrie Fox. No. 48 Square, Biddulph."

The 3rd battalion Cheshire Regiment Special Reserve was a home based training unit and provided draft for other battalions of the regiment. The regimental depot was at Chester where Frank enlisted. During the Great War the 3rd battalion, for the purpose of Mersey Defence moved to war stations at Birkenhead and Leasowe Castle, Wallasey on the Wirral.

Frank Fox served in this battalion until 6th July 1915; however his service records tell us that in September 1914 he deserted from Leasowe Castle until apprehended by the civil police at Biddulph in March 1915. For his sins Frank served 56 days in detention and was fined 45/- shillings, taken from his pay for "neglect loss" of his uniform.

It appears that in July 1915 Pte Fox transferred battalion when he was posted into the 1st Cheshire Regiment. This was a battalion that had been serving on the Western Front since the 16th August 1914. Maybe this change came about due to the 1st Cheshire's being decimated in the battles at Mons, Marne, Aisne and Ypres - actions that reduced the battalion from 900 to 200 men still fit to fight. By July 1915 not many of the valiant original 1914 "Old Contemptibles" in the battalion remained.

Frank was already a trained soldier; he may even have been an instructor coming from a training battalion. As part of a draft replacement, Frank embarked at Southampton on the 6th July 1915 to cross the channel and join his new battalion in Belgium on 10th July. Attached to 5th Division he found the 1st

Cheshire's south of Popering near Abeele in the Ypres salient. The battalion kept three companies of men in the front line and one at rest in the Zillebeke area. At one point the battalion spent 42 continuous days in the front line trenches, suffering the abysmal conditions with heavy losses.

Soon the division moved to the Somme area and on the 6th and 7th of December 1915 near to Mametz and Maricourt they carried out a number of successful raids on the enemy positions. July 1st 1916 saw the opening of the Battle of the Somme; the 1st Cheshire's were in action at Delville Wood and High Wood from mid-July. Frank Fox would certainly have had to endure unbelievable shell and machine gun fire in this action against an enemy well entrenched. In one attack the battalion met with cross fire from enemy machine guns, with many casualties. On the night of the 28th Frank and his mates were in reserve at Mametz, when ordered forward crossing Caterpillar Valley and towards Longueval and again came under terrific fire. It is believed that it was here, on the 28th July 1916, that Frank Fox lost his life.

Private Frank Ernest Fox has no known grave being commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme. He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Florence remarried Arthur Whitehurst aged 55, in 1920, at St Lawrence. Arthur had lived at 16 Stringer Street.

Thanks to Arthur Whitehurst, grandson of the above Arthur Whitehurst.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Johnson
Private Joseph Johnson
7378 1st North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 31st August 1916 Age 30

Joseph Johnson was born in 1885 in Packmoor and his birth was registered at Tunstall. He was the second son of Henry and Hannah Johnson (nee Machin). In 1891 they lived at Turnhurst Lane and by 1901 the family had moved to 5, Lawton Street, Lane Ends, Packmoor. The family remained at this property and were there at Joseph's death in 1916.

His father, Henry, was a collier born in Kidsgrove. In 1883 he married Hannah Machin at Newchapel and by 1911 they had had six children. Both the 1901 and 1911 census described Joseph as single. In 1911 Joseph was working as a labourer in an iron forge; ten years earlier he had been working in a coal mine.

We do not know if Joseph was married when he enlisted or got married while serving. However, there are three marriages recorded on Staffordshire BMD which could potentially be for this Joseph Johnson. In 1911 a Joseph Johnson married an Elizabeth Williams, in 1912 to a Mary Ann Hughes and in 1916 to a Sarah Jane Taylor. It is not known which one, if any, is 'our' Joseph.

Joseph enlisted at Tunstall; joining the 1st Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. This was a battalion that went to the Western Front on 12th September 1914 - during the very early days of the war and fought in the battles of Aisne and Ypres. However without service records or any local information, Joseph's date of enlistment is unknown. Unless he was a reservist, Joseph most likely trained as a draft replacement, and therefore joined his battalion at a later date.

As part of 6th Division, the North Stafford's served in the Ypres salient during 1915. In October the battalion changed to the 24th Division. They remained in Flanders in the Bethune area and held their lines. Cemeteries in the area contain many brave men of 24th Division who fell in these actions, including John William Smith, a Biddulph soldier. The battalion remained here until mid-August 1916 when they moved to fight in the Battle of the Somme. By the end of the month the division was in the Guillemont area of the Somme battlefield.

This may have been the area in which on the 31st August 1916, Joseph sadly fell in battle. Private Joseph Johnson has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme and also the Brindley Ford Memorial.

Elaine Bryan & Michael Turnock

Burke
Private Austin Burke
4796 6th Connaught Rangers
(Previously 3/6706 3rd Connaught Rangers and 15300 MGC)
Killed in action 5th September 1916 Age 23

Twenty-two year old Austin of 26, Brown Lees Road, Black Bull, enlisted at Burslem on 19th August 1915 into the 3rd Connaught Rangers and became Private 3/6706. He was an unmarried iron worker who had not served previously in the forces. He was described as being of a fresh complexion, 5' 4 ½" tall, 124 lbs and with grey eyes. Austin was born in 1895, the son of Matthew Burke and his second wife Ann, nee Groden. In 1911 Austin was living at 7 Pepper Street, Newcastle, with his widowed father and four of his siblings. His occupation was given as a labourer in an iron forge. Presumably it was his work in the iron industry that led to his move to Biddulph and Robert Heath's iron works.

The 3rd Battalion Connaught Rangers was a home based training unit with their barracks situated in the coastal village of Kinsale, Co Cork. After five months of training Austin's medal card and service records indicate he transferred in January 1916 to the newly formed Machine Gun Corps and received training at the Machine Gun Training Centre, Belford Park Grantham. Then on the 16th May 1916 orders for embarkation were received and following a channel crossing from Southampton, Austin and his mates docked at Le Havre.

He served with the Machine Gun Corps in Flanders and initially Austin was attached to the Base Depot of the MGC at Camiers on the French coast where he

joined 20 coy. This company was attached to 7th Division and during his time with them he fought in the Battle of the Somme at Mametz, Bazentin and High Wood. By the beginning of August he again rather surprisingly transferred units and joined an infantry battalion already in the field: the 6th Connaught Rangers attached to 16th Irish Division.

The first major action for the 16th Division came during the Battle of the Somme in September 1916 when Austin and his new mates were ordered to attack one of the strongest of the enemies' defences at Guillemont; this had been attacked before and had always resulted in failure. The ruined village hid a strong enemy position preventing the advancement of the infantry. The night attack commenced and advanced across no man's land and was soon met by murderous machine gun and mortar fire.

The 6th Connaught Rangers suffered terrible losses. Over two hundred men fell in this action, which sadly, included Private Austin Burke who at the age of twenty three was reported missing on the 3rd September and confirmed lost on the 5th September 1916. The attack was eventually successful when the division captured the villages of Guillemont and Ginchy enabling the advance to continue, but at a high cost to the division.

On his enlistment Austin had named his brother Walter as his next of kin. Walter was serving in the 9th Battalion of the North Staffs. Regiment. It would seem that news of Austin's death did not reach his landlady in Brown Lees or his sister in Newcastle. Letters survive from both of them, dated 1917, asking for information about Austin.

Transcribed copy of letter from Kate Burke (sister)

2/1/1917

Sirs,

I would be very thankful if you could give me any information about my brother Pte Austin Burke no 6/4796 Connaught Rangers as I am his dependant sister Miss Kate Burke and I have not received a letter from him for over four months now and I'll be very thankful if you can let me know anything about him as I have no parents and I feel so worried if I don't hear from him often. I will be so much obliged if you can let me know anything. My address is Miss K. Burke, no. 11 Pepper Street, Newcastle-u-Lyme, Staffs., England.

Austin has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme, Pier and Face 15A. He is not named on the Brindley Ford Memorial but he is remembered on the Brown Lees Memorial, Biddulph War Memorial, St Lawrence churchyard cross and memorial board. No newspaper reports of his death have been found for Austin. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal posthumously.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Brown
Private John Brown
6645 1st/4th Battalion Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment
Died September 8th 1916 Age 28



John Brown was the eldest son of Enoch Brown and Eliza Brown nee Biddulph. His family had lived in the Biddulph area for many generations. He was born on 6 Jan 1888 at Robin Hill Biddulph Moor. His father worked in the coal mines and his parents had married on the 28 December 1875 at Christ Church, Biddulph Moor and had lived in the Robin Hill area.

In the 1891 census Enoch and Eliza Brown are living with son John aged 3. By 1901 the family comprised of son John, now aged 13, with younger sister Annie, aged 7 and brother Enoch 3. Another brother, Charles, was born in June 1892 but sadly died early in 1893.

John's father Enoch died in 1906 at the age of 50; possibly leaving John to take care of his mother and younger siblings. His grandfather also named John Brown was a highway labourer living at Gun Battery on Biddulph Moor. His grandfather died in 1910 at the advanced age of 85.

In the 1911 census the family were still at Robin Hill. Mrs Eliza Brown was aged 51 and a widow. John was now aged 23 and a coal miner (a hewer underground) and sister Annie was 17 and a dressmaker. His youngest brother, Enoch, was 13 and a scholar. Young Enoch Brown died in 1911 age 13. His sister Annie went on to marry in 1914. Their mother Eliza Brown died in 1926 age 66.

In August 1914, at 26 years of age and with previous military experience, John Brown enlisted. 'Soldiers Died' records the place of enlistment as Lichfield. It is thought that he had previously served as a Northumberland Fusilier, soldier number 5726. However without his service records to aid research, dates and other details of this deployment remain unknown. It is known that during the war he served in the 1/4th battalion York and Lancaster, Hallamshire Regiment.

Training of this battalion was carried out at Gainsborough and in February 1915 they moved to York for their final preparation. Orders were soon received to embark at Folkestone on 14th April. The battalion was now attached to 148th Brigade, 49th West Riding Division. The infantry crossed the English Channel and sailed into Boulogne. Others in the division landed at Le Havre. Their assembly areas were Estaires, Merville and Neuf Berguin.

Taking up positions in Flanders, the division went into action on 9th May at the Battle of Aubers Ridge. This was a short action with little gain and many casualties to the 1/4th York and Lancaster's. Through the summer and into autumn the battalion continued holding their lines. In December the troops were in defence and bravely endured a new threat - a Phosgene gas attack. Mid 1916 found the 49th Division preparing for the "big push" and the Battle of the Somme commenced on 1st July.

John Brown and his friends fought in a major action near Albert on 27th July, followed by further attacks at Bazentin Ridge with intense shelling. Through to September the division bravely fought many actions; at Pozieries Ridge enemy machine guns and a barrage of shells met the pals and they received many losses. It is believed that John Brown was seriously wounded in this action and on the 8th September 1916 he sadly died from his wounds.

A memorial service was held in October at Christ Church, Biddulph Moor. The Chronicle reported that *'the church was crowded, many being unable to obtain admission'* and that Private Brown was a *'native of Biddulph Moor, some-time member of the church choir and highly respected in the district.'*

John is buried at the Contay British Cemetery at Contay in France. This is a village on the main road from Amiens to Arras in the Somme region. His name is recorded on the Biddulph Town Memorial and the St Lawrence Churchyard Memorial and also on the memorial inside Christ Church, Biddulph Moor.

Kathleen Walton & Michael Turnock

Savage
Private George Savage
15454 8th Bn., South Lancashire Regiment (formerly 12867 Cheshire
Regiment)
Killed in Action 1st October 1916 Age 19

George was the son of David and Hannah Savage. In 1901 the family had lived at 24 Stringer Street, Biddulph but by 1911, David and Hannah and seven of their eight surviving children had moved to 16, Welsh Row. David was an ironworker and hailed from the West Midlands. Hannah and their children had all been born locally at Biddulph.

George put his name forward at the very first recruitment meeting at Biddulph. It must have been a very exciting evening. The meeting took place in the Public Hall and the local newspapers reported that **"long before the doors of the Public Hall were thrown open the streets in the immediate vicinity were packed with a dense crowd of people, and so great was the crush that many were unable to obtain even standing accommodation in the Hall. The attendance would be between 500 and 600, and a public gathering of such numbers,**

and permeated with such boundless enthusiasm, has rarely been experienced in the annals of Biddulph."

This response had not been anticipated and although at least 100 men wanted to sign up, the **'lack of any organised method for securing the signatures of the large number of men anxious and willing to join'** meant that arrangements were made for the Public Hall to open up the next day to cope with the demand. The hall was decorated, the platform having **'a profuse display of flags and bunting, from which the Union Jack hung conspicuously in the centre, and previous to the entrance of the platform party the audience whiled away the time in singing "God save the King", "Rule Britannia" and other patriotic songs.'**

Perhaps this lack of organisation was the reason why George and another Welsh Row young man, Abraham Millward, went over to Macclesfield to enlist on 31st August 1914. As his birth was registered in 1897, George may not have been seventeen years of age. George perhaps felt that it was the thing to do; following his colliery mates who had already taken the King's shilling. His service records suggest that he initially enlisted in the Cheshire Regiment (12867), as had Abraham (12825), so perhaps they were close pals as well as neighbours.

Goodbyes said to his parents and siblings at Welsh Row, Mow Cop, he was soon to start basic training at Codford and Bournemouth; drilling, bayonet practice and musketry. In May 1915 more intensive training at Wokingham was undertaken. They were attached to the 25th Division and with final preparation for war completed in June at Aldershot, George and his pals crossed the channel arriving in France on 28th September 1915.

The divisional concentration area was at Nieppe and the next few months found the soldiers acclimatised to trench life and defending their part of the line on the Western Front. In May 1916 Vimy Ridge was the first major action undertaken by the battalion. Though they fought valiantly these attacks came to nothing and they lost many men. After this action the 8th South Lancashire's were ordered to withdraw to St Pol - a safe back area to rest and retrain. June brought the battalion to Warloy, a back area of the Somme district. Now they were part of the 75th Brigade; the battalion first became involved in the Battle of the Somme on the 2nd and 3rd July in the Martinsart area. With constant shelling and terrific machine gun fire it was soon apparent this unsupported and costly attack would inevitably fail. Again the battalion withdrew.

George and his mates throughout the summer and into autumn were in and out of the trenches and at times were used to carry heavy loads, during darkness, to the front area. Water cans, bombs, Lewis gun and rifle ammunition. Still on the Somme, it is believed that on the 1st October 1916, the battalion were in an attack on the enemy at the Zollern Redoubt and Hesslan Trench. During the move forward a fellow soldier fell wounded; George bravely picked up his mate to carry him to safety, but before they could get back to the British lines George was sadly killed carrying him.

His service records survive and include a letter (from Joseph Higginson and dated 1920) from the Mow Cop & District Branch of 'The National Federation of Discharged & Demobilised Sailors & Soldiers'. This was addressed to the Officer in charge of records of the South Lancashire Regiment:

"Dear Sir,

When 15454 Private George Savage (late 8th Batt South Lancs Regt) of 16 Welsh Row Mow Cop Stoke-on-Trent was killed in action Oct 1st 1916, his mother received a letter from his officer stating that he was killed whilst carrying a wounded comrade in.

On behalf of his parents I appeal to you to look up this man's record and see if he was recommended for a distinctive decoration or mentioned in despatches. After being in conversation with an eye-witness of this man's heroic death I am compelled to admit that he deserved one of England's highest awards."

No further correspondence survives in his service records.

Private George Savage has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, the Biddulph memorials and he is also remembered on the St. Thomas, Mow Cop memorial.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Goldstraw
Corporal Albert Goldstraw
36523 88th Bde. Ammunition Col. Royal Field Artillery
Died 13th November 1916 Age 41



Albert was born early in 1875 at Grindon Moor near Leek. His parents, James and Charlotte Goldstraw nee Hancock, had married at St. Peter's in Stoke in 1853. They had a large family and Albert was their youngest child. He was baptised on 28th March 1875 at Grindon.

On the 1881 census, James, a 52 year old agricultural labourer was living with his wife, Charlotte, and five of their children remaining at home. Albert was aged 6 and a scholar.

By 1891 his mother was widowed and living with son John, aged 35, at Grindon Moor. Both Albert and his elder sister, Hannah, were servants at Ferney Hill Farm, Cheddleton for William Bailey and his family. William Bailey had been born in Biddulph and as a child had lived at Ox-Hay Farm. This appears to be the only link to Biddulph that can be found.

Albert's father died in 1883 and the children either married or moved to employment away from home.

In 1892 Albert married Mary Jane Heath at St. James Church in Newchapel. However, on January 2nd 1893 he enlisted in the North Staffordshire Regiment at Lichfield. His occupation was given as a collier. His records on recruitment described him as aged 19 and 5' 8½" in height. He weighed 132 lbs and had brown hair, grey eyes and had pit scars on his spine. Army records show that he was first posted on the 13th April 1893 and later served in Malta (9th Nov 1894 – 4th Oct 1895), Egypt (5th Oct. 1895 – 11th October 1897) and East India (12th Oct. 1897 -2nd Feb. 1902). In 1896 he participated on the Dongola expedition and was awarded a medal. He was wounded slightly on 25th June 1901 at Richmond in South Africa. Still in South Africa in February 1902 but Albert returned to England in October of that year. On January 1st 1905 he was discharged. His army records show his mother as Charlotte Goldstraw of Grindon Moor (deceased) and his wife as Mary Goldstraw of 23 Station Road, Newchapel, near Tunstall.

By 1911 Albert and Mary resided at 36 Piccadilly Street in Tunstall along with their daughters Alice 17, Florence Lilian 7 and son George 5 - in addition to three boarders. Albert was now described as a 'Confectionery Waggoner'.

With the advent of the First World War Albert enlisted at Manchester, joining the Royal Field Artillery. He must have been around 39 years of age by this time. He travelled to Bulford on Salisbury plain to start basic training. Besides the personal training of discipline, fitness, gun drill and marching, Albert was taught that the horses of the artillery came before his own needs; watering, feeding and grooming morning and night, "Stables" took priority. As a wagoner he was probably used to such routines.

The winter of 1915 was spent in billets at Andover and Basingstoke. By spring the artillery Gunners and Drivers were at Tidworth where further training took on a more deadly role; the 18 pounder field guns were a weapon to be feared and required skill to fire and maintain. Orders to prepare for embarkation were issued; King George V on the 23rd June inspected the 19th Western Division of which Albert was now attached - serving in the 88th Artillery Brigade Ammunition Column.

The Division crossed the English Channel between the 16th and 22nd of July and on landing the troops moved to their assembly concentration area at St Omer. As divisional artillery to 19th Division they moved to the fields of Flanders to adjust to life on the battlefield. In September the artillery was to see their first action in the Pietie area giving support to their infantry in the Battle of Loos.

Without service records to help, it is difficult to pinpoint when Albert gained promotion to Corporal. Come 1916 the frontline routine continued and Albert and his pals brought up ammunition and other supplies, mainly at night and out of sight of the enemy artillery. Their loaded general purpose waggons went

forward to feed their artillery batteries. This ammunition was carried from the divisional dumps in the safer back areas.

The Battle of the Somme approached; the date was unknown to the men, however on 24th June all along the Somme battlefield the artillery went into action. A barrage of shells was laid down on the enemy position, this lasted for a week. The Ammunition Columns worked none stop day and night bringing up the shells to feed the batteries. It was dangerous work; many brave men fell during this operation being the target of enemy artillery. The battle opened on 1st July, and although progress was slow, the batteries moved forward to support their divisional infantry. By November the 19th Division infantry had fought through La Bosisselle, High Wood and onto the Pozieres Ridge. It is believed that it was about this time that Corporal Albert Goldstraw sadly died on the Somme battlefield.

Albert now rests in the Pozieres British Cemetery at Ovimers La Boisselle. His widow, Mary, died a few years later in 1919.

Corporal Goldstraw is remembered on the Biddulph Moor memorial inside Christ Church and on the cenotaph in Albert Square. However his name does not appear on any of the St. Lawrence memorials.

Kathleen Walton & Michael Turnock

Simpson
L/ Sergeant Harold Herman Simpson
40471 8th Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 18th November 1916 Age 35

Harold Herman Simpson was born in 1881 in the village of Langley near to Macclesfield in Cheshire. His father Samuel and mother Eliza, nee Wain, were both born in nearby Sutton and were employed in the silk industry. On the 1891 census Harold appears as a scholar aged 9 years. By 1901 he was living at 71 Hall Terrace, Sutton, and was aged 19 and a silk printer.

He came to Biddulph looking for employment - which he found at the Robert Heath's works. He settled and in 1906 married Louisa Berry at St Lawrence Church in Biddulph. By 1911 the couple were living in the Mill Hayes area along with their two daughters; Annie (2 years) and Mary (11months).

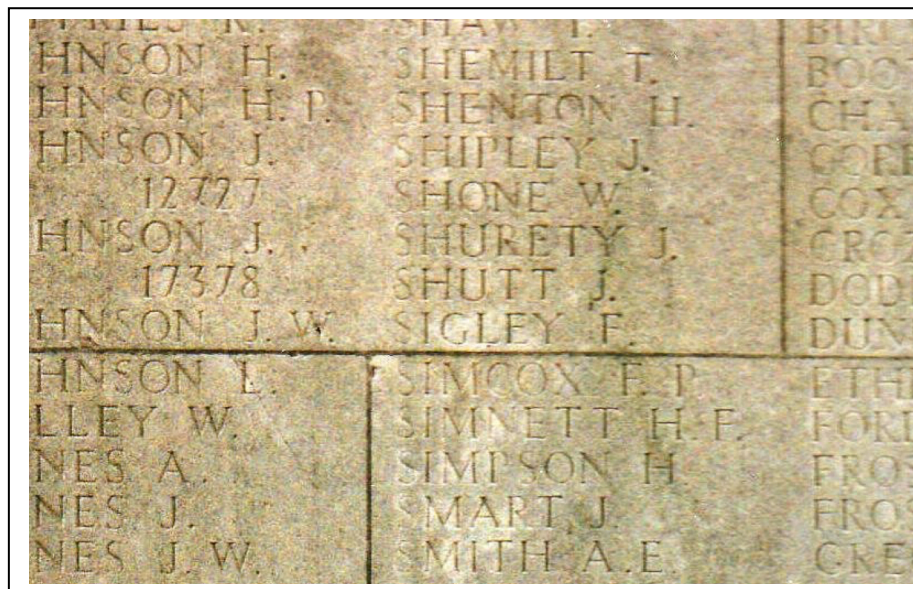
With the outbreak of war he enlisted at Biddulph in September 1914 - joining the 'Biddulph Company' which had been initiated by Richard Harding. Young sportsmen were encouraged to join. Although at 33 years he was not 'young' he was described in a local newspaper report as '*a well-known left-handed hitter of the Knypersley Cricket Club's senior eleven*'. His service records have not been found and other sources suggest that he may have initially joined the 2/5th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, a second line unit, and he may have served in Ireland.

He transferred to the 8th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, a battalion that trained at Weston super Mare and Salisbury Plain. The battalion was attached to the 19th Western Division and was ordered to war. Embarking on the 17th July 1915 the division crossed to France and then moved forward to their assembly area at St Omer.

On the Western Front Harold and his mates were ordered to dig in and defend their lines until late September when they saw action in a supporting and diversionary role in the Battle of Loos. The following year the 19th Division prepared for action in the *Big Push*; the Battle of the Somme was looming. Biddulph men Harry Bailey, Joseph Evenson, Jonathan Barlow and Jack Moss all served with Harold in the 8th North Stafford's; sharing a joke and local news - no doubt this was a comfort, as the Chronicle reports tell us. Harold gained promotion to the rank of Lance Sergeant.

They were not used in the opening of battle, however, three days later they endured enemy machine gun and rifle fire and the battalion made a successful attack at La Bosisselle. This terrible battle continued with no respite into November 1916. By the 18th and 19th November, Harold and the lads had advanced to Grandcourt. The winter weather and deteriorating ground conditions were made unbelievably harsh by constant shelling. A snow blizzard met the infantry as they attacked and the North Stafford's entered enemy trenches fighting valiantly in hand to hand combat.

This was to be a sad time for the 8th Battalion for on the 18th and 19th November 1916 almost seventy gallant Staffordshire men were to fall at Grandcourt, including at the age of thirty five Lance Sergeant Harold Simpson. He fell on the battlefield along with two of his pals from Biddulph; Arthur Lacey and Harry Bailey. This was the closing day of the battle and the survivors withdrew to Battery Valley. At first Harold was reported missing and a long agonising wait at home for Louisa ensued. It was not until March 1918 that he was officially confirmed as dead.



Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel March 23rd 1918
Sergeant Harold Simpson
Well known Knypersley Cricketer Killed in Action

“After a long period of suspense to his wife and family and a large circle of friends in the Potteries area, official intimation has been received by Mrs.

Simpson, Mill Hayes, Knypersley, that her husband, Sergeant Harold Simpson, North Staffs Regiment was killed in action on November 18th 1916. It was on this date that Sergeant Simpson was first reported as missing, and the present belated official news but confirms the fears that have all along been held, that one more gallant Biddulph soldier had made the great sacrifice for King and country.

Prior to joining the Army, Sergeant Simpson was employed at Messrs. R.Heath & Sons, Black Bull works as a checkweigh-man. He was one of that loyal and enthusiastic body of volunteers from the Black Bull works organised under Captain R.S.Harding for enlisting with the 5th North Staffs Regiment in September 1914. After a period of training at Butterton Hall and elsewhere, Sergeant Simpson was drafted to Ireland at the time of the Irish Rebellion and served on the Regimental Police until he left for France in 1916. As an N.C.O. Sergeant Simpson gained the respect and esteem of his officers by conspicuous ability and devotion to duty, and his loss is deeply regretted also by the men of his company.

This regret will also extend to many friends and admirers in North Staffs League cricket circles, deceased being well known as one of the most brilliant batsmen in the league. He was a popular member of the Knypersley Cricket Club and such were his hitting propensities that he earned for himself the title of the 'Knypersley Jessop' and delighted many a Saturday afternoon crowd by the brilliance of his free and forceful batting. However big the score against them, Knypersley was never beaten while 'Harold' was at the wickets. A left-hander, with a fast delivery, Sergeant Simpson was also a dangerous bowler, and his numerous fine batting performances were supplemented by the many excellent feats with the ball. His death will indeed be a serious loss to North Staffordshire Cricket.

Harold was never recovered from the battlefield and has no known grave. He is now commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme. Harold is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Mike Turnock & Kathleen Walton

Lacey
Private Arthur Lacey
16600 8th Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 19th November 1916 Age 25



Census returns suggest that Arthur, the son of Richard Henry and Rose, had been born in Congleton, however, his service records state his place of birth in 1891 as Biddulph. His early years were certainly spent in Congleton. His father died in the autumn of 1895 and in 1901 he and his widowed mother lived at 4, Mill Green, Congleton. By 1911 he had moved to Biddulph, found employment in the ironworks and was living with his sister and brother-in-law at 8, South View. On 1st September 1914, Arthur Lacey enlisted at Biddulph into the 8th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. Arthur's service records inform us that he had previously served in the 7th Cheshire regiment. He gave his address as 12, South View and stated that he was employed as a miner.

Initially the battalion had difficulties over barracks and equipment at Bristol before moving to Weston super Mare and then Tidworth on Salisbury Plain for their intensive training. It was while on leave from Perham Down camp that Arthur may have made the decision to ask his sweetheart to become his wife as on 21st October 1914, Arthur and Alice Ann married. The occasion was an important one for Biddulph with local papers carrying the following report:

First 'Khaki Wedding'

Weekly Sentinel: October 24th 1914: **A Khaki Wedding at Biddulph**

"The first khaki wedding celebrated in Biddulph for many years took place at the Parish Church on Wednesday morning, when Lance-Corporal Arthur Lacey, who is with the 8th North Staffords at Perham Down Camp, was married to Alice Ann, the third daughter of James Wilshaw, Station Road, Biddulph. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Rowland Bateman, Vicar of Biddulph. Lacey, who left Biddulph with the first batch of recruits for Lord Kitchener's Army, was granted four days leave for the happy event, and returned to camp on Thursday. He looked very smart in his khaki uniform, and has also proved very smart in his duties at

camp. The many friends of the soldier bridegroom and his bride in Biddulph wish them every happiness."

Arthur became a father with the birth of Leonard Arthur. As he had not yet left for France, we can only hope that he got to meet his son.

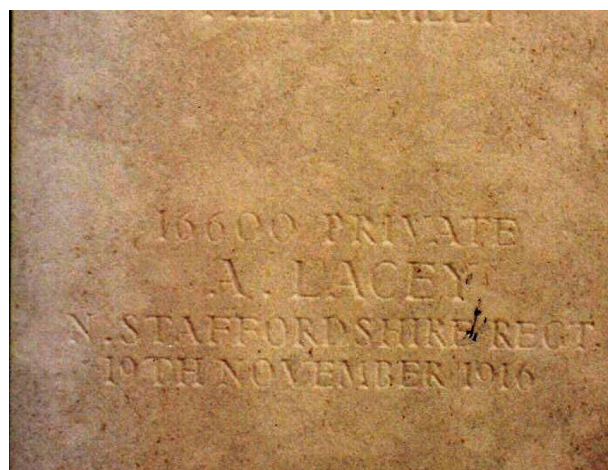
20th June 1915 brought the King to Tidworth to inspect the 19th Western Division. Arthur served in "C" company and his battalion were now attached to this new division. Soon after, orders were issued to prepare for embarkation, and the division crossed the channel on 17th July. The lads were to see the French coast the next day, moving inland to St Omer, their assembly point.

Final preparations for war were made and late September to early October found the troops engaged in a diversionary action in the Battle of Loos. Christmas came and went and in the early spring of 1916 the 8th Stafford's were in the Laventre - La Bassee district, fighting in the usual abysmal conditions. The battalions' pals from Biddulph, Jonathan, Harry, Joe, Jack and Harold would soon be preparing for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme.

The battle opened on the 1st July and the 19th Division were to see action at La Boisselle with a successful attack against the enemy on the 4th. They continued their hard slow slog throughout the summer. This battle came at a terrible cost to the men and saw them still fighting in November with the pals south of Grandcourt. The winter brought deteriorating conditions. Living in the trenches was dreadful and on the 18th and 19th, over the open Somme landscape, a heavy snow blizzard swept in. The deteriorating weather conditions combined with the already frozen ground was where the battalion made its attack on enemy lines. This was at very close quarters and fighting was hand to hand.

Although they fought bravely many men fell on the battlefield over those two days. On the 19th November 1916 Pte Arthur Lacey was killed in this action along with pals Harold Simpson and Harry Bailey. Private Lacey now rests in the nearby Grandcourt Road Cemetery. He is also commemorated on the Biddulph memorials.

Right: At Grandcourt Road Cemetery.



Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Bailey
Private Harold Bailey
40431, 8th Bn., North Staffordshire Regiment
Who died on 19th November 1916 Age 20



Born c. 1896, Harold was the son of Mary Ellen Bailey. It seems likely that he was brought up by his grandparents, Thomas and Sarah Ann in the Cloud Side area. His mother married Alfred Fisher at Leek in 1897 but Harold remained with his grandparents and was still living with them at the age of 15 in 1911. His grandfather was a farmer and stonemason so perhaps Harold planned to learn the trade.

He was another local soldier who joined the ranks in the early days of the Great War; enlisting at Butterton in September 1914. Harold, or Harry as he was known, joined the 8th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. Leaving his work as a stonemason at Cloud Side, he started his initial training at Butterton Hall moving on to Bristol, Weston super Mare and then Tidworth, Salisbury Plain.

Training complete there followed an inspection by King George V on the 20th June 1915 and the battalion, now attached to 57th Brigade, 19th Western Division, made ready for war and embarkation. The troops crossed the English Channel landing in France on the 18th July, and soon moved forward to their concentration assembly near St Omer. By late September the division were preparing to fight a diversionary action in the Battle of Loos.

The following year Harry and his mates were to see action in the Battle of the Somme; a battle with many casualties lasting from 1st July until late November. The 8th North Stafford's fought throughout this time with a successful attack at La Boisselle on the 4th July. On the 18th November they were in action south of Grandcourt. These brave soldiers were already enduring an unbelievably cold winter and by now the weather had turned even worse, with a blizzard of heavy snow greeting the troops that day.

Not dissimilar to the 13th October 1915, this too was to be a sad time for the Regiment. For on the 18th and 19th November 1916, almost seventy valiant Staffordshire men were to fall including, at the age of twenty, Private Harry

Bailey. Two of his pals from Biddulph - Arthur Lacey and Harold Simpson, also died in the closing days of the battle.

Over twelve months later, on December 15th 1917, the Chronicle reported on the case of Private Harry Bailey. It would seem that initially he was reported as 'missing' but from 'available evidence of an eye-witness, the War Office are now constrained to conclude that he was killed in action or died of wounds the 18th - 19th November 1916'. They continued with a statement from the War Office which reported that they 'regretted that the correct casualty suffered by this soldier was not originally reported, but it was not always possible to collect accurate details regarding casualties immediately after action. Prior to enlistment, Private Bailey was employed by his grandfather, Mr, Thomas Bailey, stonemason, Cloud Side.'

Harry Bailey was never recovered from the battlefield and has no known grave and is now commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme. He is also commemorated on the Biddulph and Congleton memorials.

Michael Turnock

Shaw
Private Walter Stanley Shaw
18740, Grenadier Guards 4th Battalion Rank GDSN
Died 17th December 1916 Age 21



Walter Shaw was born on the 24th June 1895 in Bridge Street, Bradley Green, Biddulph, the son of Richard Shaw, a colliery labourer and Hannah Shaw nee Sherratt. Richard and Hannah had married at St Lawrence Church, Biddulph in 1875. By 1881 they had one child Agnes Maud and were living in Bridge Street in Biddulph. On the 1891 census the family are still in Bridge Street, but the family has grown and now includes Agnes 11, Hannah Eliza 9, Richard Percival 5,

Harriet Emily 3 and baby Adelaide Ellen aged 5 months. Richard is now age 33 and a coal miner.

The family lived at 67 Congleton Road in 1901, Walter was just 5 and is described as a scholar. There are now 6 children at home. Agnes Maud is now 21, Hannah now named as Annie 18, Richard Percival is 15, Miriam 7, Walter Stanley 5 and Ada 5. Ada was born in 1896.

By 1911 the family are at 71 Congleton Road, the couple had been married for 35 years and have had nine children, six of which were still living. Walter was the second son; having an older brother Richard Percival Shaw. Richard and Hannah had two sons and seven daughters. On the 1911 census Walter is described as "*coal miner take off underground*", he was 15 years old. His father was an electric labourer at the coal and iron works. Living at home now was Margery Miriam 17, Walter and Sarah May 8.

Walter was still employed as a miner when he enlisted in the Grenadier Guards. Mystery surrounds which battalion he enrolled in. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission tells us it was the 4th battalion however his medal card records the 3rd battalion. However both battalions have similar military histories.

On enlistment the following description was noted: height 5ft 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", weight 142 lbs, chest measurement when fully expanded 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ " with a range of expansion of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". His complexion was described as fresh. He had blue eyes and light brown hair. His religious denomination was Wesleyan.

Walter enlisted at Macclesfield on 8th September 1914 joining the Grenadier Guards for a three year Short Service engagement; however on the same day he absconded from his unit. Walter was not apprehended by the local police until 23th December 1915; it is unknown where he was during this time. He was held to serve without trial; this decision was made by the General Officer Commanding law district 77625 on the 1st January 1916, and his service towards engagement agreement reckoned from 23rd December 1915, meant a fresh start for Walter.

Walter was back with his unit in training which continued until he was posted to join his battalion in France on the 28th September 1916. He served with the 4th Battalion Grenadier Guards who were attached to the Guards Division. This division had been in France since July 1915 seeing action in the Battle of Loos and in 1916 the Battle of the Somme. At the time of Walter joining his battalion they would have been in the Somme district.

The Guards next action and a baptism of fire for Walter to endure was late September in the battle for Morval, when the Guards made a brave and very successful attack resulting in the capture of the village at Lesboeufs, a strong enemy position. By the end of November the enemy weakened by five months of battle were to withdraw from the Somme battlefield, retreating to the Hindenburg Line.

In mid-December, twenty one year old Walter was seriously wounded and a few days after on the 17th December 1916 sadly Guardsman Walter Stanley Shaw died of his wounds. This was at the 34th Casualty Clearing Station. Close to where he now rests at the Grove Town Cemetery, Meaulte, near Albert, the 34th Casualty Clearing Station was based.

His mother received the news of his death on Christmas Eve 1916. In the local papers the following reports appeared:

Died of Wounds : Private W. Shaw

News has been received by Mr and Mrs Shaw, 71 Congleton Road, Biddulph that their son Pte. W Shaw, Grenadier Guards has died in hospital as a result of wounds received in action. Prior to his enlistment He was employed by Messrs. Robert Heath & Sons.

Memorial Service

The relatives of the late Walter Shaw, recently killed in France, hope to attend a service at Biddulph Church on Sunday morning and the vicar (d.v.) will preach on Philippians 1.,21.

His name is found on the St Lawrence Memorial Board, the Churchyard Memorial and the Town Memorial. He is also remembered on the family grave at St Lawrence: "*Walter killed in action aged 21 years.*"

Walter received the Victory Medal and the British Medal.

Michael Turnock & Kathleen Walton

With thanks to Mr John Shaw - great-nephew of Walter Stanley Shaw.