

Wallace William Grey 1894 - 1915

Another story to emerge from the Great War is that of Wallace Grey, a native of Box. At his baptism, in 1897, his surname was given as Burford; this anomaly is resolved as his father, William, was the son of Harriett Burford who later married George Grey. William appears to have used Grey as a surname, but was legally Burford. In 1888 he married Harriett Powis in Stroud, but their first two sons died within a year of birth. Of thirteen children only Wallace, Elizabeth and Louisa were still alive in 1911.

William and Harriet appear to have spent all their married life in Box, living close to the Box Inn, in one of the small cottages in that vicinity; the Census records do not give any further address details but the dwelling had a total of four rooms. By 1911 William described himself as a coal haulier with Wallace a brass worker and Elizabeth a silk millhand. Louisa was still at school.

Wallace joined the army in 1914, enlisting at Stroud, although he is not thought to be shown on the photograph of the earliest recruits in Minchinhampton. However, he is named as serving his country in November 1914 in Holy Trinity magazine, (which would, of course, have been his parish church and was where he was baptised). He was a member of the 10th (Service) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. This had been formed at Bristol in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's New Army, an (initially) all-volunteer army formed in the U.K. following the outbreak of hostilities. The recruits were formed into completely new battalions, attached to the old regular battalions, 1st and 2nd Gloucestershire. Following initial training, probably at Horfield in Bristol, soldiers were billeted in Cheltenham in November 1914 and then Wallace would have moved to Salisbury Plain for advanced training in April 1915.

By the summer of 1915 it became necessary to deploy the first units of the New Army on the Western Front. Wallace landed in France on 8th August and 10th Battalion joined 1st Battalion in First Division, under the command of General Sir Douglas Haig. By this time Wallace had risen to the rank of Corporal (although some local sources quote Sergeant) and training continued through warm conditions in early September. Together, both the New and the Old, they would take part in the battle of Loos that autumn. Compared with earlier small-scale British efforts, this attack of six Divisions was a mighty offensive indeed - so much so that it was referred to at the time as 'The Big Push', however only in a supporting role to a larger French attack in the Third Battle of Artois. It took place, therefore, on ground not of their choosing, across wide, flat expanses dotted with spoil heaps and before stocks of ammunition and heavy artillery were sufficient. The opening of the battle was noteworthy for the first use of poison gas by the British Army. The Long, Long Trail, a website detailing the British Army in the Great War, gives further detail of the first day, September 25th, during which Wallace received the wounds which led to his death two days later. *"The left-hand 1st Division began to advance a few minutes late, after casualties were suffered from the British gas which had drifted back into the assault trenches. ... The 1st Brigade did not suffer so badly from gas, and the lead battalions (10/Gloucesters and 8/R. Berkshires, both New Army units that had replaced Guards battalions in the Division in August 1915) advanced through all objectives despite heavy casualties. ... But the reserves had been held too far from the battle front to be able to exploit the successes and succeeding days bogged down into attritional warfare for minor gains."*

It seems that Wallace was evacuated to the town of Lilliers, near Bethune, which was a hospital centre with casualty clearing stations located there, along with billets and headquarter offices.

He died from his wounds on September 27th a few months after another young soldier from that part of Box, Alfred Hyde, who was also a brass worker. Wallace's parents must have been devastated to receive news of his death at home in Box, His commanding officer wrote "*The noble way in which your gallant son received his wounds ... it was indeed a sacrifice worthy of an Englishman. He fell while leading his men in a charge which afterwards proved victorious. He was much esteemed by all who knew him and his loss is greatly felt in the company.*" Four months later William received £3 owed in back-pay to his son and in 1919 a further £4 10s. "War Gratuity". Wallace's grave is in the Lilliers Communal Cemetery in France but his sacrifice is commemorated on the Town War Memorial in Minchinhampton, the Calvary outside Holy Trinity, the Memorial inside St. Barnabas and on the Wayside Cross at Woodchester.

In early September, Private William Fisher of 10th Battalion wrote home to his parents while training in France for the planned offensive:-

"Dear Mother & Dad,

I am just writing you a few lines hoping you are quite well as this leaves me very well at present glad to hear Lil is got a lot better and I hope she will keep so. We are still having it very warm out here, they have mostly finished harvest out here, I have had two letters and fags from Bisley they said all of them are keeping very well, I have plenty off letters to write now but we have not much time for writing for we are at something most off the time, I am a bomb thrower, and Bert is something to do with the wire that is put in front off the trenches, I don't know when we are going to them again but I don't think it will be long do you know whether Bill Ayers is come out here, I heard that their lot was out but I don't know if it is right. I see in the paper that they done a lot of damage in London with the air raid we had three of our chaps wounded with one but they are got pretty well over it now, they are a crafty lot of people they want a good doing down and I think they will have it now. I suppose Bill Morley is kicking about there he out [ought] to be out here but I daresay he would soon want to be back again and I don't think it will be long before some of the slackers will have to come and do their share. Well I have not much news to tell you as we don't see much out here. So I think I must close trusting this will find you all quite well. I remain your everloving Son, Will XXXX . Tell Lil I received her letter quite safe and will write soon."

Will was not to survive the battle, and nine days after writing to his sister Lily he was killed on 13th October during the attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt, one of a hundred and fifty men of the battalion who were killed, wounded or went missing that day.

Enlisted in 10th Gloucestershire at Stroud Corporal Entered France in early August 1915 but died of wounds 27th September 1915

The first genuinely large scale British offensive action but once British appeals that the ground over which they were being called upon to advance was wholly unsuitable were rejected. The battle is historically noteworthy for the first British use of poison gas.

By 8.00am they were in Gun Trench, an intermediate line running South of the Hulluch quarries. The Regular support battalion, 1/Cameron's, pressed the advance on towards Hulluch. They waited for the 2nd Brigade to come up on their right. Further attacks by 2nd Brigade had met with the same devastating fire as the first, and was held up, with a large number of men lying out in the open, close under the German wire. At 9.10am Division gave orders to Green's Force to advance in support, but all runners were hit and the orders were not received until 10.55am. A direct frontal attack by the 1/14th London Regiment (London Scottish) and 1/9th King's at Lone Tree met with a hail of close-range bullets, and many men were hit. 2/Royal Munster Fusiliers, coming up in support, found the trenches near Le Rutoire so full of dead and wounded that they advanced above ground, and were virtually annihilated. The attack had effectively halted.

The Long, Long Trail
