

Frederick Evers-Swindell 1894 - 1917

Sometimes the local war memorials record the ultimate sacrifice during the Great War of men who originally lived in this area, but had moved to other parts of the then Empire. Minchinhampton Town Memorial names men who, in 1914, lived in Canada, Australia and New Zealand; Ernest Frederick, known as Fred to his comrades, was one of the latter. He was born at Bownham Grange on the edge of Rodborough Common; his parents were of independent means and had lived much of their lives in Hampshire but, like so many before or since, retired to this area. There were seven children, the three boys were privately educated and Frederick was a boarder at Wycliffe College from 1906 until 1910. Sometime between 1915 and 1920 his parents moved from Bownham to Burleigh Tower.



At the age of sixteen, before taking his final exams, he left to join his two elder brothers, Wilfred and Arthur, who had gone to live in New Zealand. When the Great War broke out they were farming at Moor's Valley, Wainuiomata, in the hilly area just to the east of Wellington Harbour on North Island. He enlisted in the 1st Wellington Infantry Battalion on 19th April 1915 – pronounced fit, he was described as 5ft 11½ inches in height, 10 stone 3 lbs. in weight, with a dark complexion, brown hair and eyes. By August he had been promoted to lance-corporal on completing his training and embarked with the regiment for the Middle East, arriving on the Gallipoli Peninsular on 19th September. He asked to return to the ranks (later in the War he also refused a commission) and with the remnants of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force he was involved in the strategic withdrawal of December 1915.

The Battalion then went to Egypt before being posted to France in April 1916; they were engaged in the Battle of the Somme in September. Christmas of that year saw Fred on leave in England, but on 1st January 1917 he was back in France at Sailly-sur-Lys. His Battalion was involved in almost continuous fighting throughout the spring and summer, but by September they were on the move again to Ypres.

The village of Passchendaele is synonymous with the third Battle of Ypres. Just south of the village, on 4th October 1917, Fred and his comrades formed up facing the enemy on the Gravenstafel Ridge. A letter from his commanding officer, treasured always by his mother, explains the manner of his death. “...*I want to extend my sincerest sympathy to you and yours in the death of your son, who was killed in action on the 4th inst. He was my best bomber, a really splendid soldier, and I fear from the point of view of the platoon his loss can never be replaced ... He was struck by a bullet from a machine gun and died almost immediately. It was he and another who first discovered this particular machine gun. It was difficult to locate and was causing a lot of trouble. Immediately his comrade located it, he went for it, followed by your son. Their splendid example so stimulated the remainder of the platoon that although your son was killed and the other wounded, their mates went for the gun and put it out of action.*” Although the circumstances of his death are known, Pte. Evers-Swindell has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial in Flanders.