

CLARKE, CHARLES

Private

5th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment

Service No: 15644

Died 08/08/1916. Killed in Action, aged 22

Charles Clarke was the second son of Thomas and Agnes Clarke of Beenham and born in 1894. The 1871 census shows the Clarke family to be local, Thomas having been born 10 October 1860 in Bucklebury and living at Nine Elms Farm, between Southend Bradfield and Upper Bucklebury and next to the former home of Kate Middleton. It has not been possible to find the marriage of Thomas to Agnes but the 1901 census shows Agnes was from Tadley and Thomas to be a bricklayer's labourer. At this time they are living in "Lower Common", Bucklebury with their five children: Thomas 11, Gertrude 10 both born Bradfield, and Charles 7, Stanley 4 and Hilda 2, all born in Bucklebury. By 1911 the family have moved to Beenham and are living on The Green with the addition of Edward 8 born Bucklebury, and Ella 6 born Beenham. Thomas is recorded as a general labourer and Charles has become a farm labourer.

At the start of the war, Charles would have been 20. At some point he enlisted into the 5th Battalion of the Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire Regiment at Reading as Private 15644. Interestingly his Army number is close to that of 15654 George Green, reported last month, also of the 5th Battalion who enlisted on the 1 December 1915. We can imagine the two lads, both of whom were living on The Green travelling the nine miles together to join up at Brock Barracks. If that is the case, Charles would have gone in the knowledge of his uncle William, 38, youngest brother to his father Thomas, had died of wounds on 16 October 1915 and now commemorated in St. Denys' Church, Stanford Dingley.

The 5th (Service) Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment was a Kitchener Battalion, raised at Reading on 25 August 1914 and known affectionately as "The Biscuit Boys". On the date of Charles' death, the regimental diary reads: "France. In the Trenches N.W of Pozieres. On the morning of August 8th the Germans made 4 counter attacks on our position in 5th Avenue. On our left flank at 3am they made a bombing attack and got into our trenches but were immediately driven out. At the same place they attempted a second attack at 7.30am which was easily repulsed. Simultaneously, enemy made a determined attack on the barricade which formed the right flank of our position in 5th Avenue. The enemy employed Flammenwerfer and under cover of the smoke got into the trench. After hand to hand fighting they were driven out and beyond the barricade. At 5.30am they repeated the attack and this time succeeded in getting into the trench and compelling our men to withdraw down the trench. A fresh barricade was erected about 50 yards from the old one and the enemy were checked there. The net result of the 4 attacks was that the enemy gained about 50 yards of trench with great loss of life. Casualties 6 officers and 128 other ranks".

Charles Clarke has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial Pier and Face 11 D. The official record of war dead records "Son of Thomas and Agnes Clarke, of Beenham Village, Reading, Berks".

Charles's father Thomas was still alive in 1939, living at Wickens Corner, Beenham, described as widower, and incapacitated.