

EDWARD SMITH

Private

5th (Service) Battalion, Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment

Service No: 19596

Died: 05 April 1918

Edward Smith was born in Beenham the second son of Thomas and Jane Smith, his birth being registered at Bradfield in the last quarter of 1888. He was baptised in Beenham on 4 November 1888. Edward's father, Thomas was from Frilsham, born 1847 and his mother Jane nee Garrett was born in 1866 and came from Bucklebury; they had married in the second quarter of 1885, again registered at Bradfield. Several of Edward's siblings were baptised in Beenham, including Edith Harriet (bp 4 Apr 1886), Alfred Thomas (bp 6 Nov 1887) and Arthur (bp 1 Nov 1891). Interestingly, Edward's father had been married previously to Ann Knight in 1873 and had had two other children, Charles Frederick and Mary Jane.

The 1891 census shows the family to be living in Paradise Lane, Bucklebury. Thomas 44 years, was an agricultural labourer, Jane, 35 and their children then included Charles F. 9, born Bucklebury, Mary J. 7 born Beenham, Edith H. 5, Alfred Thomas 3 and Edward 2.

Ten years later in 1901, the family have moved to Mount Pleasant where Thomas 54 is a carter on a farm, Jane 43, brother Charles F. 19 is also a carter and Alfred T. 13 a carter's boy. Edward is 12 and his younger brother, Arthur 9.

By 1911 Edward's parents and brothers Alfred Thomas 23 and Arthur 19 are living at 11 Mount Pleasant but Edward is a lodger of Ellen Carter, housekeeper aged 68 at The Stocks, Beenham. Edward is shown as born Beenham aged 22, single and a domestic gardener. Two other boarders were Doris May Gray, aged 6 from Clapham and Francis Gray, aged 2 from Chiswick.

At some point Edward enlisted in Reading and by 1918 was a private in the 5th (Service) Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment. The 5th Battalion, was a Kitchener Battalion, raised at Reading on the 25th August 1914 undergoing training at Shorncliffe, Folkestone and Malplaquet Barracks at Aldershot. They proceeded to France on the 31st of May 1915 and served with 35th Brigade in 12th (Eastern) Division on the Western Front. On the 6th of February 1918 they transferred to 36th Brigade still with 12th (Eastern) Division. In March 1918 they moved by motor lorry from Busnes to Albert and were in action in The Battle of Bapaume and spent the spring engaged in heavy fighting as the enemy advanced across the old Somme battlefields.

Just before Edward was killed, the Regiment were at Warloy near Albert. An account of operations April 2nd - 8th reads "The 5th Royal Berkshire had a quiet day in front of Albert on the 3rd, but shelling increased on the 4th. At 4 am on the 5th April the Battalion was warned of imminent attack. At 7am the enemy barraged front lines, and battery positions around Bouzincourt. Infantry attacks were launched on the whole of the 36th Brigade front but were repulsed. The enemy made 3 attacks on the left and centre companies of the 5th Royal Berkshire but each was beaten back with the help of the 9th Royal Fusiliers on the left. By 10 am everything had quietened down but at noon a new barrage was opened and the Germans en masse succeeded in entering the left and centre trenches held by the battalion. The right Company and 1 platoon of D Company held firm. At 2.30pm the remainder of D Company was sent up by the CO. As they advanced up the slope they came under intense machine-gun fire and lost 50% casualties. 2 Companies of the 7th Royal Sussex counter-attacked at 8.15 pm and regained part of the lost trench and at 4 am on the 6th the other 2 companies of the Royal Sussex relieved the right Company of the 5th Royal Berkshire and consolidated. Few of the left and centre Companies survived and the Battalion was formed into 2 Companies. "A" & "B" was about 100 strong and "C" & "D" about 90

strong.

The 6th was quiet until 5.30 pm when 35th Brigade outposts were driven in. At 11 pm the 37th Brigade took the place of the 36th Brigade and the 5th Royal Berkshire was attached to the 35th Brigade. Its trench strength at that time was 231. Casualties in those first days of April: Officers 7 wounded 5 missing, ORs: 243 Killed



Edward Smith is commemorated on Panel 56 and 57 at the Pozieres memorial. Pozieres is a village 6 kilometres north-east of the town of Albert. The Memorial commemorates over 14,000 casualties of the United Kingdom and 300 of the South African Forces who have no known grave and who died on the Somme from 21 March to 7 August 1918. The Pozieres memorial relates to the period of crisis in March and April 1918 when the Allied Fifth Army was driven back by overwhelming numbers across the former Somme battlefields, and the months that followed

before the Advance to Victory, which began on 8 August 1918.

For his sacrifice, Edward Smith was awarded the Victory Medal. His half-brother, Charles F. Smith (b 17 Apr 1881 d 30 Dec 1962) married Amy Freemantle of Kingsclere (1874-1951) in 1910; in 1911 they were living at Wickens Corner, in 1939 High Street, Bradfield and more latterly, Church Street, Theale.